

Penrod

US : 1922 † : dir. Marshall Neilan : Associated First National Silent : ? min
 prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:
*Wesley Barry; Gordon Griffith; Jackie Condon; Newton Hall; Florence Morrison;
 Ernest (Sunshine Sammy) Morrison; Clara Horton*
 Adult cast unknown

Ref:	Pages	Sources	Stills	Words	Ω	□	€	Z	⚡	Copy on VHS	Last Viewed
3099b	2½	3	2	1,028	-	-	-	-	-	No	Unseen

† but shot in 1920



Wesley Barry and Clara Horton in an uncharacteristic sweetheart scene

Source: *The Silents Majority website*

Halliwell's Filmgoer's Companion general note on Penrod:

"Booth Tarkington's American boy character, in his mid-west small town setting, was for many years a favourite Hollywood subject. Marshall Neilan directed Gordon Griffith in a 1922 version. In 1923 William Beaudine directed Ben Alexander in the title role in

"**PENROD AND SAM**", which was remade by Beaudine in 1931 with Leon Janney, and again by William McGann in 1937 with Billy Mauch. Mauch and his twin brother Bobby appeared in two sequels: "**PENROD'S DOUBLE TROUBLE**" (38) directed by Lewis Seiler, and "**PENROD AND HIS TWIN BROTHER**" (38) directed by McGann. Two Doris Day musicals, "**ON**

MOONLIGHT BAY" (51) and **"BY THE LIGHT OF THE SILVERY MOON"** (53), were also lightly based on the Tarkington stories: Penrod, unaccountably disguised as "Wesley", was played by Billy Gray."

Excerpt from **The Moving Picture Boy** entry on Barry:

"During 1920 Wesley got his first incontrovertible lead in the title role of **"PENROD"**, a feature-length kid film based on the 1914 Booth Tarkington best-seller. Penrod, for the benefit of non-American readers, was the American fore-runner of Richmal Crompton's William, who saw the light eight years later - a creature of wild imagination and grandiose stratagems, from the ruins of which, by a mixture of luck and bluster, he emerges unscathed. Subsequent screen Penrods included Ben Alexander, Leon Janney and Billy Mauch. Wesley Barry's **"PENROD"** wasn't in fact released until 1922, by which time he had had another lead in **"DINTY"**, an earlier role writ larger. Though he retained his impishness, the teens eventually crept up on Wesley Barry. He married in 1926 but remained a popular screen teenager for several more years."

Incidental note from **The Moving Picture Boy** entry on Bobby Gordon in **"PENROD AND SAM"** (23):

"...Racial caricatures are a depressing feature of Booth Tarkington's otherwise likeable "Penrod" books, and have undoubtedly assisted them into oblivion. One would rather not recall the names of the little black brothers, Herman and Verman..."

The Silents Majority website caption to front page still:

"Clara Horton and Wesley Barry; from **"PENROD"** (Associated First National, 1922), based on Booth Tarkington's famous novel. Clara (1904-1976) began her screen career in the early 1910s as "The Eclair Kid" for the studio that employed her." – Diane MacIntyre



Top to bottom: Wesley Barry, Florence Morrison, Ernest "Sunshine Sammy" Morrison & Gordon Griffith
Source: *A Pictorial History of the Silent Screen*

[no listing in "Classics of the Silent Screen", "Hollywood in the Twenties", "Silent Movies: A Picture Quiz Book", "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 2001", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and Video Guide", "Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

No further information currently available. The first of six **PENROD** films, all of them produced by First National, although the last three with the Mauch twins seem to have borrowed only the familiar name for an otherwise unrelated series of contemporary kid detective vehicles. "**PECK'S BAD BOY**" was another oft-remade title of early twentieth century American scamphood, as incarnated by Jackie Coogan, Jackie Cooper and Tommy Kelly.

Wesley Barry was 13 at the time of shooting the film, his many other titles including "**DADDY LONG LEGS**" (19), "**THE UNPARDONABLE SIN**" (19 – no, not *that* one), "**SCHOOL DAYS**" (21) and "**RAGS TO RICHES**" (22). A long wiry cascade of freckles with a cocky grin, he was the very model of an upwardly mobile lad from the streets, and evidently struck a chord with American audiences. In a day when child players – in vaudeville and on screen – were ten a penny, Barry was unquestionably a star in his own right, and not without opportunist impersonators.

Gordon Griffith was also 13. Two years previously he'd played "**TARZAN**" as a boy in the cinema's first outing for the jungle man, and "**SON OF TARZAN**" in a 1920 serial. "Gordon Griffith, a youthful actor of uncommon gifts" enthused one contemporary critic, "impersonates Tarzan as a boy. He is a fit subject for a sculptor, as he climbs through the trees in the company of the apes, his naked body showing its grace of line in every move.." In 1920 he was Tom Sawyer in "**HUCKLEBERRY FINN**".

Ernest "Sunshine Sammy" Morrison was 7, but had been in regular employ with Hal Roach (usually under sobriquets like "little sambo" or "the frolicsome pickaninny") since 1917. One of the initial **Our Gang** contingent, he and sister Florence were trapped in the comic nigger roles nobody (nobody white, at any rate) seemed to think offensive at the time. Morrison in due course became the first millionaire black actor in the US, but that was due in no small measure to his father's astute business sense – it didn't all come from film royalties.

Jackie Condon, described by Holmstrom as "a child of almost supernatural charm and sauciness" was just two, and also went on to sterling work in some 78 **Our Gang** shorts. Resembling a far prettier version of Jackie Coogan, the puzzling thing is why Condon never established himself as a solo child star. Newton Hall, here playing the Georgie Bassett character, was 7, the only member of the original cast to be used again by William Beaudine in the 1923 "**PENROD AND SAM**". Clara Horton, finally, was 16.

See versions of "**PENROD AND SAM**" from 1923, 1931 and 1937, "**PENROD AND HIS TWIN BROTHER**", "**PENROD'S DOUBLE TROUBLE**" and subject index under **DOGS, RASCALS & SCALAWAGS** and **BOOTH TARKINGTON**.