

MICKEY MOUSE: AN AMERICAN ICON

As told through REAL PHOTO POSTCARDS

By Tom DeLuca

"I only hope that we don't lose sight of one thing - that it was all started by a mouse."

Walt Disney

Mickey Mouse came alive on the pages of a notepad on a long train trip home from Manhattan, New York to Hollywood, California. Walt Disney had said that Mickey had come along at one of the lowest points in the fledgling Disney Brothers Studios, after Walt had received some crushing contractual news, which almost sent them out of business. But out of adversity comes true genius.

Mickey Mouse premiered in "Steamboat Willie" on Broadway at the Colony theatre on November 18, 1928. Mickey became extremely popular here in the US and an immediate success story. Soon after, Mickey was exported by Disney to all parts of Europe and then worldwide, in order to expand his revenue base for the same product shown in the US. The comic shorts, with their innovative methods of production, were expensive to make, and this revenue was much needed to continue to make a quality product.

By early 1930, Mickey was a worldwide sensation, as this American icon brought some much needed fun and diversion, at a time when the world was experiencing the Great Depression. He was now being marketed in many different ways, such as being made into toys and dolls, as well as used as advertising on many different articles for sale.

Postcards were now being produced with images of Mickey Mouse and his friends. The postcards of the early 1930's were of many different styles of art and printing types, and from countries all over Europe, most notable Great Britain, Germany, Belgium and France.

For this particular presentation, only Real Photo Postcards were chosen for additional emphasis of how widely known Mickey Mouse was in the real world. As he was recognized so easily, it shows how much of an International icon he truly was, and in how much of a cross section of life he was depicted. Real photo cards are not normally associated with comic strip characters as such, and are more commonly seen in small town views, local events or limited production personal photos. But Mickey Mouse was larger than life, and could be found on these cards just about anywhere. Mickey was the "Everyman," so in that small cross section of Real Photo cards that exist, Mickey was "Everywhere."

The original presentation at the November meeting included over 75 selected Real Photo postcards depicting Mickey in some portrayal, and the cards represented some 20+ different countries of origin. Here are some of those postcards, each with a story of their own to tell.

The first grouping of four postcards depicted are printed using the real photo process as a means of production, and are not real photo postcards in the way most modern collectors refer to them. But these are important in their own way to be documented here.

Figure #1---Mickey Mouse "Greets Your birthday" on this Valentine and Sons Ltd. card circa 1938. Valentine and Sons Ltd. was the most prolific of the publishers that used the "real photograph process" to produce cards with Mickey, as well as many other Disney characters. About a half dozen different sets exist which feature him, and show Mickey in an extremely pure and true to Disney drawn form as we had known him in his early years.

Figure #2---This "Movie Usher" Mickey is from the Belgian "Escamator"

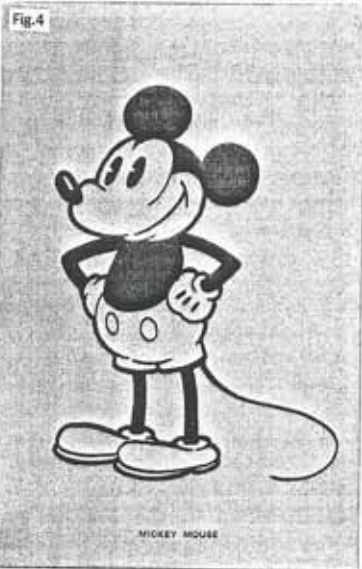


Fig.5



Oliga Tschichowa



Fig.6

series of cards, which shows Mickey in a harsh rodent-like image form. This intriguing set of New Years' cards produced from 1933 to 35, portrays Mickey in many different roles, such as a musician, pig catcher, and baby carriage mommy.

Figure #3—This is a prime example from the series of cards of Mickey at St. Cyr. This was a military prep school in France, which stressed the sciences and mechanical arts. Mickey's are shown on various cards dressed in Military uniforms, using draftsman tools, fine tuning radio equipment, and shooting guns. The drawings of Mickey are very futuristic in their look, and drawn with an edge in their design.

Figure #4—The "Picturegoes" series of cards produced in London, England is a prolific series of cards featuring over 400 different famous movie and film real personalities. Mickey Mouse is depicted here in a famous pose of his hands on hips. This is one of three different known Mickey's in the set. Funny indeed that a cartoon character is included with the likes of some of the most famous real film stars of the 1920's and 1930's decades.

Figure #5—Mickey whispers "sweet nothings" into the ear of Olga Tschewowa, perhaps Germany's most popular young actress of the day. The Ross-Vertag 1930 card shows one of the earliest dolls produced in Europe together with an actress of immense appeal in a publicity type photo shoot. Everyone wanted to take a "selfie" with Mickey. It was a "top stars" pairing, with Minnie Mouse reportedly being a bit jealous indeed.

