

This Day in History... December 21, 1937

Snow White Premieres

On December 21, 1937, Walt Disney released *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the world's first full-length animated feature film, forever changing the landscape of cinema. What began as a daring experiment became a cultural phenomenon that launched Disney into global fame.

Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs was inspired by an old German folktale collected by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm. The story follows a young princess whose beauty incites the jealousy of a wicked queen. Threatened by the queen's murderous intentions, Snow White finds refuge with seven dwarfs who live in a quaint woodland cottage. While Disney preserved the basic storyline, he softened its darker elements, emphasizing romance, friendship, and humor, creating a version that would captivate audiences of all ages.

The film's creation was nothing short of monumental.

The idea began one evening in 1934 when Walt Disney gathered his animators in a small studio on the Disney lot. Disney himself acted out every role, running across the stage and performing the story with such energy that one animator later commented that even the movie couldn't match the original live performance. It was clear from the start that Disney intended this project to be unlike anything the world had seen.

At the time, animated shorts were popular but had limited financial potential. Walt wanted to push boundaries and create a feature-length film, a venture many in Hollywood considered too risky. The production required a team of 750 animators, who produced over two million sketches. The final film contained approximately 250,000 frames and cost nearly \$1.5 million—a staggering amount for the era. To fund the project, Disney even mortgaged his home and borrowed money, taking a personal risk that would ultimately pay off in historic ways.

The animators devoted extraordinary care to every detail. Colors were chosen deliberately to evoke emotions, lighting was carefully tested to create realistic shadows, and each movement was meticulously studied to ensure authenticity. The

*Issued the year after
Disney's passing.*

team's dedication gave life to characters who were not just cartoons but felt like real beings to audiences.

Despite the enormous effort, the project was widely criticized in Hollywood. Many doubted that audiences would sit through a feature-length cartoon, dubbing it "Disney's Folly." However, as the premiere approached, excitement grew. Advanced ticket sales at Los Angeles's Carthay Circle Theatre outpaced all previous films, with buyers limited to four tickets each due to unprecedented demand. On December 21, 1937, the premiere sold out, and tens of thousands more lined the streets hoping to catch a glimpse of the event.

The premiere itself was a spectacle. Walt Disney and his wife, Lillian, attended alongside celebrities including Shirley Temple, Clark Gable, Judy Garland, Charlie Chaplin, Marlene Dietrich, Milton Berle, Ginger Rogers, Cary Grant, and George Burns. Chaplin praised the film, declaring that Disney had created "one of the greatest comedians of all time" in the character of Dopey.

Snow White was an immediate and lasting success. It earned Disney international acclaim and set the stage for decades of animated filmmaking. The movie was the first to have a commercially released soundtrack, held the title of highest-grossing film in the world for a year, and solidified Disney's reputation as a pioneering filmmaker. Beyond financial success, it became a beloved story across generations, with characters and songs that remain iconic to this day.

*The Queen stamp, from the
2017 Disney Villains Sheet*



Over the years, the film's influence only grew. In 1994, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* became the first animated film selected for the National Film Registry. *Entertainment Weekly* later named it the 23rd greatest film of all time, the highest-ranked animated feature on the list. Its enduring popularity is a testament to Disney's vision, the talent of his animators, and the timeless appeal of a story about courage, friendship, and hope.



*Snow White stamp from
Celebrate the Century*



*Snow White and Dopey Art of
Disney Stamp*

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