

= Billy DeBeck =

William Morgan DeBeck (April 15 , 1890 ? November 11 , 1942) , better known as Billy DeBeck , was an American cartoonist . He is most famous as the creator of the comic strip Barney Google , later retitled Barney Google and Snuffy Smith . The strip was especially popular in the 1920s and 1930s , and featured a number of well @-@ known characters , including the title character , Bunky , Snuffy Smith , and Spark Plug the race horse . Spark Plug was a merchandising phenomenon , and has been called the Snoopy of the 1920s .

DeBeck drew with a scratchy line in a " big @-@ foot " style , in which characters had giant feet and bulbous noses . His strips often reflected his love of sports . In 1946 , the National Cartoonists Society inaugurated the Billy DeBeck Memorial Awards (or the Barney Awards) , which became the Reuben Award in 1954 .

= = Life and career = =

= = = Early life = = =

William Morgan DeBeck was born on April 15 , 1890 on the South Side of Chicago , where his father , Louis DeBeck , was a newspaperman employed by the Swift Company . The elder DeBeck was French , and the name DeBeck was originally spelled DeBecque . His Irish @-@ Welsh mother , Jessie Lee Morgan , had lived on a farm and was a schoolteacher .

= = = Early career = = =

After graduating from Hyde Park High School in 1908 , DeBeck attended the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts . He sold cartoon drawings during this time to finance himself , at first in 1908 for the Chicago Daily News . His caricatures of models drew the attention of his fellow students , and though he had intended to become a painter in the Flemish tradition , he quit the Academy after two years after he got a cartooning job with the weekly paper Show World in 1910 . His cartoons showed the influence of John T. McCutcheon and Clare Briggs , whom he had admired in his youth ; he also had the skill to draw in the more fastidiously cross @-@ hatched style of a Charles Dana Gibson , copies of whose drawings he sold as originals .

DeBeck soon left Show World for better opportunities at Youngstown Telegram in Ohio as a editorial cartoonist , then again at the Pittsburgh Gazette @-@ Time in late August 1912 . He later contributed cartoons to the New York City humor magazines Life and Judge . While living in Pittsburgh , he traveled to New York to show comic strip samples to Arthur Brisbane , an editor working for William Randolph Hearst 's newspaper empire ; Brisbane rejected the work . DeBeck later stated the examples " were terrible " as he " had been doing political cartoons for the Pittsburgh Gazette , and the comics were new " to him . He returned to Youngstown and married Marian Louise Shields there in 1914 . Some time later they divorced , remarried in 1921 , and eventually divorced again .

In May 1915 , DeBeck and a partner named Carter launched a newspaper syndicate and correspondence cartooning course ; DeBeck 's advice to his correspondence students was : " First learn how to draw ? then go to a good art school and get a firm foundation in the arts " . The school was not a success , and DeBeck returned to Chicago and joined the Chicago Herald in December 1915 . He worked on a strip called Finn an ' Haddie for the Adams Newspaper Service on the side . On December 9 , immediately after starting at the Herald , he began a strip called Married Life that so caught the attention of Hearst ; legend says that , to acquire DeBeck , Hearst bought the Herald and merged it with the Chicago Examiner , as DeBeck had refused to join the Hearst empire after the Examiner raised his monthly salary from \$ 35 to \$ 200 . DeBeck 's creations were first adapted to film when an animated version of Married Life appeared in a Seattle Sunday Times newsreel in 1917 . DeBeck created a number of other features , especially for the sports section , while his

antics made him something of a local celebrity .

= = = Barney Google = = =

On July 17 , 1919 , a new comic strip by DeBeck in the vein of Married Life on the sports page ; Take Barney Google , For Instance differed in that it was about a henpecked , sports @-@ obsessed husband and his travails defying his wife . Google was interested in non @-@ fictional sports stories , such as the heavyweight championship between Jess Willard and Jack Dempsey . It was not long before DeBeck refigured the tall , thin Google into the short , squat character he was to be remembered as , and the title too was soon shortened to Barney Google . It was not popular until DeBeck had Google acquire a race horse named Spark Plug (nicknamed " Sparky ") in a strip dated July 17 , 1922 . The dilapidated , blanket @-@ covered horse became such a marketing and merchandising phenomenon that the character has been called the Snoopy of the 1920s ? toys , balloons , and games were among the popular items adorned with Sparky 's image . When DeBeck introduced the horse , he also introduced a little @-@ used technique into the strip : continuity . Barney Google went from being a gag @-@ a @-@ day strip to one in which both humor and suspense kept readers coming back each day , as Google desperately tried to get his horse to win a race . The sequence in which Spark Plug was introduced into the strip was republished in the October 1922 issue of Comic Monthly ? likely the earliest newsstand comics periodical .

