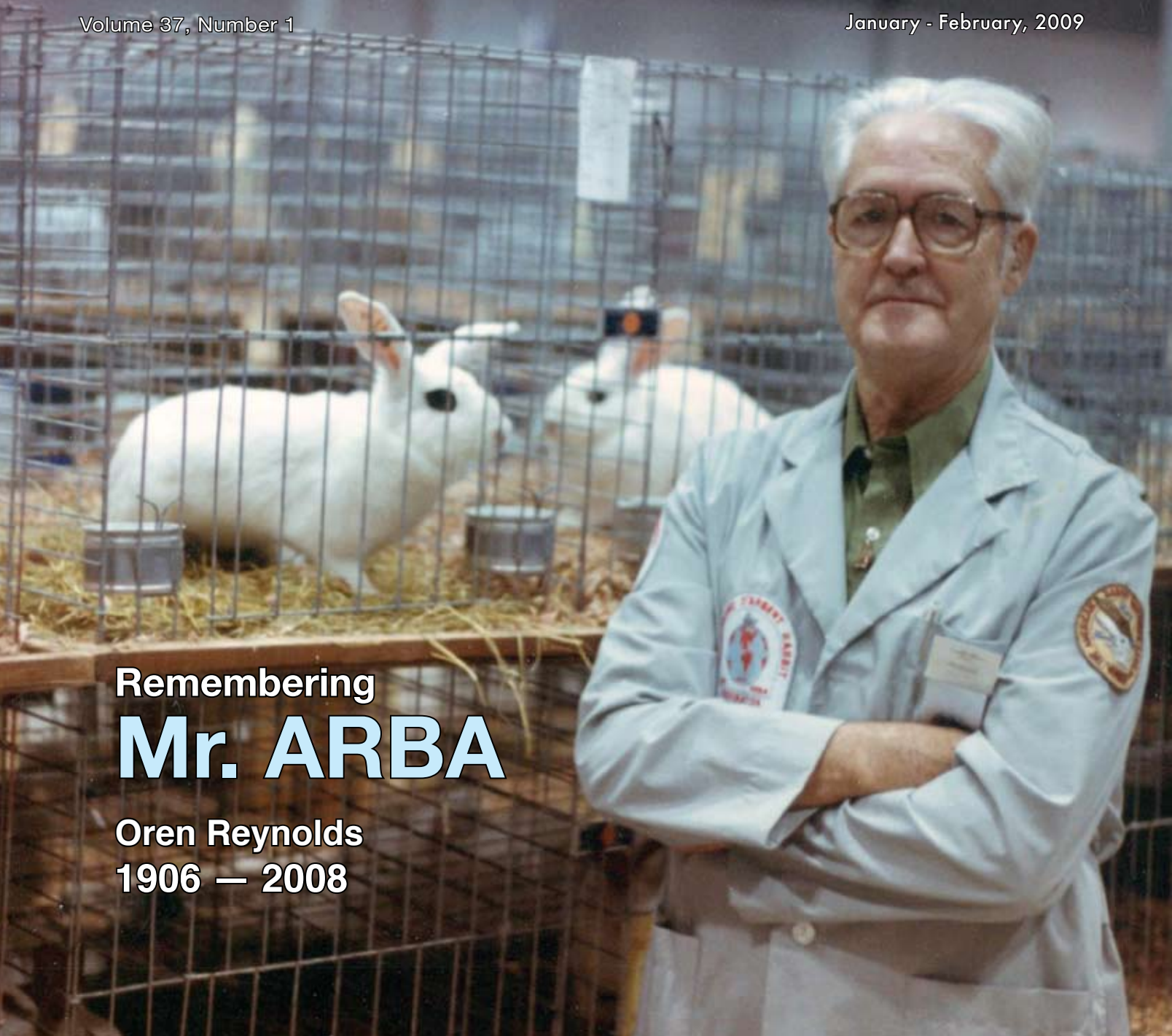


# Domestic Rabbits

Voice of the American Rabbit Breeders Association, Inc.

