

The Black Flame of the Amazon
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When Van Cronkhite Associates Incorporated, a Chicago-based radio consulting agency, dissolved in early 1938, some of its former employees promptly created TransAir Incorporated, another agency focused on building and selling radio programming, especially news and transcribed shows.

With William F. Arnold as president, Ray Launder as vice-president, and John Taylor Booz as secretary, TransAir quickly sold its first series to Toledo, Ohio's Hickok Oil Company. That first sale was *The Black Flame of the Amazon*, a quarter-hour show that Hickok wanted on the Michigan Network as well as stations in Toledo, Cleveland, Canton, and Youngstown. Recorded by Aerograms Incorporated out of Hollywood, *The Black Flame of the Amazon* premiered on February 14, 1938.

The program aired five days per week and featured adventurer and explorer Harold Noice. Noice had spent the last half of the 19-teens on Arctic exploration trips and spent significant time among the Inuit. He later turned his attention to South America and the Amazon region, the period during which the *The Black Flame of the Amazon* is very loosely based. Noice played himself in the series and the scripts were written and produced by Aerogram's J. B. Downie.

After going off the air for the summer, Hickock Oil renewed *The Black Flame of the Amazon* on September 26, 1938 for a 39-week run to last through the school year. The show's reach expanded to Cincinnati's WCKY, Richmond, Virginia's WRVA, and other stations in Kentucky, North Carolina, and West Virginia under the sponsorship of Strietmann Biscuit Company and Felber Biscuit Company, both subsidiaries of United Biscuit Company.

Promoted as an educational adventure series, the producer created a Hi-Speed Explorer's Club after a gasoline brand of the Hickock Oil sponsor. Executives boasted that over 450,000 youngsters joined the Explorer's Club after hearing about it on *The Black Flame of the Amazon*. Other sponsor information includes the Independent Packing Company backing the program in St. Louis and Jefferson City, Missouri, in 1940 and Pacific States Oil Company underwriting it over San Francisco's KFRC in 1941. Industry records show it was still on the air as late as 1943.

Sources:

Dunning, John. *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio*.

Broadcasting February 1, 1938, August 15, 1938, October 15, 1938, August 1, 1938, December 1, 1938, January 1, 1939, January 1, 1940, February 10, 1941

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