

Walt Disney

Walter Elias "Walt" Disney (December 5, 1901 – December 15, 1966) was an American [film producer](#), [director](#), [screenwriter](#), [voice actor](#), [animator](#), [entrepreneur](#), [entertainer](#), [international icon](#),^[2] and [philanthropist](#), well-known for his influence in the field of entertainment during the 20th century. Along with his brother [Roy O. Disney](#), he was co-founder of Walt Disney Productions, which later became one of the best-known motion picture producers in the world. The corporation is now known as [The Walt Disney Company](#) and has annual revenues of approximately USD \$35 billion.^[*when?*]

Disney is particularly noted as a film producer and a popular showman, as well as an innovator in [animation](#) and [theme park](#) design. He and his staff created some of the world's most well-known fictional characters including [Mickey Mouse](#), for whom Disney himself provided the original voice. During his lifetime he received four honorary [Academy Awards](#) and won twenty-two Academy Awards from a total of fifty-nine nominations, including a record four in one year,^[3] giving him more awards and nominations than any other individual in history.^[*citation needed*] Disney also won seven [Emmy Awards](#) and gave his name to the [Disneyland](#) and [Walt Disney World Resort](#) theme parks in the U.S., as well as the international resorts [Tokyo Disney](#), [Disneyland Paris](#), and

Walt Disney



Walt Disney in 1954

Born	<div>Walter Elias Disney</div> December 5, 1901 ^[1] <div>Hermosa, Chicago, Illinois, U.S.</div>
Died	<div>December 15, 1966 (aged 65)</div> <div>Burbank, California, U.S.</div>
Occupation	<div>Interred: Forest Lawn Memorial Park, Glendale, California, U.S.</div> <div>Film producer,</div> <div>Co-founder of The Walt Disney Company, formerly known as Walt Disney Productions</div>
Years active	1920–1966
Political party	Republican
Religion	Christian (Congregationalist)
Spouse	Lillian Bounds (1925–1966)
Children	Diane Marie Disney Sharon Mae Disney
Parents	Elias Disney Flora Call Disney
Relatives	Herbert Arthur Disney (brother) Raymond Arnold Disney (brother) Roy Oliver Disney (brother) Ruth Flora Disney (sister) Ronald William Miller (son-in-

Disneyland Hong Kong.

The year after his December 15, 1966 death from lung cancer in [Burbank, California](#), construction began on Walt Disney World Resort in Florida. His brother Roy Disney inaugurated the [Magic Kingdom](#) on October 1, 1971.

1901–1937: Beginnings

Childhood

Disney was born on December 5, 1901, at 2156 N. Tripp Avenue in Chicago's [Hermosa community area](#) to [Irish-Canadian](#) father [Elias Disney](#) and [German-American](#) mother [Flora Call Disney](#).^{[4][5]} His great-grandfather, [Arundel Elias Disney](#), had emigrated from [Gowran, County Kilkenny](#), Ireland where he was born in 1801. [Arundel Disney](#) was a descendant of [Robert d'Isigny](#), a Frenchman who had travelled to England with [William the Conqueror](#) in 1066.^[6] With the d'Isigny name [anglicised](#) as "Disney", the family settled in a village now known as [Norton Disney](#), south of the city of [Lincoln](#), in the county of [Lincolnshire](#).

In 1878, Disney's father Elias had moved from [Huron County, Ontario](#), Canada to the United States at first seeking gold in [California](#) before finally settling down to farm with his parents near [Ellis, Kansas](#), until 1884. Elias worked for the [Union Pacific Railroad](#) and married [Flora Call](#) on January 1, 1888, in [Acron, Florida](#). The family moved to [Chicago, Illinois](#), in 1890,^[7] hometown of his brother [Robert](#)^[7] who helped Elias financially for most of his early life.^[7] In 1906, when Walt was four, Elias and his family moved to a farm in [Marceline, Missouri](#),^[8] where his brother Roy had recently purchased farmland.^[8] In Marceline, Disney developed his love for drawing^[9] with one of the family's neighbors, a retired doctor named "Doc" Sherwood, paying him to draw pictures of Sherwood's horse, Rupert.^[9] His interest in trains also developed in Marceline, a town that owed its existence to the [Atchison, Topeka and Santa Fe Railway](#) which ran through it. Walt would put his ear to the tracks in anticipation of the coming train^[5] then try and spot his uncle, engineer [Michael Martin](#), running the train.^[clarification needed Running? Driving maybe?]

law)

[Robert Borgfeldt Brown](#) (son-in-law)

[Roy Edward Disney](#) (nephew)

Signature



The Disneys remained in Marceline for four years,^[10] before moving to [Kansas City](#) in 1911^[11] where Walt and his younger sister Ruth attended the Benton Grammar School. At school he met Walter Pfeiffer who came from a family of theatre aficionados, and introduced Walt to the world of vaudeville and motion pictures. Before long Walt was spending more time at the Pfeiffers' than at home.^[12] As well as attending Saturday courses at the [Kansas City Art Institute](#),^[13] Walt often took Ruth to [Electric Park](#), 15 blocks from their home, which Disney would later acknowledge as a major influence of his design of [Disneyland](#)).^[citation needed]

Teenage years

In 1917, Elias acquired shares in the O-Zell jelly factory in Chicago and moved his family back to the city,^[14] where in the fall Disney began his freshman year at [McKinley High School](#) and took night courses at the [Chicago Art Institute](#).^[15] He became the cartoonist for the school newspaper, drawing patriotic topics and focusing on [World War I](#). Despite dropping out of high school at the age of sixteen to join the [army](#), Disney was rejected for being underage.^[16]

