

## Ray Kroc, 1902-1984: The Man Who Made McDonald's Popular Around the World

He helped develop the fast food industry. *Transcript of radio broadcast:*  
24 November 2007

VOICE ONE:

I'm Phoebe Zimmermann.

VOICE TWO:

And I'm Steve Ember with PEOPLE IN AMERICA in VOA Special English. Today, we tell about Ray Kroc, the man who helped make the fast food industry famous. He expanded a small business into an international operation called McDonald's.



Ray Kroc

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

You probably know what fast food is. It is cooked food that is ready almost as soon as you enter a public eating place. It does not cost much. It is popular with most Americans and with many people around the world. Some experts say that at least twenty-five percent of American adults eat fast food every day. Most fast food restaurants offer ground beef sandwiches called hamburgers and potatoes cooked in hot oil called French fries. Other fast food places serve fried chicken, pizza or tacos.

VOICE TWO:

You see fast food restaurants almost everywhere in the United States. The names and the designs of the buildings are easily recognized – Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell and of course, McDonald's. Most are chain restaurants. That means each one is part of a huge company.

Each restaurant in the chain has the same large, colorful sign that can be recognized from far away. Each offers its own carefully limited choice of foods. Each kind of hamburger or piece of chicken tastes the same at every restaurant in the chain.

VOICE ONE:

The fast food industry began with two brothers in San Bernardino, California in the nineteen forties. Mac and Dick McDonald owned a small, but very successful restaurant. They sold only a few kinds of simple food, especially hamburgers.

People stood outside the restaurant at a window. They told the workers inside what they wanted to eat. They received and paid for their food very quickly. The food came in containers that could be thrown away. The system was so successful that the McDonald brothers discovered they could sell a lot of food and lower their prices.

VOICE TWO:

Ray Kroc sold restaurant supplies. He recognized the importance of the McDonald brothers' idea. He saw that food sales could be organized for mass production -- almost like a factory. Mister Kroc paid the McDonald brothers for permission to open several restaurants similar to theirs. He opened the first McDonald's restaurant near Chicago, Illinois, in nineteen fifty-five. Soon, more McDonald's were opening all across the United States. Other people copied the idea and more fast food restaurants followed.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

Raymond Albert Kroc was a very wealthy businessman when he died in nineteen eighty-four. But he had not always been successful. Ray was born in Illinois in nineteen-oh-two. His parents were not rich. He attended school in Oak Park, near Chicago. Ray never completed high school, however. He left school to become a driver for the Red Cross in World War One. He lied about his age to be accepted. He was only fifteen. The war ended before he could be sent to Europe.

VOICE TWO:

After the war, Ray became a jazz piano player. He played with famous music groups. He got married when he was twenty. Then he began working for the Lily Tulip Cup Company, selling paper cups. He kept trying new things, however. He attempted to sell land in the southern state of Florida. That business failed. Ray Kroc remembered driving to Chicago from Florida after his business failed. He said: "I will never forget that drive as long as I live. The streets were covered with ice, and I did not have winter clothing. When I arrived home I was very cold and had no money."

VOICE ONE:

Ray Kroc went back to being a salesman for the Lily Tulip Cup Company. He was responsible for product sales in the central United States. His life improved when he started a small business that sold restaurant supplies. He sold a machine that could mix five milkshakes at one time.

In nineteen fifty-four, he discovered a small restaurant that was using eight of his machines. He went there and found that the owners of the restaurant had a good business selling only hamburgers, French fries and drinks.

At first, Mister Kroc saw only the possibility for increasing the sales of his mixers to more restaurants. Then he proposed an agreement with the McDonald brothers to start a number of restaurants. Under the agreement, the McDonald brothers would get a percentage of all sales.

VOICE TWO:



**Ray Kroc's first McDonald's restaurant in Des Plaines, Illinois in 1955**

The first McDonald's restaurant opened in Des Plaines, Illinois, in nineteen fifty-five. Ray Kroc was fifty-two years old -- an age when many people start thinking about retirement. He opened two restaurants. Soon he began to understand that the real profits were made in selling hamburgers, not the mixers. He quickly sold the mixer company and invested the money in the growing chain of McDonald's restaurants.

In nineteen-sixty, Mister Kroc bought the legal rights to the restaurants from the McDonald brothers. By then, the chain had more than two hundred restaurants.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

Fast food restaurants spread quickly in the United States because of franchising. Franchising means selling the legal right to operate a store in a company's chain to an independent business person. If the company approves, the business person may buy or lease the store for a period of years.

Many people want to own a McDonald's restaurant, but only a few are approved. Each restaurant buys its supplies at a low cost from the parent company. Each restaurant also gives the company about ten percent of the money it earns in sales. Today, about seventy percent of McDonald's restaurants worldwide are owned and operated by independent businessmen and women.

VOICE TWO:

Ray Kroc was good at identifying what the public wanted. He knew that many American families wanted to eat in a restaurant sometimes. He gave people a simple eating place with popular food, low prices, friendly service and no waiting. And all McDonald's restaurants sold the same food in every restaurant across the country.

Ray Kroc established rules for how McDonald's restaurants were to operate. He demanded that every restaurant offer "quality, service and cleanliness." People lucky enough to get a franchise must complete a program at a training center called Hamburger University. They learn how to cook and serve the food, and how to keep the building clean. More than sixty-five thousand people have completed this training.

(MUSIC)

VOICE ONE:

McDonald's began to expand around the world in nineteen sixty-seven. Ray Kroc's business ability made McDonald's the largest restaurant company in the world. There are now more than thirty thousand McDonald's restaurants on six continents.

The company operates in about one hundred twenty countries. Every day, McDonald's restaurants around the world serve about fifty million people.

VOICE TWO:

In later years, Ray Kroc established the Kroc Foundation, a private organization that gives money to help others. He also established a number of centers that offer support to families of children who have cancer. They are called Ronald McDonald houses.

Many people praised Ray Kroc for his company's success and good works. But other people sharply criticized him for the way McDonald's treated young employees. Many of the workers were paid the lowest wage permitted by American law. Health experts still criticize McDonald's food for containing too much fat and salt.

In the nineteen seventies, Ray Kroc turned his energy from hamburgers to sports. He bought a professional baseball team in California, the San Diego Padres. He died in nineteen eighty-four. He was eighty-one years old.

VOICE ONE:

That first McDonald's restaurant in Des Plaines, Illinois, was torn down. It was replaced by a store and visitors center that attempts to copy what was in the original building. Another museum in nearby Oak Park describes the life of Ray Kroc. Ray Kroc's story remains an important part of McDonald's history. And his way of doing business continues to influence fast food restaurants that feed people around the world.

(MUSIC)

VOICE TWO:

This program was written by George Grow. Lawan Davis was the producer. I'm Steve Ember.

VOICE ONE:

And I'm Phoebe Zimmermann. Join us again next week for another PEOPLE IN AMERICA program in VOA Special English.

