

## A tribute to Fred Heddleson, part two

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on December 21, 2010)

Last week we introduced this non-fiction story by Rebecca Carroll, author of *Milk Glass Moon*. Let's join Rebecca as she continues her story about Fred.

*Fred Heddleson: A Near-Century of Art and Memories* by Rebecca Carroll (continued)

Although Fred Heddleson liked to draw as a boy, his education and career have also lent themselves to his art. He grew up in New Matamoras, a small town on the Ohio River in southeastern Ohio. His boyhood was idyllic—Mark Twainish like—with he and his friends swimming and kayaking in the river and chasing paddleboats to ride on their wakes.

It was in that river that he began believing in fate. He was swimming to an island in the river one day and got into trouble because of the bigger than usual waves and strong current. He started to panic but then realized he should remain calm. He got to the island and believes something helped him do it: fate. In another river adventure, Heddleson and his friend Sappo built two, 10-foot kayaks from plans they ordered from *Boys Life*.

The kayaks had a light wooden frame covered with canvas and could be sailed with the wind, but they couldn't track them. They sailed about three miles up the river, taking enough food to camp overnight. While they were gathering and chopping wood for a fire, Sappo's ax slipped and cut the fat part of his leg just below the knee.

The gash was about two inches long but not very deep and bled profusely. It was getting dark, and they had no lights on their kayaks, so they bandaged it with some Band-aids and went to bed in their pup tent. They paddled home the next day, proud that they had used their Boy Scout skills and the Boy Scout motto of "Be prepared."

Many other experiences shaped Heddleson's life and career. He remembers when he was about 10 years old, he was interested in carpenter work. He had an uncle who lived about 50 miles away and built houses. Heddleson's father decided it would be a good experience to send him to stay with his Uncle Everett and serve as an apprentice.

Uncle Everett took Heddleson home with him, but the problem was he was in the middle of negotiating contracts and not building any houses. Heddleson stayed home with his cousins, who were 5 and 6 year-old boys, nicknamed "the wrecking crew." They made Heddleson miserable, and he became very homesick.

When his dad called to check on him, Uncle Everett put him on the phone, and he began crying. Uncle Everett met his dad halfway to deliver him home. He learned that homesickness sure made one miserable but would not kill you.

As the Great Depression came on, his family fared well furnishing fuel to road contractors, and his father also ran 3 school buses. When Heddleson was about 12, his father had a car and an old truck at his garage and needed them home. He let Heddleson drive the truck—home was about a mile away.

Heddleson did okay until he met a vehicle on his side of the road. Heddleson steered the car into a grassy strip until the car passed. His father told him he did well, and when Heddleson turned 16, his father got him a chauffeur's license so Heddleson could drive a gasoline truck in the family business.

Heddleson's father was 19 years old when he was born and was more like a brother than a father but was still a good father. Once Heddleson was on a date and ran out of the road. The tail light on the car got caught in a fence and was bent. He showed it to his father the next day, expecting a lecture. He told his father he ran off the road because he was "necking" and not paying attention to his driving. Surprisingly, his father told him to pull off the road the next time he wanted to neck!

Heddleson also drove a school bus for his father. There was lots of cold weather and snow in

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southeastern Ohio, and his last pick-up was a little 1<sup>st</sup> grade girl who had to walk quite a distance to get to the bus stop. Heddleson made an extra effort to pick the girl up regardless of the road conditions. He would let her sit in front of the heater to warm up as she was usually shivering by the time she got to the bus.

Interesting stories abound in Heddleson's life. He recounts when in 1938, he and classmate Lou Helmuth pooled their money, bought a Roadster for \$30 that they named the Cannon Ball, and spent two months driving 10,000 miles throughout the United States. Before they left, they made a list of people they might know who lived in various stops along the way. They would call on them and get a night's lodging and a good meal.

In Los Angeles, one of their stops was in an exclusive neighborhood. The young men asked if they could pitch a tent in the back yard, but the gentleman let them stay in one of the bedrooms, and they were treated like royalty, letting them use the man's Packard convertible for a week (theirs looked a little road weary). The family also took them to their private beach club and other Los Angeles' attractions.

At other times during the trip, they mowed yards for a meal. Heddleson says trust was much different then; no one was afraid of them like you would imagine would be the case now. Heddleson and Helmuth each kept a log during the trip, and Heddleson still has his and a copy of Helmuth's log. They kept in touch until Helmuth's health declined and his death in 2008.

After his father died (at age 41), Heddleson left his senior year of college to return home to take over the business. One cold night after dark, Heddleson was lying on his back, putting chains on a piece of equipment, when he realized it was a "hell of a way to live," so in 1940, he went back to Case Engineering School and finished his degree in mechanical engineering with a specialty in aeronautics.

