

Motion picture biographies have depicted the lives of men ranging from Christ through such men of the 19th and 20th centuries as Louis Pasteur, Alexander Graham Bell and Thomas Edison, to mention but a few. With the advent of the Soaring Sixties, the film makers are searching rather desperately for material to transfer to the screen. Eliminating a Broadway play or a best selling novel, there is a dearth of good commercial properties.

Two men, highly respected denizens of their respective lines of endeavor - composer Dimitri Tionkin and author-commentator-world traveler Lowell Thomas - have combined forces to discover an obvious oversight in American film biographical history.

Who is the subject? Why, no one else but the multi talented, thoroughly arresting world-wide figure -- statesman, printer, poet, philosopher, humorist, scientist, lover -- Benjamin Franklin, who, for eighty-four years starting at his birth in 1706, lived a life replete with adventure, romance, purpose and contribution to humanity.

Why the motion picture screen has not attempted to put a celluloid umbrella over the versatile statesman, who was a veritable Jack of all trades and a master of every one, is hard to fathom.

It is the intention of Lowell Thomas and Dimitri Tiomkin to bring to the movie theatres an exciting cavalcade of a man who lived two hundred years ago and yet who, by his brain power, verve and personality, would have been an ideal citizen in 1960 as we engage in a race to conquer outer space and confederate the new frontiers that have been some years removed from the perimeter of a more perfect life in this century.

The theme of the picture, though biographical, would be in no way burdened and hampered by the stodgy pitfalls and staid pace that usually govern costume filmizations. Rather, the Franklin saga would be dotted with bagatelles and documents of an extraordinary life. The manifold ingredients are a humble beginning; rebellion against his father and the pater's profession of soap making; his start as a printer and publisher; his projection of common sense and proverbs in "Poor Richard's Almanack"; his

spectacular experiment of flying a kite in a thunderstorm, which was a forerunner of electricity; his creativity in the founding of the new American nation; the lighthearted quality which caused him to invent musical instruments, bifocal glasses and a new kind of stove. It was he who raised sixty million dollars to finance the American Revolution; it was Franklin's brilliant mind and witty grasp of the social amenities that made him so thoroughly accepted as an urbane representative of a new floundering nation. In his crowded lifetime his sphere of activities encompassed a hand in drafting the Declaration of Independence, a job as Postmaster General and an important arm in directing United States naval operations. The American statesman also had a serious conflict to surmount right in his own home. While he was helping forge the destinies of the new born nation, his son was identified quite vividly with the Loyalists and Tories who had pledged undying support to the mother country. This then is Benjamin Franklin, perhaps the model for American representation at the UN.

Why the producers Thomas and Tiomkin? For more than thirty years Lowell Thomas has been a nightly visitor into millions of American homes. His voice is one of the best known in the world.

Behind his annotation of the news, Mr. Thomas has been a fabled world traveler and an author of profundity where world citizens are concerned. His interest in the medium of motion pictures can best be assayed by his pioneer executive position with Cinerama. It is rather easy, then, to understand why a devoted and respected American citizen who has been a part of the communications industry would want to breathe life into the Benjamin Franklin story.

Dimitri Tiomkin has won too many Academy Awards for his musical compositions for motion pictures to receive identification in this area. He has been a vibrant part of Hollywood film making since 1930 and has worked hand in hand with such creative giants as David O. Selznick, Frank Capra, George Stevens and John Huston. His proximity to pictures that have grossed hundreds of millions of dollars gives him strong insight into what is good and what is very good in motion picture production. He is also a devoted humanitarian and feels, along with Mr. Thomas, that Benjamin Franklin's story properly projected on the screen would go a long way beyond offering mere high grade screen entertainment. Messrs. Thomas and Tiomkin are of the belief that from world-wide release there would be great cultural gains and intra country communal understanding.

Perhaps Mr. Franklin was able to foresee the coming of indelible records on film if he didn't actually envision his own life being perpetuated on a reel. After all, it was he who said: "The next thing most like living one's life over seems to be a recollection of that life..."