

Before there was Carl Barks, there was Kay Kamen

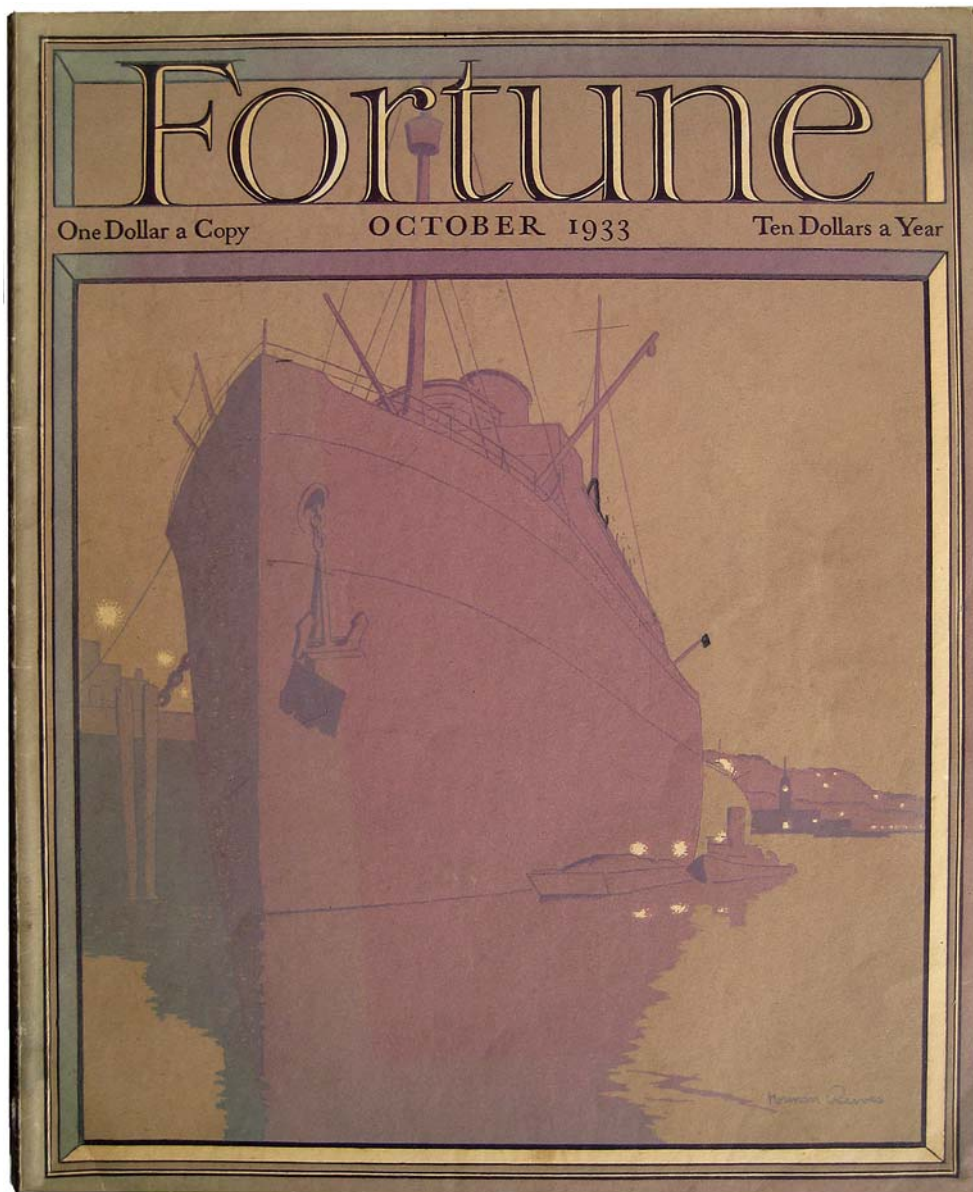
by Joseph Cowles

FANS OF CARL BARKS are likely to agree that it was the Old Duck Man's art and stories which made Dell Comics and Western Printing successful. Indeed, Carl's tales of Donald and his three nephews, Uncle Scrooge, Gyro Gearloose and Duckburg's other characters are known to have been the comic book industry's top income producers. At its peak of popularity, *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories* boasted a monthly circulation of more than 3,000,000 copies—making it the country's third most popular magazine (right behind *Reader's Digest* and *The Saturday Evening Post*), and generating a huge income sufficient to cover overhead of the many Dell Comics with much smaller press runs.

