

## THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE LONE RANGER

*The Lone Ranger*, with his cry of “Hi-Ho Silver!” has become an American institution ranking with Paul Bunyan in the realms of folklore and legend. *The Lone Ranger* retains the greatest current popularity of all the great characters created during the Golden Age of radio drama. There are still radio and TV re-runs of *The Lone Ranger* series which continue to this day. The best known star of *The Lone Ranger* television show, Clayton Moore, still rides Silver in parades, TV commercials, and a number of years ago directed traffic in Denver at the site of an auto accident. (Because of licensing restrictions he was not allowed to wear his mask for many years.)

The hard riding western hero is no legend from the past, but is a hero born of radio, and created by a Detroit showman, George W. Trendle.

When the Detroit station WXYZ terminated its affiliation with the Columbia Broadcasting System in 1932, part owner Trendle faced the problem of filling a schedule with programs which could compete with the network offerings. He became determined to create a program dedicated to youth, one which would be interesting and exciting. In a conclusion destined to make history he decided not to “write down” to children. He recalled the books he had read as a boy: The adventures of Buffalo Bill and the works of James Fenimore Cooper. He remembered how his imagination had been stimulated with a healthy desire to emulate the story-book heroes.

In Mr. Trendle’s mind the ideal program would be action packed without emphasis on violence and bloodshed, one that would entertain as well as quietly instruct and inspire. It would appeal to children but would be logical and interesting to adults.

A Western story, he decided, would be the very thing. It must depict the early pioneer days in the West--the days when America was in the making. Trendle envisioned a radio series that would paint a graphic picture of the hardships endured by pioneers that they might establish the principles which have been handed down as an American Heritage.

George W. Trendle called in a Buffalo, NY writer named Fran Striker to work on the show with him. These men conferred with other WXYZ staffers like director Jim Jewell and station manager Brace Beemer (also an announcer). Many refinements were added. The masked man would use silver bullets to make him even more unique. (This precious metal would be a constant reminder of the preciousness of human life---neither was to be used lightly.) He would ride a white horse to make him an even more striking figure. Of his origins, he could be a Texas Ranger working alone, on a secret mission---“*The Lone Ranger*” someone at the conference suggested.

Mr. Trendle added an explicit description of the lead character. He must not be the movie style, swashbuckling type who laughed and sang as he shot down outlaws, but a realistic, serious and sober-minded man with a righteous purpose, one who would serve as an example of good living and clean speech. He must not possess or attempt to imitate any particular voice or lingual characteristics, except those of good English. He was to be a man of mystery---one who for some reason chose to conceal his identity. He must be motivated by a burning desire to help the builders of the West and to do it, not for personal credit or gain, but purely for love of country.

At this point, Striker went to work. The story idea was crystallized into script ready for broadcast. There were a few trial programs in which *The Lone Ranger* was played---Trendle recalled vaguely---by “a man named Deeds.” Some say Jack Deeds, but the whole name is actually uncertain. *The Lone Ranger* was first broadcast without fanfare on January 30, 1933, and was scheduled for three complete half hour adventure stories every week. For the regular run of the show the part was played by George Seaton, later a famed movie director. After a few months, the station manager tried the lead role for a half year. But for a time, Brace Beemer seemed more interested in business interests than in radio acting, and the role was played for some half dozen years by Earl Graser (pronounced “Grah-zer”) until his accidental death in 1941. At that time, Beemer resumed the role of the masked man, and continued until the last broadcast in 1955. Over 6000 episodes were broadcast, and over 3000 preserved on acetate tape. Beemer’s voice lives on in re-runs of the series, and even in TV commercials long after his death on February 28, 1965. The faithful Indian, Tonto, was always played on radio by John Todd. He grew quite elderly during the long run of the show, although his voice never revealed it. The Lone Ranger and Tonto were partners, a lesson in Brotherhood, an authentic American legend, a shining moment in our national folklore. “Hi-Yo Silver!” is ever a call to answer the best of our ideals. Trendle had his ideal program.

