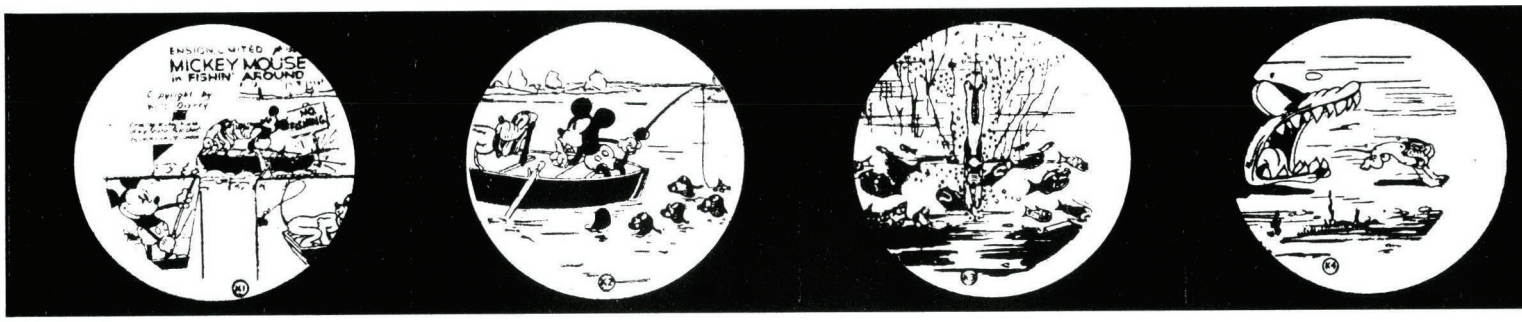


THE ENSIGN DISNEY

TOY LANTERN SIDES

M. C. WILLS-WOOD

The toy projector was, in the late nineteenth century, a popular children's toy and has persisted in one form or another to the present day. In the 1930s the Ensign Company, under licence from the Disney Film Company, manufactured a toy projector and lantern slide sets which recreated the cinema adventures of Mickey Mouse and other Disney characters.

MICKEY MOUSE

In 1928 Mickey Mouse made his screen début in the short black-and-white cartoon film *Steamboat Willie*. There followed a series of Mickey Mouse cartoons, each costing approximately $4,500 to produce. However, by 1931, as Walt Disney strove to improve the quality of the films, these costs had risen to around $13,000.

By the early 1930s, during the years of the depression, the innocent, fearless and comic adventures of Mickey had made him a household name all over the world. Walt Disney was quick to exploit Mickey in the merchandising of children's books, toys, etc., and in 1930 appointed William Banks Levy as Disney's merchandising representative for Great Britain. Licences were only granted to companies whose products satisfied Walt Disney's high standards, and numerous applications were refused. When a licence was granted it was under the copyright of Walt Disney, Mickey Mouse Limited.

ENSIGN LIMITED

Ensign Limited, of High Holborn, London, was granted a licence to manufacture a toy projector and a series of black-and-white Mickey Mouse lantern slide sets. These were based on some of the early black-and-white Mickey Mouse films of 1930 and 1931 (see I below). Later on, colour sets were produced, based on later black-and-white and colour Mickey Mouse films, and some of the colour Disney 'Silly Symphony' films (SS).

The 'Silly Symphonies' were short cartoon films, the first one being *The Skeleton Dance*, made in 1929. In these films, music and comic situations with different characters were used to tell a story, thus moving away from the cartoon film based on a single character cast in different roles, as in the Mickey Mouse film. As a development of this, a 'feature symphony', *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, was made between 1934 and 1937.

ENSIGN SLIDE SETS

The Ensign toy slides were of uniform size, 5¼ x 1½ in. Each slide consisted of a celluloid strip on which was printed a series of separate lantern slide pictures which were 'framed' by a separate black paper strip. These strips were sandwiched between glass covers.

The black-and-white sets (I) contained two slides and a reading, and cost six pence. Each slide had four round lantern slide pictures, some of which were divided into two, three or four segments, recreating the overall effect of the action from a continuous film scene. The black-and-white slide sets were: 'also available as presentation set, complete series of eleven stories, with reading, in attractive presentation box, cost five shillings and six pence.'

The colour slide sets (see II below) usually contained two slides and a reading and cost one shilling. Each slide had six square lantern slide pictures, and only one scene per slide picture. (NB. *The Three Little Pigs* slides have only four lantern pictures each.)