You may already know that *WDC&S* was originally titled *Mickey Mouse Magazine*, and began as an experimental publication conceived and developed through the efforts of Walt Disney's marketing genius, Herman Samuel "Kay" Kamen. You'll find lots of interesting information on the Internet about Kay Kamen's merchandising of many Disney-related items—from comic books to Mickey Mouse watches—all of which are now sought after by collectors of Disneyana.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, while browsing in a used book store, I came across a copy of the October 1933 issue of *Fortune* magazine. It's big, thick, and packed with articles about people and businesses that were doing well financially, although this was worst year of The Great Depression.

The *Fortune* column "Off the Record" featured an article headlined "Money Mouse," about Kay Kamen's involvement with Disney merchandise. Believing that CBFC members might enjoy knowing what was being said about the value of



Cover image of the Depression-era magazine for readers who had money and for those dreaming of acquiring it.

Disney items some 75 years ago, I have transcribed the text of the article:

MONEY MOUSE

THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND'S REFUSAL to leave a film performance before the Mickey Mouse comedy came on, even though her ladies-in-waiting insisted that she'd be late for tea at the palace (Queen Mary said she didn't care about tea; she wanted to see Mickey Mouse), hasn't any obvious connection with dollar watches

or cheese or boys' pants. But the connection is there. For if the Queen would rather miss tea than miss Mickey Mouse, then there is very good reason to believe that inexpensive watches with a Mickey Mouse dial will sell very well. They do, and Mickey's creator, Walt Disney, reaps his reward. He is still rather surprised.

When Mickey first began his rise to his present position as the world's most famous contemporary mouse, a few

astute merchandisers wrote in and asked if Mr. Disney had any objections to their using Mickey as a part of their trademark. If Mr. Disney wasn't too busy he would tell them to go right ahead. If he was busy he'd throw the request in the wastebasket. But Mickey got around and Mr. Disney wasn't at all interested until a mail-order house executive told him that he was losing a lot of profit by not selling the right to have a picture of Mickey on a watch or an ice-cream cone. So Mr. Disney, still only mildly interested, got hold of a Mr. Kay Kamen, who now takes care of Mickey Mouse in business.

LAST YEAR MICKEY MOUSE was on \$1,000,000 worth of merchandise. This year he sells at the rate of about \$5,000,000 a year, which means at least \$250,000 for the Disneys. There are more than a hundred companies using the Mouse trademark—National Dairy Products, International Silver, Ingersoll-Waterbury (watches), Dennison (paper), Hicock (belts), Seneca (textiles). A recent issue of a boys' outfitting magazine had twenty-two pages out of seventy-four devoted to stories and proud advertising displays of pants and sweaters and caps decorated with Mickey Mouse. *McCall's Magazine* uses him and his Minnie for patterns. National Dairy, which uses the trademark on ice cream and cheese and such, ordered 30,000,000 Mickey Mouse ice-cream cones this year and an affiliate company in the South sold 6,000,000 Mickey Mouse ice-creams-in-a-cup in the first six weeks of sales.

NOT ANYONE MAY USE the trademark. Users must have an A-1 rating, must promise not to allow Mickey Mouse merchandise to be sold at marked-down or cut-rate prices, and must submit their products and advertising to Mr. Kamen. If he doesn't like the drawing—Mr. Disney doesn't draw all the Mickey Mouses but he gets mad at a poor imitation—the user has to try over again. If Mr. Kamen

doesn't approve of the company the company gets along without Mickey Mouse. No maker of laxatives, beer, or cigarettes may use Mickey Mouse. It's too undignified or unwholesome for the children. Nor may Mickey make radio appearances. Disney thinks the voice would be disillusioning. As a side line, Mr. Kamen edits the *Mickey Mouse Magazine*, a simple little monthly full of good sentiments and bad puns. It is distributed through department stores

and had a circulation in June of 300,000 copies. Now it's about double that.

