

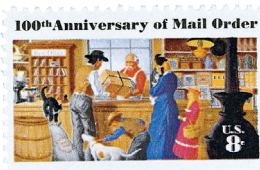
## This Day in History... December 6, 1964

### *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*

On December 6, 1964, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* first premiered on television. Based on a popular book and song, it became an instant classic, appearing on television every year since.

This stamp celebrated the 100th anniversary of Ward's creation of the mail order business. In the 1930s, Chicago-based retail store Montgomery Ward bought and gave away coloring books to children every year for Christmas. In 1939, they decided it would be easier to create their own book and tasked copywriter Robert May with crafting a fun story for their new book.

May knew the story would be about a reindeer and first considered naming it Rollo or Reginald before deciding on Rudolph. While sitting in his office considering how to write the story, he looked out the window to see a thick fog rolling in over Lake Michigan. As he later recalled, "Suddenly I had it!... A nose! A bright red nose that would shine through the fog like a spotlight!"



*The Rudolph story was originally developed for books sold by Montgomery Ward. This stamp celebrated the 100th anniversary of Ward's creation of the mail order business.*

Nearly a decade later, the story was turned into a cartoon by Max Fleisher to promote Montgomery Ward stores. Then in 1949, May's brother-in-law turned the poem into a song, popularly performed by Gene Autry. The tune, which differed some from the book, was the number one song that Christmas and sold 2.5 million copies its first year. It would go on to become the second best-selling record of all time into the 1980s. In the coming years, the tale of Rudolph would also be adapted for comic books as well as another children's book from Little Golden Books.

In 1964, 25 years after the original book was produced, the story was adapted once again into the beloved stop-motion animation television special by Rankin and Bass. When the producers were planning the special, they couldn't find a copy of the book, so they based their story on the song and added in some new characters – Hermey the elf, Yukon Cornelius, Clarice, the Abominable Snow Monster, and Sam the living Snowman.

The animation was filmed in Tokyo, Japan, and the sound recording was done in Toronto, Canada. The 55-minute film premiered on December 6, 1964. It became an instant classic and has been shown on TV every year since, making it the longest continuously running Christmas special in TV history.

In the years since its release, there have been several sequels – *Rudolph's Shiny New Year* (1976), *Rudolph and Frosty's Christmas in July* (1979), and *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer and the Island of Misfit Toys* (2001).



*Stamps issued in 2014 for the 50th anniversary of the TV special and 75th anniversary of the original story.*

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May consulted often with his four-year-old daughter Barbara as he composed the tale, changing the story to please her. He designed the story as a poem, matching the popular "A Visit from St. Nicholas."

When shown the finished story, May's employer asked, "Can't you come up with anything better?" But the executive agreed to publish May's fable of an adventurous reindeer, and customers snatched up 2.4 million copies in that first year.

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