DeBeck kept readers on the edges of their seats with uncertain suspense : sometimes Spark Plug actually won a race . While DeBeck resisted at first , Hearst demanded a pretty girl be introduced into the strip . DeBeck brought in Sweet Mama , which initially created a stir , and certain papers dropped the strip , but after the phrase swept the nation , the strip 's popularity only increased . Over the years , DeBeck was credited with introducing more neologisms and catchphrases , such as " heebie @-@ jeebies " , " horsefeathers " , " balls of fire " and " time 's a @-@ wastin ' " . In 1923 , Billy Rose penned a Tin Pan Alley pop hit called " Barney Google (with the Goo @-@ Goo @-@ Googly Eyes) " . A series of Barney Google live @-@ action films starring Barney Hellum appeared in 1928 and 1929 .

DeBeck had included a topper called Bughouse Fables (signed " Barney Google) " with his main strip since 1921 , though he soon handed it off to assistant Paul Fung . On May 16 , 1926 , he replaced Bughouse Fables with Parlor , Bedroom & Sink Starring Bunky , a strip that was popular enough on its own to survive until 1948 .

According to later Barney Google and Snuffy Smith scripter Brian Walker , DeBeck had become " one of the highest @-@ paid cartoonists in America " at this point . In the early 1920s , DeBeck moved to Riverside Drive in New York City , and in 1927 remarried Mary Louise Dunne . The couple spent the next two years in Europe , after which they settled down again in New York . DeBeck 's active lifestyle sometimes caused him to miss deadlines . He enjoyed traveling , deep sea fishing , golf and playing bridge . As a golfer since 1916 , DeBeck spent time on courses with such notables as Harold Lloyd , Walter Huston , Rube Goldberg , Fontaine Fox , Clarence Budington Kelland and bridge authority P. Hal Sims . He was also acquainted with such celebrities as Babe Ruth , Lowell Thomas and Damon Runyon . His best friend was the cartoonist Frank Willard , who also attended the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts .

= = = Snuffy Smith = = =

Barney Google 's popularity persisted into the Depression era ; in 1933 , Fortune magazine reported DeBeck 's weekly earnings at \$ 1200 . In the spring of 1934 , DeBeck hired 17 @-@ year @-@ old Fred Lasswell as an assistant after seeing his work on a poster . He wanted a letterer for Barney Google , and Lasswell 's lettering impressed him . Lasswell started by doing chores for DeBeck , as well as taking on lettering and other duties on the strip . DeBeck undertook educating Lasswell in cartooning , having him attend schools , copy the works of masters like Gibson and May , and copy line @-@ for @-@ line the artwork from DeBeck 's own comics . Lasswell moved in with the DeBecks , and would tag along with them wherever they moved . He would take over his mentor

's strip after his death and continue it into the 21st century .

DeBeck gained a growing interest into the culture of Appalachia in the 1930s and amassed a library on the subject that he later donated to Virginia Commonwealth University . Among the books he admired were those featuring Sut Lovingood by George Washington Harris ; inside Sut Lovingood Yarns (1867) DeBeck produced his first sketch of Snuffy Smith , a character that grew from talking with and sketching the Appalachian hillbilly locals . Just as the strip 's circulation was starting to flag , DeBeck introduced Snuffy in a storyline in which Barney inherited an estate in the mountains of North Carolina . After dodging the ornery hillbilly 's bullets , the two became fast friends . The strip was eventually renamed Barney Google and Snuffy Smith , and Snuffy would take over from Barney Google as the central character . Lasswell , with his own country roots , provided much of the inspiration for Snuffy and his Appalachian environment . Especially , he provided a source for the locals ' dialect . Hillbilly culture enjoyed much popularity in the 1930s ; Snuffy Smith appeared the same year as Al Capp 's Li 'l Abner . By 1940 , DeBeck 's strip appeared in 210 newspapers with a combined circulation of ten million .

The Charles Mintz studios produced four full @-@ color animated Barney Google and Snuffy Smith shorts in 1935 . The series had two more live @-@ action adaptations in 1942 : Bud Duncan starred as Snuffy Smith in Private Snuffy Smith and co @-@ starred with Cliff Nazarro as Barney Google in Hillbilly Blitzkrieg .