Now that Mickey is tied up with things like ice cream and cheese, his mouseyness is soft-pedaled to make the connection a bit more proper. Anyway, a current survey shows that children don't think of Mickey as a mouse. A good many of them were asked whether Mickey Mouse is a dog or a cat. Almost half of the tots answered brightly: "A cat."

—*Fortune Magazine*
October 1933

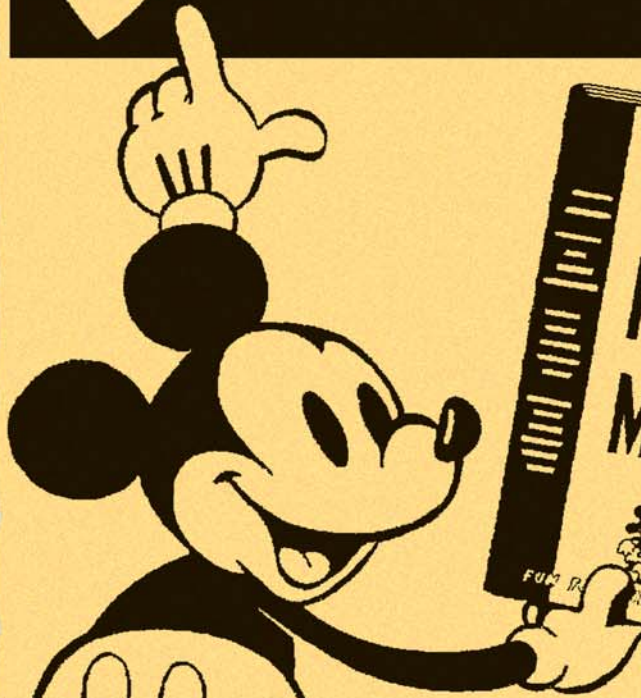


Walt Disney's Comics and Stories, Vol. 9, No. 8, May, 1949. Published monthly by arrangement with Walt Disney Productions. Subscription price in the U.S.A., \$1 per year, 10 cents per copy; foreign subscriptions, \$2 per year; no Canadian subscriptions accepted. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Poughkeepsie, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. All rights reserved by Walt Disney Productions throughout the world. K. K. Publications, Inc., assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts. Owners submitting manuscripts assume all risk for their loss or damage. Printed in U.S.A., by Western Printing & Lithographing Co. Entire contents copyright, 1939, 1944, 1945, 1946, 1949, by Walt Disney Productions. Published by
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CHANGE OF ADDRESS requires four weeks. Old address, as well as new, must be given.
A copy of your old address, as shown on the back cover of the magazine, will speed delivery

Under the K.K. Publications, Inc. business name, Kay Kamen's "side line" business, *Mickey Mouse Magazine*, eventually became the wildly popular *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*, issuing more than three million copies each month.

Free!

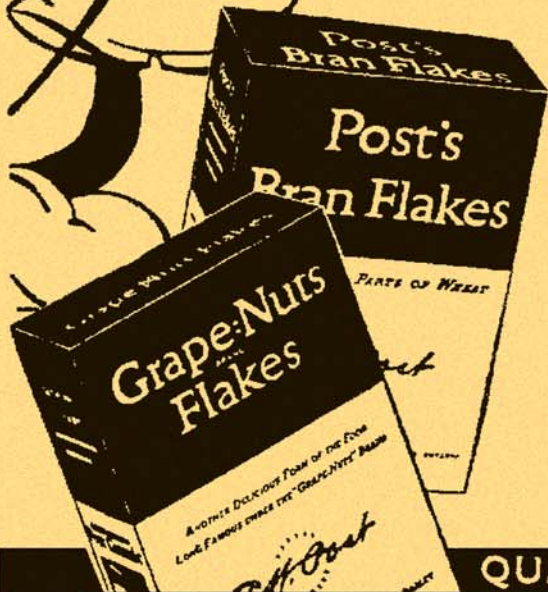
BIG 10¢ MICKEY MOUSE MAGAZINE



STORIES
COMICS
PUZZLES



Absolutely Free!