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## Remembering **Mr. ARBA**

Oren Reynolds  
1906 — 2008



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# Mr. ARBA

For more than a half century Oren Reynolds gave our organization steady guidance. We will miss him.

## Remembering an industry icon

The American Rabbit Breeders Association has lost its iconic *Mr. ARBA*. Oren Reynolds, the consummate rabbit showman, ARBA judge, ARBA past president, esteemed ARBA advisor, and *Domestic Rabbits* Editor Emeritus, passed away on November 3, 2008 at the incredible age of 102 years. As one who survived two world wars, the Great Depression, two wives, a sister, a son and one grandson, Oren was part of what author and journalist Tom Brokaw described as the *Greatest Generation*. At 102, he courageously survived a hip replace-

ment surgery only to later succumb to the weakness of his aged heart. Throughout much of his life, on a daily basis, he served 'The American', or the ARBA as we know it today. In so doing, Oren set a standard for consistency, service, and dedication, the likes of which are rare to find in our busy world.

## Humble beginnings

Oren R. Reynolds was born in Herrick, Illinois on February 25, 1906 to Willie Clifton and Mary Luella Reynolds. When he was very young, he traveled by covered wagon with his parents and

sister to Big Sandy, Montana in pursuit of land under the newly expanded Federal Homestead Act. There, they established a small farm seventeen miles from the nearest neighbor. They were in such remote wilderness it was necessary to wear boots for fear of rattlesnakes. Their home was constructed of tongue and groove boards with layers of brown paper, and wood shingles on the roof. It was snug and warm in the winter. Oren's mother ordered carpet from Sears, Roebuck and Co. which came in twenty-four inch strips that had to be sewn together. This carpet was placed over a layer of straw on the floor. Each fall Oren's mother would take the strips apart, wash and dry the carpet, re-sew the strips, and place them over a fresh layer of straw.

After a few years, his mother became homesick, and the family returned to Illinois. Illinois was to be Oren's home for the rest of his life. After high school, Oren studied to be a CPA, but a family illness intervened and he went to work as a meat cutter at the Eastern Packing Company to support them. It was very physical work yet it was a profession he continued for forty-two years.

## A well-kept secret

Glen Carr, past ARBA Secretary and close friend of Oren, revealed that Oren was very athletic, and was a talented baseball player in his youthful years. During one 1920's game, Oren was hit in the mouth with a line drive, knocking



They crossed the plains in a covered wagon before building their pioneer homestead in Montana, c 1910. (L-R): Oren's mother, Mary Luella; Oren; sister Bernice; a neighbor; and Oren's dad, Willie.



Oren in 1906 with sister Bernice.

1900



As a boy c1917

1910



A dashing young man c 1920s

1930



Oren raised New Zealand Reds prior to serving our country during the war years.

1940

out two of his front teeth. No dentist was able to repair them. So Oren decided, instead of living with a gap in his smile, he would have *all* of his teeth pulled. When the dentist began pulling the teeth, the pain was so great that Oren was forced to go home for the day. He bravely returned the next morning and had the rest of the teeth pulled. He was fitted with a set of teeth made from rubber that was intended to be used temporarily. But they fit and looked great — so Oren continued to use them for the next thirty years! Many folks never knew that Oren had lost all his teeth at such an early age.

**A dedicated family man**

Oren and his beloved wife Bessie were married in 1924 and had one son, Raymond, who they adored. When the Reynolds family took extended car trips, young Ray collected stickers from the various towns and states, and; after he had collected a large number of the decals, he

covered an entire window on the family sedan. Oren discovered the brightly colored collage as he left one morning for work. He simply could not drive the car in that condition. He had to find another way to get to work, and instructed Ray to remove every one by the time he returned home. Ray worked for hours that day with a razor blade — finishing the job before his dad came home. Oren enjoyed Ray’s friends, many of whom preferred the Reynolds home to their own. On one occasion, when they were young adults, a friend of Ray’s challenged Oren to a drinking contest. Ray reported that eventually the always-determined Oren was the last one standing!

