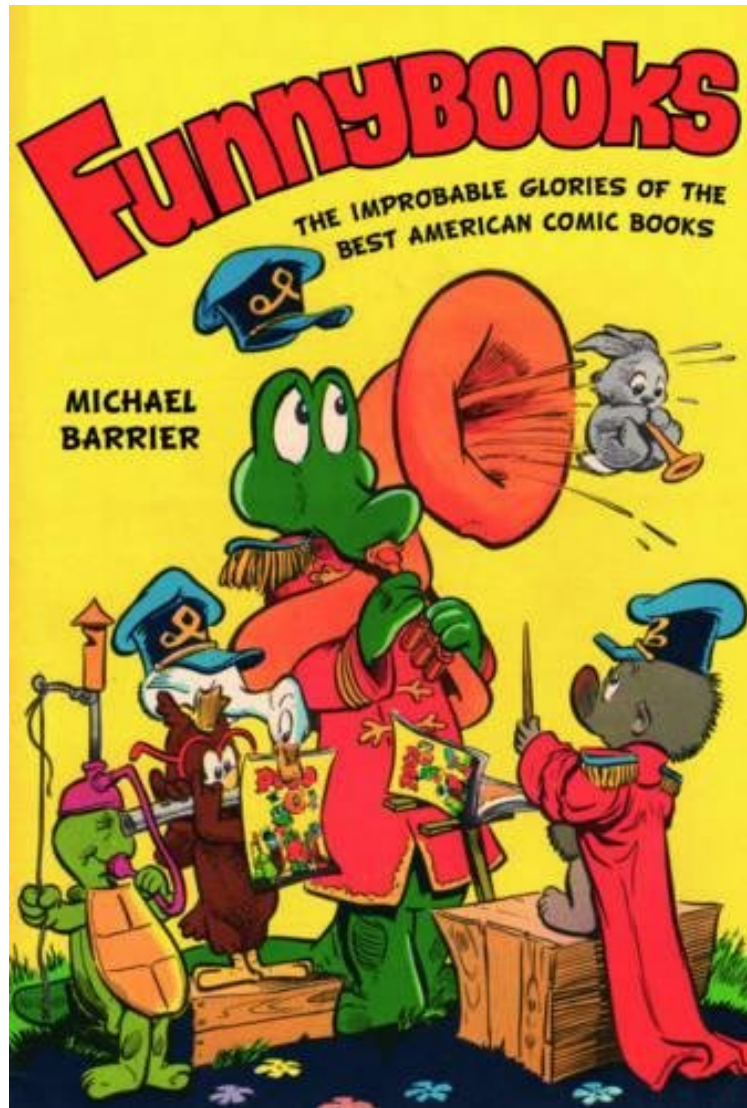


# Funnybooks: The Improbable Glories of the Best American Comic Books

*Michl Barrier*

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**Michl Barrier : Funnybooks: The Improbable Glories of the Best American Comic Books** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Funnybooks: The Improbable Glories of the Best American Comic Books:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. A nostalgic inside look at the world of comic books.By Joseph Robert CowlesWhether you are an aficionado of old comic books or simply have a curiosity about their history, how they came to be, and who were the movers and shakers of the industry during its golden era, this recently published

work by Michael Barrier will thoroughly please you. I had difficulties getting the book away from my wife, but once she'd finally acquiesced and returned it to me I was able to dig into it with glee. Barrier gives us great insights on Carl Barks of course, and Walt Kelly, as well as many other wonderful cartoonists of bygone times. I found myself longing for the good old days of lazy afternoons and weekends spent reading well written and delightfully illustrated stories (overlooking the slapdash printing qualities, of course), swapping funny books with friends, and wishing now I'd been smart enough to hang on to some of them. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Most highly recommended!

By J. K. Weston  
Mike Barrier is the godfather of all serious Barks scholarship, publishing first in his fanzine, *Funnyworld*, which later became the magazine, *Funnyworld*. Eventually this work culminated in his book, *Carl Barks and the Art of the Comic Book*, a serious study and biography of Carl Barks with a listing of all his known comic book work. *Carl Barks and the Art of the Comic Book*, published 35 years ago, remains THE essential Barks reference book and is to a very large extent, the foundation on which all projects reprinting Carl Barks comic books are built, in the USA and elsewhere in the world. *Funnybooks* takes a look at Barks' publisher, Western Printing and Lithographing, and its relationship with Dell Comics, a prodigious task made vastly more complicated by the fact that most of Western's archives were trashed and discarded over 30 years ago. But with meticulous research, Barrier takes a deep and detailed look into the company, its methods of doing business, its relationships with artists, writers, and licensors of many of the characters featured in its comic books. And the book takes a special look at some of its most important writers and artists and their work in the greater context of the company. Most important among these creators would be Carl Barks, Walt Kelly, John Stanley, and Gaylord Dubois, but many others are also mentioned and some written of extensively, though none so thoroughly as Barks, Kelly, and Stanley. We are not likely to get a more thorough study of Western and its creators than this book, though some may in the future write more detailed studies of individual creators. I am considered to be an expert on the work of Carl Barks, and have contributed to numerous works of scholarship on Barks, including Barrier's earlier book on Barks and several reprint projects. But I learned considerable new material about my favorite comic book creator, one of the most important and widely read authors of the 20th century, Carl Barks, by reading this book. And I gained a greater appreciation of several of Western's other creators. Once I picked the book up, I couldn't put it down. Anyone with a serious interest in comic book history, even if not a Dell fan, owes it to himself or herself to read this book. Barrier's writing style makes this an enjoyable as well as an informative read. Most highly recommended. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful.