Figure #6—In this classic photo card, Sonia Henie, a three time Olympic figure skater, just had to share the spotlight on ice with Mickey Mouse. Not exactly a "Disney on Ice" performance yet, but this credited Photoglob-Wehrli's & Vouga & Co. shot, pictures this famous pairing in the land of the rich and famous at St. Moritz, Switzerland.

Figure #7—This early 1930's German card shows pirate-adorned children, with perhaps a nanny, posing with a "real-life" Mickey Mouse on board a Rhine River cruise ship. Cruise ships of the day would entertain the passengers by having Mickey join the excursion with them, and then when posing with their new friend, have souvenir postcards made of their time together.

Figure #8—Numerous real photo postcards depict children with all sorts of small Mickey Mouse toys and dolls in their hands or at their feet, as they pose in picture studios for the perfect shot for their yearly holiday photos or just the family albums. This card is one of the better shots with very large Mickey and Minnie dolls standing on either side of "Jimmy," who is writing "to Grandma with Love."

Figure #9—This P-C Paris France postcard is a typical example of a Children's Christmas photo shoot. St. Nicholas is peering down on two young girls looking at the wonderful toys at the base of the chimney and fireplace, including both Mickey and Minnie dolls as well as a Mickey Mouse Art book. The P-C Paris photographers (circa. early to mid-1930's) were prolific in their taking of shots of children posing in many ways with Mickey related toys and dolls.

Figure #10—Mickey always loved a parade, as shown in the Aix-En-Provence (France) 1936 "Carnaval XLIII" real photo postcard. There are numerous examples of parades throughout Europe which showed these scenes of floats which carried all sizes of Mickey's, both crafted or live-suited. There were also many town festivals and celebrations in which people dressed up in Mickey costumes or even large Mickey heads and posed in the streets (see the WC4 newsletter #503, page 1 for an example of many people dressed as Mickey.)

Figure #11—World War II certainly did not prevent Mickey from popping up all over. This great card view shows a group of eleven soldiers posing with their trucks behind them. The far left truck sports a Mickey Mouse emblem on the side of the door! Another typical spot for Mickey or his good buddy Donald to show up was as "Nose Art" on the sides of airplanes.

Figure #12—In this real photo image Mickey is playing a Harmonica on the side of the drum in front of this orchestra on the small stage. What makes this card a fantastic image is that this orchestra is playing a concert inside a German prisoner of war camp, Stalag III-B near Frankfurt, Germany. To show the Red Cross and others that prisoners were being treated well inside the camps the Nazi's would release these types of postcards for soldiers to write home. Mickey was well known as a crowd pleaser, and his relationship with jazz

Fig.7



Fig.8



Fig.9



Fig.10



music placed him in every camp band.

Figure #13—If you are going to make a really nice costume of Mickey Mouse, you better get your photo taken ! This card could possibly be a Halloween type card, but the more likely explanation is that it is for some type of dress-up party or even a job perhaps, as this circa early 1930's card is German in origin.

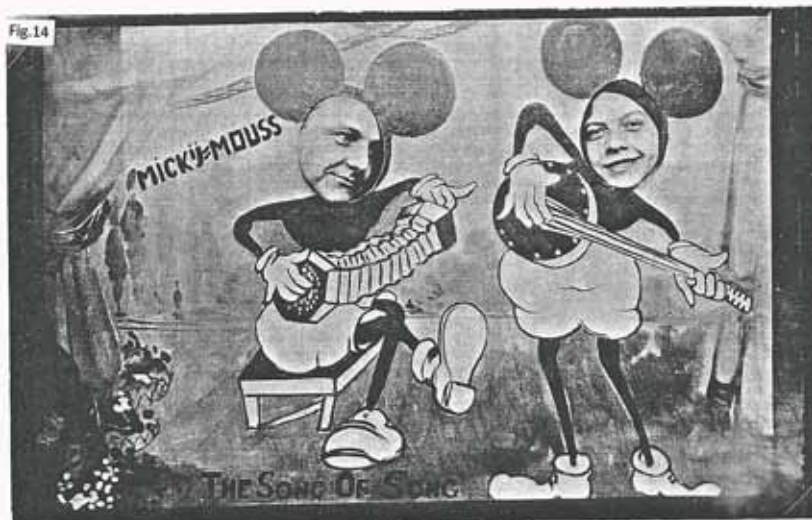
Figure #14—This is a much simpler way to dress up as Mickey and Minnie ! This amusement park related card with cut-out heads, allows anyone to be Mickey for a moment, playing music with an accordion/concertina or banjo. This mid-1930's carnival/funhouse card originated from Antwerp, Belgium, and cards similar to this one exist throughout tourist locations in Europe.

Figure #15—Storefront real photo cards show many an owner standing in front of their establishments, proud to tell or advertise their accomplishments in business. This husband and wife team stand in front of the Kaufhaus, J. Rowelski, probably in 1930's Germany, with "Micky Maus" adorning the window of their establishment. This is a great example of how Mickey was the best salesman for merchants, as he brought attention to their stores.