After his rejection by the army, Walt and a friend decided to join the [Red Cross](#).^[17] Soon after joining he was sent to France for a year, where he drove an ambulance, but only after the armistice was signed on November 11, 1918.^[18]

Hoping to find work outside the Chicago O-Zell factory,^[clarification needed No mention of when or why he worked there]^[19] in 1919 Walt moved back to Kansas City to begin his artistic career.^[20] After considering whether to become an actor or a newspaper artist, he decided on a career as a newspaper artist, drawing political caricatures or comic strips. But when nobody wanted to hire him as either an artist or even as an ambulance driver, his brother Roy, then working in a local bank, got Walt a temporary job through a bank colleague at the Pesmen-Rubin Art Studio^[20] where he created advertisements for newspapers, magazines, and movie theaters.^[21] At Pesmen-Rubin he met cartoonist [Ubbe Iwerks](#)^[22] and when their time at the studio expired, they decided to start their own commercial company together.^[23]

In January 1920, Disney and Iwerks formed a short-lived company called, "Iwerks-Disney Commercial Artists". However, following a rough start, Disney left temporarily to earn money at the Kansas City Film Ad Company, and was soon joined by Iwerks who was not able to run their business alone.^[24] While working for the Kansas City Film Ad Company, where he made commercials based on [cutout animations](#), Disney

became interested in animation, and decided to become an animator.^[25] The owner of the Ad Company, A.V. Cauger, allowed him to borrow a camera from work to experiment with at home. After reading the Edwin G. Lutz book *Animated Cartoons: How They Are Made, Their Origin and Development*, Disney considered cel animation to be much more promising than the cutout animation he was doing for Cauger. Walt eventually decided to open his own animation business,^[26] and recruited a fellow co-worker at the Kansas City Film Ad Company, [Fred Harman](#), as his first employee.^[26] Walt and Harman then secured a deal with local theater owner Frank L. Newman, arguably the most popular "showman" in the Kansas City area at the time,^[27] to screen their cartoons at his local theater, which they titled *Laugh-O-Grams*.^[27]

Laugh-O-Gram Studio

Presented as "Newman Laugh-O-Grams",^[27] Disney's cartoons became widely popular in the Kansas City area^[28] and through their success, he was able to acquire his own studio, also called [Laugh-O-Gram](#),^[29] for which he hired a vast number of additional animators, including Fred Harman's brother [Hugh Harman](#), [Rudolf Ising](#), and his close friend Ubbe Iwerks.^[30] Unfortunately, studio profits were insufficient to cover the high salaries paid to employees. Unable to successfully manage money,^[31] Disney's studio became loaded with debt^[31] and wound up bankrupt^[32] whereupon he decided to set up a studio in the movie industry's capital city, Hollywood, California.^[33]

Hollywood

Disney and his brother Roy pooled their money and set up a cartoon studio in Hollywood^[34] where they needed to find a distributor for Walt's new [Alice Comedies](#), which he had started making while in Kansas City^[32] but never got to distribute. Disney sent an unfinished print to New York distributor [Margaret Winkler](#), who promptly wrote back to him that she was keen on a distribution deal for more live-action/animated shorts based upon *Alice's Wonderland*.^[35]

Alice Comedies

[Virginia Davis](#), the live-action star of *Alice's Wonderland* and her family relocated from Kansas City to Hollywood at Disney's request, as did Iwerks and his family. This was the beginning of the [Disney Brothers' Studio](#) located on Hyperion Avenue in [the Silver Lake district](#), where it remained until 1939. In 1925, Disney hired a young woman named [Lillian Bounds](#) to ink and paint celluloid. After a brief courtship, the pair

married that same year.

The new series, *Alice Comedies*, proved reasonably successful, and featured both [Dawn O'Day](#) and [Margie Gay](#) as Alice with [Lois Hardwick](#) also briefly assuming the role. By the time the series ended in 1927, its focus was more on the animated characters and in particular a cat named Julius who resembled [Felix the Cat](#), rather than the live-action Alice.

Oswald the Lucky Rabbit

Main article: [Oswald the Lucky Rabbit](#)

By 1927, [Charles Mintz](#) had married [Margaret Winkler](#) and assumed control of her business. He then ordered a new all-animated series to be put into production for distribution through [Universal Pictures](#). The new series, *Oswald the Lucky Rabbit*, was an almost instant success, and the character, Oswald — drawn and created by [Iwerks](#) — became a popular figure. The Disney studio expanded and Walt re-hired [Harman](#), [Rudolph Ising](#), [Carman Maxwell](#), and [Friz Freleng](#) from [Kansas City](#).

Disney went to [New York](#) in [February 1928](#) to negotiate a higher fee per short and was shocked when [Mintz](#) told him that not only did he want to reduce the fee he paid Disney per short but also that he had most of his main animators, including [Harman](#), [Ising](#), [Maxwell](#), and [Freleng](#)—but not [Iwerks](#), who refused to leave Disney—under contract and would start his own studio if Disney did not accept the reduced production budgets. [Universal](#), not [Disney](#), owned the [Oswald](#) trademark, and could make the films without Walt. [Disney](#) declined [Mintz's](#) offer and as a result lost most of his animation staff whereupon he found himself on his own again.^[36]

It subsequently took his company 78 years to get back the rights to the [Oswald](#) character when in 2006 the [Walt Disney Company](#) reacquired the rights to [Oswald the Lucky Rabbit](#) from [NBC Universal](#), through a trade for longtime [ABC](#) sports commentator [Al Michaels](#).^[37]

Mickey Mouse

Main article: [Mickey Mouse](#)

