

# Ben Alexander

Titles: 40    Sources: 3    Stills: 8

Born: Nicholas Benton Alexander III; Goldfield, Nevada, May 26<sup>th</sup> 1911  
Died: Hollywood; July 5<sup>th</sup> 1969



*"PENROD" mk.II (Alexander) in a studio publicity shot with "PENROD" mk.I (Wesley Barry)*



Advice from mother on how best to deal with father, in **"BOY OF MINE"** Source: *The Silents Majority*

Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion entry:

"American boy actor of the silent days; later a character man."

Halliwell's Television Companion entry:

"American actor, a former child star of the cinema, who in later life played a second lead cop in **"Dragnet"** and **"The Felony Squad"**"

The Moving Picture Boy entry:

"The freckled expounder and interpreter of a child's soul, to whom nice little Jackie Coogan and all other studious Baedekers of child psychology must bow the knee... Incredible artistry." Such was the verdict of Germany's *"Filmwoche"*, in 1924, on the playing of Nicholas Benton Alexander III, better known as Ben or Benny. (But later, Nick to his friends.)

His first public appearance was on the cover of a rose catalogue, his second as Cupid in **"EACH PEARL A TEAR"**; and after two years in the movies he won the world's heart as "the littlest brother" in Griffith's World War One epic **"HEARTS OF THE WORLD"**, jealously

sticking his six-year old tongue out at his brother's girl-friend. Ben Alexander began as a cuddlesome, strikingly Aryan infant, sleepy and sensual in a Robert Mitchumish way, gradually becoming more aquiline as adolescence approached.

He was the screen's second **"PENROD"**, handsomer than Wesley Barry had been, more passionate than puckish.

Though never a star again - the real magic left him with the onset of puberty, and he became, in his own words, purely a commercial actor - the handsome Alexander continued to get good secondary roles during the Twenties and early Thirties. (He was, for instance, one of the young Germans in **"ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT"**, and Lew Ayres, its hero, became his closest real-life friend.) At first his roles were decent and idealistic, then turned caddish or worse in films like **"ARE THESE OUR CHILDREN?"** And **"THIS DAY AND AGE"**: he complained that he was fast becoming "the screen's youngest Dracula".

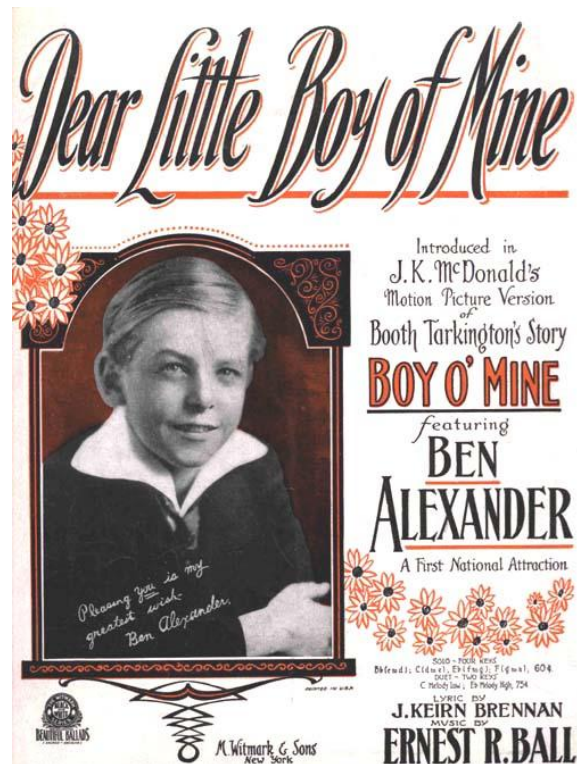
In 1935, however, he began working as a presenter for several NBC radio programmes, culminating in the Sunday-night **"Signal Carnival"** from 1936 to 1939. This left his

weekdays free, and Ben went back to Stanford to complete his education, abandoning his original ambition of medicine in favour of Business Administration. Later he diversified from acting into commerce, and ended up owning a large Hollywood motel, two gas stations, a car dealership and some mortuaries.

After naval service in World War Two, Ben Alexander moved from radio to TV, and was only lured back to acting by his friend Jack Webb, whose tubby sidekick he became in the TV series "Dragnet" (52-59). A few years later he himself became the star of another series, "Felony Squad" (66-69). There was no time for more."

