

This Day in History... November 23, 1887

Happy Birthday Boris Karloff

Boris Karloff was born William Henry Pratt on November 23, 1887, in Camberwell, London, England.

The youngest of nine children, Karloff initially pursued a career with the British Government's Consular Service, but left college before graduating. He then went to Canada where he worked on a farm and held a variety of odd jobs before he discovered acting. His first performances were in Canadian theater and it was at this time he adopted his stage name, possibly to prevent embarrassing his family, many of whom were diplomats.

For nearly a decade, Karloff acted with several different theater companies and continued to perform odd jobs to pay the bills. The extensive manual labor took a toll on his body and left him with back problems for the rest of his life. By the late 1910s, Karloff reached Hollywood and appeared in several silent films, though he had yet to make his big break. Some of these early appearances included *The Masked Rider* (1919), *The Hope Diamond Mystery* (1920), and *King of the Wild* (1931). Soon Karloff received more significant roles in *The Criminal Code* (1931), *Five Star Final* (1931), and *Scarface* (filmed in 1931 and released in 1932).

Karloff finally got his big break with *Frankenstein* in 1931. Despite the uncomfortable costume that included four-inch high, 11-pound shoes and extensive makeup, Karloff brought the monster to life, establishing himself as a horror movie icon. Within the next year, he had starring roles in *The Mummy*, *The Old Dark House*, and *The Mask of Fu Manchu*. Though he became known for his horror roles, Karloff also appeared in non-horror films such as John Ford's epic *The Lost Patrol* (1934).

Soon, Karloff was paired with another horror star, Bela Lugosi. Though the two men never had a close friendship off-screen, they would star in a number of movies together over the years including *The Black Cat* (1934), *Gift of Gab* (1934), *The Raven* (1935), and *The Invisible Ray* (1936). Karloff would also reprise his role as Frankenstein's monster several more times over the years.

While continuing to appear in films, Karloff returned to the stage in 1941 for *Arsenic and Old Lace*. Later in the decade, he had his own radio and television series, *Starring Boris Karloff*. And in 1950, he played Captain Hook in a stage production of *Peter Pan*, for which he received a Tony Award nomination.

Karloff appeared on a number of television shows in the '50s and '60s. This included his last appearance as Frankenstein's monster for a Halloween episode of *Route 66* in 1962. Karloff enjoyed a resurgence in popularity in 1966 when he narrated and provided the voice for the Grinch in Dr. Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. He went on to receive a Grammy for Best Recording for Children.

Karloff continued to act in his final years before dying on February 2, 1969, in Sussex, England.



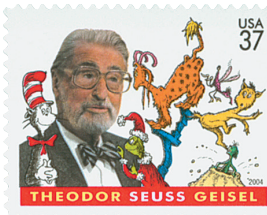
From the Classic Movie Monsters issue



Stamp depicting Boris Karloff as the Mummy.



From the American Filmmaking set



Stamp issued for Dr. Seuss's 100th birthday.

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