





Louisiana Levee Worker and His Child, 1930s  
*Photo by Charles Fenno Jacobs*



## Chapter Seven “The Nunnery”

### *The Ink and Paint Department*

PAST THE STUDIO GATE, in the building on the left, one could see through the windows, women sitting at rows of desks. Pausing to look, it was easy to see what they were doing: one group was tracing penciled drawings onto sheets of transparent material; the other, painting them on the reverse side.

This was the domain – until mid 1935 – of the Ink and Paint Department – exclusively female and off limits to men. Nicknamed “The Nunnery,” its inmates rarely saw or mingled with their masculine counterparts busily at work in bee-like fashion, only a few yards away.<sup>1</sup>

The procedure of hand-tracing (originally in black ink) the animator’s drawings onto clear celluloid (“cels”) and painting the reverse side with opaque pigment (originally in shades of black and grey) was, by the early 1920s, almost uni-

versally used throughout the industry. At that time men handled this phase of production.

Each inked and painted cel was the ultimate expression of the animator’s original concept. After the artist’s first drawings were refined, corrected, processed by inbetweeners, gone through the sweatbox sessions (“okay for cleanup”), and received final approval (“okay for inking”), then and only then did they proceed to the Ink and Paint department.

Inking was by far the more difficult task. Its success was crucial to a cartoon’s visual appeal. Badly traced cels or even successive cels whose line widths did not match would produce jitters when magnified on those giant screens, making even the best animation look unprofessional and crude. This was not lost on the producers who, from the beginning, appreciated the special skills necessary to make even adequate tracings.

By the mid Twenties, at least at Disney’s, it was decided that women were better suited,



Original Ink and Paint building, c. 1937. This building was the original studio premises. Roy’s office would always remain here, with entrance on Hyperion (for a more comprehensive photo, see page xxii, where the Ink and Paint building is shown complete, lower left). Well before *Snow White*’s time, the building had undergone many changes, both internal and external. Inkers normally worked in a room to themselves; however on occasion, due to space constraints, some might be visible from the walk towards the animation building, as described in the text. In 1935, an entirely new, air-conditioned Ink and Paint building was erected well to the east, on the other side of the comic-strip artists’ “bungalow.” Between the two Ink and Paint buildings were the three film vaults. The first of these (5’6” x 13’) was built in 1932, with a second one, considerably larger (30’ x 60’), added in 1934.

temperamentally, to both these endeavors. When one young lady from Lewiston, Idaho came to work part-time as a cel painter, there was no official Ink and Paint Department. The year was 1925 and the woman was Lillian Bounds, soon to become Walt's secretary and finally his wife. (For several years Lillian would return to her painting desk when the studio was in a pinch.)

It didn't take the Disney brothers long to realize a separate department would better facilitate the production procedure: a department comprised solely of women. (Until the early '30s, new male recruits might also find themselves – if only temporarily – with paintbrush in hand.) Walt decided that Lillian's sister Hazel Bounds Sewell – a divorced mother with one small daughter – should head the department. She would prove more than adequate for the job.

With the onset of the Depression the Ink and Paint Department, like the rest of the studio (still at that time all in one building), began to expand. By 1930, before the new animation building would give the women the original space all to themselves, there were about eight or nine inkers and painters. By the end of 1936, when *Snow White* began full production, there were more than forty full-time inkers and fifty painters (this number would increase along with the work-load on the feature; by the time *Snow White* was completed, it would nearly treble).<sup>2\*</sup>

Prospective applicants were normally required to submit a portfolio. They were young women, some barely out of high school and all eager for a job. Those whose samples showed evidence of the kind of skills needed were then put into a training class. In the early Thirties this was usually in the evening, of varying duration – sometimes two weeks, sometimes eight weeks – and, until mid-decade, without pay. One former trainee recalls an ordeal certainly not unique. The year was 1932.<sup>3\*</sup>

We [Evie Parsons Sherwood, later a supervisor, and myself] went to night school twice a week. And they said, "If you can cut the mustard, we'll hire you."

When we went to school, the first place they put us was in inking...*you know how fragile [those lines] are?* You do not go this way [upwards] with those pens, you only draw [like this, down] or they just spread ink all over everything. Well, the first thing I did was, I'm drawing Mickey, and everything is splattering. I spent the whole evening there trying to do [one] Mickey...You had to sign your name on it. I think I still have that cel. So, the second night – Evie and I both went into inking the first night – she stayed but I [didn't]. And the supervisor...Marie Henderson...comes up to me and she says, "Honey, I think maybe you'd better go into the painting department." And of course I didn't know I was being demoted, you know. No, the inkers were the top dogs. Boy, and what a clique they were!...So the time came for us to graduate, I guess, and we both got hired...<sup>4</sup>



Hazel Sewell, head of the Ink and Paint department, c. 1937.



*Photo courtesy of the late Ruth Bart*

Ink and Painting group, 1932. Training methods varied over the years. Marceil Clark, animator Les Clark's sister (seen here, right of center behind cake), was originally hired in 1932, shortly after high school, as a painter. Later she was asked to undertake the more demanding inking job. She had no real training period for either. She later recalled: "One of the inkers who'd been inking for some while would sit down and you'd watch how she did [it] and then she would watch you ink and paint, point out what you might be doing wrong or what would be an easier way for you to hold your paint [brush] or whatever. And that was the way we learned, the way I learned."

Marie Henderson was a no-nonsense gal, to use studio parlance. For years she was one of the inking supervisors. To some, her stern presence only added to the frustration of learning to do something for which few seemed destined to excel. And if you did not excel: "...every Friday, Marie Henderson would move behind the girls' backs and she'd say, 'Well, that's all. Goodbye.'" And home you went – for good.<sup>5\*</sup>

Another supervisor was Uba Valescobijou O'Brian (later chief air-brusher). During the training period,

she would get a scene from the animators and she would do a stop-watch of inking on one cel from that scene and then it was given to us in a stack of the animator's drawings. And we had to keep up that pace...[It wasn't tense, at least for me.] We were enjoying what we were doing. It was a great place to work."<sup>6\*</sup>

Sometimes, if rarely, hopefuls could be hired right away, going directly into the inking department. One young lady who needed a job, came to the studio in 1933. She found herself a permanent place before the day was over.

I had done silk screen work for a tire company. I had studied art in high school and went [for a short time to a tiny art school run by the father of a school-friend of mine]. It's not even in existence now. So I had a little bit of art training. More of commercial type of art, though. At that time silk screens were cut in by hand. Now they photograph... That was why I was good at doing the inking.

So we all tried out and they hired several gals that day [I think there were ten of us] and I was one of 'em. [We didn't have any extended training period].<sup>7\*</sup>

But that was the exception rather than the rule. And as inking grew more sophisticated, so the training period became longer. With rising standards, those applicants with prior art studies found themselves having the advantage. Some prospective inkers and painters, in fact, had considerable art training. One future inker not only had a year-stint at Occidental College but two years at Chiou-nard's. In spring of 1935 she tried out at Disney's.

[I submitted a portfolio] and they called me...Out of a hundred girls which they accepted – there were many more than that [who] applied – but they took a hundred of us and they put us in one of the wings... all by ourselves...and we had to do inking on cels. See, we'd all been artists but that's a special deal...And out of one hundred there were eight of us left. And we didn't get a cent for it.

I was living at the Hollywood Studio Club For Girls and it cost me seven and a half [dollars a week]. Two meals a day and room. And I had to go...by streetcar and transfer at Beverly [Drive] to go out to Hyperion. And that was five cents a day. So my dad had to help me a little bit. And if we could get out to have a dinner date, why, they'd take thirty-five cents off the evening meal price.

I think it was eight weeks we went to school without anything and then we were laid off. I went back pretty soon, maybe two or three weeks later...Then they called us up and we went to work at \$8 [a week] for half a day, six days a week. And I worked for about three weeks and they put me on full time at \$16.<sup>8\*</sup>

By late 1936 the training period for inkers was from three to six months. Painters required no such protracted training. The following year some groups received a small weekly remuneration

for gas. I think it was, like \$10 a week to just train [- my training period was three months]. And they dropped like flies. You'd have little pink slips – you know, you'd be working at your desk and these little pink slips would come along and you'd sit there trembling and – *am I*



Walt Disney Studios, c. 1936-7, showing the new Ink and Paint building on the right and the even newer animation wing addition, just being completed on the left (white two-story building)

*going to be the one that's thrown out? – 'cause you wanted to be there so badly. Well, I survived that and then the work job – then you got \$16 a week. That was a big thing.*<sup>9</sup>

Working with cels was difficult. They were unpredictable. Until the late 1940s they were made of nitrate stock, which could scratch easily, even when handled by cotton-gloved hands. They were lifted (and handled) only by the edges with the tips of the fingers. Another problem was the build-up of static electricity which would attract dust particles – no small issue. Moreover, the nitrate cels were highly flammable, adding danger to an already complicated process. Throughout the Twenties and Thirties, cels were routinely washed and re-used for economy – up to three times. With the advent of Technicolor, it was found that certain colors, like the bright blue dye of Donald Duck's sailor outfit, would bleed into the cel itself, making re-use impossible.

The material itself was called "Pyralin" and manufactured at the Plastics Division of the Du Pont Labs in Arlington, New Jersey. It arrived at the studio in batches of sheets, usually twenty by fifty inches. These cels were temperamental and subject to temperature variation and humidity. Cels would warp from changes in the weather or, especially during the late summer months, from heat waves (until the mid 1930s, there was no air conditioning in the Ink and Paint Department – although there were certain areas in the studio, e.g. sweatbox rooms, that did have this, then-unusual, perk). This would produce defects that were, erroneously, thought to come from inadequate inking or animation.<sup>10</sup>

Of all the separate components in a cartoon's assembly line, inking was undoubtedly the most painstaking and tedious, requiring great skill and a steady hand. The animator's pencil line had to be scrupulously followed for even the slightest deviation from the original drawing would result in a noticeable jitter when projected. In addition – at least at Disney's – there was a further refinement:

*and we had a different way of inking and we did shading. You did... what they call shading and later on [when I was at other studios] everything was just one fine line...of ink. On Disney's, like on Mickey*



Mouse and all, on the rounded...areas we'd make the line heavier.

Lines were painted originally in black ink, even in color cartoons. Some colored ink lines were used, for instance, for the interior folds on clothes and some special effects. Yet the character's outline would consistently be done in black.