After losing the rights to [Oswald](#), [Disney](#) felt the need to develop a new character to replace him, which was based on a mouse he had adopted as a pet while working in his [Laugh-O-Gram](#) studio in [Kansas City](#).^[38] [Ub Iwerks](#) reworked the sketches made by [Disney](#) to make the character easier to animate although [Mickey's](#) voice and personality were provided by [Disney](#) himself until 1947. In the words of one [Disney](#)

employee, "Ub designed Mickey's physical appearance, but Walt gave him his soul."^[38] Besides Oswald and Mickey, a similar mouse-character is seen in the *Alice Comedies*, which featured "Ike the Mouse". Moreover, the first *Flip the Frog* cartoon called *Fiddlesticks* showed a Mickey Mouse look-alike playing fiddle. The initial films were animated by Iwerks with his name prominently featured on the title cards. Originally named "Mortimer", the mouse was later re-christened "Mickey" by Lillian Disney who thought that the name Mortimer did not fit. Mortimer later became the name of Mickey's rival for Minnie – taller than his renowned adversary and speaking with a Brooklyn accent.

The first animated short to feature Mickey, *Plane Crazy* was a **silent film** like all of Disney's previous works. After failing to find a distributor for the short and its follow-up, *The Gallopin' Gaucho*, Disney created a Mickey cartoon with **sound** entitled *Steamboat Willie*. A businessman named **Pat Powers** provided Disney with both distribution and **Cinephone**, a **sound-synchronization** process. *Steamboat Willie* became an instant success,^[39] and *Plane Crazy*, *The Galloping Gaucho*, and all future Mickey cartoons were released with soundtracks. After the release of *Steamboat Willie*, Disney successfully used sound in all of his subsequent cartoons, and Cinephone also became the new distributor for Disney's early sound cartoons.^[40] Mickey soon eclipsed Felix the Cat as the world's most popular cartoon character^[38] and by 1930, despite their having sound, cartoons featuring Felix had faded from the screen after failing to gain attention.^[41] Mickey's popularity would subsequently skyrocket in the early 1930s.^[38]

Silly Symphonies

Following in the footsteps of *Mickey Mouse series*, a series of musical shorts titled, *Silly Symphonies* were released in 1929. The first, *The Skeleton Dance* was entirely drawn and animated by Iwerks, who was also responsible for drawing the majority of cartoons released by Disney in 1928 and 1929. Although both series were successful, the Disney studio thought it was not receiving its rightful share of profits from Pat Powers,^[42] and in 1930, Disney signed a new distribution deal with **Columbia Pictures**. The original basis of the cartoons was their musical novelty with the first Silly Symphony cartoons featuring scores by **Carl Stalling**.^[43]

Iwerks was soon lured by Powers into opening his own studio with an exclusive contract, while Stalling would also later leave Disney to join Iwerks.^[44] Iwerks launched his *Flip the Frog* series with the first voiced color cartoon *Fiddlesticks*, filmed in two-strip **Technicolor**. Iwerks also created two other cartoon series, *Willie Whopper* and the *Comicolor*. In 1936, Iwerks shut down his **studio** in order to work on various projects dealing with animation technology. He would return to Disney in 1940 and go

on to pioneer a number of film processes and specialized animation technologies in the studio's research and development department.

By 1932, although Mickey Mouse had become a relatively popular cinema character, *Silly Symphonies* was not as successful. The same year also saw competition increase as Max Fleischer's flapper cartoon character, Betty Boop, gained popularity among theater audiences.^[45] Fleischer, considered Disney's main rival in the 1930s,^[46] was also the father of Richard Fleischer, whom Disney would later hire to direct his 1954 film *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. Meanwhile, Columbia Pictures dropped the distribution of Disney cartoons to be replaced by United Artists.^[47] In late 1932, Herbert Kalmus, who had just completed work on the first three-strip technicolor camera,^[48] approached Walt and convinced him to reshoot the black and white *Flowers and Trees* in three-strip Technicolor.^[49] *Flowers and Trees* would go on to be a phenomenal success and would also win the first 1932 Academy Award for Best Short Subject: Cartoons. After the release of *Flowers and Trees*, all subsequent *Silly Symphony* cartoons were in color while Disney was also able to negotiate a two-year deal with Technicolor, giving him the sole right to use their three-strip process,^{[50][51]} a period eventually extended to five years.^[43] Through *Silly Symphonies*, Disney also created his most successful cartoon short of all time, *The Three Little Pigs* (1933).^[52] The cartoon ran in theaters for many months, featuring the hit song that became the anthem of the Great Depression, "Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf".^[53]

First Academy Award

In 1932, Disney received a special Academy Award for the creation of "Mickey Mouse", a series which switched to color in 1935 and soon launched spin-offs for supporting characters such as Donald Duck, Goofy, and Pluto. Pluto and Donald became standalone cartoons in 1937,^[54] with Goofy following in 1939.^[55] Of all Mickey's partners, Donald Duck, who first teamed up with Mickey in the 1934 cartoon, *Orphan's Benefit*, was arguably the most popular, going on to become Disney's second most successful cartoon character of all time.^[56]

Children

The Disneys' first attempt at pregnancy ended when Lillian miscarried. She became pregnant again and gave birth to a daughter, Diane Marie Disney, on December 18, 1933. The Disneys adopted Sharon Mae Disney (December 31, 1936 – February 16, 1993).^[57]

