

## The Creation of Walt Disneyland

---

### "Inspiration

In the 1940s, a couple of Walt Disney's top animators were real train buffs. They got Uncle Walt interested in the hobby and he set up a miniature steam railroad that circled his house and gardens, big enough to ride. After several train-theme parties, Walt got the idea that if his friends got such a kick from this one ride, maybe a whole amusement park would lure vacationers who were visiting Hollywood to star-gaze.

### How Walt Got The Money

Walt proposed the idea to his brother Roy, the Disney stockholders and their bankers...but they rejected it. In fact, they thought he was nuts. (In those days, amusement parks were sleazy places full of carnival side-shows, rip-off games and cheap mechanical rides.)

So Disney was on his own. He went on a relentless search for financing. He sold his Palm Springs home and leveraged his \$100,000 life insurance policy to finance his project. He lined up corporate sponsors who were willing to pay for exhibits and restaurants in exchange for name recognition.

But the turning point came when he made a deal with ABC-TV. At the time, ABC, a relatively new network, was a distant third in the ratings. It was desperate for high-quality, high-name-recognition programming Disney could provide. But Disney had already turned down offers from other networks. Why should he join forces with a loser like ABC? The answer: financing for his amusement park. In exchange for doing the show, Disney received a substantial sum of money and ABC agreed to call the show "Disneyland," virtually making the weekly show a one-hour commercial for the park. But perhaps more important, later, in an "unrelated" deal, ABC purchased 38% interest in Disneyland, Inc., the company set up to build the park. (Ironically, Disney now owns ABC.)

When Roy saw the package Walt had put together, he changed his mind and hopped on the Disneyland bandwagon. In 1954, ground was broken in an Anaheim orange grove.

### Opening Day

In the wake of its enormous success, people have forgotten that Disneyland's Opening Day was a disaster. Nearly 33,000 people - twice as many as the number invited - packed the park with the help of forged tickets and surreptitiously placed ladders. Not all the rides were operational, and the restaurants ran out of food after a few hours. In some parts of the park, concrete and asphalt hadn't hardened properly, and women walked out of their high heel shoes.

Also, there had been a plumbers strike during construction, and there weren't enough drinking fountains. The press thought it was a ploy to get visitors to purchase soft drinks. What they didn't know was that, in order to be ready for opening day, Walt had to choose between installing toilets or drinking fountains.

Thanks to nationwide TV coverage emceed by Ronald Reagan, the entire country learned of the mess. The next day's headlines read, "Walt's Dream A Nightmare," and Disney seemed to agree: For the rest of his life he referred to opening day as "Black Sunday"

## **Land of Illusions**

When Uncle Walt bought the property for Disneyland in Anaheim in the early 1950s, he couldn't afford to buy all the land he wanted. So, in order to fit everything in, he used movie makers' tricks to make everything look bigger.

One trick was to use things that are familiar, but make them smaller than normal. Unless you look carefully and measure with your eyes, you'll assume, for instance, that the Disneyland train is full size. It isn't. It's built to 5/8 scale. Many of the Disney buildings use the same trick, but that's just the beginning.

If you look carefully at some of the Disney buildings, especially those on Main Street, you'll notice there's something a little odd about them. They are not only smaller than normal, but their second and third stories are smaller still. This is known in art and in movie-making as "forced perspective." By tapering the upper stories, the designers fool your eye into believing that they are bigger and taller than they really are.

This is done especially skillfully on Sleepy Beauty's Castle, even to the point that the bricks get smaller and smaller with each level.

In making Disney World, this was less of a problem, because by that time, the company could afford to buy an area bigger than most cities. It used many of the same tricks, but on an even bigger scale.

## **Disneyland Deaths**

According to *Egg* magazine, at least 53 people have died at Disneyland. According to *Egg*:

- The first Disney death was apparently a suicide. In 1964, after an argument with his girlfriend, a passenger on the Matterhorn stood up on the ride and was catapulted onto the tracks when his car came to a sudden stop. He never regained consciousness, and died four days later.
  - The Matterhorn killed again in 1984, when a 48-year-old woman fell out of the ride and was struck by the following car. (For the rest of the day, the Matterhorn was closed due to "technical difficulties.")
  - Two people have been accidentally killed in accidents in Tomorrowland's PeopleMover ride, two others have drowned in the river surrounding Tom Sawyer's Island. Another person was run down by the monorail when he tried to sneak into the park without paying; and a park employee was crushed by the moving wall in the "America Sings" attraction
  - The park's first homicide occurred in 1981, when a man was stabbed after touching another man's girlfriend. (Disneyland was found negligent in the death and fined \$600,000 after a park nurse neglected to call paramedics - and instead had the victim driven to the hospital in a park van.)
  - Not all Disneyland deaths happen inside the park: In 1968, 44 people were killed in two separate helicopter accidents traveling between Disneyland and Los Angeles International Airport; and in 1987 a teenage male was killed during a gunfight in the parking lot
-