

Animation Art • Lion King • License Plates • Finding Nemo



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DISNEYANA

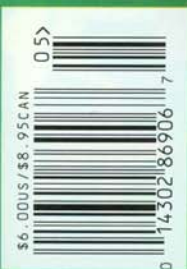
Update

**Early Walt
Disney World
Merchandise
1971**

**New York
Toy Fair
Report**

**Walt's
Retreat
Smoke Tree
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**Latest
Pins**



**Celebrating 75 Years
of Mickey Mouse Birthday
Merchandise**

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Issue Number **51**

May/June 2003

In This Issue...

Mickey's 75th Year...

...prompted a revisit to other Mickey landmark celebrations. Throughout this issue you will find features on the ten special watches issued for Mickey's 20th Birthday in 1948, a King Features newspaper strip promotion done in 1953 for his 15th, and a large selection of 50th Birthday merchandise done in 1978. Throughout Mickey's 75th Year Celebration, other major anniversary merchandise will be featured.

A New York Toy Fair follow-up story of coming merchandise for *Finding Nemo*, *The Lion King*, Disney Princesses, and other Hasbro and Playing Mantis lines are included in this issue, but there are still plenty of leftovers for next time. The amount of merchandise is being naturally increased in an attempt to get Disney Consumer Products back on track.

Walt Disney's vacation home at Smoke Tree Ranch provides a behind-the-scenes story as Walking in Walt's footsteps becomes a growing collector interest. Not many can be invited there for the unique experience of camping in a preserved five-star desert. Go if you ever get the chance.

On the Cover...

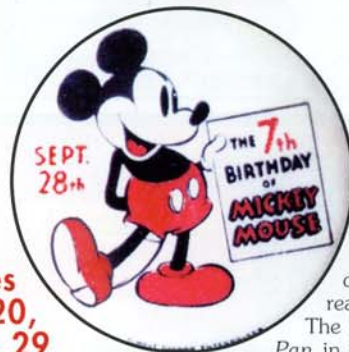
Theme-park porcelain bisque figure commemorating Mickey's 60th Birthday sets the tone of this issue — Celebrating 75 Years of Mickey Mouse Birthday Merchandise.

Contributors

Paul F. Anderson, George Hattersley, Jack & Leon Janzen, Harvey Kamens, Howard Lowery, Dean Mancina, Bob Molinari, Tina & Ron Olson, Jim Silva, David R. Smith, Brian Doyle and Richard & Jason Taylor.



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The first record of a celebrated Mickey Mouse birthday was a button in honor of Mickey's 7th Birthday. Snow White was the big topic when Mickey was ten and World War II wiped out any chance of 15th Birthday merchandise. So the first real chance for a birthday promotion came in 1948. The 25th year proved to be a minor event with *Peter Pan* in release and the ramp-up to TV production and Disneyland dominating the studio.

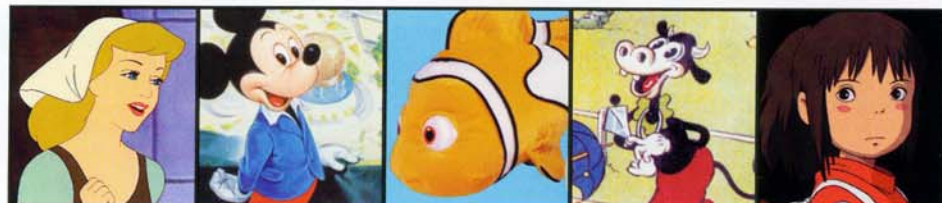
Not much more was done until Mickey's 50th, which was a major company-wide promotion celebrated by both US theme parks, the Consumer Products Division, and theatrical distribution. There has been added emphasis in Mickey's 60th year and other smaller events on each November 18th ever since.

Celebration of Mickey's 75th year comes in a tight-budget year and the celebration is starting slowly. The actual event is still many months off and merchandise is gradually increasing. More on that next issue.

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DISNEY MERCHANDISING PART 51: THEME PARK MERCHANDISING MOVES TO FLORIDA

EARLY WALT DISNEY WORLD MERCHANDISE PART 1

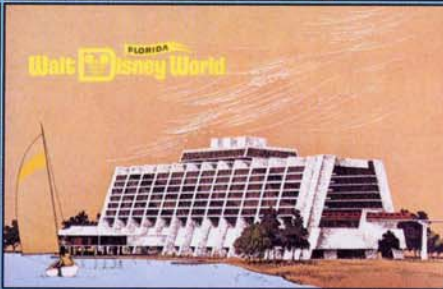
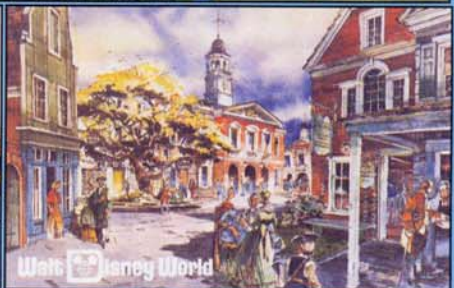
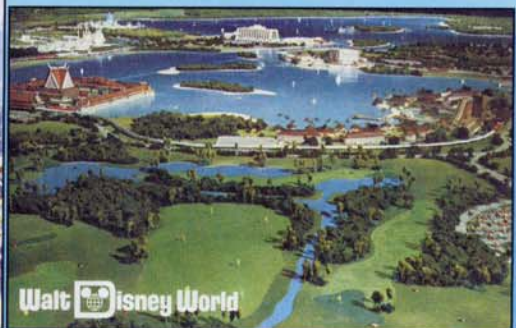
Facts found in this article came from personal interviews and meetings with "Bo" Boyd, Ralph Kent, and DeWayne Booker. This article is the first in a series on early Walt Disney World Merchandise history and collectibles.