When You Buy 1 Package each of
"GRAPE-NUTS" FLAKES
and
POST'S BRAN FLAKES
from your Grocer

HURRY! A free gift is waiting for you! Go to your grocer's. Buy one package each of "Grape-Nuts" Flakes and Post's Bran Flakes at the regular price. And get the big Mickey Mouse Magazine for your child—free.

Two Grand Cereals
Post's Bran Flakes helps keep the family fit by supplying needed

bulk in a cereal with a crunchy goodness and delicious flavour.
"Grape-Nuts" Flakes is nourishing as well as wonderfully delicious. With whole milk or cream and fruit it supplies more varied nourishment than many a hearty meal.

Get the big free book for your youngster today!

QUANTITY LIMITED—GET YOURS TODAY

Kay Kamen knew how to get the word out; his innovative marketing work led to the success of *Walt Disney's Comics and Stories*, and the creative genius of Carl Barks insured the magazine's massive circulation for several decades.

Gleaning through old newspapers is a great way to find information about Disney history and collectibles. The examples of articles, advertisements and promos on these pages were found at www.NewspaperArchive.com.



Walt Disney with marketer Kay Kamen, who showed the animator how to generate profits from merchandise.

HEYMAN-FISHER BOYS' DEPARTMENT

WEEK-END SPECIAL

BOYS' SPORT PANTS

English SHORTS
Our regular \$1.00 and \$1.25 values in sizes to 15. To close out at... **79c**

KNICKERS
Values to \$1.50 are sharply reduced to this low price. Sizes to 16... **97c**

LONG PANTS
Our values up to \$2.00 are now reduced at this special sale price. Sizes up to 20, at... **\$1.95**

MICKEY MOUSE MAGAZINE
September Issue
10c

The Heyman-Fisher Co.
"THE QUALITY SHOP"

1937 clothing store advertisement.

MAGAZINES

Out Today At Your News Stand

TRUE STORY	POPULAR SCIENCE
READERS DIGEST	PHOTOPLAY
RED BOOK	PHYSICAL CULTURE
NEW MICKEY MOUSE MAGAZINE	

Might's Book Store

At left is an advertising clipping which positions Kamen's MM mag right up there with other popular periodicals of the day.

Kay Kamen made sure that his brainchild, *Mickey Mouse Magazine*, was known far and wide. This excerpt from a nationally syndicated column, "Answers to Questions" (below), shows one of Kamen's methods. The same question appeared in this and similar columns again and again for a number of years.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 2, 1937

ANSWERS to QUESTIONS

by **Frederic J. Haskin**

A reader can get the answer to any question of fact by writing the Times Recorder Information Bureau, Frederic J. Haskin, director, Washington, D. C. Please enclose three (3) cents for reply.

Q. Is there a Mickey Mouse Magazine and if so where is it published?
E. H.
A. The Mickey Mouse Magazine, a Monthly, is published by Kay Kamen Ltd., RKO building, New York city.

Q. Please give a biography of Moon,
the philanthropist...

Q. Who is head of The Roycrofters,
an organization devoted to printing...

MAN ABOUT MANHATTAN

By **GEORGE TUCKER**

New York—Your New Yorker of the boom period who paid \$1,000 for a first edition of Dante's "Divine Comedy" is still as much of a bibliophile as ever, but now he has transferred his affections to the less expensive magazine field. There is a lively market for first editions in magazines today.

Copies of the American Mercury, dated January, 1924, are quoted at \$4. . . . Vol. 1, No. 1, of the New Yorker, which sold originally for 15 cents, is worth \$100. . . . First editions of Colliers, Time, and Liberty are invaluable and are not on the open market. . . . A first of Radio News, an obscure 5 cent publication in 1919, brings \$1.

An indication of the alertness of "First" connoisseurs was that demand for copies of Mickey Mouse magazine which recently announced a new form. Almost every known "collector" in the country wrote in and requested a special copy.

This new interest in magazine first-edition buying has resulted in the opening of dozens of shops which have sprung mushroom-like in the side streets of midtown. All of them have a surprising stock of Firsts.

Comic book collecting has been around as long as comic books, as this nationally syndicated article indicates. It's from *The Evening Tribune* of Albert Lea, Minnesota, and was published Wednesday, August 21, 1936.