For the first feature-length cartoon, the search for a more refined look brought an important change: colored ink outlines were introduced for the first time. This was the suggestion and "innovation" of background painter Maurice Noble. Although a complex procedure, the added effort subtlety, though cumulatively, enhanced the film's visual effect. It would become standard practice on all subsequent features and even most shorts. Gone was the hard black line. However beautifully traced, this had formerly given every character a superimposed look and only further added to the already inherent two-dimensional nature of the art of animation. Suddenly the characters took on a new form and scope, inhabiting their increasingly realistic cartoon world with a vitality and unity unmatched before. For *Snow White*, "some of the cels had twelve colors of ink on a single cel. You had a separate color for the eyelid and the dark for the eye [pupil] and then the eye itself was a different color. The mouth is a different color."<sup>11\*</sup>

Color separation was also used, i.e. a color requiring two different shades. Perhaps part of Snow White's arm, for example, might be in shadow and therefore

Inking examples showing cel with colored inking line (*Snow White*) and one done mainly in black (*Goddess of Spring*), both shown life size. Inking an animator's drawing was an exacting job and required tremendous skill. Even line widths on successive cels needed to be maintained. This was especially tricky since ink lines were rarely the same width from one point to the next but swelled in the curve of a line and tapered at the end. Note difference between colored inking (bottom) and those done in black (right). Even on the latter (whose original size is only slightly more than 2" for the figure of Hades) note the pink-colored interior inking lines to outline the lighter color painted on back - no doubt to give added dimension to an otherwise completely flat appearance.







Original animation drawing by Robert Stokes. After a character's color has been decided on, colored linking lines – used on *Snow White* for the first time – would then be selected. As many as 12 separate colors might be needed for inking any one cel. The first drawing of a scene, such as this one, would usually be given all needed indications for inking and painting, as well as information on special effects (in this case “DX mask” – to be discussed in the next chapter). Many of the inking lines in this scene were in various shades of grey. The red list at left is for the colors applied on the opposite side of the cel: here no less than twenty-one separate tones.

that section would require a darker tone. In such cases a transparent ink line was applied on top of the cel to guide the painter (who would apply the color to the opposite side). This transparent line would not be visible when photographed, further enhancing the effect of realism and believability.

Inkers normally worked with cotton gloves with the thumb and index fingers removed. This was to prevent perspiration or moisture from contaminating the cel surface. Inkers would be given an entire scene, never single drawings. Flexible steel-tip pens were used. With their left hand (if right-handed) they held a pointing stick, used to keep the cel flat against the paper underneath. Like the animator's board, inker's desks had registration pegs and a rotating disc to facilitate the process of turning the cel for greater ease in inking and therefore greater accuracy.<sup>12\*</sup>

[We used different pen points. A favorite was No.] 290, which is a very flexible point pen [made out of metal but not a crow quill pen]... You can never do any inking with a crow quill...[But the 290 was the very fine, very flexible pen that was used on *Snow White*].

[For storing the pens,] you have like a half-round of wood and they drilled little holes out of it. And then they had, like small cold cream jars that they put [a] little hole [for] every color that you were using and you have a pen in each one, so you never changed your pen...inbetween inks. You have a pen in each color... They're water soluble but, like your India inks, they would dry hard and then you could scrape back if you happened to break your line, and pick it up.

Then we had a little ebony pointer that we used and kept those sharp...to make those lines absolutely perfect...You have to keep stirring [the paint]. When you'd go to lunch, you'd put a little water on 'em and then you'd have to cover 'em, wipe your pens off because the ink would attack the pen point too and take the ends off your pens at times and then you'd have to change all your points...Just water [to clean the pens].

You never did one cel at a time. You'd do scenes. And ...you'll have these things in front of you – shelves and you always worked with a slipped cel underneath or a paper...to keep them from scratching as you put them on your shelves and back. They'd just give us a stack of drawings and then they'd put 'em under the cels...

[You'd paint] each color. If it's all black you would ink your whole cel but if you're working with color you'd put one color on at a time and you'd put it on your shelf. And you'd do your

Inker at work on *Snow White*. "They worked us overtime a lot... They wanted absolute perfection..." The most difficult work was the so-called trace-backs, which involved the re-tracing of a stationary portion of a drawing, say the torso of a figure, while the upper part moved. Sometimes this was done on a separate cel with the moving parts superimposed

on another cel. More often, however, the entire figure was required on the same cel (due to the fact that several cels might already be needed for that particular scene – normally a maximum of four were used). With trace-backs, the same line with no variation was demanded on each successive cel because any change produced a jitter on the screen (in the normal tracing of moving drawings a slight change in line width was not as noticeable).



Inking Department, 1937



Snow White close-up, very likely inked by Virginia Haas. "For a full-figure shot, Snow White appears in fifteen tints...These vary from tint 685-1/2 (yellow shoes) to pastel 23 (cheeks). When she sings, six colors are added to her eyes and mouth for close-ups, these ranging from orange-yellow on the lids to light red for the lips." "Putting a Fairy Tale on the Screen," *Popular Science Monthly*, January, 1938.

whole pack – if you've got twelve, fifteen, or twenty, they'd go on your shelves and you'd put 'em in sequence and then you'd pull 'em all down as they were dry. At the end of your thing they were pretty dry and you'd stack 'em all up and take your next color and go again...

And they'd have somebody that would do a cel and they'd time it and you had – if you wanted to work – you made your time...You didn't play around for two minutes...We had one break in the morning and one in the afternoon.<sup>13\*</sup>

Said another inker:

Walt did the nicest thing...He had a maid and she would fix all the girls soup at 10 o'clock – consume. And they'd ring a bell or something and the girls would go out and have a little rest for ten minutes. And then in the af-

ternoon they had tea – same way. So that you had a rest in the eight hours. 'Course businesses do that now but they didn't then.

The actual technique of tracing lines did not involve the hand but rather the arm and elbow and did, indeed, take weeks and even months to master, if at all.

You had to have such control that it's fantastic...I look at it today and I marvel that we ever did that...(I lost my sight at one point...My sister had to take me home. I couldn't see the clock at the end of the corridor.) You work off the end of your elbow and you make a long swing. You don't do finger work. You can't use your fingers at all. [Even very small details like eyes and mouth], you still work from your elbow.

And then the lifting of your pen to taper your lines – or if you're going to do a heavier line you put your pen down a little heavier and then you lift and you got to do all of that from your elbow. It's more like oriental brush work...So that's the difference between ink and paint...The perfection of the line you had to reach and keep.<sup>14</sup>

The work on *Snow White* was demanding, requiring a realism and a line that was new. Closeups of the heroine posed the most daunting challenge because of details on the eyes and mouth. The inkers found themselves facing their most exacting assignment thus far. Some seemed born to their calling. Said one former inker, "It's the fine line, the ending – they had to be careful. We all did Snow White but this one girl, Virginia Haas, was better than anybody. She got most of



the close-ups.” As seen on the screen, Miss Haas’s work is remarkable for its security and refinement.<sup>15</sup>

It is easy to overlook this most exacting procedure and to take for granted the legacy of these bright young women who received no screen credit. Yet without their painstaking and dedicated attention to the smallest detail, the miracle of *Snow White* and its full impact would remain a might-have-been. (One of the studio’s inkers would later achieve a broader recognition from her unusual work as an evangelist-healer: Kathryn Kuhlman.)<sup>16\*</sup>

When the inking was completed the cels were delivered to the painting division. This task, though considerably less demanding, nevertheless required precision and concentration. Cels were painted on the reverse side in various colors. As many as twenty-eight separate colors might be applied to a single cel. And because of the reflective surface of the cel, both inking and painting, like animation, was hard on the eyes.<sup>17\*</sup>

Since the earliest days of animation, painting on cels had always posed irksome difficulties. No paint could be found that would adequately adhere to the cel’s shiny surface. After the paint had dried, it would often flake off, especially as cels had to be handled continuously. During the summer heat, cel paint could melt and stick to adjacent cels, necessitating large numbers of re-makes. Originally, when all “color” was basically black and shades of grey, poster paint and later, Chinese black and white paints, were used – mixed with various fixatives. In the Twenties, a vile-smelling substance called ox gall, a gum arabic derivative, became the standard additive. However, it was never entirely satisfactory.<sup>18</sup>

To cope with these problems, during the early Thirties, Disney established a paint lab where all paint would now be manufactured on the premises. With the advent of Technicolor in 1932, first used in the Silly Symphony *Flowers and Trees* of that year, the paint lab was routinely challenged as better and better fixatives and more reliable colors were required. Eventually the studio found that a gum-based paint would more easily adhere in addition to having the necessary flexibility to withstand the constant use (all paints were water-based to facilitate cel reuse). It also wasn’t long before the color charts reached one thousand shades. For their first feature, the number of separate shades was said to be 1,500. Approximately 85 gallons of paint were used.<sup>19</sup>

One of the reasons that so many separate colors were needed has to do with the nature of the pyralin material itself. Since even thin cels have a density (and at Disney’s, cels of varying weight and thickness were often in use simultaneously), several cels placed one atop the other would produce a slight darkening of the colors on each successively lower cel. Normally, each character had a separate cel. Donald Duck would be painted on one cel and the Wise Little Hen, for example, painted on another. Often, however, if the characters were in contact, like Mickey and Minnie holding hands, both would be drawn onto the same cel. (Any special effects, such as water, steam, fire, clouds, etc. would always be painted onto a separate cel.) Thus, if a character appeared on the top level in one scene while later it was on a lower level (e.g. behind another character), its color for that scene would have to be strengthened in order to match the prior one on top.



Kathryn Kuhlman, 1932. At least one Inker and Painter who worked at the studio during this period would leave anonymity behind for a profession few women have claimed any distinction: evangelist. Her name was Kathryn Kuhlman. She would later have an extensive ministry during the 1960s and appeared on many television talk shows, including Johnny Carson’s *Tonight Show*. She died in 1976.



In the Paint lab, c. 1937. Paints were, in the early days of animation, notoriously difficult to keep on the cell, flaking and melting being a constant problem until the advent of controlled temperature.

By the early Thirties, it was determined that a maximum of four cel levels could be used without causing serious difficulties to the clarity of the background, always placed underneath the bottommost cel. Using more than four cels was found to produce a greying of both the painted background as well as the cels at the lowermost level. Therefore a four-cel level scheme became standard practice. This was used even when a scene had only one or two cels that contained a painted character, a blank cel (or cels) being added to make a total of four cel levels. For *Snow White*, however, it was decided to expand this to six cel levels on certain scenes. This was primarily due to the complexities of the new Multiplane Camera.