While people in Oak Ridge were celebrating the end of World War II and their efforts in its end, Heddleson was having his own celebration at Indian Lake near Lima, Ohio. He was visiting a friend when the news came across the radio that the war had ended. His friend ran out the back door shouting for Heddleson to follow.

The friend went into his barn and climbed up into the hay loft. He had a calliope salvaged from a local steam boat. "Fred, play that thing," he said. Heddleson played all the patriotic songs he knew for about an hour. The friend climbed down to get something but came back up and told Heddleson to come down and look. The yard was full of about 100 people, listening, talking, and celebrating the war's end. The loud music of the calliope and their mutual celebration brought them together.

Although Heddleson did not come to Oak Ridge until 1952, he has an indirect connection to the early years of Oak Ridge. In the World War II years, he worked in Baltimore for the Glen L. Martin Aircraft Company, manufacturer of bombers. He remembers walking through the plant during his lunch break, looking at the bombers being assembled. Martin built the B26, a "very hot" bomber that not many could fly well; it was called the "widow maker."

Heddleson's interest in it gained him a ride that ended with a mop and bucket after he became sick while flying. At his next job at Westinghouse, he built small electric motors and engine generators for aircraft. Later, at Eglin Air Base in Pensacola, Florida, during World War II, he flew four hours a day for six weeks to test stability of gun turrets on bombers. Remembering his earlier experience getting sick after flying in the B26, he says he didn't get sick, but the war ended, and so did the project.

After the war, he left Westinghouse and did architectural work and remodeling. That work dried up because of material shortages. He then went to a chemical plant back home in Ohio and then got a good offer to design plumbing and heating systems in Parkersburg, West Virginia. Fate intervened, he believes, when he read in the newspaper about a company from Oak Ridge interviewing local people. He went to the interview and was hired on the spot. He moved to Oak Ridge in 1952 and began working in Engineering at ORNL.

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After he transferred to the Nuclear Safety Information Center, he was responsible for a report on commercial nuclear power plants. He used his sketching skills to sketch an aerial view of each plant that applied for a license (over 100 plants) and worked on various projects at both Y-12 and ORNL until his retirement in 1980. He did consulting work on various nuclear problems for ten years and then retired again. His mechanical drafting background helped him in both his career and with his pen and ink drawings.

[Rebecca concludes her story on Fred Heddleson next week, join us for the conclusion of this excellent tribute to one of our renowned artists – Ray]



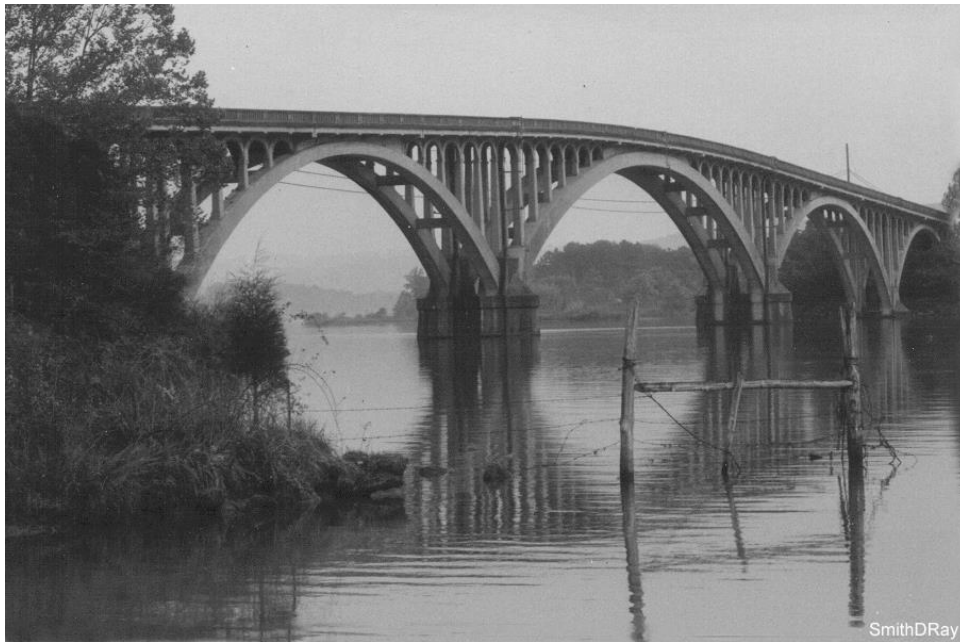
Rebecca Carroll and Fred Heddleson

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One of my all time favorites of Fred's art – The Old Solway Bridge



A favorite photograph I made of the Old Solway Bridge