

This Day in History... July 17, 1955

Disneyland Opens to Massive Crowd

On July 17, 1955, Walt Disney realized one of his long-time dreams when he opened his Disneyland amusement park in Anaheim, California.

Renowned animator Walt Disney had long dreamed of opening an amusement park to share his bustling creativity with children and adults alike. Throughout the 1930s and 40s he visited a number of amusement parks with his daughters and began to plan what his own park could be like. Disney's earliest known written plans for the park date to August 31, 1948, when he wrote about a proposed park called "Mickey Mouse Park" after visiting the Chicago Railroad Fair and Henry Ford's Museum.

At the same time, people frequently wrote letters to the studio asking for visits and tours. Disney knew that the busy studio had little entertainment value to fans, but realized that he could establish a place for them to visit near the Burbank studios. Disney's early plan was for an eight-acre park with a boat ride and themed areas. He soon began visiting other parks, around the world to find inspiration. Disney then turned the project over to designers to create concepts for the park. But their ideas grew to encompass an area much larger than Disney initially expected.

Disney then hired Harrison Price to find a suitable area to build such a massive park. With Price's encouragement, Disney purchased a 160-acre plot of orange groves and walnut trees in Anaheim. The cost of building the park was high, so Disney looked for new ways to raise funds. He created a show called Disneyland for the struggling ABC network in return for their financing the park. Disney also rented out shops to outside companies on his Main Street, USA.

Construction on the park began on July 16, 1954. A nearby highway was also built during this time and additional lanes were added in anticipation of heavy traffic for the new park. After just a year of construction and \$17 million, Disney planned a special "International Press Review" for select guests on July 17, 1955.

Invitations went out to 6,000 studio employees, construction workers, sponsors, members of the press, and their families. However, counterfeit passes were made and over 28,000 people showed up, causing major traffic jams.

And that wasn't the only problem. The larger crowd meant the vendors ran out of food and drinks. Some of the asphalt was still fresh and women's high-heeled shoes got stuck. A plumbing strike left Disney to decide between working water fountains or working toilets and he chose the latter. As one report claimed, "Probably for the first time in his career, Disney disappointed thousands of youngsters."

But the day wasn't all bad. Walt delivered a stirring speech, in part saying, "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 which have created America... with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world." Guests also got a glimpse into the magic of Disney in five different themed sections: Adventureland, Frontierland, Fantasyland, Tomorrowland, and Main Street USA.

The opening event was also broadcast in a live 90-minute special, "Dateline Disneyland," hosted by future president Ronald Reagan, Art Linkletter, and Bob Cummings. It was one of the largest live broadcasts ever that faced its own challenges.

Stamp issued for Reagan's 100th birthday.



But it was still viewed by 90 million people. Walt was unaware of most of the issues that plagued the opening day (dubbed "Black Sunday") because he was busy with the live broadcast. When he found out about the issues he invited the press back for a second private day to experience the true magic of Disneyland.

Walt and his staff worked hard to correct the problems of the first day. Customers began lining up at 2 a.m. the following day to experience the magic for themselves. Some 50,000 people turned out that day and it only took seven weeks for the park to surpass one million visitors.

For decades, Disneyland was the most-visited park in the world – to date it's hosted over 750 million visitors. However, in 2023 it was surpassed by its sister park Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Orlando, which has seen over 17.72 million visitors since opening in 1971.



Stamp designed by two Disney artists.



The park was built on the site of a former orange grove.



The first US stamp to have first day ceremonies at Disneyland.

This Day in History... July 17, 1955

Disneyland Opens to Massive Crowd

On July 17, 1955, Walt Disney realized one of his long-time dreams when he opened his Disneyland amusement park in Anaheim, California.

Renowned animator Walt Disney had long dreamed of opening an amusement park to share his bustling creativity with children and adults alike. Throughout the 1930s and 40s he visited a number of amusement parks with his daughters and began to plan what his own park could be like. Disney's earliest known written plans for the park date to August 31, 1948, when he wrote about a proposed park called "Mickey Mouse Park" after visiting the Chicago Railroad Fair and Henry Ford's Museum.

At the same time, people frequently wrote letters to the studio asking for visits and tours. Disney knew that the busy studio had little entertainment value to fans, but realized that he could establish a place for them to visit near the Burbank studios. Disney's early plan was for an eight-acre park with a boat ride and themed areas. He soon began visiting other parks, around the world to find inspiration. Disney then turned the project over to designers to create concepts for the park. But their ideas grew to encompass an area much larger than Disney initially expected.

Disney then hired Harrison Price to find a suitable area to build such a massive park. With Price's encouragement, Disney purchased a 160-acre plot of orange groves and walnut trees in Anaheim. The cost of building the park was high, so Disney looked for new ways to raise funds. He created a show called Disneyland for the struggling ABC network in return for their financing the park. Disney also rented out shops to outside companies on his Main Street, USA.

Construction on the park began on July 16, 1954. A nearby highway was also built during this time and additional lanes were added in anticipation of heavy traffic for the new park. After just a year of construction and \$17 million, Disney planned a special "International Press Review" for select guests on July 17, 1955.

Invitations went out to 6,000 studio employees, construction workers, sponsors, members of the press, and their families. However, counterfeit passes were made and over 28,000 people showed up, causing major traffic jams.

From the Art of Disney Series

And that wasn't the only problem. The larger crowd meant the vendors ran out of food and drinks. Some of the asphalt was still fresh and women's high-heeled shoes got stuck. A plumbing strike left Disney to decide between working water fountains or working toilets and he chose the latter. As one report claimed, "Probably for the first time in his career, Disney disappointed thousands of youngsters."

But the day wasn't all bad. Walt delivered a stirring speech, in part saying, "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 which have created America... with the hope that it will be a source of joy and inspiration to all the world." Guests also got a glimpse into the magic of Disney in five different themed sections: Adventureland, Frontierland, Fantasyland, Tomorrowland, and Main Street USA.

The opening event was also broadcast in a live 90-minute special, "Dateline Disneyland," hosted by future president Ronald Reagan, Art Linkletter, and Bob Cummings. It was one of the largest live broadcasts ever that faced its own challenges.

Stamp issued for Reagan's 100th birthday.

But it was still viewed by 90 million people. Walt was unaware of most of the issues that plagued the opening day (dubbed "Black Sunday") because he was busy with the live broadcast. When he found out about the issues he invited the press back for a second private day to experience the true magic of Disneyland.

Walt and his staff worked hard to correct the problems of the first day. Customers began lining up at 2 a.m. the following day to experience the magic for themselves. Some 50,000 people turned out that day and it only took seven weeks for the park to surpass one million visitors.

For decades, Disneyland was the most-visited park in the world – to date it's hosted over 750 million visitors. However, in 2023 it was surpassed by its sister park Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World in Orlando, which has seen over 17.72 million visitors since opening in 1971.



Stamp designed by two Disney artists.



The park was built on the site of a former orange grove.



The first US stamp to have first day ceremonies at Disneyland.