A character's color design was finalized in what would later become known as the Color Model Department. At the time of *Snow White*, this was still more or less a few key background painters along with Hazel Sewell and some of the supervisors from Ink and Paint. All character colors, those for shorts as well as the feature, are determined relatively late in production, after several key backgrounds have been painted. Those for *Snow White* were understandably more carefully scrutinized than for any prior cartoon.<sup>20</sup>

The main qualifying factor in any character's color design is not only the personality of that character but how those



Inkers at work, c. 1937. Many inkers and painters were laid off when their required work was completed (e.g. *Snow White*). But they were subsequently rehired later full time, if they so desired. Although the wage scale at the bottom was barely adequate for living independently at the time, those who worked full time were rarely, if ever, laid off, even when work grew scarce. "I know...the reason for [the strike in 1941 was because some thought \$18 or \$20 a week was not a living wage]. But, they worked at Disney's and they *stayed* at Disney's and they were paid when there was no work, to do something else. In other words, you didn't lose your weekly check...We went through a lot of sour periods where we had nothing to do. So we started making these [cel] set-ups that they're [now] getting for millions of dollars for the pictures – frames, making the mattes and all that – just to be busy. And we made those so Walt could give 'em to friends. And we were paid our weekly salary. And we had no animation or anything going through and we weren't laid off – we stayed. And we were paid. Where can you work day in and day out, year after year, with a – even tho it's a lesser salary – you're working everyday, not laid off?" (Ruth Tompson interview)

colors will read against the background it will eventually inhabit. The final selection is, in effect, a trial and error process involving several different color combinations. Although for the heroine, no one could recall specifically what combinations were tried and ultimately rejected, one can assume (and in this there was general agreement) that they were many. Perhaps Snow White once donned a brown skirt with a dark green bodice or even a maroon skirt with a yellow top. (There exist color tests of Snow White running through the forest as well as single test cels painted mainly in yellows, blues, or pinks with minimal costume-color design. This was almost certainly for test camera work only. Such a monotonous scheme for the film's title character can hardly have been seriously considered.)

The entire color selection process took approximately two months. (When colors are finalized, each color's number is written on the first drawing of every animated scene, along with numbers for the different shades that will be used for inking.) For the dwarfs we are fortunate in knowing what some of their early color combinations were. Initially, most dwarfs were in various shades of light reds and pink, a color Grace McCurdy, one of the painting supervisors, thought too bland and not consistent with their life style. "Since they lived alone and isolated in the woods, they would have spun their own yarn and I felt they would have used berries to dye their clothes with. You know, kind of rich, mulberry colors." It was she who conceived Dopey's yellow-green tunic with lavender hat to singularize that character as well as Grumpy's hallmark mulberry purple. In this she was warned by Hazel, who also lived under the same roof as Walt, her brother-in-law: the master hated the color purple. Therefore Hazel concocted an optional scheme for Grumpy in a green tunic. But Grace was convincing, and won out. "Mulberry seemed to be more of a grumpy color than green."<sup>21</sup>

As for the mask in the Magic Mirror, as well as the Queen and the elaborate inlaid box, both symbolizing jealousy, destruction, and betrayal, the talented young background painter Maurice Noble was responsible (it was he who suggested using colored inking lines, mentioned earlier – and utilized for the first time on *Snow White*).

The mask design itself was taken from live-action film footage of layout designer Hugh Hennesy acting out the part in heavy make-up and lighted from below. Walt himself did not have any suggestions as to the color scheme. As Maurice Noble recalled,

I think I probably worked the color scheme out myself. Because I knew what the setup was, you see, and what we had to do. And this was when we started to employ colored lines around the color separation...And then we had to break it down to make it work for flat tones of color [because it's very difficult to do any shading on the cels]. Chances are I selected the colors and everything to contrast with the bright warmth [of the flames] here so this would come out.

As for the box, a highly ornamental design, and the Queen's own color scheme, Maurice availed himself of what the backgrounds offered him. The colors of the Queen and box had to harmonize. These considerations, rather than being in-



Test cel of Snow White.

*Courtesy of the late Isabelle Wheaton*







Hugh Hennesy's sketch taken from live-action filming of himself in theatrical make-up, lighted from below.

spired, e.g., by Persian miniatures or other outside sources, determined what we now see.

I have a hunch that the colors and everything on this box were selected so that they would work well against the Queen. In other words, one prop had to read against the other and so forth. So colors were always carefully selected so that they would read well on the screen. And this would have to always work – these warm colors would have to work against the tones of her costume. This is what usually were deciding factors in selecting colors (see page 371).<sup>22\*</sup>

Painters, like inkers, were all young women ready to work. One of the early painters, who would later become a supervisor, was Dorothy Thompson-Smith (later Mullins) who arrived at the studio one April day in 1931. She was all of twenty. Dot, as she was always known, had attended Higgins Art School, a small training establishment in the Los Angeles area and had actually once worked for the exorbitant sum of \$4 an hour. "That was the most I ever made." Coming in to be interviewed by Hazel Sewell, she was asked, "Can you work for two weeks?" "I stayed eighteen years!"<sup>23</sup>

### Depression Life – Recollections of Two Disney Women

Though most women were local, some came from farther afield. Lucy and Isabelle Wheaton were born in Arkansas. Their father had drowned before Isabelle, the oldest, was ten. As Lucy described,



Dot Smith at work on *Snow White*

We were very, very, very poor. It was during the Depression. And everybody, all over the United States, was poor. We came out in a Model T Ford. It took us three months. I worked along the way. I was a teenager...I had a sick mother and a sick cat. And I drove this car out. I burned my brakes out on Superior Highway in Arizona...

I was coming to California to do artwork because there was no art available in Arkansas. You either had to come to the Coast or go to New York. My sister had gone to Buffalo, New York...I mean, you

took any job you could think of. It was just horrible.

[We all worked in the art profession.] See, my mother was an artist. All of us had made money by working with photographic art. I was an art painter – of art. I mean you do painting [i.e. the coloring] of the sepia pictures [portraits]...before Technicolor came in...And that's a dying art, how you can do that. But that's how I came to California and started working at Austin Studios doing the artwork... At five cents a print. That was in 1932. [Note: Austin Studios – with several satellite branches – was one of the more prominent photographic establishments in Southern California during this era.]

[My sister had gone to] Buffalo because ...she couldn't find anything for work and I didn't have any job. So we just left – lock, stock and barrel – mother and...I. [We] turned in our...security deposit [for the gas company]. And we got enough money and we bought a car – this model T Ford – for twenty dollars. And we started out with thirty dollars. Mother had just gotten her pension check...

So...mother did retouching of photographs. That's how she raised us. And then she did painting of photographs and always taught watercolor painting and so on and had raised us. And we all made little, painted cards, Christmas cards. We did everything we could to make money. You know, just to put food on the table.

So we started out, Mother and the cat and myself with as much canned goods as we had and we'd had a real bumper strawberry crop that summer. So we had canned strawberries and we had some cans of tuna in the back of the car. And that's how we managed and whenever we needed a little money, [we'd stop along the way]...

The first stop was El Paso, Texas and I started to work with a photographer there and mother did retouching and that is when Roosevelt was elected. And all of a sudden beer was



Resettlement administration client – Boone County, Arkansas-1935

*Photo by Ben Shahn, courtesy of Corbis Archives*



Central High School, Little Rock, Arkansas. Both Lucy and her sister Isabelle graduated from this school (built in 1928). Little could they have known that decades later it would become the focal point of profound racial tension when, in 1956, it became the scene of enforced integration. It is now one of the most celebrated landmarks in the country.





Downtown El Paso, 1950s



Near Lordsburg, New Mexico, 1937, itinerant travellers stalled

Photo by Dorothea Lange, courtesy of Corbis Archives

the most important thing and I had never had any beer and we didn't – weren't that [way] – well, we just didn't drink. And I never was so astonished by people wanting beer...Roosevelt was in and there was beer!...I was seventeen. I guess I was. I just graduated from high school. Anyway...we stayed there [in El Paso] till mother's pension came again. We only had thirty dollars a month to live on. She had a thirty dollar pension from my father 'cause he had been a Spanish-American War veteran. I was of older parents. Both my parents were up in their forties and fifties when I was born so that's all we had...So we were there, having started [from Arkansas] in September...until the pension came the first of November. And then we started out again.

I was always going to write *Mother Drove a Model T*. 'Cause everything happened on the Model T that should go wrong...and that was rather expensive 'cause it took all our money – about a third of the money. So...the bearings burned out. It was Lordsburg, New Mexico. We got as far from El Paso to Lordsburg, New Mexico and that happened. And then we wired for money from the east and nobody...[had] any money to send. So we slept in the car. We were – you call homeless – we were homeless too. And then with a cat – homeless.

Finally we got a little bit from more work and we came up over the Roosevelt Highway in the Pinals [Pinal Mountains] there and got as far as Globe, Arizona. And we could get a place for a dollar and a quarter a week. And we [stayed] with this old lady in her house, in a housekeeping room. And immediately started out for



the first photographer and they found a woman photographer, Mrs. Reeves, that was a widow raising two children. All of our friends were always widows raising two children. Or one child. It never exceeded that...

See, two times that are good for re-touchers is June for the brides and December or November and December for the Christmas. So it's May and June you live pretty good and November and December there's lots of work. And the rest of the time you sort of squeak by. And mother did very fine hem stitching for the Jewish people in Little Rock. That's how we managed – [she] did embroidery – beautiful embroidery. She never finished the garments, she only did the beautiful artwork, the embroidery on them. Anyway, we went and stayed till after Thanksgiving and the [next] check came in December.

And then, we were – just felt real good and whatnot. And coming down Superior Highway – you don't notice that now with the roads the way they are but the road down from Globe, if you're familiar at all – Pinal is very high and [you] go down this winding road like this into Phoenix. Anyway, my brakes burned out, coming down this road in this Model T Ford. And it's a two-lane road with gullies on both sides...real deep cliffs where the water goes when they have the storms. Drainage ditches is what it is. And so, I saw this one little road going off to the side and I quick-wheeled into it. And it was a gypsy camp. And I went as far as the car would take me till it stopped and I stopped in the middle of a gypsy camp...I was [terrified] and if you don't think I was praying all the way...*Shepard, show me how to go.* And...they finally turned me around and got me back. And so then I coasted down the rest of the way till the next auto court, into an auto court.

Mother was not well. The cat was quiet. I mean it was a little coupé. That's what we had. And with just a little back, you know, that you could put your provisions in. And that was it. It



Pinal Mountains, Arizona



Globe, Arizona, Superior Highway (US 60) c.1929.



Lucy in later years

was a 1926 [Model T]...today it would be worth something!

