

# Famous New Yorker Walter Rollin Brooks



Image source: [freddythepig.org](http://freddythepig.org)

Walter R. Brooks wrote stories about talking animals for both children and adults. More people remember the talking horse he created for adults, but the talking pig Brooks created for children is still beloved by many fans.

Walter Rollin Brooks was born on January 9, 1886, in Rome, Oneida County, where his maternal grandfather had once been mayor. After Walter's mother died, relatives sent the 15 year old to the Mohegan Lake Military Academy, where he helped edit the student newspaper. He attended the University of Rochester and studied medicine for a time before going into the advertising business.

An inheritance allowed Walter to retire from business for a while. During that time he published his first poem in a 1915 issue of *The Century* magazine. Two years later, he went back to work as a

publicist for the American Red Cross and an editor for various magazines.

Brooks' first book appeared in 1927. Published by the prestigious Alfred A. Knopf company, *To and Again* introduced the animals of Bean Farm, who had the amazing ability to talk to each other and human beings. The success of *To and Again* led to 25 more books over the next 32 years. Freddy, the smallest and smartest pig on the farm, became the star of the series. So much so, that *To and Again* was later retitled *Freddy Goes to Florida*. Freddy played roles from explorer to detective and cowboy to pilot, and even met space aliens in the 1950s. The Freddy series is still admired for its clever stories and intelligent characters.

Freddy the Pig allowed Brooks to become a full-time writer by the 1940s. His most successful work for adults was a series of stories about a talking horse named Ed. Starting with "The Talking Horse" in *Liberty* magazine, Brooks published 23 stories about Ed between 1937 and 1945. While the Freddy books reached their peak of popularity in the 1950s, Ed was almost forgotten by the time Brooks died on August 17, 1958.

Walter R. Brooks' place in history changed when film director Arthur Lubin planned a TV series based on his popular movies about Francis the talking mule. Francis was created during World War II by David Stern, who may have been inspired by Ed the horse. Lubin couldn't get the TV rights to Francis, but his secretary convinced him to make a show about Ed. *Mr. Ed*, a toned-down version of Brooks' series, ran for six seasons from 1961 through 1966. The show's success inspired the first-ever book publication of Brooks' stories as *The Original Mr. Ed*.

As reruns of *Mr. Ed* played on TV long after the show ended production, most of the

Freddy the Pig books went out of print. Grown-up Freddy fans who would not let their beloved pig be forgotten formed the Friends of Freddy in 1984. Their organization holds conventions every year and helps keep the series in public libraries. Inspired by an article in the *New York Times Book Review*, the Overlook Press began reprinting the books in 1997. The series is now making new fans in print and electronic editions. Freddy the Pig may yet prove to be Walter R. Brooks' most enduring legacy to American culture.

To learn more about Walter R. Brooks read "Talking Animals and Others" by Michael Cart or Freddy the Pigs' fan webpage, <http://freddythepig.org>. This is one of a series of Famous New Yorker profiles written by Kevin Gilbert for the NYNPA Newspaper In Education Program. All rights reserved 2017.

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**Rome** is a city in the north-central part of the state. In 1817, construction of the Erie Canal began in Rome ultimately connecting Albany and Buffalo.