

Perinton's Disney Connection at Riki's Family Restaurant

Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was a pretty big deal. It was the first full length animated feature film by the renowned studio. The film premiered on December 21, 1937 at the famed Carthay Circle Theatre in Hollywood, and was nationally released shortly after. Disney's classic is ranked by the American Film Institute as the greatest animated film ever produced in this country, and one of the top films of any genre. And of course, there is a Perinton / Fairport connection. His name was Jacques Roberts.

A 1920 graduate of Fairport High School in a class of 16 students, Jacques Roberts excelled in school as an artist, orator, in theatre, and dance. After studying art at Mechanics Institute, later known as the Rochester Institute of Technology, young Roberts went to work at Eastman Kodak. But unlike most, his office was 2,600 miles from Fairport, with the company's sales force in Mexico City.



A portion of the vintage Fairport-themed mural at Riki's Family Restaurant

With his background in art, it's not surprising that Roberts soon strayed from sales and returned to his passion. In 1931 he won first prize in a contest sponsored by Bausch and Lomb to design a new trademark for the company. And by 1936, Roberts had a contact with Walt Disney. He left behind a career in commercial art to join an enormous staff focused on creating the most ambitious animated project ever. Roberts was interviewed in a Rochester Times-Union article in 1938, in which he spoke of his role in the creation of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*: "Walt

and all of his artists rather consider that “Snow White” being the first feature length picture to go out of the studio, is more or less a test proposition. The problems we faced and pretty well conquered will smooth themselves out in the next feature.” Jacques Roberts worked on many other Disney projects over the years, and also served as a producer.

Despite his career in animation, it is Robert’s hometown art which our residents may find most compelling. Many of you have likely seen the large wall murals at Riki’s Family Restaurant, 25 North Main Street. In earlier times the establishment was known as the Fairport Grill, and before that, Fairport Lunch and the Fairport Hotel. It is believed the unsigned murals which grace the walls were painted by our own Jacques Roberts. The streetscape scenes depicted are unmistakably Fairport, and feature many buildings which still stand today, as well as the Main Street lift bridge.

The murals attributed to Jacques Roberts at Riki’s were likely painted before he left our community to work for Mr. Disney. The artist and former Fairport resident passed away in California in 1997 at 95 years of age.

By Bill Poray, Perinton Town Historian