The round shape of the black-and-white slides recreated the toy magic lantern pictures of yesteryear, while the later square lantern slide pictures created a shape similar to the cinema film frame of the day.

I. Black-and-white sets

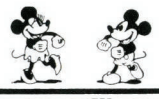
Slide set – same title as Mickey Mouse film Date – same as original Mickey Mouse film

Slide set/MM film	Date		
Pioneer Days	1930	*The Delivery Boy*	1931
Traffic Troubles	1931	*The Mouse Hunt*	1931
The Gorilla Mystery	1930	*Mickey Steps Out*	1931
The Cactus Kid	1930	*Fishin' Around*	1931
The Birthday Party	1931	*The Firefighters*	1930
The Castaway	1931		

OTHER MICKEY MOUSE LANTERN SLIDE STORIES

Story	
A	Pioneer Days
B	Traffic Troubles
C	The Gorilla Mystery
D	The Cactus Kid
E	The Birthday Party
F	The Castaway
G	The Delivery Boy
H	The Mouse Hunt
J	Mickey Steps Out
L	The Firefighters

Toy Slides, per story of 8 pictures 6d.
Standard Slides (3¼ × 3¼) 8 slides 2/6



ENSIGN, LIMITED present

MICKEY MOUSE
in "FISHIN' AROUND"

Copyright by Walt Disney

From the Mickey Mouse Movie Stories, published by Dean & Son, Ltd., London.

Title Slide K1

Beneath a bright and cheerful sun
Mickey went out to fish,
He was looking for a lot of fun—
And he certainly got his wish!

Mickey's oars were splashing merrily through the sparkling waters of the little lake as he rowed along towards the spot where he knew the fish were biggest. And some little fish were playfully jumping over his oars as they dipped and rose, while sitting in the stern of the boat was Pluto, who had come along to help Mickey make a big day of it. Suddenly—

Bump! Went the boat—
And Mickey turned pale,
Thinking they'd rammed a whale.
He turned quickly 'round
And was surprised as he found
A "NO FISHING" sign in their trail!

Slide K2

Now, Mickey doesn't believe in signs, especially "NO FISHING" signs. So he just yanked this one out, and hanging a couple of horseshoes on it, he sank it with a splash. And then they settled down to fish—Mickey with his pole and Pluto with a line tied to his tail.

Their lines had hardly touched the water when "Arrrk, Arrrk!" Pluto got a bite! But Mickey was feeling a nibble himself just then, so he turned and whispered "sh-sh-sh!" to Pluto. As he did so a flock of little fish stuck their heads out of the water and whispered, "sh-sh-sh!" right back at him.

One of them even stole the worm off his hook and jerked the line, and when Mickey pulled it up, there was the little fish riding on it and laughing at him.

Mickey got angry and threw in his hook
To catch the young upstart by chance,
But he just wasn't careful, and alas!
didn't look,
And the hook caught in the seat of his pants!

Off went Mickey's pants into the water and when he pulled them up that same little fish hopped out of them.

Now, Pluto was having his troubles too. The fish were teasing him, strumming "plunk-a-plunk" on his tail, hanging old clothes on his hook and jerking his line. And when he barked at them, one of them squirted a mouthful of water in his eye!

Slide K3

And then Pluto WAS mad! In he went ker-splash! right after the little villain.
Down to the bottom dived the brave pup,
Scattering the fish here and there,
When he barked you could see the bubbles go up,
And the barks pop out in the air!
He sniffed all around till he found a clam,
And into its shell stuck his snout
But the clam got peeved, squeezed his nose with a slam,
And poor Pluto almost passed out.
A long, slippery eel swam between his legs and almost scared the life out of him. But he kept on sniffing and looking for that little fish.
Mickey, above, a bite did await,
While behind him with wiggles and squirms
A little fish danced round his can of bait,
And gobbled up all his worms!
"Hey! HEY!" shouted Mickey, "get away from those worms!" And jumping up he chased all the little fish off the boat.
In the meantime, down on the bottom of the lake, Pluto had discovered the little fish who had squirted the water in his eye. The little rascal darted into a big cave—Pluto right after him. But the pup didn't stay in there long!

Slide K4

Out he came ki-yi-ing at the top of his voice with a great big fish right after him!
Again and again the monster nipped

Fishin' Around—continued from overleaf.

