

## A tribute to Fred Heddleson, part three

(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on December 28, 2010)

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

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

Fred Heddleson's interest in flight simulators led to an interest in computers in the early 1960s when he had a computer built for the simulators. He had to keep upgrading his computers as the simulator tapes became more complex and advanced. He uses computers today but admits he is a bit intimidated—doesn't want to do something that will cause the computer to crash and have to take it to a repairman. His aeronautical background led Heddleson to get his pilot's license when he was 55. He liked flying for the sheer pleasure of it.

He maintained his license for 15 years and had to give it up when he could no longer pass the annual physical. He redirected his love of flying to the radio controlled model airplanes. Surprisingly, Heddleson's interest in computers has not transferred to an interest in telephones; he was scared of them as a child and does not like to use them now because of hearing loss. Heddleson has also been interested in Native American lore. As a Boy Scout leader, he developed a show about Indian traditions, and it became a successful fundraiser for local PTA groups and Boy Scouts.

Heddleson has seen lots of notable inventions: the telephone, indoor plumbing, radios, television, record players, air conditioning, but computers have impressed him the most. When juke boxes for 78 rpm records went out of vogue, he bought two juke boxes for \$25 each. He reveals his humorous side when he recounts a story of wiring the juke box in the basement through some organ speakers upstairs. He and a friend fooled several visitors by pretending the friend was playing the organ, but the sound was really coming from the juke box.

Although he retired 30 years ago, Heddleson has never really retired. His interests are many: he plays the organ for his supper two to three times a week at a local retirement center. In his early days of playing, he was playing in a restaurant in Kingston when an elderly man asked him to play a piece he had written when he and his wife celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. Heddleson played the song, but there was no response. He played it again and still no response. After the 3<sup>rd</sup> time, the group applauded and cheered; Heddleson still wonders why they didn't applaud the first 2 times.

Another time a young couple with a baby and the grandparents came in and said they had just had their baby baptized and wanted Heddleson to play something for the baby. Heddleson was a bit at loss at what to play but played "Jesus Loves Me." The family was happy. At the Davis Cafeteria (in the old Downtown Shopping Center in Oak Ridge), a man used to come in regularly and sit close to the organ.

On one evening, the man asked him to play "My Blue Heaven" and "Your Cheatin' Heart." Heddleson still wonders what was going on in the man's life at the time. Playing now for over 40 years, he has also played at the old Holiday Inn, the Oak Ridge Country Club, and the Elks Club. He also plays one day a week at the Keystone Elder Care at First United Methodist.

Playing by ear, he plays 1920s, 30s, and 40s music and takes requests that he can usually play unless they are contemporary. He constantly worries about the volume. Some want it louder, and others want him to be playing quietly in the background so they can talk. He takes requests, and the beautiful "Stardust" and "Somewhere My Love" are his most requested songs.

Other artistic endeavors include jewelry making, and Heddleson was once an accomplished water skier. When he was 46, he and 2<sup>nd</sup> wife Freda lived on the lake in Kingston, and he got fairly good skiing on one ski going backwards with Freda as his driver. He realizes he was not as good as some of the younger skiers on the lake, but he was good for a 58 year old.

Heddleson has also been a successful real estate developer. When TVA sold land joining Watts Bar Lake in 1955, he bought a few acres in the Stump Creek across the lake from Long Island Marina. He added 2

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other private purchases to that and had 34 acres with about 2000 feet of shore line. He had a road built into the property and sold individual lake front lots, and the property now has about 15 homes.

Heddleson speaks fondly of his three wives. His first wife Ruth had a French heritage, and he married her the day after he graduated from Case. He was a country boy, and she was a city girl; they couldn't reconcile their differences, so they divorced. He had custody of daughter Judy but had to work, so he left her with a couple who had no children.

He then married Freda, and after a couple of months of adjustment, he went to get Judy. The couple wanted to adopt her and made it difficult for Heddleson to get her. He took desperate measures and kidnapped Judy and moved back to southeastern Ohio. He and Freda had a daughter, Janet, soon after. Heddleson says, "Many good things come to an end, and so did our marriage."

Heddleson met his beloved Peggy 3 years later, and they were married one year later. They had both been single long enough to be independent, so they mutually agreed that they would have an independent marriage, which meant each had his and her own life and their joint life, and each had his and her own money.

In addition to daughters Judy and Janet, Heddleson has three stepchildren whom he remains close to: Tina, Peter, and Kirk; two grandchildren; six step grandchildren; and three great grandchildren. Judy describes him as a true Renaissance man and as generous, recounting a story when he picked up a young hitchhiking couple between Kingston and Oak Ridge.

Heddleson was on his way to work in Oak Ridge one rainy day when he saw the couple walking along the road. The man was carrying a small child, and the woman had a small dog on a leash. Heddleson stopped and offered them a ride into town. They got in and said they needed to get to I-40 to hitch a ride to Louisville, Kentucky. Heddleson originally planned to let them out at the Interstate, but he couldn't bear to put them out in the rain, so he took them all the way to Louisville.

He arrived home that evening around supper time, and needless to say, he did not make it to work that day! During the trip, he had learned the woman was pregnant, and a few months later, he received a birth announcement.

Even though Heddleson remains active and happy for the most part, his conversation is sprinkled with some sadness; he's the lone surviving male of Stover High School in Ohio, class of 1935. One female classmate is also still with us. "My journey has been a long one, and I am still learning," he says.

However, Heddleson does not linger on the losses in his life. He is busy working on the next Christmas card and handing out advice to budding artists. He says to "draw, draw, draw every day and take art lessons."

Art for him is the endless search for better pictures, color coordination, and artistry in his music. Heddleson attributes his full and long life to "three good wives, joyful living, and a glass of wine every evening." I suspect he is being a little modest here; with his pen in hand and his other ample talents, he has brought joy to many in his near century of living.

Ray: There you have it! I hope you have enjoyed Rebecca's tribute to Fred Heddleson. Look for his art this Christmas as he has again created the city of Oak Ridge's official Christmas card.

A second series of articles is being written that focuses on Peggy's banners. Fred takes great pride in Peggy's artistic approach to creating unique banners and writing poetry. He has cataloged all of Peggy's work. I think you will enjoy learning about Peggy's banners in an upcoming *Historically Speaking*. – Ray

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Rebecca Carroll and Fred Heddleson



Fred's official City of Oak Ridge Christmas Card for 2010

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Fred proudly displays on the wall of his art studio at his home all of the official City of Oak Ridge Christmas Cards