1937–1941: Golden age of animation

"Disney's Folly": *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*

Following the creation of two cartoon series, in 1934 Disney began planning a full-length feature. The following year, opinion polls showed that another cartoon series, *Popeye the Sailor*, produced by Max Fleischer, was more popular than Mickey Mouse.^[58] Nevertheless, Disney was able to put Mickey back on top as well as increase his popularity by coloring and partially redesigning the character to become what was considered his most appealing design to date.^[38] When the film industry learned of Disney's plans to produce an *animated* feature-length version of *Snow White*, they were certain that the endeavor would destroy the Disney Studio and dubbed the project "Disney's Folly". Both Lillian and Roy tried to talk Disney out of the project, but he continued plans for the feature, employing [Chouinard Art Institute](#) professor Don Graham to start a training operation for the studio staff. Disney then used the *Silly Symphonies* as a platform for experiments in realistic human animation, distinctive character animation, special effects, and the use of specialized processes and apparatus such as the [multiplane camera](#) – a new technique first used by Disney in the 1937 *Silly Symphonies* short *The Old Mill*.^[59]

All of this development and training was used to increase quality at the studio and to ensure that the feature film would match Disney's quality expectations. Entitled *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the feature went into full production in 1934 and continued until mid-1937, when the studio ran out of money. To obtain the funding to complete *Snow White*, Disney had to show a rough cut of the motion picture to loan officers at the [Bank of America](#), who then gave the studio the money to finish the picture. The film premiered at the Carthay Circle Theater on December 21, 1937 and at its conclusion the audience gave *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* a standing ovation. *Snow White*, the first animated feature in America made in Technicolor, was released in February 1938 under a new distribution deal with [RKO Radio Pictures](#). RKO had been the distributor for Disney cartoons in 1936, after it closed down the Van Beuren Studios in exchange for distribution.^[60] The film became the most successful motion picture of 1938 and earned over \$8 million on its initial release. These initial release earnings for *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* would be the equivalent of \$122,487,945 in 2010. ^[61]

Golden age of animation

Following the success of *Snow White*, for which Disney received one full-size, and seven miniature Oscar statuettes, he was able to build a new campus for the [Walt Disney Studios](#) in [Burbank](#), which opened for business on December 24, 1939. *Snow White* was not only the peak of Disney's success, but also ushered in a period that

would later be known as the Golden Age of Animation for the studio.^{[62][63]} Feature animation staff, having just completed *Pinocchio*, continued work on *Fantasia* and *Bambi* as well as the early production stages of *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan* and *Wind in the Willows* while the shorts staff carried on working on the Mickey Mouse, Donald Duck, Goofy, and Pluto cartoon series, ending the *Silly Symphonies* at this time.^[clarification needed More info needed on end of the Silly Symphonies to make a new and separate sentence.] Animator Fred Moore had redesigned Mickey Mouse in the late 1930s after Donald Duck overtook him in popularity among theater audiences.^[64]

Pinocchio and *Fantasia* followed *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* into the movie theaters in 1940, but both proved financial disappointments. The inexpensive *Dumbo* was then planned as an income generator, but during production most of the animation staff went on strike, permanently straining relations between Disney and his artists.

1941–1945: World War II era

In 1941, the U.S. State Department sent Disney and a group of animators to South America as part of its *Good Neighbor policy*, at the same time guaranteeing financing for the resultant movie, *Saludos Amigos*.^[65]

Shortly after the release of *Dumbo* in October 1941, the United States entered *World War II*. The U.S. Army contracted most of the Disney studio's facilities where the staff created training and instruction films for the military, home-front morale-boosting shorts such as *Der Fuehrer's Face* and the 1943 feature film *Victory Through Air Power*. However, military films did not generate income, and the feature film *Bambi* underperformed on its release in April 1942. Disney successfully re-issued *Snow White* in 1944, establishing a *seven-year re-release tradition* for his features. In 1945, *The Three Caballeros* was the last animated feature released by the studio during the war.

In 1944, *Encyclopædia Britannica* publisher William Benton, entered into unsuccessful negotiations with Disney to make six to twelve educational films per annum. Disney was asked by the US *Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs*, Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA), to make an educational film about the *Amazon Basin*, which resulted in the 1944 animated short, *The Amazon Awakens*.^{[66][67][68][69][70]}

1945–1955: Post-war period

Disney studios also created inexpensive package films, containing collections of cartoon shorts, and issued them to theaters during this period. These included *Make Mine Music* (1946), *Melody Time* (1948), *Fun and Fancy Free* (1947) and *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1949). The latter had only two sections, the first based on *The*

Wind in the Willows by [Kenneth Grahame](#), and the second on *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* by [Washington Irving](#). During this period, Disney also ventured into full-length dramatic films that mixed live action and animated scenes, including *Song of the South* and *So Dear to My Heart*. After the war ended, Mickey's popularity would also fade.^[71]

By the late 1940s, the studio had recovered enough to continue production on the full-length features *Alice in Wonderland* and *Peter Pan*, both of which had been shelved during the war years. Work also began on *Cinderella*, which became Disney's most successful film since *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*. In 1948 the studio also initiated a series of live-action nature films, titled *True-Life Adventures*, with *On Seal Island* the first. Despite its resounding success with feature films, the studio's animation shorts were no longer as popular as they once were, with people paying more attention to Warner Bros. and their animation star [Bugs Bunny](#). By 1942, [Leon Schlesinger Productions](#), which produced the Warner Bros. cartoons, had become the country's most popular animation studio.^[72] However, while [Bugs Bunny's](#) popularity rose in the 1940s, so did [Donald Duck's](#),^[73] a character who would replace Mickey Mouse as Disney's star character by 1949.^[74]

During the mid-1950s, Disney produced a number of educational films on the space program in collaboration with [NASA](#) rocket designer [Wernher von Braun](#): *Man in Space* and *Man and the Moon* in 1955, and *Mars and Beyond* in 1957.