**He raised rabbits with a passion**

Oren was drawn into the world of rabbits the way so many parents are; his son showed an interest — so they began the project together. The son soon turned to other activities, but Oren was hooked!

Before the war, Oren had New Zealand Reds, and when he returned from the armed services, he got into Champagnes. He started with a buck and two does, later adding two more bucks to his small herd. After that, he never went outside his line in all his years of showing Champagnes.

*“Those showing against him had to ‘get good or get out’ ”*

—Wayne Cleer

He was the Secretary/Treasurer and newsletter editor for the Champagne D’Argent Rabbit Federation for twenty-five years, and aggressively built the club. Over ninety percent of all the Champagne pedigrees in the US are believed to have Oren’s rabbits behind them.

Known for consistently having rabbits with the best fur and the best condi-

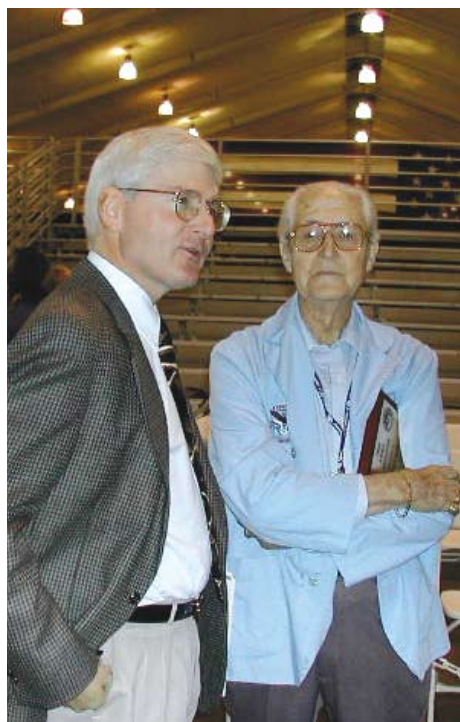


**“I miss Bessie”** was Oren’s reply when asked in a recent interview who he missed the most in his life, (his wife of 62 years passed in 1988).

tion, Oren won more normal colored fur classes at ARBA conventions than anyone else in history. Wayne Cleer, current Champagne Club Secretary, reported that those showing against him had to ‘get good or get out’. But Oren did not have beginner’s luck. It took over two years of showing before his Champagnes won their first blue ribbon. Oren later described it as his most meaningful win because it was at a convention and the rabbit went on to win best junior.

After dogs wiped out his prize-winning Champagnes, he acquired Florida Whites from his good friend and fellow hall-of-famer, E. R. “Fibber” McGehee. Oren continued to maintain that herd of Florida Whites until the age of 100.

Oren attended fifty consecutive ARBA conventions, from 1948 to 1998. He recalled in a recent interview that the road trip to the 1949 Long Beach, California Convention was an adventure, taking the old Route 66. He also attended the 2001 Convention in — *continues...*



**Advisor to the Presidents:** Oren, a past president himself was advisor to nine ARBA Presidents, including good friend, Dr. Chris Hayhow.



**A favorite judge:** A mustachioed Oren judges a class of Floridas in front of an eager crowd.



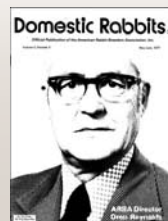
Oren, the family man, with (L-R) his son Ray; Grandson Greg; and father Willey. Oren (R) obtained his first Champagnes in 1947.

1950



Oren was the tireless long-standing editor of the Champagne news a position he held for 25 years.

1960



A 1977 cover story by former Domestic Rabbits editor, Bob Bennett, paid tribute to Oren.

1970



Oren was inducted into the ARBA Hall of Fame in 1984

1980

*Continued ...* — San Diego, California, and had the honor of cutting the ribbon for the opening ceremony. Oren became a judge in 1945, at the age of 39. He was a very popular judge, excelling at judging all the commercial breeds. He continued Judging into his late nineties.