But anyway we got into this motor court [- in the desert -] and that night *it snowed*. Ah! it was the coldest night that you could imagine...And [the] next morning we had to be pushed around the auto court three times before the engine would start. Fortunately there was somebody to push us around 'till I got started. But everyone of those sand dunes were like lemon meringue pies with the snow cap on every one. So you never tell me the desert was hot, it was so cold (laughs).

And [we] got into Los Angeles under difficult circumstances 'cause I still didn't have brakes, I was still very, very cautious in my driving...I learned how to tighten those brakes...and I changed tires, I did everything... [Anyway]...I came and got under a viaduct and a big, beautiful Cadillac with driver [came along], and I stalled my car in the [road] and so I was pushed into Los Angeles.

[So I got a job at Austin Studios]...up on Seventh Street. Seventh and Hope, between Hope and Spring...and worked hard. I got to the point where I could make sixty cents an hour if I worked real fast. And I always had been a very fast artist – but it wasn't right at the beginning. But anyway, I think I made \$3 that day, that was just wonderful!...That was December of '32.<sup>24</sup>

Meanwhile, Isabelle, her older sister was having her own adventures.

Well, there was a Depression on, you know. And I had friends from Camdon, Arkansas who were moving from Seattle to Buffalo, New

York. They – a young man, he was blind, and he needed a driver for his car – and the family [Mr. and Mrs Vickers] followed in their car all the way out and [we] had wrenches and one thing and another out of a baseboard box... And I drove the car... (This had all happened very quickly. Friends who knew the Vickers in Little Rock had recommended my driving. I don't know about that [laughs] but at any rate I didn't wreck the car.)

It was Memorial Day and I remember



Los Angeles, 1932. The original caption reads: 2/11/1932-Los Angeles, CA – Thousands of unemployed are seen here as they gathered in Los Angeles recently, but quickly scattered when police appeared on the scene and arrested leaders alleged to be Red agitators.



looking out – it was very beautiful along this – where we went through, I think we went through St. Louis someplace. And then everybody was picnicking and I thought “What’s the matter with everybody,” and then I realized it was Memorial Day.

And we got to Buffalo, New York. And what had happened is, the young man was an inventor, and he did his work through modeling clay parts and [he had invented a] hydraulic jack. And he and his father were going to go into business with somebody in Buffalo, New York.

Buffalo was a very interesting place at that time because every other building was a small business trying to get on its feet. But lots more activity going on there than any of the other big cities and so forth. And I had done negative re-touching but what they needed at that time was positive re-touching...[for catalogue sampling and so forth]. So, I don’t know, there were just hundreds of small businesses there. I went from one to another with my samples and got an airbrush and the

young man’s sister drove him part of the time, I drove him part of the time. And I taught her to do the work and we had a studio in the basement in the house they rented in Kinderhook, New York and we had pretty good business that way. However, it wasn’t entirely wonderful. (They had a large dog that I had trouble negotiating at times.) And I managed to get on WPA (laughs)...

Anyhow, I went to work at Albright Art Gallery, which was a salvation – and taught two advanced classes in painting and art, creative work. And ran lantern slides for Rockwell Kent who drew [so many magazine and book illustrations, especially for the Modern Library.<sup>25</sup> Anyway] I put the lantern slides on for his lectures and altogether found the art gallery a very interesting place with lots of interest-



Main Street, Buffalo, after snowstorm – 1930s



Albright Art Gallery





Long Beach Earthquake, 1933. The Long Beach earthquake occurred on March 10, 1933 with a magnitude of 6.4. One hundred and fifteen lives were lost, mostly from falling debris.

ing people around. And the warmest set of boilers in the boiler room anywhere in Buffalo (laughs). It got twenty-seven below while I was there and driving on solid ice was no joke. And even Niagara froze over... So I would get off the bus, plow through the snow and go in the boiler room door – it was wonderful, that warmth! (laughs) So I don't know whether I was more interested in Buffalo's industry or the warmth of those boilers. It was a large thing in my life.

But in '33 I got word that Long Beach had gone all to pieces [from the great earthquake there that year] and where my family were had fallen apart. And it was terrible. I didn't hear from them and I had wrote – I guess I wrote 'cause we couldn't get through on the phones. I wrote the police department to please check on my family and see if they were all right. [They were living in Huntington Park, which got the worst part of it, next to

Long Beach.] They had to sleep out in the patio – the yard, for three weeks and it was a terrible time. But the police went right over and I got a scorching letter from mother. She said, "Oh me! *To have the police* (laughs)..." He said, "Madam, have you written to your daughter?" And she said, "No, I haven't, I really couldn't get things together!" (Laughs) Anyhow, that was terrible but in '34 I got together enough money to come out to join them and live in Los Angeles.

And of course, well, we were kind of a close-knit family and I very much wanted to get together. So I took the bus in March, I think

it was, in 1934, from Buffalo, New York, to Hollywood...I had my samples with me and it was really funny because the bus was stopped at the border, of course, and I said, "What are you looking for?" I had a large, flat portfolio of my work and they, the officer said, "Well, I was looking for boll weevils." I said, "Well I just came from New York and they don't have them there." And I said, "I don't think you're going to find any and you might ruin my samples. I don't want my artwork ruined." Oh, there was a light-hearted girl that I happened to sit with on the bus and we sat and giggled while he went through the boxes and got his arm caught in the boxes and couldn't get out. And he let mine alone...So...I arrived at Hollywood and Vine, right on the corner of Hollywood and Vine. And a little elephant came down the sidewalk and it was very interesting. [They used to put on these shows at the Chinese Theater. Live elephants.] Anyhow I caught a bus and went up to La Brea where they had an apartment in a cluster of little bungalows, like they used to have – a court.

And I looked in the newspapers and I saw an ad for artists at Disney's. And so I took my samples and bounced over and Hazel Sewell, the sister-in-law of Walt... looked at the samples and she said, "What can you do?" And I said, I thought maybe special effects or something like that, with the airbrush. And that was fine, she got me into a seat in the inking department and there weren't very many girls, I don't think there were more than twelve, fourteen girls there at that time. That was just after the *Three Little Pigs* made a big hit.<sup>26</sup>

Isabelle would later work as a special assistant to Hazel Sewell, monitoring the girls' progress and productivity in the form of "report cards" compiled at regular intervals. The following is an example, entitled "Inking troubles," the original of which is handwritten (although undated, the year is 1935).

July 1st – Scene 39 M 36 – back to animators – Delay – girl had to lay work aside. Scene 45 M35 – back to inkers due to careless inking – of soles of feet of keeper – about 10 (?) cels – just enough to waste time – (affected 3 girls work). July 2nd – Scene 68 -S29 – Careless inking – of head piece on preacher – separation of edge of head piece and edge of neck of instrument jumps back and forth every other cel – takes up time in discussion and breaks speed of painters – not absolutely necessary to return to inker – so just ritards 2 painters. [in margin:] a great many small details – very annoying<sup>27\*</sup>



Hollywood and Vine, c. 1937

PROD. <i>Seq. 6A</i>		SCENE <i>#28-C</i>		NAME <i>Lucile Greathouse</i>	
NO. OF CELS <i>8</i>		CELS PER HOUR			
START		FINISH		DEDUCTED	TOTAL
DATE <i>8-19-37</i>	HOUR <i>10:30</i>	DATE <i>8-20-37</i>	HOUR <i>11:20</i>	<i>15 min</i>	<i>3:25</i>
DATE <i>8-20-37</i>	HOUR <i>10:30</i>	DATE <i>8-20-37</i>	HOUR <i>1:20</i>		<i>2:00</i>
DATE <i>8-23-37</i>	HOUR <i>9:00</i>	DATE <i>8-24-37</i>	HOUR <i>11:00</i>	ESTIMATE <i>4:00</i>	<i>9:20</i>
CELS	NUMBERS	DESCRIPTION		EST	NOT DEDUCTABLE
<i>6</i>	<i>37-414</i>	<i>Grumpy</i>		<i>20</i>	
<i>2</i>	<i>21A-29</i>	<i>"</i>			REG:
					EST:
					CHSEN:
					EST:

8-123-PRINTERS (ITEMS DEDUCTIONS ON REVERSE SIDE)

An example of Isabelle's "report cards". This report, tabulated by Isabelle Wheaton estimates 9-1/2 hours' work on bubbles for the feature (Seq. 6A, sc. 28C: Grumpy getting washed) by Lucile Greathouse, an obvious newcomer. It comprises three days' work from 8/19 - 8/23/1937, mostly on the night shift. Noted on the back: "deductions - 2 rest periods"

And as work on the feature grew more and more intense, so did one's sense of responsibility. Isabelle continues:

See, I took care of the bulletin boards and [I was made responsible for budgeting] the pictures that went through...I could budget [say, a painter's time at] \$50 or whatever it was to run a picture through the place [for a short.]

[Anyway, once during *Snow White*] I was looking frantically for a transparent paint for shadows and we followed up a number of different concoctions and I heard about somebody in the commercial district of Los Angeles that had gum tragacanth, I think it

was. (According to the *World Book Encyclopedia* [1960 ed.] tragacanth is a "true gum obtained from various shrubs [*Astragalus*] of the pulse family. These grow chiefly in Asia Minor, Iran, and Syria. Tragacanth is dull white or yellowish in color, and clear and hornlike in texture. It is usually sold in the form of thin flakes or ribbons. These swell into a jellylike mass when soaked in water. Tragacanth is one of the oldest materials used in pharmacy, going back to Biblical times. It is used in the preparation of tablets, or pills, emulsions, and creams, and to a small extent in printing gums for textiles.")

And I went down to get some and ran through a red light and I was so tired - we worked so hard on the thing [*Snow White*] that I was just on edge. And when I ran through the light I had picked up the gum tragacanth and a policeman caught me at it and was going to fine me for going through the red light. And I burst into tears and I sat there and I must have cried for, oh, I don't know, maybe fifteen or twenty minutes. And he said, "It isn't that serious. You're really going to live through this." And I said, "It's just important that I get back to the studio, I've already been gone too long, trying to pick up this thing where we're doing this experimental work." And he laughed and finally let me go. He said, "Now, I think maybe if you'll calm [down] a little more, you can drive on back to the studio." It was just so - we were so dedicated. It was just the most important thing that we were on.

[During the final year of the picture I moved into one of the apartments the studio had bought next-door on Griffith Park Boulevard.] Well, I volunteered [for the night crew]. I was always volunteering for





Break-time, c. 1937. Isabelle Wheaton is seen third from left (in white blouse). "In the construction of a short cartoon, about one hundred girls are employed seven days, or a total of 5,600 hours to complete the inking and painting of a seven-minute film." *Film Guild's Handbook: Cartoon Production*, 1939.

something. So I volunteered to take a night crew. And I don't remember [when exactly it was.] We worked very, very hard and I couldn't sleep days...We were working on scenes from *Snow White*, trying to get it through. And I had a lot of inexperienced girls that wanted a job there and it was really quite rough. And I would be so tired, I couldn't even climb the stairs to my apartment. I'd get down and crawl up.

