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Quick, Timely Reads  
On the Waterfront

**Mickey Mouse Club**  
*We were 'almost' too cool to watch, but not quite!*

By David Frew  
June 2023



From 1955 until 1959, after-school network television featured a kid-friendly show designed to occupy our little brothers and sisters. Most of us really cool, Bay Rat types had siblings and we often laughed at their preoccupation with silly kids shows. Bay Rats had all watched and enjoyed the Sunday evening “Disneyland” program, featuring such amazing topics as Davey Crockett, but weekday children’s stuff? Never.

Real American history, featuring a buckskin hero wearing a coonskin cap was important, but kids dressed in T-shirts and mouse-eared caps were way below us. Scholars later noted that Disney had “adjusted” a few of the important details regarding Davey Crocket, but we were none the wiser back then.

After sneaking a few peeks over my younger brother’s shoulder as he was mesmerized by the afternoon television show, I began to catch the “drift” of the show. It was a Disneyesque variety show featuring a regular cast of seemingly little kids, each of whom had his or her name printed on a T-shirt. The inspirational leader, a 40-something singer named Jimmy Dodd, regularly led the kids in continuous rounds of Americana. Truth, justice, and the American way prevailed. Each day of the show, senior Mouseketeer Jimmy began by singing the opening “March Song” and ended with a moralizing epistle about how kids could lead better lives. It was pure Disney and each of five weekdays featured a theme such as “special guest day.”

The cast of kids featured a squad of Mouseketeers who, like Jimmy, appeared to be much younger than their actual years. Mouseketeers sang, danced, and performed various skits reminiscent of earlier Vaudeville days. Disney contracted with each of the Mouseketeers for one entire season at a time. In anticipation of sickness, absenteeism, or departures, Disney created an “A” cast as well as a smaller “B” cast. The secondary cast members were available to fill in and a few of them managed to move up to the “A” team as permanent cast members.



*The Mouseketeers with their spiritual leader, Jimmy Dodd, standing at the top*

The most consistent cast member, of course, was Mickey Mouse, himself. Mickey appeared in two different ways. Each show featured at least one Mickey Mouse

cartoon, many of which had been rescued from the oblivion of history. Vintage cartoons were crude as compared to the more modern ones that had been made during the post-World War II era. Introductions to the daily animated cartoons were connected to the theme of the day for each show. Mickey's additional daily appearances were created especially for the show. The more modern Mickey was animated and scripted especially for each program. As an indication of Walt Disney's personal investment and interest in the show, he personally provided the voice for the cartoon Mickey who appeared in each show, even though he had long since turned voice-over duties to another Disney animator.

The first few times that I noticed the Mickey Mouse Club show I was watching mindlessly as my younger brother was tuned in. At first it seemed silly. Way too young for me. Mouseketeers singing songs. Vintage cartoons like "Steamboat Willey," which was Mickey's debut appearance and crude by comparison to modern animations. The show was obviously for little kids. Totally hokey, as I told many of my Bay Rat buddies. But then ... on a fateful day during the second season, my attention was captured by a show that featured Annette. Double take. She wasn't a little kid at all. She was a teenager pretending to be younger than her actual age. As I was to learn later, Annette Funicello was older than me at the time and having grown up in an Italian neighborhood. I did not have to hear her last name to know that she was a beautiful and shapely Italian girl. I was hooked.



*During her late-1960s movie star days, Annette holds a photograph of herself as a Mouseketeer.*

Annette went on to enjoy a spectacular career as both a singer and movie star. She may be best remembered for a series of beach movies that she made with Frankie Avalon. Another of the older Mouseketeers, Bobby Burgess, enjoyed a long career with the Lawrence Welk television show after his Mickey Mouse Club days ended. While attending college in California, he won a series of dance contests that led him to Lawrence Welk, where he became a long-term regular. Bobby's tenure on

that show may have been helped when he married Welk's accordion player's daughter.



*Bobby Burgess, ex-Mouseketeer, displays his "Lawrence Welk" persona during the late 1960s.*

Every episode of the Mickey Mouse Club ended with a song/sermon that was sent out to good little boys and girls everywhere. It was Walt Disney's opportunity to project the solid "American values" that were to become imbedded in both of his theme parks. After the epistle/message for the day, Jimmy Dodd sang a calming and melodic tune:

*'And now it's time to say goodnight  
to all our company,  
M-I-C-K-E-Y  
M-O-U-S-E.'*

My closeted fascination with Annette flowed from growing up in an Italian neighborhood, where there were several beautiful girls who resembled her. Many of my friends were more drawn to blond girls and made their preferences known at an early age, but not me. I spent many happy afternoons with my little brother watching Annette. I watched Annette and hoped that by some miracle I might meet such a dream girl. Until one day at Beach 6 on Presque Isle, I spotted Mary Ann, who would eventually become my wife.



