

# Hopalong Cassidy Continues to Generate Income

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Speaking to Copyright Office staff in September 2012, songwriter Paul Williams said, “Copyright has allowed me to make a living and raise a family.” William Boyd (1898–1972) is another example of someone in the arts who made his living as a result of the intellectual property he owned.

Boyd’s story could be titled “Worn-out Actor Risks Everything and Buys Copyrights.” These copyrights made him a very rich man, but how?

Hopalong Cassidy of the Bar 20 Ranch was a fictional character of the Old West created by Clarence Mulford (1883–1956). Mulford told of Cassidy in a series of stories and novels (some illustrated by famed western artist Maynard Dixon) beginning in 1905. Hopalong, who received his moniker from his limp, the result of a bullet wound, was a rough cowboy with all the usual bad habits: drinking, swearing, smoking, shooting, and gambling.

Playing Hoppy in movies made from 1935 to 1943, William Boyd was nearly washed up as an actor when he accepted the role. He transformed the character from rough- to clean-living, a cowboy who used neither tobacco nor alcohol and who always played fair on the side of law and justice.

When producer Harry Sherman decided to cease making Hoppy movies, Boyd, thinking the movies might have a future on television, mortgaged everything he owned in 1944 to buy character rights from Mulford and the backlog of the movies in which he had starred.



David Scott’s Hopalong Cassidy Museum in Cambridge, Ohio, displays Hopalong memorabilia.

Broadcast on the new NBC in 1949, “Hopalong Cassidy” was the first network TV western series. Hoppy became a superhero to children.

Wearing his trademark black cowboy garb and black Stetson and riding his white horse, Topper, William Boyd was one of the first actors to license merchandise. In 1950, the *Wall Street Journal* said, “For folks who sell things to the nation’s small fry, he’s the greatest godsend to come down the train in the memory of man.” Due to his success, “manufacturers are standing in queues awaiting permission to tack his name to their merchandise for juveniles.” Merchandise included roller skates, bikes, cowboy clothes, hats, toy six-shooters and spurs, cookies, comic books, bread, ice cream and candy bars, and watches. His image was the first to appear on a child’s lunch box.

At the time of Boyd’s death, the *New York Times* characterized his Hopalong as “a kind of middle-aged



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Galahan in shining black cowboy suit and boots.” Although he left school after the sixth grade, Boyd died a wealthy man due to his business acumen and copyright protection. In 1947, Hopalong Cassidy Productions’ *Unexpected Guest* was the first television program submitted for copyright registration. The Hopalong movies are still under copyright and still generating income. The rights to all 66 movies and 52 original television episodes are today owned by U.S. Television Inc., which bought the rights from Boyd’s estate, William Boyd Enterprises, and Mulford’s estate and trust. Funded by Mulford’s copyrights, the Clarence E. Mulford Trust had assets of \$9,974,270.82 in 2011 and funds projects in Mulford’s town of residence, Fryeburg, Maine. ©