Testimony before Congress

Disney was a founding member of the [anti-communist Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals](#). In 1947, during the early years of the [Cold War](#),^[75] Disney testified before the [House Un-American Activities Committee](#) (HUAC), where he branded [Herbert Sorrell](#), [David Hilberman](#) and [William Pomerance](#), former animators and [labor union](#) organizers, Communist agitators. All three men denied the allegations and Sorrell went on to testify before the HUAC in 1946 when insufficient evidence was found to

link him to the Communist Party.^{[76][77]}

Disney also accused the [Screen Actors Guild](#) of being a Communist front, and charged that the 1941 strike was part of an organized Communist effort to gain influence in Hollywood.^[75]

1955–1966: Theme parks and beyond

Planning Disneyland

On a business trip to Chicago in the late-1940s, Disney drew sketches of his ideas for an [amusement park](#) where he envisioned his employees spending time with their children. The idea for a children's theme park came after a visit to [Children's Fairyland](#) in [Oakland, California](#). This plan was originally intended to be built on a plot located across the street to the south of the studio. These original ideas developed into a concept for a larger enterprise that would become [Disneyland](#). Disney spent five years developing Disneyland and created a new subsidiary company, [WED Enterprises](#), to carry out planning and production of the park. A small group of Disney studio employees joined the Disneyland development project as engineers and planners, and were dubbed [Imagineers](#).^{*[citation needed]*}

As Disney explained one of his earliest plans to [Herb Ryman](#), who created the first aerial drawing of Disneyland presented to the [Bank of America](#) during fund raising for the project, he said, "Herbie, I just want it to look like nothing else in the world. And it should be surrounded by a train."^[78] Entertaining his daughters and their friends in his backyard and taking them for rides on his [Carolwood Pacific Railroad](#) had inspired Disney to include a railroad in the plans for Disneyland.

Disneyland grand opening

Disneyland officially opened on July 18, 1955. On Sunday, July 17, 1955, Disneyland hosted a live TV preview, among the thousands of people in attendance were [Ronald Reagan](#), [Bob Cummings](#) and [Art Linkletter](#), who shared cohosting duties, as well as the mayor of Anaheim. Walt gave the following dedication day speech:

“ To all who come to this happy place; welcome. Disneyland is your land. Here age relives fond memories of the past and here youth may savor the challenge and promise of the future. Disneyland is dedicated to the ideals, the dreams and the hard facts that have created America ... with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world. ”



Carolwood Pacific Railroad

Main article: [Carolwood Pacific Railroad](#)

During 1949, Disney and his family moved to a new home on a large piece of land in the **Holmby Hills** district of **Los Angeles**, California. With the help of his friends **Ward and Betty Kimball**, who already had their own **backyard railroad**, Disney developed blueprints and immediately set to work on creating a miniature **live steam** railroad for his backyard. The name of the railroad, **Carolwood Pacific Railroad**, came from his home's location on Carolwood Drive. The railroad's half-mile long layout included a 46-foot (14 m) long trestle bridge, loops, overpasses, gradients, an elevated berm, and a 90-foot (27 m) tunnel underneath his wife's flowerbed. He named the miniature working steam locomotive built by Disney Studios engineer **Roger E. Broggie** *Lilly Belle* in his wife's honor and had his attorney draw up right-of-way papers giving the railroad a permanent, legal easement through the garden areas, which his wife dutifully signed; however, there is no evidence of the documents ever recorded as a restriction on the property's title.^[clarification needed]

Expansion into new areas

As Walt Disney Productions began work on Disneyland, it also began expanding its other entertainment operations. In 1950, *Treasure Island* became the studio's first all-live-action feature, soon followed by *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* (in **CinemaScope**, 1954), *Old Yeller* (1957), *The Shaggy Dog* (1959), *Pollyanna* (1960), *Swiss Family Robinson* (1960), *The Absent-Minded Professor* (1961), and *The Parent Trap* (1961). The studio produced its first TV special, *One Hour in Wonderland*, in 1950. Disney began hosting a **weekly anthology series** on **ABC** entitled *Disneyland*, after the park, on which he aired clips of past Disney productions, gave tours of his studio, and familiarized the public with Disneyland as it was being constructed in Anaheim. The show also featured a **Davy Crockett** miniseries, which started the "Davy Crockett craze" among American youth, during which millions of coonskin caps and other Crockett memorabilia were sold across the country.^[79] In 1955, the studio's first daily television show, *Mickey Mouse Club* debuted and would continue in various incarnations into the 1990s.

As the studio expanded and diversified into other media, Disney devoted less of his attention to the animation department, entrusting most of its operations to his key animators, whom he dubbed the **Nine Old Men**. Although he was spending less time supervising the production of the animated films, he was always present at story meetings.^[80] During Disney's lifetime, the animation department created the successful *Lady and the Tramp* (the first animated film in **CinemaScope**) in 1955, *Sleeping Beauty* (the first animated film in **Super Technirama 70mm**) in 1959, *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (the first animated feature film to use **Xerox cels**) in 1961, and *The Sword in the Stone* in 1963.

Production of short cartoons kept pace until 1956, when Disney shut down the

responsible division although special shorts projects would continue for the remainder of the studio's duration on an irregular basis. These productions were all distributed by Disney's new subsidiary, [Buena Vista Distribution](#), which had taken over all distribution duties for Disney films from [RKO](#) by 1955. Disneyland, one of the world's first theme parks, finally opened on July 17, 1955, and was immediately successful. Visitors from around the world came to visit Disneyland, which contained attractions based on a number of successful Disney characters and films.

After 1955, the *Disneyland* TV show was renamed *Walt Disney Presents*. It switched from black-and-white to color in 1961 and changed its name to *Walt Disney's Wonderful World of Color*, at the same time moving from ABC to NBC,^[81] and eventually evolving into its current form as *The Wonderful World of Disney*. The series continued to air on NBC until 1981, when it was picked up by CBS.^[82] Since then, it has aired on ABC, NBC, the Hallmark Channel and the Cartoon Network via separate broadcast rights deals. During its run, the Disney series offered some recurring characters, such as the newspaper reporter and sleuth "Gallegher" played by [Roger Mobley](#) with a plot based on the writings of [Richard Harding Davis](#).