**Always above the political fray**

At first, he was not interested in becoming involved in politics, but in 1959 he became a director, then Vice President in 1965, and rose to be President in 1971. He was instrumental in moving the headquarters to Bloomington, Illinois, and within a couple of years, he brought Ed Peifer into the organization, persuading him to become the Secretary by telling him that it would be a “part time” job. Glen Carr feels that the size and success of the ARBA today is due to the early collaboration between Ed and Oren.

As President, Oren established the ARBA Youth division, which had 700 members in its first year, and within a very few years outnumbered the adult members in new memberships. Oren considered his creation of the youth programs to be one of his most rewarding contributions to the association. Oren was a mentor to many young breeders, encouraging and advising them, and providing them with excellent stock with which to build prize-winning herds.

During Oren’s tenure as President, the first issue of Domestic Rabbits Magazine was published in 1973 under the editorship of noted rabbit author, Bob Bennett. When Bob Bennett had to resign due to work commitments, Oren took over the publication in May of 1974. Soon, Oren switched printing houses and was able to double and then triple the size of the magazine with the cost savings. For six issues a year, over a span of 32 years, Oren lovingly created the magazine in a small room in his home. Oren retired as the Editor of Domestic Rabbits maga-

zine at the age of 100, in 2006. He was promptly provided the honorary title of Editor Emeritus.

**The senior statesman**

When Fibber McGehee was president of the New Zealand Federation, he looked regularly to Oren for his wise advice and counsel. Fibber, now 82, had been best of friends with Oren since 1955 and coincidentally shares the same birth year as Oren’s late son Ray. In 1984, ARBA President, Dr. Terry E. Reed saw fit to appoint Oren to be an honorary advisor to the Board. No one person in ARBA history has attended as many board meetings or was as knowledgeable on ARBA business as Oren Reynolds. When the ARBA Hall of Fame Library opened in 2002, it was dedicated to Oren’s unsurpassed service to the Association.

Many people were interviewed for this article. Past officers from Dennis Holcomb (past President) to Glen Carr (past Executive Director) to Oren’s surviving daughter in law, Vivian Reynolds, plus many other friends of Oren. They all said he was universally loved and respected.

Oren was meticulous, intelligent, and brought integrity and strong leadership to his roles. Folks soon discovered that they couldn’t argue with him, as he had done his homework, knew all the details, and had all his ‘ducks in a row’. He was an intimidating exhibitor; his animals had the best fur, color, and condition. As a judge, he was fair; he judged the animals, not the breeders. As a leader, he was determined, a peacemaker over divisive issues, and folks loved him for his sincerity and dedication. He was a guiding force for the past half century. Oren Reynolds was Mr. ARBA .

By ELLIE BONDE and KEVIN WHALEY

Vivian Reynolds contributed photos and Stephanie Baker provided research support.

**What is life like after 100?**

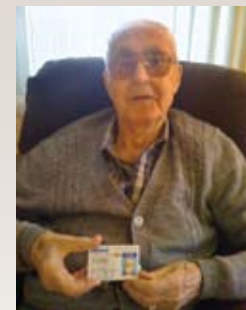
For Oren Reynolds, it included more daily activities than a lot of folks much younger could handle. Kevin Whaley took the below photos while conducting interviews with Oren at his home in 2006 and 2008.



Oren was proud of his own feed formula which he sold for 30 years, (Wayne Cleer still uses it today.) At 100 years young, he sold as much as 3 tons per month from his home garage—lifting fifty pound bags!



Oren maintained a tidy vegetable garden, shown above in 2007 when he was 100.



It seems impossible that someone looked and acted as young as Oren did. The spry centennialist was quick to offer his drivers license as proof of his 102 years! May, 2008.

Watch excerpts from the 2008 video interview by clicking on the “Library” link at: [www.arba.net](http://www.arba.net)



Giving a speech in 1984. Shown with Dr. Terry and Sandy Reed, Orlando, Florida.

1980



With wife, Ida 1990s

1990



With son, Ray 1990s

2000



Cutting the ribbon for the 2001 ARBA Convention

2008