

# FROM WAY OUT WEST

## Cowboy Yelling Contest Launched Radio Career For Happi Hill

**H**APPI HILL says that one of the first things his old friends in Alberta, Canada, would ask if they could see him now would be "How come a no-account cowpoke like you was able to trade the prairie for a city slicker's job in a milk-and-honey country like this?"

That's a fairly long story and an interesting one. Happi himself admits it's a far cry from the back country of Alberta to his regular morning session over Station 3ZB, Christchurch. But then, he was always pretty restless.

Happi's father ran a trading post at Lost Lake, a little town near the Montana border, and having rather more literary inclinations than the average trader, he started a weekly paper, *The Ranchland Times*. Happi and his brother used to help set up type. Lost Lake was, and still is, almost a lost town. The railway is 30-odd miles away, and pull down the church, schoolhouse, livery-barn and trading post, and there would be only a hitching post left to mark the site. In every direction stretch thousands of acres of unbroken prairies; 40 miles straight west are the Rockies.

Happi went to High School in Calgary City where the principal was William Aberhart, now leader of Alberta's Social Credit government. Mr. Aberhart believed in dramatising education. He made his teachers dress up in the national costumes of the people they were lecturing about, and used moving pictures to teach geography. Happi remembers seeing a film of the West Coast of New Zealand during one of these geography lessons. Most of the class decided to go there as soon as they were old enough to leave school.

### He Took Advertising Seriously

Happi Hill's education was cut short by a disastrous series of droughts which swept through the south-west of Canada. Labour was short, and Happi became a cowpuncher. Four successive droughts parched the prairies and killed off thousands of head of cattle. For Happi life became a series of long drives to better grass and, during the winters, lonely months of tending herds in distant mountain pastures.

The long winter evenings gave him plenty of time for reading, and one night he saw an advertisement "Make Big Money in Advertising." Apparently it was no trouble for an advertising expert to earn as much as the President of the United States. Happi promptly enrolled on a two years' correspondence course, working out his examination



**WILLIAM ABERHART**  
He taught Happi at school

papers regularly every month and mailing them to Chicago.

One January and February he slipped up, and got a tough letter from his instructor, who reproached him with losing interest. The instructor sitting in his warm office in Chicago naturally didn't know that his student was living in a tent 42 miles from a mailbox and that during those two months blizzards were so tough that it was impossible for him to get to town at all. He spent the time practising writing advertisements and composing Western songs.

When the weather broke he made a trip east to Montreal, New York and Chicago, and launched a series of desperate attempts to get into advertising. It wasn't long before he was back home on the range.

### His Yell was Loudest

Undaunted, he took on another correspondence course, this time in what the schools of broadcasting describe as "Radio Technique." The first practical results of his training became apparent under unexpected conditions. Every July he and his cowpuncher friends would go to the Calgary Stampede ("rodeo" to New Zealanders) and enter the various contests. This time there was a "Cowboy Yell" contest, in which candidates stood on a platform and yelled "Yahoo" or something to that effect into a microphone. He was preceded by all sorts of barrel-chested, bass-voiced entrants whose whoops, however, didn't seem to impress the crowd.

Then suddenly the words of the textbook on microphone technique came to Happi's mind—"if the head is turned away from a directional microphone, the voice sounds thin and feeble." To a man his fellow competitors had been turning their heads skyward in the culminating ecstasy of this whoops. Happi yelled straight at the microphone, won the first

prize of 50 dollars, and achieved his first break in broadcasting.

### Tour of "Hick Towns"

This feat led to bigger and better things. The judge of the yelling contest invited him to join up with a Chataqua Party and tour the north-western states of America that fall. This Chataqua Party visited all the "hick towns" putting on music, comedy, and inevitably, some spine-chilling ghost story for the benefit of countryfolk who had no other form of entertainment.

In the four months he was with it the party never once had a rehearsal. Before they went on the stage the master of ceremonies would say, "Keep singin', or actin' crazy—anything at all, while I think what to do in the play." The play was actually made up as they went along. The audiences, genuine, dyed-in-the-wool hill-billies, came out of the mountains perhaps twice a year, and provided there were screams, blackouts, and people dressed in stage clothes, they didn't care whether there was a plot or not.

It was a rare experience, and with the money he saved, Happi paid for a course of Scientific Agriculture at the University of Alberta.

### Over the Fence

Then, one summer four years ago, he met a tourist from New Zealand who painted such a glowing picture of this country that Happi immediately became unsettled and dissatisfied. Ranch life and ranch surroundings became less and less inviting. As Happi says, "a pasture never seems the same to a cow that has looked over the fence."

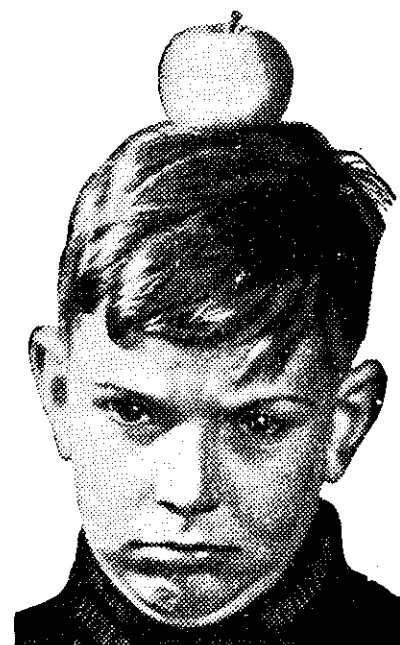
When he went into town for the mail, he'd watch the old-timers. They would gather around the post office and chew tobacco and discuss the low price of beef, the high rates of grazing, and the early winter. They were worn out, grim-eyed, soured, and rheumatic. Happi saw what he himself would become some day, and he didn't like the prospect.

### What Decided Him

To his partners in a ranching venture he waxed enthusiastic about New Zealand, suggested that they sell up and try cowpunching in New Zealand where the grass grew a foot high. "Horsefeathers," said his partners. "Jest another o' your fancy notions—ferget it."

What decided him was the winter of 1936-37. It was one of the toughest winters that had hit the prairies since the ice age. It didn't break until the middle of April, and by that time a year's careful farming and a whole season's profit had disappeared into thin air.

That year Happi Hill came to New Zealand where he has since found scope for his knowledge of both advertising and broadcasting. He has been appearing over the Commercial Broadcasting Service for the past three years, and is at present conducting a session entitled "Fashion Fancies" from 3ZB every week-day morning at eight o'clock.



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