And we had the girls like the one that came from somewhere – I believe it was Boston – and got the job – and she was [always] so hungry. We had a – Walt served cookies and tea as a pick-up about mid-morning and afternoon and at night, like that. He would serve the cookies and hot tea. And she ate all the cookies on the whole thing and the girls were just horrified and she couldn't do the work – it was really very sad. And finally

Two poems, 1937. The sense of dedication felt by most during this time was balanced by humor, even in the Ink and Paint department.

#### Olive Piper's Ode to Painters

When the earth's last Mickey is painted  
And the scenes are checked and OKayed  
When the last symphony's gone to the camera  
And the last bonus check has been paid  
And a score of feature-length pictures  
Beginning with lovely Snow-White  
Has changed the trend of all Movies  
And made a big hit over night  
We shall rest, and God knows we shall need it  
Then we'll retire at 65  
And enjoy the security measure  
In case we are still alive.....

#### Kae's ode to Inkers

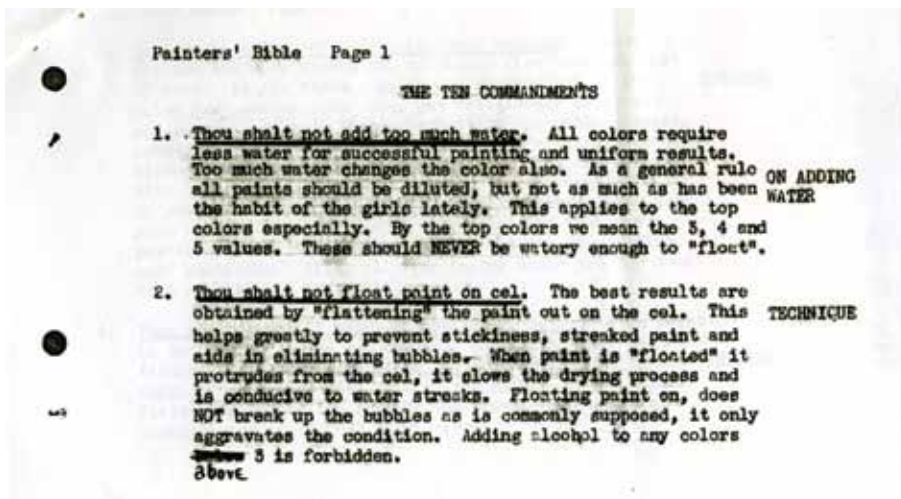
When the earth's last Mickey is inked  
And if ever we finish Snow White  
By working both day and night  
We shall rest, and God knows we shall need it.  
We'll lie down for an aeon or two  
Till the "Master of all good Comedies"  
Shall put us to work anew!

Those who are good shall be wealthy\$\$\$\$  
And sit in a golden chair  
They will ink at a ten acre cel  
With pens...only an Inker can bare.

Only the master will praise us  
And only the master will blame  
No one shall work for money\$\$\$\$  
And no one shall work for fame  
But each for the joy of her "average"  
And each in her separate star\*\*\*\*\*  
Shall ink the "Mouse" as she sees it  
For the good of Mice as they are.



The Painter's Bible. Cel painters during these years were provided with a dark green booklet entitled "The Painter's Bible" – containing their own Ten Commandments: "Thou shalt not add too much water..." "Thou shalt honor thy fine sable-hair brushes..." "Thou shalt always check your finished work before handing it in..." Reflecting not only a different era, this work also expresses well the sheer enjoyment experienced by most members of the Disney "extended family" who appreciated their rare situation: loving what they did and getting paid for it.<sup>28\*</sup>



hired was animator Les Clark's sister Marceil. She was from a large family and recalled how the simple need to survive was the paramount concern of most people during those times.

We lived in Venice...And went to Venice High School. [Les was older by] nine years...His art background was only art in high school. Mine was the same. [No college.] Depression. Nobody had any money. Very bad Depression. [Neither of our parents were artists or artistic.] We just both were interested in art and I had two majors: art and business. I figured that when I got out of high school I planned to get a job and I'd probably be in a business. But in, like, secretary or something. Just

we had to get transportation for her back to Boston through the Traveler's Bureau, Traveler's Aid? But the girls would come around and look at me and say, "That's just terrible! Look what she's done."

So we had quite a time at night. I was so tired one night I came up and there was a wrinkle in the sheet and I sat down on the floor by my bed and cried. Mother, in the meantime – we had a fairly active little mother – and she got tired of my working so hard so a friend came by, going on the way to Yellowstone and asked if she'd like to go along. She left a note on the table, "Have gone to Yellowstone – will be back later." And so she didn't appear for, I guess, another year or something.<sup>29\*</sup>

The Nunnery must have been an exhilarating place with some of the brightest young talent anywhere in Southern California. One of the youngest ever



loved art. We were attracted to it.

There were twelve of us. That's why we didn't go to college. Twelve of us during the Depression. [Les] was the oldest. I was the oldest girl. I was the fifth in line...I graduated in June and I went to work in September [of 1932] and [Les] said..."Well, maybe when you graduate I can get you a job at Disney's." And I didn't think much

about it, I thought, well, I'll continue with...all of my business subjects so there will be something there for me. And three months later after I got out of high school, he got me a job. And I started as a painter.

[Most of the girls there] were older than I and [they all] used to call me the baby...[I had no training period. They just] sat me down, handed me the paintbrush. It was only black and white at that time. And I remember they gave me a scene with lots of splashes of water all over the place. Zip. And they handed me another set and I was on my way!...\$16 a week.

[Later on, I did inking too and then] I had a training period... But I was still on the payroll 'cause I could still paint...I was a very fast painter. They didn't really want to lose me as a painter because I was one of the fastest at the time but I guess they felt I might be a fast inker too. [By the time I went into inking, we were doing color cartoons. But] I started in black and white. I painted black. The first few days all I painted was black.

By the time of *Snow White*, Marceil's talent was utilized in a job that was equally demanding and frustrating. She was put in charge of applying the transparent paint that Isabelle Wheaton had frantically sought to find – and nearly costing her a traffic ticket.

You know what I had to do on *Snow White*? We had – they used transparent shadows and very difficult [to apply]. It was very difficult. The thing is that it was very hard to get that paint on without it streaking. And one batch was never the same as another one and often time it varied in color. And somehow I managed to do it and they liked the way I put the shadows on. So they made me do them all. They gave



Destitute family – Arkansas, 1935

During this period, all employees expected – and received – bonuses for their added efforts, some small, some large. "The terrific devotion we had, dedication to the purpose of everything, would be rewarded by a bonus. And Roy [Disney later] put a squelch on that," said Isabelle Wheaton. On *Snow White*, bonuses for the Ink and Paint girls were leaner than their male counterparts – mainly due to the non-creative work involved (Isabelle, e.g. got \$61.55 while Lucy only \$11.06 – Lucy's husband Al Taliaferro, however received \$718.22). Although stated otherwise by several inkers and painters, virtually all of those engaged full-time did receive some bonus for the feature. Soon bonuses as a policy would be discontinued studio-wide.





Marceil Clark, aged 17, 1932.

me a department and people to work with me and [we] sat there and did this...

[It was a] grey-blue transparent [solution], kind of like a gelatin – gelatin kind of thing. And it was very hard to get on evenly...[An example would be the shadows on the ground when the dwarfs are walking. All those were done with this solution] and when they're walking, those shadows animate and the paint was just a messy job...<sup>30\*</sup>

Marceil, as Les Clark's sister, was in a privileged position. She knew many of the key players at the studio, including Walt.

You see, that was a pretty tight-knit group, Les and all the rest of them. They all were very conservative thinking, politically. And Art [Babbitt] and Bill [Tytla] were not. And I could see where they disapproved of those two politically...[And Walt] was [or at least became] very conservative politically in his thinking...[But he really] was ingenuous...And I think that we all respected him...looked up to him. See, he was the King. He was. And I think most of the guys felt that way too, that worked with him...with the exceptions of a few like Art Babbitt. But I know my brother, he was like a father to my brother. My brother just revered him...<sup>31</sup>

When all the inking and painting was completed, it was time for the “checker” to make sure everything was ready before being sent to camera – the final phase of production (save for watching the dailies and the inevitable retakes). Reviewing thousands and thousands of cels, observing that each and every one was inked and painted correctly and in proper sequence was demanding enough. This job asked for more.

The final checker (always a woman from the Ink and Paint department) had to make sure that all the camera setups, i.e. pans, trucks, and overlays worked as required on each exposure sheet. This necessitated a thorough knowledge of the mechanical side of animation. And with much of *Snow White* utilizing the newly-invented Multiplane Camera, this now meant a painstaking and laborious process to determine that all the calibrations needed for this new-fangled contraption worked as intended.

For one young, bright-blue-eyed, woman who would later become one of *Snow White*'s final checkers, working at Disney's was a dream come true. Her name was Katherine Kerwin.

I was born in Manchester, New Hampshire in 1912...In 1920, my dad had passed away and there were four of us kids and my mother brought all four of us out here...I was eight years old when we came out and my dad had passed away and my mother got TB from him and the doctor gave her six months to live and that's why she brought us out here. So we didn't have any friends or anything out here, you know, at first. But then, we soon got them and...[my mother lived] to eighty-three. She told the doctor “You don't know who you're telling *that* to!”

I always wanted to work [at Disney's] – when I was in high school

# *Those Marvelous Inkers and Painters*















and everything. It was during the Depression...And so I kept taking my little samples over and everything after I graduated from high school...So anyway then, it was in December of '34 that they finally called me to come over and try out for working there in Inking and Painting.

At the time, in December, I was working at Robinson's, gift wrapping [at that time one of the Southland's most fashionable stores]. And there was a Depression on and you know, you needed every dime you could get. So anyway they called me to come over there and try out. So then I'd work all day [at Robinson's] and then I'd take the streetcar and the bus and get out there at night and ink and paint and everything. But anyway...I think they tried out a hundred people that time – many more later – [and we weren't paid], we were just trying to show what we could do...It was just a couple of weeks that we did it and I think it only included about four nights in all, like Tuesday and Thursday.