Disney had already formed his own music publishing division in 1949 and in 1956, partly inspired by the huge success of the television theme song [The Ballad of Davy Crockett](#), he created a company-owned record production and distribution entity called [Disneyland Records](#).

Early 1960s successes

By the early 1960s, the Disney empire had become a major success, and Walt Disney Productions had established itself as the world's leading producer of family entertainment. Walt Disney was the Head of Pageantry for the [1960 Winter Olympics](#).

After decades of pursuit, Disney finally acquired the rights to [P.L. Travers'](#) books about a magical nanny. *Mary Poppins*, released in 1964, was the most successful Disney film of the 1960s and featured a memorable song score written by Disney favorites, the [Sherman Brothers](#). The same year, Disney debuted a number of exhibits at the [1964 New York World's Fair](#), including [Audio-Animatronic](#) figures, all of which were later integrated into attractions at Disneyland and a new theme park project which was to be established on the [East Coast](#).

Although the studio would probably have proved major competition for [Hanna-Barbera](#), Disney decided not to enter the race and mimic Hanna-Barbera by producing Saturday morning TV cartoon series. With the expansion of Disney's empire and constant production of feature films, the financial burden involved in such a move would have proven too great.

Plans for Disney World and EPCOT

In early 1964, Disney announced plans to develop another theme park to be called Disney World a few miles west of [Orlando, Florida](#). Disney World was to include "the Magic Kingdom", a larger, more elaborate version of Disneyland. It would also feature a number of golf courses and resort hotels. The heart of Disney World, however, was to be the Experimental Prototype City (or Community) of Tomorrow, known as [EPCOT](#) for short.

Mineral King Ski Resort

During the early to mid 1960s, Walt Disney developed plans for a ski resort in [Mineral King](#), a glacial valley in California's [Sierra Nevada](#) mountain range. He brought in experts such as the renowned Olympic ski coach and ski-area designer [Willy Schaeffler](#), who helped plan a visitor village, ski runs and ski lifts among the several bowls surrounding the valley. Plans finally moved into action in the mid 1960s, but Walt died before the actual work started. Disney's death and opposition from conservationists ensured that the resort was never built.

Death

In 1966, Disney was scheduled to undergo surgery to repair an old neck injury^[83] caused by many years of playing [polo](#) at the Riviera Club in Hollywood.^[84] On November 2, during pre-operative X-rays, doctors at [Providence St. Joseph Medical Center](#), across the street from the Disney Studio, discovered a [tumor in his left lung](#).^[85] Five days later a biopsy showed the tumor to be malignant and to have spread throughout the entire left lung.^[85] After removal of the lung, doctors informed Disney that his life expectancy was six months to two years.^[85] After several [chemotherapy](#) sessions, Disney and his wife spent a short amount of time in [Palm Springs, California](#).^[83] On November 30, Disney collapsed at his home. He was revived by fire department personnel and rushed to St. Joseph's where on December 15, 1966, at 9:30 a.m., ten days after his 65th birthday, Disney died of acute circulatory collapse, caused by lung cancer.^[83] The last thing he reportedly wrote before his death was the name of actor [Kurt Russell](#), the significance of which remains a mystery, even to Russell.^[86]

Disney was cremated on December 17, 1966, and his ashes interred at the [Forest Lawn Memorial Park](#) in [Glendale, California](#). Roy O. Disney continued out with the Florida project, insisting that the name be changed to [Walt Disney World](#) in honor of his brother.

The final productions in which Disney played an active role were the animated feature *The Jungle Book* and the animated short *Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day*, as well as the live-action musical feature *The Happiest Millionaire*, all released in 1967. Songwriter **Robert B. Sherman** recalled of the last time he saw Disney:

“ He was up in the third floor of the animation building after a run-through of *The Happiest Millionaire*. He usually held court in the hallway afterward for the people involved with the picture. And he started talking to them, telling them what he liked and what they should change, and then, when they were through, he turned to us and with a big smile, he said, 'Keep up the good work, boys.' And he walked to his office. It was the last we ever saw of him.^[87] ”

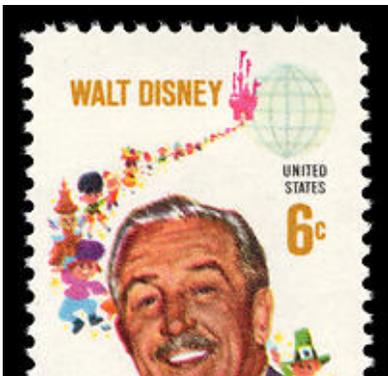
A long-standing **urban legend** maintains that Disney was **cryogenically frozen**, and his frozen corpse stored beneath the **Pirates of the Caribbean** ride at Disneyland.^[88] However, the **first known cryogenic freezing of a human corpse** did not occur until January 1967, more than a month after his death.^[88]

Legacy: 1967–present

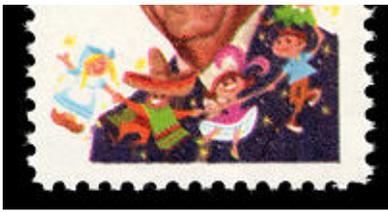
Continuing Disney Productions

After Walt Disney's death, Roy Disney returned from retirement to take full control of Walt Disney Productions and WED Enterprises. In October 1971, the families of Walt and Roy met in front of **Cinderella Castle** at the Magic Kingdom to officially open the Walt Disney World Resort.