Figure #16—This snowy street scene showing Hick's Restaurant of Lancaster, New Hampshire is the perfect place for Mickey to sit down on a pair of elephants to get a first hand seat for the upcoming Winter Carnival, featuring the New England sled dog races. At the same time, make sure you stop in for a coffee or some hot chocolate at the restaurant to keep warm, was the extra message Mickey was to perhaps deliver.

Figure #17—This US real photo advertising postcard shows the latest in styles of fashionable sandals. Manufactured by the Sporting Shoe Co. of 39 Chambers St., New York, NY, these are clearly hailed as the "Children's Shoe Sensation for 1948 !"

Figure #18—As all of the Mickey Mouse short films included music as a central element to the movement of the story line, the type of music often used was jazz. Mickey became uniquely associated with this American form of music, and often appears with



band members, like in this 1930's solo shot with a musician playing the drums. The side of the large drum offers a great place to adorn the music with great images of Mickey and Minnie.

Figure #19—The "Mickey Bar," best known in France, but also known throughout most of Europe and even the world, was the place to go back in the 1930's through 1950's, especially if you were a tourist and didn't know where to go ! It was the friendly place where one could hear American jazz music, as well as sample good food and spirits, like a café or restaurant. This Mickey Bar was in Montmorency, France (near Paris).

Figure #20—The "Mickey Mouse Club" for children started here in the US as early as 1929, even though most people are more familiar with the TV version of the club from the 1950's. This "Journal de Mickey" club was formed in France for children. This card shows a grouping of them posing for a shot with Guignoi, the puppet, with the Mickey signs in the background. Also extremely popular throughout Europe, as seen in real photo postcards, are pictures of "Club Mickey." These are usually beach area scenes at resorts, cordoned off for children, showing signs of Mickey amongst elaborate play areas set up on the beaches.

Real Photo Postcards offer a unique and wonderful slice of Americana as exported to the world through Mickey Mouse. This American icon shows up in so many different contexts, it is no wonder that all the world was his stage from the very start, and still is today as the spokesman and goodwill ambassador for the Disney organization.

Bibliography:

- How to Be Like Walt* by Pat Williams
- Walt Disney: an American Original* by Bob Thomas
- Disney A to Z* by Dave Smith

All of the cards are the standard 3½ x 5½, but some have been reduced to allow more images on these four pages. They are Figures #1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 13 and 15.

Fig.16



Fig.17

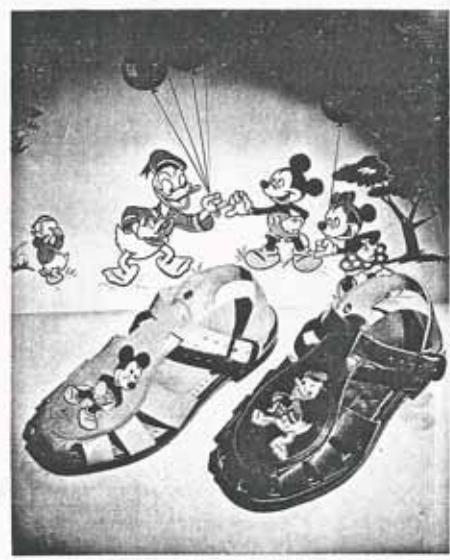


Fig.18



Fig.19

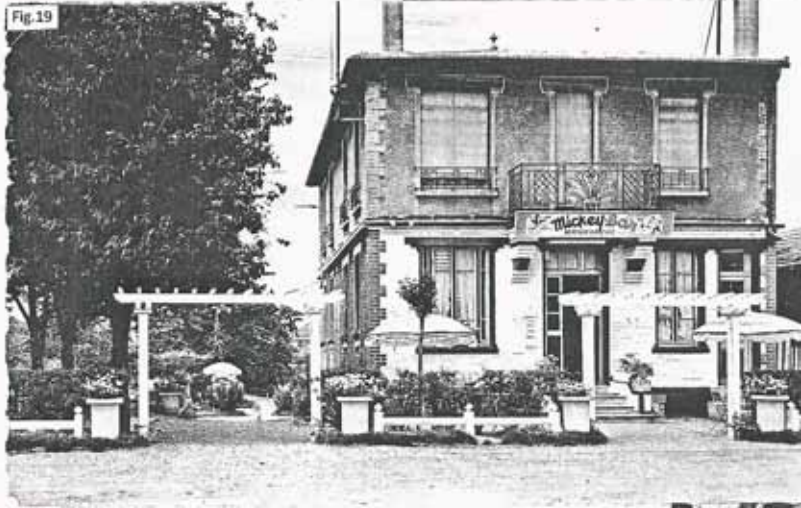


Fig.20