Dell Comics were Great Comics  
By Brent R. Swanson  
When I was a regular customer at the newsstands and comics racks that abounded in drug and grocery stores in the '60s, the Gold Key line was part of the abundance that included the Archie, Dennis the Menace, Harvey, and D.C. periodicals. Less predominant were the comics from Dell, which were mostly TV show adaptations and relatively obscure in-house titles. At the time, I had no idea that Dell and Gold Key had once been one in the same, nor did I dream that Gold Key titles would decline as dramatically as Dell's.

Michael Barrier's "Funnybooks" chronicles the history of Western Publications and Dell Comics in a detailed and readable account. The merger of these companies in 1936 brought together the artistic sensitivity of Oskar Lebeck and the business acumen of George Delacorte. By the early 1940s, Dell Comics was the imprint on dozens of monthly titles featuring characters licensed by Disney, Warner Bros., and Walter Lantz, as well a multitude of movie cowboys and Edgar Rice Burroughs properties. Dell became a publishing powerhouse. When the superhero comics suffered from postwar reader entrenchment, "Walt Disney's Comics Stories" exceeded the 3 million mark in monthly copies sold. A major part of Dell's success was the unique talent recruited to write and draw the comics. Barrier concentrates on three of the greatest contributors: Carl Barks, Walt Kelly, and John Stanley. Barrier has been referred to as "Barks' Boswell" in the wake of his definitive "Carl Barks and the Art of the Comic Book," but he provides even more insight in this volume, with equal attention given to Kelly and Stanley. Barks and Kelly were both ex-Disney employees; Stanley had worked for the Fleischer Studios. All three brought skills of story construction and draftsmanship from the studios to the drawing board, creating stories and characters that became beloved to generations of readers. Barks (the Disney Ducks) and Stanley (Little Lulu) utilized characters created by others; Kelly worked from a concept created by Oskar Lebeck. But all three artists made the characters their own. Barks created supporting characters including Uncle Scrooge McDuck, who soon eclipsed the other Ducks in reader popularity. Stanley added characters to Lulu's neighborhood and Walt Kelly created a whole swampland for Pogo Possum and Albert Alligator. But Western Publishing's business model didn't change with the decades. Barrier chronicles the sad decline of the company whose executives failed to keep up with the changing newsstand scene of the late '60s and '70s. Dell broke away in 1962 and would vanish within a decade. Gold Key survived on reruns and a scant amount of new material until 1984. All that remains are the great stories. Western Publishing destroyed the majority of their records (as well as their artwork), making a book with this level of detail an incredible achievement. Barrier concludes, "...in years to come those stories will have the opportunity to make their case to new readers. With luck those readers will prove to be as perceptive as the midcentury children and parents who recognized and sought out the work of the "very good ones."

*Funnybooks* is the story of the most popular American comic books of the 1940s and 1950s, those published under the Dell label. For a time, Dell Comics Are Good Comics was more than a slogan it was a simple statement of fact. Many

of the stories written and drawn by people like Carl Barks (Donald Duck, Uncle Scrooge), John Stanley (Little Lulu), and Walt Kelly (Pogo) repay reading and rereading by educated adults even today, decades after they were published as disposable entertainment for children. Such triumphs were improbable, to say the least, because midcentury comics were so widely dismissed as trash by angry parents, indignant librarians, and even many of the people who published them. It was all but miraculous that a few great cartoonists were able to look past that nearly universal scorn and grasp the artistic potential of their medium. With clarity and enthusiasm, Barrier explains what made the best stories in the Dell comic books so special. He deftly turns a complex and detailed history into an expressive narrative sure to appeal to an audience beyond scholars and historians.

"Comics historian Barrier sets off like Scrooge McDuck in search of gold. He pans out the criteria of artists including Walt Kelly, John Stanley and Carl Barks, and stakes a claim for their work as deserving the same respect as classic literature."