= = = Later life and death = = =

DeBeck had a studio apartment on Park Avenue in New York , and homes in Great Neck in New York and St. Petersburg in Florida . In the early 1940s , he developed cancer and found it increasingly difficult to work . Sensing his end was near , he made a special trip to see Marian Shields . His last signed daily strip appeared July 4 , 1942 , and his last Sunday the following August 2 . With Lasswell contributing to the war effort , the strip continued under an assistant , Joe Musial . On November 11 , 1942 , DeBeck died at the age of 52 in New York City , with his wife at his bedside . They had no children . Barney Google appeared in 206 newspapers at the time , and Musial continued the strip until Lasswell took it on full @-@ time in 1945 . Over time , Barney faded from the strip , and the title contracted to Snuffy Smith .

In 1943 , Mary DeBeck donated to the Ringling School of Art all of her husband 's art supplies , including drawing tables , reams of drawing paper , hundreds of colored pencils , lamps , drawing boards , inks , drawing pens , artist smocks , etching plates , and an etching press . Mary remarried , and she died February 14 , 1953 , aboard a DC @-@ 6 from National Airlines which plummeted into the Gulf of Mexico during a thunderstorm on a flight from Tampa , Florida to New Orleans .

= = Style = =

DeBeck 's drawing style falls in the " big @-@ foot " tradition of American comic strips such as The Katzenjammer Kids , Hägar the Horrible , and Robert Crumb . It had a scratchy line and characters with bulbous noses and giant feet . Though he often procrastinated , DeBeck could work quickly and make it just in time for his deadlines .

DeBeck put Barney Google through great changes throughout his twenty @-@ three @-@ year run on the strip , changing situations and characters frequently . The storylines reflected the outlook of the 1920s boom years , the Great Depression , and World War II .

= = Legacy = =

DeBeck 's main strip continued in the hands of Fred Lasswell long after its creator 's death . The number of newspaper that carried it had been flagging in the years leading to DeBeck 's passing , partly because the hillbilly dialect in the dialogue was difficult to read for many . The syndicate informed Lasswell that if many more newspapers dropped the strip , it would be canceled . Lasswell refocused on Snuffy Smith , dropped much of the dialect , and moved away from continuity to a gag

@-@ a @-@ day format . The strip 's popularity once again increased , and by 1989 it was running in 900 newspapers in 21 countries . It has continued in different hands since Lasswell 's death in 2001 .

Debeck 's hillbilly depictions , though stereotyped and distorted , had a higher degree of accuracy than those of Al Capp or other contemporary cartoonists , and painted hillbillies in a better light . DeBeck included authentic expressions such as " plime @-@ blank " (" exactly ") and " a lavish of " (" a lot of ") , and included explanations of dialect unfamiliar to his readers . Some such as country singer Roy Acuff objected that the strip perpetuated stereotypes of hillbilly culture .

DeBeck is credited with introducing or popularizing a number of neologisms and catchphrases via Barney Google , including " heebie @-@ jeebies " , " horsefeathers " , " hotsy totsy " , " balls of fire " , " time 's a @-@ wastin ' " , " touched in the head " , and " bodacious " .

Charles M. Schulz , creator of the Peanuts comic strip , was nicknamed " Sparky " after DeBeck 's racehorse character , and DeBeck 's drawing style has been an influence on contemporary cartooning and popular culture , and on such later cartoonists as Robert Crumb and Bobby London . The Barney Google Sunday page for September 18 , 1938 was placed in the time capsule at the 1939 World 's Fair .

The National Cartoonists Society 's annual award was originally named the Billy DeBeck Memorial Award . Created by Mary DeBeck Bergman in 1946 , these were known as the Barney Awards . She also made the annual presentation of engraved silver cigarette cases , with DeBeck 's characters etched on the cover , to the winners (Milton Caniff , Al Capp , Chic Young , Alex Raymond , Roy Crane , Walt Kelly , Hank Ketcham and Mort Walker) . In 1954 , after her death , the DeBeck Award was renamed the Reuben Award after Rube Goldberg , and all of the earlier winners were re @-@ awarded Reuben statuettes .

= = List of comic strips = =

Finn an ' Haddie (1916)

Married Life (1916)

Olie Moses and Mara , Inc

Take Barney Google , F 'rinstance (1919) , later Barney Google , then Barney Google and Snuffy Smith

Bughouse Fables , soon taken over by DeBeck 's assistant , Paul Fung

Parlor , Bedroom & Sink (1926) , later Bunky