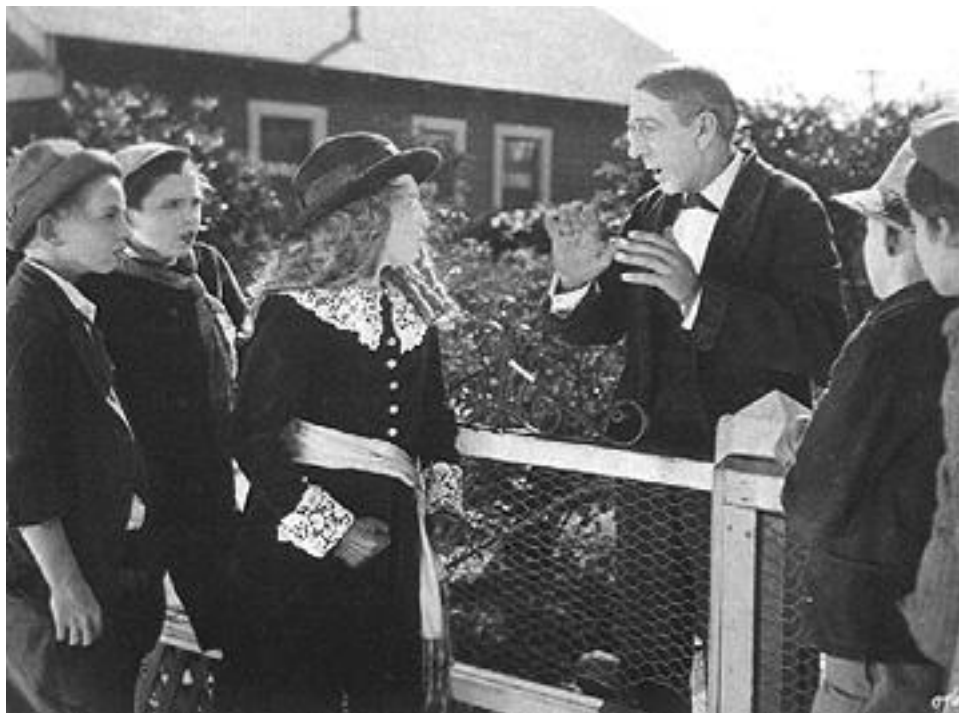
[see also NB 11/1]

"Pleasing you is my greatest wish – Ben Alexander"



reads the dedication on this songsheet  
Source (and below): *The Silents Majority*





As lace-collared brat in **"PAMPERED YOUTH"**

Source: *The Silents Majority* website



Above, in "PENROD AND SAM", with Joe Butterworth left, Cameo, and Gladys Brockwell

Source: *The Moving Picture Boy*

Below, ditto, with Joe Butterworth (Sam) and Buddy Messinger

Source: *A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen*



## FILMOGRAPHY

Year	Age	Title	Role
16	5	EACH PEARL A TEAR	as Cupid
16		BIG TREMAINE	
16		MACBETH	as MacDuff's son ?
		<i>with Francis Carpenter, Francis Marion</i>	
17	6	THE LITTLE AMERICAN	
17		A ROMANCE OF THE REDWOODS	
17		WHAT MONEY CAN'T BUY	
18	7	THE HEART OF RACHEL	
18		HEARTS OF THE WORLD	
		<i>with Francis Marion</i>	
18		THE LADY OF THE DUGOUT	
18		LITTLE ORPHANT ANNIE <i>[sic]</i>	
		<i>with Billy Jacobs (aka Paul Jacobs)</i>	
18		THE ONE WOMAN	
18		THE TURN IN THE ROAD	
19	8	BATTLE OF YOUTH	
19		THE BETTER WIFE	
19		THE HUSHED HOUR	
19		JOSELYN'S WIFE	
19		THE MAYOR OF FILBERT	
19		TANGLED THREADS	
19		THE WHITE HEATHER	
20	9	THE FAMILY HONOR	
20		FIGHTING JOB	
20		THE LUCK OF GERALDINE LAIRD	
20		THE NOTORIOUS MRS SANDS	
20		THROUGH EYES OF MEN	
20		THE TRIFLERS	
20		THE WHIPHAND	
21	10	THE HEART LINE	
21		THE SKY PILOT	
22	11	IN THE NAME OF THE LAW	
23	12	BOY OF MINE	in title role
23		JEALOUS HUSBANDS	
		<i>with Don Marion</i>	
23		PENROD AND SAM	in central role, Penrod
		<i>with Joe Butterworth, Buddy Messinger, Newton Hall, Bobby Gordon, Eugene Jackson</i>	
24	13	- - - "Juvenile Comedies" series - - -	
24		A SELF-MADE FAILURE	
25	14	FLAMING LOVE	
25		FRIVOLOUS SAL	
25		PAMPERED YOUTH	as Georgy Minafer
25		THE SHINING ADVENTURE	
		<i>with Elmo Billings, Jimmy Boudwin</i>	
26	15	THE HIGHLANDERS	
26		SCOTTY OF THE SCOUTS	serial
30	19	ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT	
		<i>with Robert Parrish</i>	
34	23	NO GREATER GLORY	
		<i>with George Breakston, Frankie Darro, Jackie Searl, Tad Alexander, Jimmy Butler, Donald Haines, Bruce Line</i>	