McHenry Tichenor, media mogul, was born on December 21, 1897, the fourth of five sons of Joseph M. and Effie M. Tichenor of Morganfield, Union County, Kentucky. His father, a telegraph operator and later a farmer, had served during the Civil War as a private in the 12th Kentucky Cavalry.

Educated in public schools in Hopkinsville, Christian County Kentucky, McHenry was to follow his four-year older brother, Warren Clay, to Oklahoma City, where both would be employed in the newspaper business at the Oklahoman and the Oklahoma City Times. In 1917 both brothers were serving in the Oklahoma National Guard. The unit was called to active duty in 1918, and the 186 men and 212 horses went to war in 1918 as Company F 111th Ammunition Train, 36th Division where Clay rose to the rank of captain.

By 1927 McHenry had moved on to Shawnee, Oklahoma where he was advertising manager for the daily newspaper. More importantly the next year the 28 year old had married Texan Geneviere Beryl Smith, 24.

In 1930 the ambitious Tichenor came to the rapidly developing Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas. Two years later in 1932 Tichenor was able to purchase the struggling 22 year old Valley Morning Star newspaper with its offices in downtown Harlingen, Texas. The purchase from the March-Fentress Group was said to cost $50,000, of which $10,000 was cash. Five years later Tichenor would sell the paper to Hubert Hudson for $125,000.

Tichenor would serve as administrator for the relatively new Valley Baptist Hospital and guide it out of serious fiscal difficulties. In the war years, 1942 and 1943, he served on its board of trustees. This is likely where exposure to less fortunate patients led to his quiet lifelong medical philanthropy.

In 1940 Tichenor was to make a decision that would shape the rest of his life. He organized the Harbenito Broadcasting Company. The name was a combination of Harlingen and the adjacent city of San Benito. The radio station opened in 1941 with a paltry 250 watt signal and a staff of eleven. It secured the call sign, KGBS. Popular belief is that McHenry Tichenor gave its call sign the initials of his wife, Geneviere Beryl Smith. In January 1944 it would become an affiliate of the Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) and later a minor affiliate of ABC.

GBS, however, was also the initials George B. Storer, founder of Storer Communications. In a shrewd move McHenry, in 1950, sold the call sign KGBS, allowing it to become the call sign of a Storer station in San Diego. His South Texas station then was to become KGBT.

It was in 1946 that McHenry and his wife purchased the 1923 La Feria estate of land promoter, Al F. Parker. The structure and its beautifully landscaped surroundings occupy a city block and are currently maintained as the McHenry Tichenor Museum Project, a fitting legacy for the character and leadership of Mr. Tichenor.

In 1953 Tichenor's broadcasting entity expanded with the acquisition of radio station KSOX in Harlingen. On 1530 kHz, this first 50,000 watt station in the Valley was originally constructed by former Harris County Judge and Houston Mayor, Roy Hofheinz (q.v.). After the purchase, KGBT gave up its 1240 kHz dial spot for 1530, moved into studios and offices at 1519 West Harrison, and in time, after a series of transactions, became the first American radio station with full-time Spanish language programming. This innovation was revolutionary for its time. In 1957 a new television studio for KGBT-TV was added to the radio building by chief engineer Alfred R. Beck of the station.
By 1960 the principals of the station were McHenry Tichenor, president, J.C. Looney of Edinburg (and a stockholder), vice-president, and Troy McDaniel, secretary-treasurer and general manager of the station.

In the early 1950s Tichenor served on the first Cameron County-appointed South Padre Island Park Board. This board laid the groundwork for the erection of the first causeway ever to connect the island to the mainland. It was named the Queen Isabella Causeway, and its completion dramatically changed the economic and developmental potential of the island.

The Harlingen Chamber of Commerce, when in 1971 it established the Harlingen Historical Hall of Fame, honored McHenry Tichenor for his achievements by making him an initial inductee.

McHenry well tutored and nurtured his successor and only child, McHenry Taylor Tichenor Sr., for in the 1980s, his son would move the Tichenor Media System into a buying spree of radio stations and change their format to Spanish language, a wise move indeed as it foresaw the changing market demographic. In 1997, TMS merged with Heftel Broadcasting to become the nation’s largest Hispanic radio group with 38 radio stations in every major U.S. Hispanic market. In 2004, HBC merged with Univision Communications.

McHenry Tichenor's wife Geneviere died in 1985. He was to die at age 98 on 10/24/96. He is buried next to his wife at Mont Meta Memorial Park, San Benito. Starting with one radio station in 1940, he grew the company to 20 stations at the time of his death and was on the verge of acquiring 16 more. In the Rio Grande Valley he founded KGBT AM, KELT FM, and KGBT-TV 4 and owned these plus Valley stations KIWW-FM, and KQXX-FM.

In 1987 McHenry Tichenor wrote an anecdotal autobiography titled Bits and Pieces from the Life of McHenry Tichenor. The community characterized him as an individual with a "great sense of humor and a man who had strong values". He would be remembered throughout the South Texas region for his numerous civic and charitable endeavors that literally touched thousands with his generosity.


Norman Rozeff