Pluto on the tail with his great teeth until Pluto, swimming for his very life, shot up through the water like a sky rocket and came down on the boat, Plop!
WOW! That was a narrow escape! But presently he calmed down and shaking the water out of his hide, sat down to fish again.
Now, down below, two little fish came along, and seeing Mickey's and Pluto's hooks, they tied them together and jerked on the lines. And then what a scene!
The excited fishermen yanked one another
While each tried his best to stick on,
They thought they had hold of a shark's grandmother,
Or perhaps it was Mobie Dick's son!
At last Pluto could hold on no longer, and splash! overboard he went, and down under the boat, with Mickey pulling him through the water as hard as he could.
But you can imagine Mickey's surprise, when with a mighty pull he brought up Pluto! And Pluto had a little fish in his mouth.

Slide K5

When Mickey saw the fish in Pluto's mouth, it gave him a great idea. He swung Pluto around over the basket, and Pluto dropped the fish into it. Then Mickey swung Pluto back and dropped him in to catch some more fish. At that moment the fish in the basket hopped out and dived back into the water, just in time for Pluto to catch him again under the boat. So back into the basket went the fish, the same as before, and Pluto jumped in for another.

Slide K6

But the little fish just wouldn't stay put. Out he jumped again and Pluto caught him once more, down under the boat.

"Watcha doin' thar, young feller," suddenly came a voice from the bank, and Mickey looked around to see the village constable. "Fishing!" replied Mickey. Quick as a flash the constable pulled out his gun, and pointing it at Mickey, started to step aboard the boat.

Slide K7

But Mickey didn't give him a chance. Dropping the fish pole, Pluto, and all into the water with a splash, Mickey shoved off and began to paddle away as fast as he could. And as he did so, down went the old constable into the water, losing his gun and his false whiskers. But he came up again, and climbing on a log he paddled after Mickey, blowing his police whistle after him.
Faster and faster paddled Mickey, pushing his boat along like a scooter bike. But the old constable had one of Mickey's oars, and he was gaining on him inch by inch. Then along past the constable came Pluto swimming furiously under the water with only his tail sticking out. And catching up with the boat he climbed on board.

Slide K8

As the constable was just about to catch up with them, Pluto suddenly had an idea. He stuck his tail straight out and began to spin it like a pin wheel. And then he lowered it into the water and presto! Mickey and Pluto had a motor-boat! Mickey turned around and seeing what Pluto was doing, smiled happily, and reaching out, he shook hands with his beloved old pal.
And as they left the angry constable far behind, Mickey leaned out, waved a farewell, and wriggled his ears at him!
"Say, Pluto, forget those fish in the lake,"
Said Mickey, while rowing back home.
"I'll fry us a nice big juicy steak—
And you can bury the bone!"

ENSIGN
MICKEY MOUSE
LANTERNS and SLIDES
produced by special arrangement with
WALT DISNEY
by ENSIGN, LIMITED, LONDON, W.C.1

II. Colour sets

Type of film: MM – Mickey Mouse, SS – Silly Symphony, F – Feature

(a) Two-slide sets

Slide Set Title	Disney Film Title	Type	Date
Mickey Mouse in Giantland	*Giantland*	MM	1933
Mickey Crusoe	*Mickey's Man Friday*	MM	1935
Donald Duck – an Alpine Adventure	*Alpine Climbers*	MM	1936
Mickey Mouse in Pigmy Land	*Gulliver Mickey*	MM	1934
Pied Piper	*Pied Piper*	SS	1933
Night before Christmas	*Night Before Christmas*	SS	1933
Santa's Workshop	*Santa's Workshop*	SS	1932
Big Bad Wolf	*Big Bad Wolf*	SS	1934

(b) Six-slide sets

Three Little Pigs	*Three Little Pigs*	SS	1933
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs	*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*	F	1937
Pinocchio	*Pinocchio*	F	1940

During this period, many of the slide titles were published as books by William Collins Ltd. On the *Mickey Crusoe* box lid, in small print below the title, is printed 'From the story published by William Collins Ltd', giving no credit to the story being based on a Disney film.

Donald Duck – an Alpine Adventure is based on a scene from the Mickey Mouse film *Alpine Climbers*, in which Donald encounters an unfriendly mountain goat. However, it is incorrectly credited on the box lid as a 'Silly Symphony' film.

