



DISNEY LEGENDS

by Jamie Hecker



Jamie Hecker has been a lifelong fan of Disney, and is passing on his love to his sons. He and his family visit Orlando annually and always look forward to their next trip. When not in Orlando, he resides in northern Virginia with his beautiful wife Suzanne, two boys and four cats.

You can read more about his "hidden Disney" musings at myhiddendisney.blogspot.com/

Herb Ryman

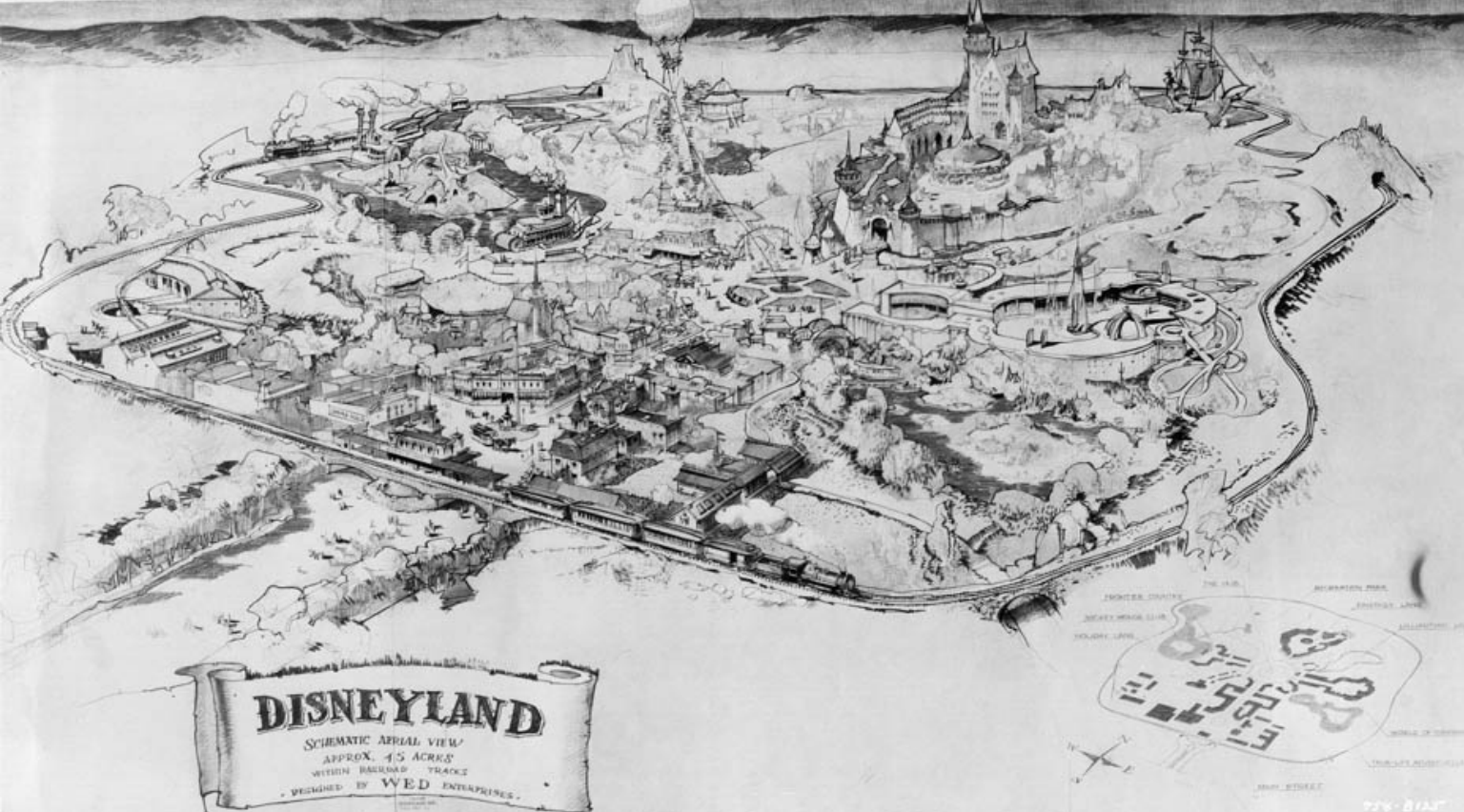
Bringing ideas from fruition to completion is a daunting task. Fanciful imagination and blue-sky concepts are always the first steps in realizing a new project. For theme parks, this is especially true. This is how all design projects begin at Walt Disney Imagineering. But before groundbreaking for construction can begin, the ideas have to be conceptualized. This is the realm where concept artists bring ideas to life, first on paper. Many concept artists have roamed the halls of WDI, but perhaps the best is Herb Ryman, who designed the original layout of Disneyland.