After giving his dedication for Walt Disney World, Roy asked Lillian Disney to join him. As the orchestra played "**When You Wish Upon a Star**", she stepped up to the podium accompanied by Mickey Mouse. He then said, "Lilly, you knew all of Walt's ideas and hopes as well as anybody; what would Walt think of it [Walt Disney World]?". "I think Walt would have approved," she replied.^[89] Roy died from a cerebral hemorrhage on December 20, 1971, the day he was due to open the Disneyland Christmas parade.



During the second phase of the "Walt Disney World" theme park, EPCOT was translated by Disney's successors into **EPCOT Center**, which opened in 1982. As it currently exists, EPCOT is essentially a living **world's fair**, different from the actual functional city that Disney had envisioned. In 1992, Walt Disney Imagineering took the step closer to Disney's original ideas and dedicated **Celebration, Florida**, a town built by the Walt Disney



Company adjacent to Walt Disney World, that hearkens back to the spirit of EPCOT. EPCOT was also originally intended to be devoid of Disney characters which initially limited the appeal of the park to young children. However, the company later changed this policy and

Disney characters can now be found throughout the park, often dressed in costumes reflecting the different pavilions.

The Disney entertainment empire

Today, Walt Disney's animation/motion picture studios and theme parks have developed into a multi-billion dollar television, motion picture, vacation destination and media corporation that carry his name. Among other assets [The Walt Disney Company](#) owns five vacation resorts, eleven theme parks, two water parks, thirty-nine hotels, eight motion picture studios, six record labels, eleven cable television networks, and one terrestrial television network. As of 2007, the company had annual revenues of over U.S. \$35 billion.^[90]

Disney Animation

Walt Disney was a pioneer in [character animation](#). He was one of the first people to move away from basic cartoons with just "*impossible outlandish gags*" and crudely drawn characters to an art form with heartwarming stories and characters the audience can connect to on an emotional level. The personality displayed in the characters of his films and the technological advancements remain influential when animating today. He was also considered by many of his colleagues to be a master storyteller and the animation department did not fully recover from his demise until the late 1980's in a period known as the [Disney Renaissance](#). The most financially and critically successful films produced during this time include *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (1988), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast* (1991), *Aladdin* (1992) and *The Lion King* (1994). In 1995, Walt Disney Pictures distributed [Pixar's Toy Story](#), the first [computer animated](#) feature film. Walt Disney's nephew [Roy E. Disney](#) claimed that Walt would have loved *Toy Story* and that it was "*his kind of movie*" ^[91]. With the rise of computer animated films a stream of financially unsuccessful [Traditional hand-drawn animated](#) features in the early 2000s emerged. This led to the company's controversial decision to close the traditional animation department. The two satellite studios in [Paris](#) and [Orlando](#) were closed, and the main studio in [Burbank](#) was converted to a computer animation production facility, firing hundreds of people in the process. In 2004, Disney released what was announced as their final "traditionally animated" feature film, *Home on the Range*. However, since the 2006 acquisition of [Pixar](#), and the resulting rise of [John Lasseter](#) to Chief Creative Officer, that position has changed with the

largely successful 2009 film *The Princess and the Frog*. This marked Disney's return to traditional hand-drawn animation and the studio hired back staff who had been laid-off in the past. Today, Disney produces both traditional and computer animation.

CalArts

In his later years, Disney devoted substantial time to funding [The California Institute of the Arts](#) (CalArts). Formed in 1961 through a merger of the [Los Angeles Conservatory of Music](#) and the [Chouinard Art Institute](#), which had helped in the training of the animation staff during the 1930s, when Disney died, one-fourth of his estate went to CalArts, which helped in building its campus. In his will, Disney paved the way for the creation of several charitable trusts which included one for the California Institute of the Arts and other for the Disney Foundation.^[92] He also donated 38 acres (0.154 km²) of the Golden Oaks ranch in [Valencia](#) for construction of the school. CalArts moved onto the Valencia campus in 1972.

In an early admissions bulletin, Disney explained:

“ A hundred years ago, [Wagner](#) conceived of a perfect and all-embracing art, combining music, drama, painting, and the dance, but in his wildest imagination he had no hint what infinite possibilities were to become commonplace through the invention of recording, radio, cinema and television. There already have been geniuses combining the arts in the mass-communications media, and they have already given us powerful new art forms. The future holds bright promise for those whose imaginations are trained to play on the vast orchestra of the art-in-combination. Such supermen will appear most certainly in those environments which provide contact with all the arts, but even those who devote themselves to a single phase of art will benefit from broadened horizons.^[93] ”

Walt Disney Family Museum

In 2009, the [Walt Disney Family Museum](#) opened in the [Presidio of San Francisco](#). Thousands of artifacts from Disney's life and career are on display, including 248 awards that he received.^[94]

Anti-Semitism accusations

Disney was long rumored to be [anti-Semitic](#) during his lifetime, and such rumors have persisted after his death. Indeed, in the 1930s he welcomed German filmmaker and Nazi propagandist [Leni Riefenstahl](#) to Hollywood.^[95] Disney biographer [Neal Gabler](#), the first writer to gain unrestricted access to the Disney archives, concluded in 2006 that available evidence does not support such accusations. In a CBS interview Gabler summarized his findings:

“ That's one of the questions everybody asks me. My answer to that is, not in the conventional sense that we think of someone as being an anti-Semite. But he got the

reputation because, in the 1940s, he got himself allied with a group called the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, which was an anti-Communist and anti-Semitic organization. And though Walt himself, in my estimation, was not anti-Semitic, nevertheless, he willingly allied himself with people who were anti-Semitic, and that reputation stuck. He was never really able to expunge it throughout his life.^[96] ”