[During those classes Hazel Sewell, the department head]...came around and checked everything out. And the first night I had beginner's luck and did real well. And then, I didn't do so well – in inking – I didn't do so well the next night 'cause she picked up my cel and saw my name and said, "Are you Katherine Kerwin?" And so the next time I found paint on the table and I was painting, not inking. And so out of the people they tried out they had three inkers that they chose and eight painters and I was a painter.

I really didn't have any real good artistic background except that I wanted to do it...Just high school...And did it at home all by myself, you know – try to copy the style of others...But as it turned out, I didn't have to do any original work after I got there because I just did painting and then I ended up in final checking. The girl that did [the final checking] worked opposite Hazel at her desk in a little office in the small building they had on Hyperion.

That was Dot Smith...She was the only final checker...we always worked Saturday until noon at that time...[And after we were through for the day] she would [still] be busy and I'd sit just outside her door – and she'd come out and ask me if I wanted to help her Saturday afternoon and boy! could I stand it to wait! I'd help her all Saturday afternoon. Of course you weren't paid for all of this: we did it 'cause we wanted to.

So then I worked with Dottie and then when there was an opening for someone to be with her, why she let me be her helper. So then I ended up being [a checker myself], after she became in charge of the whole Ink and Paint...after Hazel left [that was in 1938]. Then she was in charge of the whole Ink and Paint then I was in charge of final checking from then on...But oh, I wanted to work there so bad I could taste it and I just loved it – I stayed there until I was sixty-five and enjoyed every minute of it...

Working as a checker, Katherine continues:



They usually hand out the cels in groups of twelve or so...an easy set might have more or [a] hard set might have fewer than that...Well, then when [we] pick up these sets we get the whole scene together and we check it [first] for one thing, for color. And there might be a color jump from one set to another [where the colors don't exactly match]...That doesn't happen often but you know, that's what we would check for. And then if there was any jump in the animation [we were supposed to catch that]. [note: the penciled animation had previously been checked in the animation department before being sent to Ink and Paint.]

Checkers had to know all the fundamentals of animation photography and calibration of camera movements. They would simulate exactly how it would be when actually photographed, something that the new Multiplane Camera (to be fully discussed in the next chapter) made even more tedious and time consuming.

We had a camera board [with] the equipment that they have out in camera without a camera overhead. And then we'd make all the moves and we'd check our fields [the areas that are to be photographed. These vary in sizes]...And just once in a while we'd find an error there, they'd truck from one [field] to the other [which had been calibrated incorrectly] and we'd have to have the background extended – things like that. But we had to check for all the mechanics of it as well as the color...There aren't too many mistakes that develop but you're there to check them so in camera they don't have them...

[The cels themselves had to be handled very carefully. They were usually] brand new to begin with and then everyone has to be very careful so they don't get scratched. And after they paint them and they'd come in to us and we'd check them, then we would clean the cels and make sure there were no scratches on them...<sup>32</sup>

And then during *Snow White*...Evelyn Sherwood and I worked all night long...We [finally] finished out of Ink and Paint on Thanksgiving Day...It was, gosh, about mid-afternoon when we finally left on Thanksgiving Day. And I didn't have a car at the time and Wick [Hayes, a young animation checker] drove me home. And I sat down at the Thanksgiving dinner and fell asleep before I finished eating. But anyway it was fun to have done it all...<sup>33\*</sup>

Color checkers, (as distinguished from "animation checkers" who okeyed each finished scene in pencil), were among the few female employees to see rough animation.

Every time before we would start doing it in Ink and Paint, they'd run the rough stuff and let us see it, you know, before we would work on it...The final checkers would [later] go over with them to [also] look at the dailies [the finished product] to be sure they looked good, otherwise they'd have a retake. [These were the] color dailies. But we

always saw the rough reels before we started working on it...just to see what we were going to be doing, you know. Get us familiar with it all.

Katherine was able to recall the very last scene that was checked before being sent to camera: the Multiplane shot of the Queen racing downstairs to her dungeon.

It was a very difficult scene. That's why it had taken so long to do, you know, to get through all the departments...[I think it] had more mechanics and things in it. It was just a hard scene... After all these years it's hard for me to remember too much about it except that that was the last scene that went through Ink and Paint to the camera department on *Snow White*...On Thanksgiving Day we sent it out.<sup>34</sup>

Another woman who worked as a checker for *Snow White* had known both Walt and Roy from the Kingswell Studio days. Ruthie Tompson had romped with other neighborhood children for the Disney Brothers' *Alice in Cartoonland* series and as a young teenager was utterly fascinated with the animation process.

[Walt and] his brother Roy lived two doors down from where I lived... on Kingswell Avenue. [Walt] was staying with his uncle...Uncle Robert's son was just born about that [time]- he was maybe six or eight months old when I first [met them] – and I don't remember Walt there, at that place, but I do at the studio. And, because I was more nosey, I used to look in, on my way home from grammar school. And I think he's the one that invited me in.

There were a lot of guys there and they were doing their animation and stuff. They just turned me loose. And I wandered around, asked questions about [this and that]...I ended up sitting on the bench with Roy while he was shooting these animations. 'Cause he had a blue light [that they used on the drawings] that made my fingernails all purple. You know, that fascinates kids, those things like that. I think they call it a black light...That was the light they used. It was an antiquated thing with the camera [there] and...I was just fascinated with that light and I used to sit on the bench beside Roy until he'd say, "It's time to go home and you must be hungry." Five o'clock or something.

[This happened] almost every day...[It was] on my way to school. And in the window, the two women are painting the cels...putting the color – well the greys, in those days. So first I'm watching them through the window like that and then [Walt] comes out and says, "Hey, why don't you come inside, see what we're doing?" He was always very enthusiastic about everything that he did. He was just like a little kid with a new toy and he just enthused anybody that wanted to listen to him, I'm sure.

[That studio was about fifteen feet wide and it went] right straight back to the back lot.[There were lots of stores on Kingswell and Prospect Avenue.] And it's right near Vermont and Hollywood. Where



Ruthie Tompson, c. 1970

Hollywood goes into Sunset Blvd.

[So Walt and Roy] gave us money to play up and down the street and have us run and stuff and do things like that [for the *Alice in Cartoonland* series]...And [Walt] probably knew the names of all these kids, just like he knew mine...[But I went to the studio and] watched the fellows [by the hour]...Lillian and her sister Hazel sat at the window and painted. They were the ones that were doing the painting... [They were both] very gracious and lovely. And friendly, warm people. Hazel was great, [with a sense of humor]. But I mean, they were normal people, you know...<sup>35\*</sup>



Evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson was a major presence in the Los Angeles area from the mid 1920s thru the 1930s. She was plagued by controversy after her apparently miraculous escape from an alleged kidnapping while swimming at Venice Beach in 1926. A native Canadian, "Sister Aimee" nevertheless became identified with many American ideals of her generation and especially during the Depression she repaid her adopted country by providing much-needed help for hundreds of thousands of individuals. Her "soup kitchens" were famous as a refuge for many a down-and-outer while her unique theatrical style and dynamic presentations made her name a household word virtually worldwide. The young actor Anthony Quinn reportedly had an affair with her while her sermons and services were broadcast several nights a week. Many from the Disney fold attended these services and at least two, Ruth Thompson and cameraman Bob Broughton vividly recall her admonition during the offertory: "I don't want to hear any tinkling of coins – I want to hear paper. I love the rustle of paper money." The church she founded and its original building still survive. Aimee died in 1944 under mysterious circumstances.

Nobody sent me home. Roy's the only one who sent me home and that's because I'd been there too long. It was time to go home and eat dinner, you know...Roy's the one I remember the best of all and I've always been real fond of Roy – he's my favorite fellow. And Walt I was a little leery of because he was – you know...smart guy and running the whole shebang and everything...[But then I moved and didn't see either of them for many years].

Their reunion, nearly a decade later, was a remarkable coincidence. It underscores the Disney brothers' sense of family and their interest and concern for even long-ago acquaintances.

When I graduated from high school, I was horse crazy so...I could earn some rides by working in the office of the DuBrock Riding Academy. And [after I had been there a while,] a couple of years, two or three years, Walt, Roy and a bunch of [their] men – came out to learn how to play polo. They were all riders. Bill Cottrell, Walt, Roy, Jack Cutting.

Bud and Wilma and Dad Dubrock...ran the riding academy – used to rent horses for a cent a minute...sixty cents an hour. I don't know what they charged them to play polo, it probably was a couple bucks...or more. That's when Walt and Roy [saw me]. When they came up to the window to pay I was sitting there...Roy said, "Ruthie Thompson, what are you doing here?" [shyly:] "Working, of course." *What do you think?* (Laughs) And then Walt comes and goes the same routine and they both remembered my name from the time I was... [13 or 14] until [now] I'm in my 20s. [This was in 1932.] And they remembered me, recognized me – first name, last name, how's your sister, how's your [cousin], Dorothy and Junior?

[Well]...one day as [Walt] was paying his bill, he



said, "Why don't you come work for us?" And I said, "I can't draw." He said, "You don't need to, we'll teach you what you need to know, you come to night school." And I said, "well, [my friend] Evie Parsons... can draw." He said, "Bring her along." So the two of us went into there and we went to night school twice a week... When I first went to work at the studio we had a lot of fun.

As is the case with so many of the Disney Studio employees at this time, the Depression was the formidable backdrop to their lives. All struggled.

My step-father was a commercial artist and at that time commercial artists didn't get nothing for nothing. And so we were without money quite a bit of the time. And what I first earned at the studio helped pay the rent and do a few things like that. So during the Depression I worked in the riding academy... They gave me \$5 a week and I was happy for that and breakfast, lunch, dinner, whatever, or gas. And if I ran out of gas, I'd pay the gas station guy [with] a ring and say, "Can I have five gallons?" I'd come back and get it... I bought a lot of gas with that ring. I still got it... [Later when I was at the studio] I was grateful for what monies I got because I went through the Depression.<sup>36</sup>

Ruthie, as it turned out, was told that her work at the studio would be only for a couple of months during the fall of 1932. Around Christmas time both she and Evie were laid off. Two weeks later, the studio called them back. Although Evie returned immediately, Ruthie, honoring a prior commitment, was to wait considerably longer. In fact, it wasn't until 1937, when the workload on *Snow White* demanded anybody and everybody, that she got a call from her friend Evie.

I'd just been on a trip up to Yosemite and seen the opening of the Bay Bridge or something. And she called me and said: "You want to come back to work?" And I said, "Really, after all this time?" She said, "Do you or don't you?" And I said "Yes, yes, yes!" And so I went back.

Thus this former painter began anew as a checker. The atmosphere now, however, during those last months to finish the picture, was hardly the same. In a word: "frenzied."

