

## A tribute to Fred Heddleson

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on December 14, 2010)

I am pleased to be able to bring you a story written by Rebecca Carroll, author of *Milk Glass Moon*, a novel set in 1942 and telling the story of one family when they had to leave their home to make way for the Manhattan Project's Oak Ridge. Here, at my request, she has focused her tremendous talent on a non-fiction story about one of our own local artists, my friend – Fred Heddleson. Enjoy her wonderful story.

### *Fred Heddleson: A Near-Century of Art and Memories*

By: Rebecca Carroll

Fred Heddleson began drawing back in 1925 before many of us were born and he was a school boy and perhaps a bit bored with school. A spry, 93-year old with sparkling blue eyes who just recently received an email with a request for several historic buildings around Oak Ridge that he should draw, Heddleson has slowed down some, but he is really is too busy to think about taking it easy.

The city of Oak Ridge commissions him to do their annual Christmas card, and he's also busy settling his late wife Peggy's affairs. She was also an artist; felt banners were her main medium (a related story is being developed that features these banners - Ray), but she also worked in ceramics and glass and was a basket maker as well as a prolific writer.

As art, Heddleson's drawings are just plain pleasing to the eye. They portray the chosen building or landscape as warm, nostalgic looks into the past. He draws many buildings and landscapes that many of us are familiar with such as the Chapel on the Hill, the old Solway Bridge, and other Oak Ridge buildings, but he also draws some images that are made up completely. Photographs supply him with ideas as well.

His favorite buildings to draw are barns because they have their own characteristics and personalities. He can make changes to the drawings at various stages to portray different seasons. His first commissioned drawings were of barns.

He can even add the "Vol" touch by tinting some drawings with orange and planting a University of Tennessee motif somewhere in the picture. He has also painted his own Christmas cards for 35 years. His first card was a drawing of a red wagon. Most of the cards are scenes with barns and churches with lots of snow.

In addition to the official city Christmas cards (they include the Chapel on the Hill, the peace bell, the commemorative walk near the Civic Center, the new fire station, and the service center at Gamble Valley), he has drawn the original Oak Ridge houses A, B, C, D, F, the Guest House, a victory cottage, a dormitory, a flattop, a hutment, a trailers, the Oliver Springs and K-25 west guard gates, a horse barn off the turnpike used when the gates were still closed, the Snow White restaurant, and the old cafeteria next to the boys club. He also did six commemorative postcards for the Secret City festival.

His customers like the Chapel on the Hill the most, but they also like the flat top, the Solway Bridge, and the C house drawings. He admits it is difficult to know what people will like, and he does commissioned work on personal residences and buildings.

He has also sketched some nudes and a self portrait from a photograph (featured on the back of his barn book). He recently did 18 light houses that are located around the Chesapeake Bay, and his daughter Judy sold them in her shops in Norfolk and Virginia Beach.

Heddleson draws what is commonly called pen and ink drawings. He uses repidograph pens, using different widths and points depending on what is needed. He uses India ink—non-fading, archival, and waterproof—but he sometimes sketches with a pencil first—especially if he is relying on memory for the image, so he can make changes.

He uses a process where he draws, makes a print, then draws on the print, prints again, repeating the process until the desired effect of a faded background is achieved. While he doesn't color most of his

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drawings, if he tints them, he uses watercolors. He tried oils and acrylics but prefers watercolors. It typically takes him 8-12 hours to complete one drawing, and he may change it two or three times before he is satisfied.

Katy's Kitchen is one of the most interesting images Heddleson has drawn. Very secretive, Katy's Kitchen was a barn and silo between Y-12 and ORNL. Nuclear material was stored there in a bank-type vault, and guards were posted in the top of a silo for surveillance.

The story goes that a woman named Katy ate her lunch in the back of the barn, thus giving it its name. Heddleson got the pleasure of meeting Katy once and was a bit surprised: she was dressed up on her way to a party; in his head, he had pictured a working girl.

Heddleson has attended art workshops and classes led by professional artists such as Jim Grey, Kathy Holland, and Tony Couch. Recounting some of his training, Heddleson once took five gallons of wine to share with his fellow classmates during a week-long Jim Grey workshop.

He has taken classes through ORICL (Oak Ridge Institute for Continued Learning) and studied art and art history under several professors at Roane State. He took finger sketching from an art professor from Knoxville, but he finally decided he just couldn't do it. He told his teacher this, and the teacher told him he was his first failure.

Heddleson credits his late wife Peggy as his most influential advisor and critic. When he met her, he thought she would be his captive teacher, but he says he was the "captive student." Peg had graduated from and taught art at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, and was a good teacher; he learned much from her.

They later worked together at shows exhibiting both her art and his, serving as mutual advisors and assistants. He describes Peg as passionate about her banners as a medium to "shout out" messages about women's rights, domestic violence, and other social issues. His admiration of Peg as both an artist and a strong woman is evident in the fond and loving way he speaks about her.

Heddleson became his late wife Peg's caregiver after she had a stroke in 2008 (she passed in 2009). He was able to rekindle some cooking skills he had learned in Boy Scouts, and he fondly recalls the time Peg pushed her plate to the middle of the table and said, "I can't eat this." When he tried it, he couldn't eat it either!

Missing Peg's companionship, he would like to date again and even would like to write about dating in different periods of one's life, and he has been through most of them! He laments about how he has seen a change in morals and about how difficult it is to date when you are 90+ years old. "You have to get a fast start with the ladies before they pass away," he jokes.

[Rebecca's story of Fred Heddleson will continue next week – Ray]

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Rebecca Carroll and Fred Heddleson



Chapel on the Hillc.jpg: Fred's artist drawing of Chapel on the Hill, one of the official Oak Ridge City Christmas Cards