Even in those days of low prices and salaries, however, the tri-weekly production of *The Lone Ranger* was an expensive undertaking. With this problem, Mr. Trendle turned to H. Allen Campbell, a brilliant advertising salesman for the Hearst organization. Mr. Campbell accepted the challenge and assured the continuation of *The Lone Ranger*. He obtained sponsors not only in Detroit, but also in Chicago and New York. Unabashed by the countless difficulties, Mr. Campbell established a new three station hookup with WXYZ feeding *The Lone Ranger* program to the nationally famous stations WGN and WOR. This hookup became the Mutual Broadcasting System. He arranged for *Lone Ranger* sponsorship on a number of New England stations and later on stations on the west coast’s Don Lee Broadcasting System. With the two ends of the nation linked for the broadcast of *The Lone Ranger*, the Mutual Broadcasting System became a coast-to-coast network and an important voice in radio. By the end of the decade the radio program was carried by over 400 stations.

From the beginning, it was felt the *The Lone Ranger* could be a vital factor in the teaching of Americanism. It was something that must be preserved, protected against cheap imitation and carefully guarded at all times. Moreover, there must never be the slightest degree of unfavorable publicity about the program or any individual connected with it that might disillusion the millions of boys and girls who idolized the masked hero.

*The Lone Ranger* was born of a fictional conflict between lawmen and outlaws. John Reid was born in 1850 and was the sole survivor of a group of Texas Rangers who were ambushed by Butch Cavendish and his band of outlaws in Bryant’s Gap. The outlaws killed five rangers, including Reid’s older brother, Daniel. The Indian, Tonto, found him and nursed him to health. Reid then donned a black mask made from his dead brother’s vest, mounted his stallion, Silver, and roamed the West as *The Lone Ranger* to aid those in need, to fight evil, and to establish justice.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto encountered Butch Cavendish twice over the next quarter century. The first meeting resulted in a long prison sentence for Cavendish. The second showdown was

more decisive. Butch broke out of prison and the Lone Ranger and Tonto tracked him back to Bryant's Gap where, in a fierce gun battle, Butch Cavendish became the only victim ever claimed by the Lone Ranger's famous silver bullets. On television Butch Cavendish met his end by being tossed off a cliff in a fight.

*Beyond the Blue Horizon* was originally proposed as theme music but the idea was discarded.

It was radio that made *The Lone Ranger's* theme song, Gioacchino Rossini's *William Tell Overture*, a familiar tune in every child's repertoire, and it was radio that made "Hi-Yo, Silver, Away!" a familiar playground exclamation. Also heard in the series were clips from other chestnuts of the orchestral literature, such as Mendelssohn's *Fingal's Cave* and Liszt's *Les Preludes*.

*The Lone Ranger's* first movie serial appeared in 1938. In 1949, the radio show moved to television, and the sounds were linked to images and actors who became equally familiar. Clayton Moore played *The Lone Ranger* in all but a few episodes, and Jay Silverheels became the embodied Tonto. The television show was syndicated for four years, then picked up by the Columbia Broadcasting System, on which it ran until 1958. The show continued to run in syndication, and in 1980 an entirely new movie, *The Legend of the Lone Ranger*, appeared. It was a bust presumably because Clayton Moore, who everyone knew was *The Lone Ranger*, was not allowed to play the part.

## INTRODUCTION TO THE RADIO PROGRAM

*General Mills, makers of Wheaties, breakfast of champions, and Cheerios, the oat cereal ready to eat, presents The Lone Ranger.*

*A fiery horse with the speed of light, a cloud of dust and a hearty "Hi-Ho, Silver!" The Lone Ranger!*

*With his faithful Indian companion, Tonto, the daring and resourceful masked rider of the plains led the fight for law and order in the early western United States.*

*Nowhere in the pages of history can one find a greater champion on justice.*

*Return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear.*

*From out of the past come the thundering hoofbeats of the great horse, Silver.*

*The Lone Ranger rides again.*

*Come on, Silver! Let's go, Big Fella! Ho-Ho, Silver! Away!*

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