They were working around the clock. And like Evie worked... she [had] worked all night, I expect twelve-hour shifts or whatever it was, and I came in at 8 [a.m.]. And I can remember one morning I got in there. Evie – she's left handed – she writes right handed and erases with her left hand... And I'm walking in and here's Evie on the desk [sprawled out] like this and she's painting on the Queen: "Who's the fairest one of all?"... I say, "Evie?" She's fixing the cel, you know. When we worked, we got the finished stuff and if anything was wrong with it we had to fix it, you know. She's fixing it (laughs). "Evie! Go home!" "I can't, I've got to finish this because we're late."



Photo courtesy of Ruth Thompson

Walt in a jam: the ill-fated studio strike of 1941. "You know Walt loved, I mean he was friendly with everybody in the studio. He knew us all by name. See us in the hall, call us by name, you know. And we had that strike [in 1941] and he became a different person. I think he realized at that time that he was the boss. He was one of us before that...[With the strike,] he learned that he was It, you know. He was It before but – it was friendly It, you know...I can remember coming in from driving through the gate, parking the car and – the first day [of the strike] and he's sitting on the big things in front of the animation building...and his hat's turned up and I said, "Well, what are you going to do now?" He said, "I don't know." It was awful. I mean friends became enemies and you just dislike this person and that person because they went on strike." (Ruth Thompson interview)

And he did what he was gonna do – he walked through and left... Pretty soon the phone rings. And he started yelling at...Marie – she could hear the phone out here [at arm's length]- everybody could hear him say it: "IF EVER I BRING ANYONE OF ANY NOTE INTO THE STUDIO, I AM SHOWING HIM THE INK AND PAINT – I DO NOT WANT TO SEE ONE HEAD OVER THE TOP OF THOSE DESKS OR THEY WILL BE IMMEDIATELY **FIRED**!!"

*Snow White* premiered on Tuesday, December 21, 1937. Later that week the Ink and Paint girls got a thank-you gift personally from Walt. The results, however, were not exactly what he expected.

When the picture was finished, Walt came in with a painting cart, in which they delivered the paints to the girls to put on the cels, piled high with these great big...compacts – enameled back and beautiful things from, I suppose Robinson's or someplace. And gave each girl one – and the howl went up all the way down the thing. "Oh!" they looked in the mirror, "Oh, how awful!"

They were so tired that when they opened those compacts...and looked at themselves, they looked perfectly horrible! You could get pretty beat up at the end of a session of work at the pace at which we

This kind of euphoric madness was new to everyone. During "normal" periods things were much less hectic. However, on any given day productivity was expected, regardless of the circumstances. One day the Ink and Paint girls were visited by Walt, bringing with him one of the silver screen's biggest heart-throbs.

I think the inking supervisor was Marie Henderson [and we knew that Walt was coming in with somebody]...And, what do you know, here comes Walt and Cary Grant. Well, you see how high these things are, [the inking shelves in front of each desk]? Can you imagine heads over the top of those things – when Cary Grant walked in? We're supposed to be [working] – Walt's showing him how they do [it], and here's a whole bunch of heads sticking up there.

went. [We didn't get a thank-you note] but he just came and walked down the aisle himself and handed that compact to the girls. Each one had one and they all opened them up and looked at the mirror and they were all disheveled and face-smudged and everything and worn to a knob. And they just howled (laughs). I don't know how conscious he was at what happened but the girls were just *horrified* at what such awful hard work had done to them.

The next day things looked substantially better.<sup>37\*</sup>



## Notes

[Note: footnotes marked with an asterisk \* are intended mainly for specialists. They may be skipped by the general reader.]

<sup>1</sup> Even the lunch hours were staggered between the sexes. According to Shamus Culhane (interview, *op. cit.*), this was Mrs. Disney's idea. The only males to enter the Ink and Paint Department on a regular basis were Mr. Keener, the paymaster, and the traffic boys. According To Lucy Wheaton Yarick (*op. cit.*), "There was no mixing."

<sup>2\*</sup> According to unpublished records tabulated and kept by Isabelle Wheaton, there were approximately 42 inkers and 56 painters just prior to *Snow White*. By the end of production there were 66 of the former and 178 of the latter. However, as she noted in an additional memo, while the inkers were almost all full-time employees, the painters included some who worked for a short period of time, in some cases only a few hours. Memos from Isabelle Wheaton to Hazel Sewell dated June 2, 1939. Author's collection.

<sup>3\*</sup> Normally the training period for inkers was from two to six weeks (painters had no extended training period). Apparently these classes were only sporadically implemented until mid-decade. Night-time training classes (approximately four hours, five nights a week) were resumed in 1937 while *Snow White* was in production. One inker, originally a night-time trainee whose group then became the first (now day-time) one to be paid, recalled her sister in training for six months without pay (interview with inker Helen Nerbovig McIntosh, Winter, 1990). This six month-long training period (without pay) was corroborated by inker Ray McSpadden (interview with author, Winter, 1990). Many also had day jobs during their training period. Regarding the great length of the training period, "I think they wanted to be sure they had a group when they were ready and I think a lot of it was stringing you a long. They weren't quite ready but they didn't know when, so they just bilked you for all they could." (Helen Nerbovig McIntosh, *op. cit.*)

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Ruthie Tompson, April 21, 2001. "Painters were the lower-class nuns and the inkers were the high class nuns and we didn't fraternize that much." Since Ms. Tompson knew the Disney Brothers at the Kingswell Studio, her non-existent portfolio was waived.

<sup>5\*</sup> Interview with inker Virginia "Geno" Pearson, March 6, 1990. Another inking supervisor, with a kinder demeanor, was Martha Rose Bodie. Photo caption quote from interview with Marceil Clark Ferguson, *op. cit.*

<sup>6\*</sup> Interview with inker Marjorie Allison, March 6, 1990. Both Marjorie Allison and Geno Pearson were in the same inking training class.

<sup>7\*</sup> Interview with Evelyn Henry, later Mrs. Claude Coats (Claude was a background painter). She would later become an Inking supervisor.

<sup>8\*</sup> Interview with inker Geno Pearson, *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Grace Godino (February 4, 1990), who worked at the studio for several years in various departments. "It was good training. It worked. You stayed right with it to try to learn your craft...You worked in practically every department except animation. Walt didn't want women animators and he had good reason. Women get married and have children and he didn't want the interruptions. He wanted to hold on [to] those...men." Many women, however, did not marry nor take leave of absence and remained at their desks for a longevity equal to any animator. It will be recalled that new male recruits began at \$15 a week (or less).

<sup>10</sup> Marc Davis (*op. cit.*), distinctly remembers one such sequence at the beginning of *Snow White*, where she appears to jitter. In September of 1937 – when this scene was photographed – there was a particularly hot spell of several days. This was the cause of a slight but noticeable blemish in the animation. When seen in the final pencil test, Marc remembered it was perfectly smooth (by this time there was air conditioning in the new Ink and Paint building, but apparently only during the day). Source of information on cels from original draft of letter from Hazel Sewell, head of the Ink and Paint Department, to Dr. L.S. Deitchmann, Youngstown, Ohio, dated March 25, 1938. Author's collection. Following quote from interview with Marceil Clark Ferguson, *op. cit.*

<sup>11\*</sup> Helen Nerbovig McIntosh, *op. cit.* "Innovation" of colored ink lines from interview with Maurice Noble, *op. cit.*

<sup>12\*</sup> The following pens were used (Joseph Gelotte Pen Company): Number 290 – shading and general work; Number 303 – heavy work; Number 170 – medium work. Also, from C. Howard Hunt Pen Company: Number 100 – general work, not quite so flexible, and finally, from the Sheffield Pen Company: Number 417 – tracing line only (from letter of Hazel Sewell, cited above).

<sup>13\*</sup> Helen Nerbovig McIntosh, *op. cit.* Following quote from interview with Geno Pearson, *op. cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Helen Nerbovig McIntosh, *op. cit.* (who also provided the source for the photo caption on p. 308). Marceil Ferguson (*op. cit.*), added: "The technique was yes, your arm movement. You couldn't do it this way because you're handling a pen point on a slick surface and it didn't work that way. You held the cel with a pointer and you held the pen and then you would – all arm movement. All arm movement."

<sup>15</sup> Geno Pearson, *op. cit.* According to studio records, Virginia Haas worked from June 8, 1936 until "released" on November 14, 1941, apparently a victim of the studio strike.

<sup>16\*</sup> The studio archives gives Kathryn Kuhlman's dates as 1939-40. However, she appears on several group photos from the early 1930s (reproduced in the text), further proof that existing dates from the archives can only be used with caution.

<sup>17\*</sup> According to an unpublished memo from Isabelle Wheaton (*op. cit.*) to Hazel Sewell, dated June 19, 1936 (author's collec-

tion), there could be as many as twenty-eight colors painted on a single cel. But this number only referred to shorts. *Snow White* (although there are no known records confirming this) probably required cels with even more colors. For cel work being hard on eyes, interview with cel painter (later supervisor) Dot Smith Mullins, 1988. Compare also inker Evie Coats's (*op. cit.*) remarks on the constant strain on the eyes: "Practically blinded 'em."

<sup>18</sup> Not only heat but humidity affected a cel's performance. "Our cels have tiny pores that the paint bites into. In the period that the humidity is low and in addition to the fact that we have heat in the building, the cels shrink and loosen their hold of the paint. This condition we commonly call "paint chipping"...When the humidity is high, the moisture is retained in the cels and also in the paint, thus causing the paint to stick." Unpublished outline "Application of Paint" by Mary Weiser, head of Ink and Paint after Hazel Sewell (author's collection). "And they kept improving the quality of paint. They'd work and work on it and put certain things in it that would make it [flexible]. And then they had [to avoid putting] too much in or it would be sticky. They had different things they stir into it to make it a little stickier but not [too] sticky. Because if they didn't put some of that in, why, it would chip and peel off... So they had all kinds of things like that [that] they had to do with the paint." Interview with Katherine Kerwin, final color checker, Winter, 1990.

<sup>19</sup> "The Amazing Inside Story of How They Made *Snow White*, by Kirtley Baskette: *Photoplay*, April, 1938 and studio press book on the film's 50th Anniversary release. Paint was always mixed from powdered pigments, excepting rare colors made from dyes. These were obtained from various paint companies, including Dupont and A.J. Lynch Pigments. ("Mixing it Up With the Studio Paint Lab," *Disney Newsreel*, January 18, 1989) The studio's paint lab would eventually be headed by a Guatemalan scientist named Emilio Bianchi. His formulas, constantly improved for better adherence of the paint to the cels, are still in use today.