In the summer of 1971, the stars of the Disneyland merchandise team packed their bags and moved to Florida. The job was to prepare for the opening of Walt Disney World in October. Ed Moriarity and Bill Benson left the previous spring to operate the Preview Center where the WED Imagineering model was on display. A small shop in the center sold postcards and some Disneyland items adapted with Walt Disney World logos. They were joined by Jack Olsen, former Disneyland Merchandising Vice President, Barton "Bo" Boyd (the future head of all Disney Consumer Products), DeWayne Booker, Ray Lait and Dick Smith. Roland Pierce, Geoff Glead, and Dewey Gaines hired on early as plans for the Walt Disney Distributing Co. developed. Five artists moved along with the merchandise management team: Ralph Kent, Manager; Kragh Littlethorup, Eric Gatley, Dave Barron and Bill Barry. Russell Schroeder and another young artist were hired at the new location, made up the first Walt Disney World-based product design art department.

There were several goals in moving the theme-park merchandising operation to Florida.

The first was improving the quality of merchandise. Secondly, a new Walt Disney Distributing Company was to be formed to create products for both parks and a chain of gift stores that signed on to sell Disney products throughout the US. This first attempt to develop Disney-designed consumer products was abandoned around 1976, but finally bore fruit as The Disney Store operation some 15 years later. The whole concept, however, began as an off-shoot of theme-park merchandising, which was then about three times the sales of licensed consumer products. Since there was much more space in Florida, it just seemed natural to move the expanding theme-park merchandise operation to the new location.

The role of the Florida design operation soon began to grow even broader than planned. It developed the design and fixtures for the new shopping center. Eric Gatley headed up the display group once it was built. The merchandise group had the largest art staff on property and was called on by finance, operations, and other departments for presentation slides, promotional events, convention support, charts, signs, and other graphic materials. The scope became



A series of nine pre-opening postcards sold at the Preview Center. Each card was available with or without the Florida pennant over the word Disney.

so vast that the design group became Imagineering East in 1979 when all Ride and Show responsibilities became part of the operation. Today, merchandise creation is part of the Disney Design Group (DDG) function.

Some pre-opening postcards had a Florida pennant as part of the Walt Disney World logo, but this was abandoned before the park opened. The same postcards are also available without this feature. According to Ralph Kent, the first piece of merchandise designed for WDW was the pre-opening license plate. Other early souvenir and merchandise items had the Mickey World logo inside the big "D" in the WDW name. This mark only lasted the first few years and makes it easy to spot the earliest WDW collectibles.

Many collectors ask about the Orange Bird. It was designed by Bob Moore for the Florida Citrus Growers, sponsors of the Sunshine Pavilion in Adventureland. The character is found on a wide variety of merchandise made for about the first ten years of the Magic Kingdom. Items depicting the Orange Bird were avail-

able throughout Florida, as well as in the park. Some items were exclusive. Use of the character ceased when the sponsorship was not renewed.

The first era of merchandise ran from the opening of WDW on October 1, 1971 to the American on Parade Bicentennial celebration, which began October 1, 1975 and ran through the end of 1976. Mickey's 50th Birthday Celebration followed soon thereafter. (See separate story on page 20.) Some of the initial character merchandise continued during these promotional events — augmented by new lines, which came and went while these best sellers remained.

This article features items from 1971 through the end of 1972, plus items from the first (1972) Walt Disney Distributing Company catalog.

— Tom Tumbusch

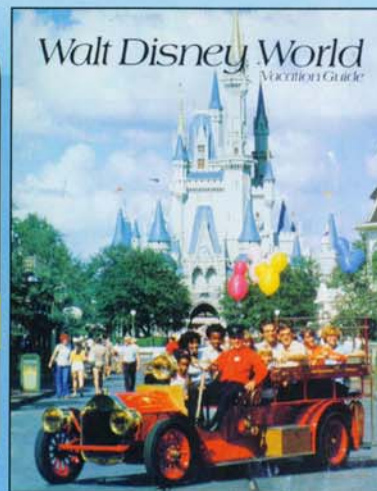
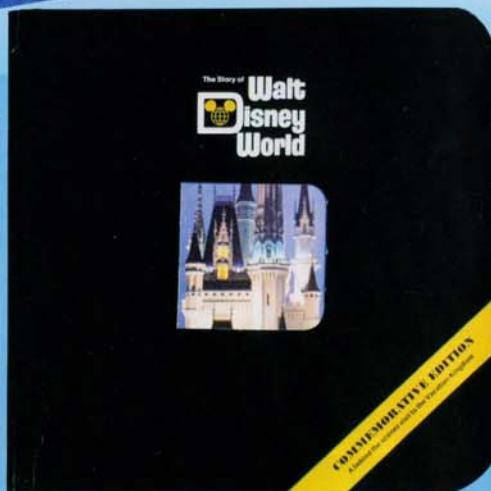
Next issue — Early Walt Disney World Merchandise Part 2



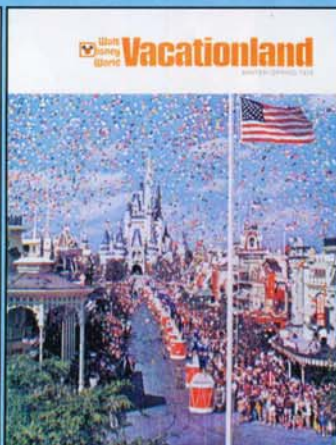
First WDW souvenir pennant



Original key for the Contemporary Resort Hotel.



Left to Right: First WDW Souvenir booklet, the story of building Walt Disney World sold the first three years, and the first hotel guest guide to the park.



Vacationland guide books available to non-Disney guests. Issues shown are Fall 1971 through Spring of 1973.

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