Herbert Dickens Ryman was born in Vernon, Illinois on June 28, 1910. He gravitated toward the arts, although his parents preferred he study medicine. Ryman graduated from Millikin University, and his artistic passion won over. He next enrolled at the Art Institute of Chicago and graduated in 1932, with high honors. Ryman took his brushes and pens to Los Angeles, where he was hired as a storyboard illustrator in the Art Department of Metro-Goldwyn-Myers Studios, better known as MGM. His career as an artist had begun, perfectly coinciding with the 'golden age' of 1930's Hollywood. His early film credits include art design for *David Copperfield*, *Mutiny on the Bounty* and *Anna Karenina*. He also contributed to MGM's classic *The Wizard of Oz's* Emerald City illustrations.

Ryman was a voracious consumer of life and was passionate to experience as much as possible first-hand. His guidance was to "(b)e inordinately infatuated with the world – its people, its history, and geography. Let your eyes speak to your heart and your heart to your hand." This drive is what led Ryman to depart from Hollywood on a self-exploratory trip to China where he found artistic inspiration across the vast country. He returned to Los Angeles a year later, and had a fortuitous encounter with Walt Disney, when Ryman was exhibiting his paintings at the Chouinard Art Institute. Walt was very impressed with the quality of Ryman's work and offered him a job at the Studio. Ryman accepted, and his early work for Disney included art design for *Dumbo* and *Fantasia's* pastoral sequence.

Ryman left Disney in 1944 to take his talent to 20th Century Fox, but he remained close to Walt, and their relationship was again pulled together to establish perhaps the most iconic Disney image of Ryman's expansive body of work – the original concept map of Disneyland. Walt was working feverishly to fulfill his dream of a theme park. His brother Roy, long skeptical of the efficacy of such a venture, finally acquiesced to Walt's desire. In order to secure funding, Roy was communicating with major investors. To help seal any financial deals, Walt needed a visual representation for the pitch, in addition to the financial literature. On short notice, Walt pulled Ryman back to the studio on Saturday, September 26, 1953. Walt outlined the concept of Disneyland to Ryman, who was intrigued. Said Walt, "My brother Roy is going to New York on Monday to arrange for financing. You know bankers. They have no imagination. They just can't visualize it when you tell them so I am going to show them with a big sketch of the park." Ryman replied, "I would love to see it. Where is it?" Walt's simple reply was, "You're going to do it."

Ryman, by his recollection, wasn't up to the task. Walt gently talked him into it though. Said Walt, "Herbie, this is my dream. I've wanted this for years and I need your help. Will you do it if I stay with you?" Ryman stayed the weekend to complete the map, with Walt guiding him. Over the span of 42 hours, the initial concept image



of a birds-eye view of Disneyland was created, on a 43-inch by 70-inch parchment. The park bears striking similarities to Disneyland today, as well as notable omissions. The iconic park castle, perimeter train ride, central hub, Rivers of America, and Main Street are all laid out. Tomorrowland deviates significantly from how it appears today, and New Orleans Square wasn't included. That's certainly understandable, since it wasn't imagined until the 1960s. The funding was approved, and Walt set forth a seismic shift in the direction of Walt Disney Productions, using his privately-owned company, WED Enterprises, to design the park and its attractions. Ryman played down his involvement in Disney history. Said Herb, "It was just a carbon pencil drawing with a little color on top of it, but Roy got the money, so I guess it turned out all right."

Ryman returned to working for Walt, this time at WED, the predecessor to Walt Disney Imagineering. Steeped in a career of fine arts, Herb now refined theme park concept design. He did copious illustrations for Disneyland through the years, and eventually for the 1964 New York World's Fair, Magic Kingdom, Epcot and Tokyo Disneyland. Ryman's grand designs span the icons of Disney theme parks. He played a key development in the design of the Progress City map for the Carousel of Progress exhibit at the New York World's Fair. For the Magic Kingdom – Cinderella Castle, Space Mountain and the Hall of Presidents all bear his artistic DNA. For Epcot, Ryman's depiction of Spaceship

Earth, Horizons, and The American Adventure pavilion accurately captured the grandiosity of the unique park. Adding a layer of depth to Ryman's legacy is that several of his paintings are on display within the pavilion, notably The Promise of America, showcasing the immigrant experience.

Ryman's design style for theme parks was transcendent. Former Disney Imagineer Eddie Sotto spoke highly of Ryman and his work, calling it "placemaking of the highest order. It's not just places; it's what we do in the places." Ryman also served as a mentor to younger artists at Imagineering. Former WDI President Marty Sklar fondly recalled, "Herbie was like our own little Tinker Bell at WDI. He was always sprinkling pixie dust on everyone and he never grew up. He had a tremendous curiosity for everything and everybody."

Ryman passed away on February 10, 1989 at the age of 78. Fittingly, he was still working up to the end, preparing sketches of Main Street for what would be Disneyland Paris. Ryman's legacy, however, continues on. After his death, the Ryman-Carroll Foundation was created by Sklar and Herb's sister Lucille Carroll. It later transformed into Ryman Arts, where it serves to bring out the potential in budding artists.

Ryman once reflected: "My own dream of happiness would be to live in every spot on our globe. To see and study and record and most of all, to understand. And to pass on in some tangible form a fragment of that enthusiasm and love." For his contributions to the Walt Disney Company, Herbert Ryman was named a Disney Legend in 1990. 🐻