<sup>20</sup> Background painter Maurice Noble, *op. cit.*, who would later head the Color Model Department. Color design for *Snow White*, particularly the background colors, were intentionally muted. Walt himself felt that for a feature, the strong colors normally used in the shorts would exhaust the viewer. Thus, while backgrounds were generally delicately shaded, even the characters were made to appear more subtle than in any previous cartoon. Not until their second feature, *Pinocchio*, did colors take on more of their former saturation. Recent DVD releases have significantly altered *Snow White*'s original palette.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Grace McCurdy, 1988. Some of the Ink and Paint girls were very loyal to their mistress, Hazel Sewell, Walt's sister-in-law. Grace would not mention her name until I had my own credentials in order. Grumpy's tunic is, in fact, deep burgundy – it is his hat and trousers that are mulberry-colored (Sneezy's pants are also purple). For two-month time period for color selection (above), interview with Dot Smith Mullins, *op. cit.*

<sup>22\*</sup> Both quotes from interview with Maurice Noble, *op. cit.* The design of the box, however, stems directly from Walt. In a story meeting of September 26, 1936, he says: "The lock on

the little casket could be a dagger stuck through a heart.."

Regarding the color selection process, Maurice further added: "I would get the drawings and then I would sit down with Hazel [Sewell] and we'd talk about them and whatnot and then we would...go thru [the color charts] and we'd decide and make decisions. And I would take a piece of animation paper and make a drawing – do watercolor sketches or opaque drawings of it – try different color schemes. Then we'd try to match them up to the color charts...[See] each color was let down for a cel level [because of the density change each cel level created. So] we would have a very pale pink and then a lighter pink and then a medium pink and then a bright pink and so forth like that. So we'd have 15 different pinks – just of pink. This would be put on the color chart and we'd have it let down from the palest color down to saturation. And it would be in cards, like this and then eventually they put them on strips so we could flip them around and compare them and all...So that's what the color charts were." Contrary to conventional wisdom, Maurice could not recall selecting the color green (for the Queen's eyes) to symbolize envy. He insisted that it was a coincidence, stating how color selection was dependent upon more practical considerations. It is still possible, however, that such a connection might have been originally suggested by Walt himself.

<sup>23</sup> Interview with Dot Smith Mullins, *op. cit.*, who later became a final color checker as well as head of Ink and Paint. Dot claimed that Walt chose her to head the department because "no man would put anything over on me." This led to unfortunate consequences, however. She was later fired by Walt because of her attitude (but also perhaps thru machinations of Ken Peterson, one of Walt's more willful production supervisors). Interview with Ruthie Tompson (*op. cit.*), who added, "If he got upset with someone, he was upset with 'em for sure." Although firing was not a regular habit of Walt's, he was not one whose generosity would be taken for granted. Once an unsuspecting employee boasted, "Well, I'll get a raise for that." Walt said, "Out the door!" (*ibid.*)

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Lucy Wheaton Taliaferro Yarick, *op. cit.* Lucy would begin work as a cel painter on January 1, 1935. At the time all inkers and painters were still housed in the original studio building to which men were off limits. This did not stop several of them from vying for their attention, however, often flashing an animator's mirror on some young lass. Thus was Lucy "distracted," eventually marrying comic-strip artist Al Taliaferro.

<sup>25</sup> Rockwell Kent, American illustrator and painter (1882-1971) was especially noted for his contributions to deluxe editions of the classics like Shakespeare, Milton, Chaucer, as well as American authors, including a noteworthy *Moby Dick* (1930). He was also the author of *Wilderness: A Story of Quiet Adventure in Alaska* (G.P. Putnam, NY, 1920).

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Isabelle Wheaton and Lucy Wheaton Taliaferro Yarick, *op. cit.* Isabelle would eventually tally up and provide the definitive number of cels used in *Snow White* (see page 478). She later joined the army during World War Two and never returned to the studio. Her sister would remain a cel painter, marry the comic-strip artist Al Taliaferro, and later retire. Said Lucy regarding her work on *Snow White*: "We all

thought we'd turn white before it'd be finished." The reader will recall Isabelle's first day at Disney's from Chapter One, page 7.

<sup>27\*</sup> Author's collection. M35 and M36 refer to "Mickey's" (i.e. shorts with "regular" Disney characters): They are, respectively, *Pluto's Judgement Day* and *On Ice*. S29 "Silly Symphony," in this case, *Music Land*. This numbering system was put into effect when "Silly Symphonies" were inaugurated (or shortly after).

<sup>28\*</sup> The following is a slightly abridged version of the complete Ten Commandments:

#### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

1. Thou shalt not add too much water. All colors require less water for successful painting and uniform results. Too much water changes the color also. As a general rule all paints should be diluted, but not as much as has been the habit lately. This applies to the top colors especially. By the top colors we mean the 3, 4 and 5 values. These should NEVER be watery enough to "float." [Since colors had to be adjusted per cel level (see above) numbers were used. Chartreuse, e.g. would originally have a number followed by a 1 (the lightest shade), 2, 3, 4, or 5 (the darkest), depending on which cel level would be used. "Floating" paint is the application by a brush that is saturated with paint (usually thinned with water) and dabbed on. This was rarely done and usually on large areas where too many brush strokes might become visible when dry (phone interview with Ruthie Thompson, Spring, 2002).]

2. Thou shalt not float paint on cel. The best results are obtained by "flattening" the paint out on the cel...Floating paint on, does NOT break up the bubbles as is commonly supposed, it only aggravates the condition. Adding alcohol to any colors above 3 is forbidden.

3. Thou shalt honor thy fine sable-hair brushes. These brushes are very expensive, so please give them the best of care...You are supplied with the finest sable-hair imported brushes available...

4. Thou shalt test all paint before adding water. When paint in the jar is jelled and custardy one has a tendency to saturate it with water before testing. PLEASE don't do this. Chances are that this is the nature of the paint...

5. Thou shalt not add alcohol to black. Black requires very little water under normal circumstances...Try various strokes in difficult points with this in mind and notice the satin-smooth results and see how firmly it adheres to the ink lines! When black fails to cling to the ink line remember that it has been thinned too much!...

6. Thou shalt give special care to light values. As

these are the easiest colors to apply in the past we have always floated them on freely...The heavy floating of these lighter colors resulting in a paint on the cel consisting of two thirds water and one third paint is causing serious damage in the camera. This condition MUST be remedied at once. The only solution is the flattening out process with our present paint.

7. Thou shalt always paint the bright and vivid colors FIRST! (For example, Emerald Green or Red Violet) By carefully painting up to JUST the edge of the line with the colors that follow we will eliminate retakes that result from careless overlapping of the dangerous and potent colors.

8. Thou shalt always place blank cels under thy work. Thou shalt not use small cels under multiple plane cels. Please keep your gloves reasonably clean, as gloves stiffened by dried paint scratch the cels. Always keep your desk free of dust.

9. Thou shalt not scrape cels outside the painted area. Whenever possible, to rectify an error, blot up the loosened paint with a rag or blotter. We all know that scratched cels cause many camera worries and show up on the screen.

10. Thou shalt always check your finished work before handing it in. This is very important. When patching is necessary painting on top sometimes saves time, but be sure and obtain special permission before doing so. Very often special colors are mixed for this purpose. Use the new special cleaning cloth only for polishing your finished work. [When a wrong color has been applied, the cel, marked with a grease pencil by the checker, is returned to the painter. The paint is carefully scrapped off and re-painted. This process is called "patching."]

<sup>29\*</sup> Isabelle Wheaton, *op. cit.* Isabelle also apparently was for a time, at least, the 'official' supply order person. On one handwritten sheet is found: 1 lb rubber bands, 3 1/2 lbs Scripto lead - 4 leads to a box - dk red #2004(133), 5 1/2 lbs (of same) blue, 3 1/4 lbs green, 1 #30 Esterbrook ball bearing clip, 10 Asco fasteners, 1 paper clip remover, 1 ink erasure with brush, 3 ink jars with lids, 3 6 1/2 field cel covers (binder), 3 5 field cel (ditto), 3000 tabulating cards, 50 plain white typewriter bond (sheets), etc.

<sup>30\*</sup> Interview with Marceil Clark Ferguson, *op. cit.* These shadows are referred to as "contact shadows."

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* Marceil spent many evenings at Art's home in Tuxedo Terrace (which he rented with fellow animator Bill Tytla), listening to classical music, talking about literature, art and social issues, particularly communism. "Strictly 'hands off.' My brother made it clear that no one would touch me."

<sup>32</sup> Cels were extremely difficult to keep clean and free from dust and lint. Said checker Ruthie Thompson (*op. cit.*), "We did



everything we could to keep those cels *clean!*" "[Sometimes we would use alcohol] but mostly we could just do it with a soft cloth...[We – the checkers – didn't normally wear gloves]." (Katherine Kerwin)

<sup>33\*</sup> Interview with Katherine Kerwin, Winter, 1990. "When we were working on this picture (*Snow White*) Evie Sherwood...and I would work all night long and then leave in the morning so they could use our space. They had so many people working. And then, when it was all out in camera, then she and I – we got paid for this – we came and brought a good book and went in our great big [lounge] in our new department and we just – we'd read and talk and sleep and the camera guys would come in and give us a shake if we were asleep and repair a cel if it needed to be repaired." Willoughby "Wick" Hays was a final checker for the penciled animation before it was sent to Ink and Paint. His name is found on many of *Snow White's* exposure sheets. There are no corresponding color (i.e. Ink and Paint) "Okay" dates supplied by the color checkers.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* (as well as previous paragraph quotation). Katherine added: "Boy, I tell you, Walt wanted – he didn't care what it

cost, just have it very accurate, you know. And after he died, what a difference around there: 'Oh don't do it so fancy,' you know, 'let it be cheaper.' It took on a whole different scope after he passed away."

<sup>35\*</sup> It seems Ruthie is confusing Hazel Sewell with Kathleen Dollard who, along with Lillian Bounds (the future Mrs. Disney) were the two main inkers and painters at the time. Lillian arrived on the scene in early Spring, 1924 while Hazel's name is not recorded until much later.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Ruthie Thompson, *op. cit.* The reader will recall from the previous chapter (footnote 27) Bud Dubrock's accident and wheel-chair days – brightened on occasion by a compassionate Walt who let him have free rein at his then-new Disneyland. Ruthie Thompson would later work in various departments until her retirement in 1975. In 2000 she was made a Disney "Legend." The next three extended quotes are also from the same source.

<sup>37\*</sup> Interview with Isabelle and Lucy Wheaton *op. cit.*