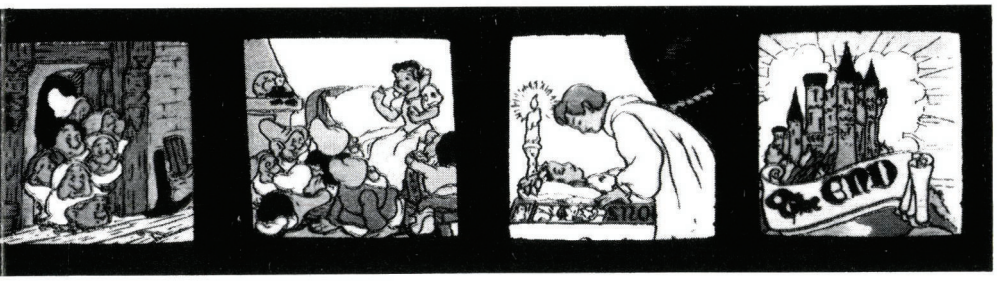
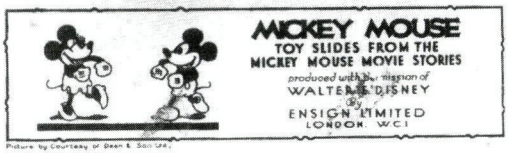
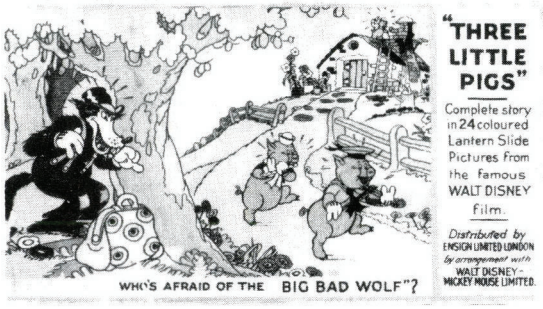
THREE LITTLE PIGS

In 1933 Disney had a huge success with the 'Silly Symphony' film *Three Little Pigs*. Costing $22,000 to make, it was to win the 1932/33 Oscar for best cartoon short film. The film's theme tune, 'Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?', composed by Frank Churchill, also became a hit. The Ensign Company produced a larger six-slide set to tell the 'complete story in 24 lantern slide pictures from the famous Walt Disney film.' The reading was a twenty-four page oblong booklet, with drawings of the little pigs and the wolf on the cover and some of the pages. On the box lid, beneath a picture of the wolf leering and spying on the pigs from behind a tree, is printed 'Who's afraid of the Big Bad Wolf?' as a selling aid. The set cost two shillings and six pence

SNOW WHITE

In 1937 Walt Disney premiered the cinema's first feature-length cartoon talkie, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, costing nearly $1½ m to make. It was a great achievement and an overnight success. To tell this story, Ensign produced a larger lantern slide set as a series of three chapters, each chapter containing two slides (a total of thirty-six lantern pictures). The chapters were individually boxed and sold in a presentation box, complete with an eight-page reading, at a cost of three shillings. The chapters could also be purchased individually at one shilling each.

The Ensign toy slide pictures are crudely printed and the quality of their detail varies. As sets they also achieve varying standards in their effort to recreate the original films. However, the quality must have been adequate as Ensign were allowed to produce them under the Disney copyright.

The detail in the black-and-white slides is poor in crowd scenes, for instance, and improves in those with fewer characters. In the early black-and-white Mickey Mouse films of 1930-31 (when animation was still in its infancy), background detail was undeveloped. The black-and-white slides of these films, with even less detail as they had no shading, still manage to capture some of the films' original qualities. Slide set storylines follow those of the films; the segmented slide pictures recreating the overall effect of a film scene by visually moving the story along more quickly and completely.

The detail and colouring-in of the colour slides again vary, from good and clear, as in *Mickey Crusoe*, to very poor, as in *Pinocchio*. The quality of Disney cartoon films improved with new technical processes. In photography, the use of the Technicolor process and the development of the multiplane camera gave added depth to scenes. There were also improvements in the colouring of the celluloid cells. Consequently, the Ensign slides with their light bright colours could now only poorly reproduce the fine detail of the Disney animation. Slide set story lines were compressed visually to a few important scenes from the feature-length cartoons. Nevertheless Ensign slide sets recreated for children the cinema magic of the Disney characters.