Disney eventually distanced himself from the [Motion Picture Alliance](#) in the 1950s.^[97]

The Walt Disney Family Museum acknowledges that Disney did have "difficult relationships" with some Jewish individuals, and that ethnic stereotypes common to films of the 1930s were included in some early cartoons, such as [Three Little Pigs](#). However, the museum points out that Disney employed Jews throughout his career and was named "1955 Man Of The Year" by the [B'nai B'rith](#) chapter in Beverly Hills.^[98]

Academy Awards

Walt Disney holds the record for both the most Academy Award nominations (59) and the number of Oscars awarded (22). He also earned four honorary Oscars while his last competitive Academy Award was posthumous.^[99]



- **1932:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: [Flowers and Trees](#) (1932)
- **1932:** Honorary Award for: creation of [Mickey Mouse](#).
- **1934:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: [Three Little Pigs](#) (1933)
- **1935:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: [The Tortoise and the Hare](#) (1934)
- **1936:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: [Three Orphan Kittens](#) (1935)
- **1937:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: [The Country Cousin](#) (1936)
- **1938:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: [The Old Mill](#) (1937)
- **1939:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: [Ferdinand the Bull](#) (1938)
- **1939:** Honorary Award for [Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs](#) (1937) The citation read: *"For [Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs](#), recognized as a significant screen innovation which has charmed millions and pioneered a great new entertainment field"* (the award was one statuette and seven miniature statuettes)^[3]
- **1940:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: [Ugly Duckling](#) (1939)
- **1941:** Honorary Award for: [Fantasia](#) (1940), shared with: William E. Garity and

J.N.A. Hawkins. The citation for the certificate of merit read: *"For their outstanding contribution to the advancement of the use of sound in motion pictures through the production of Fantasia"*^[3]

- **1942:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: Lend a Paw (1941)
- **1943:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: Der Fuehrer's Face (1942)
- **1949:** Best Short Subject, Two-reel for: Seal Island (1948)
- **1949:** [Irving G. Thalberg Memorial Award](#) (Honorary Award)
- **1951:** Best Short Subject, Two-reel for: Beaver Valley (1950)
- **1952:** Best Short Subject, Two-reel for: Nature's Half Acre (1951)
- **1953:** Best Short Subject, Two-reel for: Water Birds (1952)
- **1954:** Best Documentary, Features for: The Living Desert (1953)
- **1954:** Best Documentary, Short Subjects for: The Alaskan Eskimo (1953)
- **1954:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: Toot Whistle Plunk and Boom (1953)
- **1954:** Best Short Subject, Two-reel for: Bear Country (1953)
- **1955:** Best Documentary, Features for: The Vanishing Prairie (1954)
- **1956:** Best Documentary, Short Subjects for: Men Against the Arctic
- **1959:** Best Short Subject, Live Action Subjects for: Grand Canyon
- **1969:** Best Short Subject, Cartoons for: Winnie the Pooh and the Blustery Day

Other honors

Walt Disney was the inaugural recipient of a star on the [Anaheim walk of stars](#) awarded in recognition of his significant contribution to the city of Anaheim and specifically Disneyland, which is now the [Disneyland Resort](#). The star is located at the pedestrian entrance to the Disneyland Resort on Harbor Boulevard. Disney has two stars on the [Hollywood Walk of Fame](#), one for motion pictures and the other for his television work.

Walt Disney received the [Congressional Gold Medal](#) on May 24, 1968 (P.L. 90-316, 82 Stat. 130–131) and the [Légion d'Honneur](#) awarded by France in 1935.^[100] In 1935, Walt received a special medal from the [League of Nations](#) for creation of Mickey Mouse, held to be Mickey Mouse award.^[101] He also received the [Presidential Medal of Freedom](#) on September 14, 1964.^[102] On December 6, 2006, California Governor [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#) and First Lady [Maria Shriver](#) inducted Walt Disney into the [California Hall of Fame](#) located at [The California Museum for History, Women, and the Arts](#).

A minor planet, [4017 Disneya](#), discovered in 1980 by Soviet astronomer [Lyudmila Georgievna Karachkina](#), is named after him.^[103]

The [Walt Disney Concert Hall](#) in Los Angeles, California, opened in 2003, was named

in his honor.

In 1993, [HBO](#) began development of a Walt Disney [biopic](#), directed by [Frank Pierson](#) and produced by [Lawrence Turman](#), but the project never materialized and was soon abandoned.^[104] However, *Walt - The Man Behind the Myth*, a biographical documentary about Disney, was later made.^[105]

See also

- [Disney family](#)
- [The Mickey Mouse Club](#)
- [The Walt Disney Family Museum](#)
- [Walt Disney anthology television series](#)

Notes

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- [Disney's Fantastic Voyage](#)
- [History of Walt Disney](#)

Select your Disney online destination. Africa. South Africa. Middle East. Middle East. Walter Elias "Walt" Disney was an American entrepreneur, business magnate, animator, voice actor, producer, director, writer, and the eponymous founder of The Walt Disney Company. One of the most famous and well-known motion picture producers in the world, Walt co-founded his namesake company, Walt Disney Productions, with his brother Roy in 1923. Walt Disney is in particular noted for being a successful storyteller, a hands-on film producer, and a popular showman. He and his staff created a number of The Walt Disney Co. is a diversified international family entertainment and media enterprise. It operates through four business segments: Media Networks, Parks & Resorts, Studio Entertainment and Consumer Products & Interactive Media. The Parks & Resorts segment owns and operates the Walt Disney World Resort in Florida; the Disneyland. Resort in California; Aulani, a Disney Resort & Spa in Hawaii; the Disney Vacation Club; the Disney Cruise Line; and Adventures by Disney.