*Jiminy Cricket*

The story of how I met May Ann at the beach and then had the good fortune to convince her to date and then marry me proves that Jiminy Cricket was correct: “Dreams Can Come True.” Perhaps the Mickey Mouse Club wasn’t just for kids after all.

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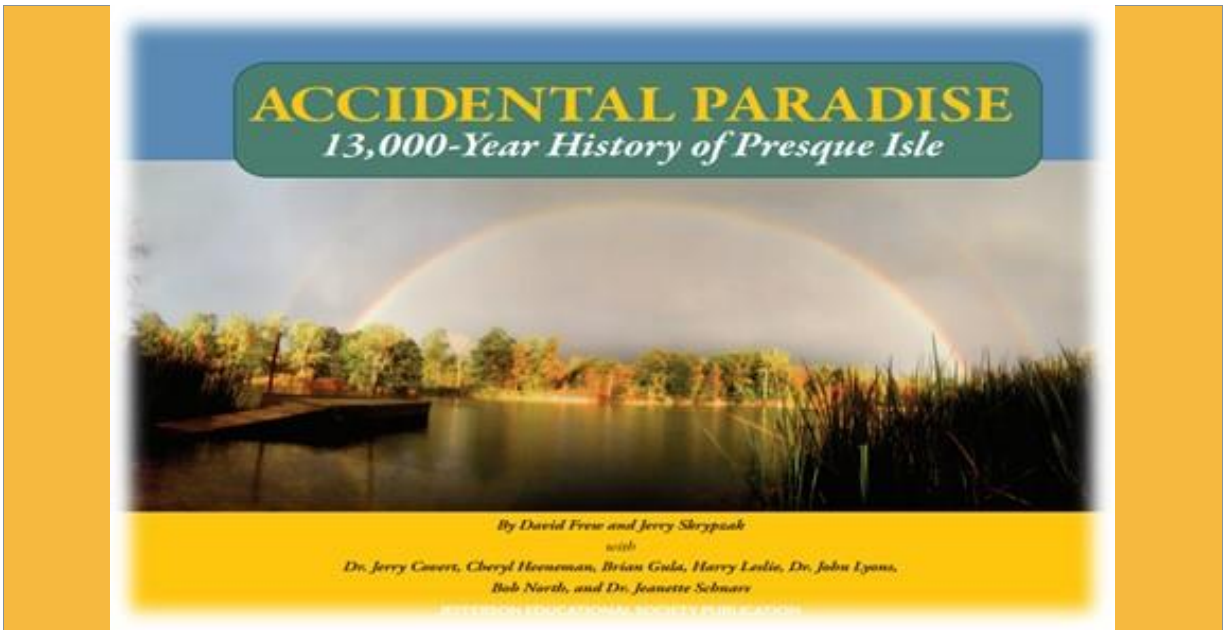
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***Accidental Paradise***  
*by Dr. David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak*



The beautiful book on Presque Isle published by authors David Frew and Jerry Skrypzak – **“Accidental Paradise: 13,000-Year History of Presque Isle”** – is on sale at the Tom Ridge Environmental Center’s gift shop and through a special website, [AccidentalParadise.com](http://AccidentalParadise.com).

The book, priced at **\$35 plus tax and shipping**, can be ordered now through the website sponsored by the TREC Foundation, [AccidentalParadise.com](http://AccidentalParadise.com).

Presque Isle Gallery and Gifts on the main floor of TREC, located at **301 Peninsula Drive, Suite #2, Erie, PA 16505** will also handle sales **daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.**

For more information, send an email to [aperino@TREC.org](mailto:aperino@TREC.org).

To watch "Accidental Paradise: Stories Behind The Stories" click [here](#).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Historian and author David Frew, Ph.D., is a Scholar-in-Residence at the JES. An emeritus professor at Gannon University, he held a variety of administrative positions during a 33-year career. He is also emeritus director of the Erie County Historical Society/Hagen History Center and is president of his own management consulting business. Frew has written or co-written 35 books and more than 100 articles, cases, and papers.*



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