

Peggy Heddleson – a true artist with a passion for banners
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on March 29, 2011)

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Earlier, *Historically Speaking* featured a series of articles telling the story of one of Oak Ridge's most prolific artists, Fred Heddleson. His drawings are a mainstay of our community. He routinely draws the official Oak Ridge city Christmas Card. He is a regular artist who displays his artwork at our annual Secret City Festival. His drawings of historic structures representing Oak Ridge history are popular items and sought after by many visitors to our city.

Fred agreed to allow Rebecca Carroll, author of *Milk Glass Moon*, to write his story and let me publish it in *Historically Speaking*, provided I would also do a series on his wife, Peggy's art. I proudly agreed and asked Deborah Schenk to write that series. Rebecca did a great job on Fred's story published a few weeks ago.

This article begins a three-part series written by Deborah Schenk telling the story of Peggy Heddleson at the request of Fred Heddleson, Peggy's loving husband. Fred wants you to know the beauty of his beloved Peggy as expressed in her banners.

He has cataloged her portfolio of banners, many made during the later years of her life when she had a great deal to say based on life experiences and chose to do so through her unique and often personal banners with often unusual, yet piercing messages. Her banners are widely known and appreciated.

Deb Schenk says of her, "Peggy Heddleson started life in 1928 in the farming community of Benson, Minnesota. Certainly, there was little emphasis there placed upon pursuing artistic endeavors which had no practical purpose.

"Peggy, however was gifted with a box of crayons and the ability to see beauty in even the ugliest of situations. Thus began her lifelong pursuit of art and beauty in many shapes and forms.

"Peggy is best known for her banners, which have been displayed around Oak Ridge in several locations, as well as around the country. Peggy also worked in clay, ceramics, basket weaving, water colors, and poetry writing.

"She also collected anything she considered beautiful, whether technically artwork or not. It would seem that Peggy's goal was to be completely immersed in the glory of this world in all of its presentations.

"Peggy expressed herself most prolifically through her banners. These fall into three categories, though there are elements that span across the entire body of work.

"There are banners Peggy made for her church with a liturgical theme. There are banners which are pure artistic work. Lastly, there are banners through which Peggy found a voice for her opinions and even private emotions.

"Peggy's first inspiration to make banners came from seeing them in her church. Peggy's work and words demonstrate a beautiful, deep, and exceedingly personal relationship with God. The personal nature of her relationship gave her the freedom and courage to re-interpret traditional themes to incorporate her own style and opinions.

"Some of the themes even gently question accepted norms. Peggy had a knack in this area for opening up a new line of thought with only a phrase and without becoming irreverent.

"One particular banner demonstrates Peggy's level of comfort in her relationship to God. She was inspired by song writer, Dore Previn, whom Peggy credits as her mentor. In one song, Dore addressed Jesus personally, asking Him questions related to His human nature.

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"Peggy found the concept wonderful! On a white background are the traditional liturgical symbols for Jesus, also in white. Across the foreground is the question, 'Did you like to walk on water?'

"The questions are intentionally made 'using the full color wheel representing all human experiences,' in Peggy's own words. It would seem that Peggy not only wanted to share the beauty and depth of her own relationship, but invites us to share it as well.

"In another banner Peggy, an advocate for feminist issues, questioned the concept of God's nature as exclusively male. A joyful banner decorated with ribbons and hearts reads 'Rejoice for unto us is born this day a baby girl.' Again, Peggy questions traditional norms and opens discussion.

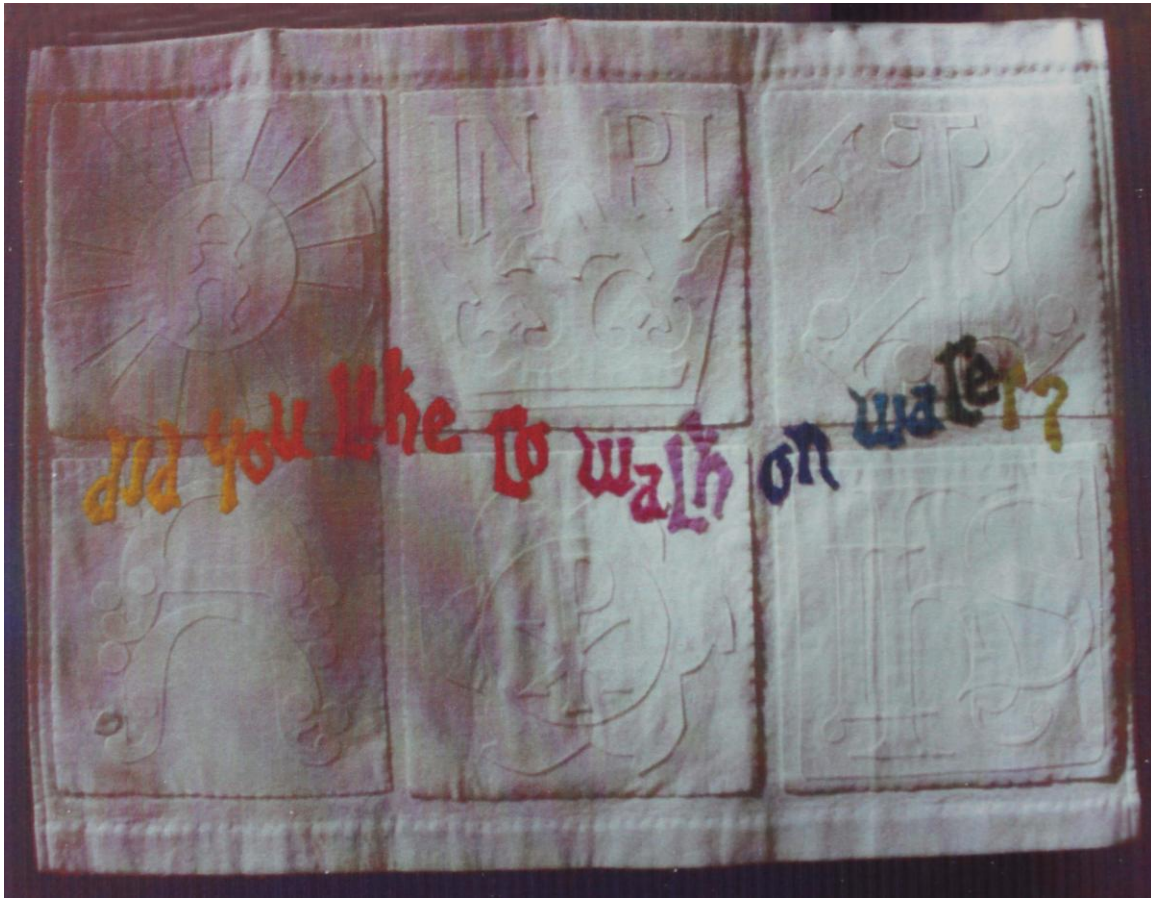
Thanks Deb, for a wonderful introduction to Peggy Heddleson and her art!

There are not many people who can achieve what Peggy achieved with banners. Many of us struggle with a desire to say something significant or substantial about life, but have no idea what medium or method would best convey our thoughts. Peggy knew. Her chosen medium of words, colors and textures woven together in a medium known simply as banners, achieved for her the desired result.

Peggy glorified her relationship with God and with others through her simple banners, now left behind for us to enjoy and to interpret the meaning they hold for our lives. She lives on and her love for God is evident through her banners.

Next we will examine Peggy's banners in light of her artistic framework and finally we will take an insightful look at her chosen manner of conveying very personal feelings, thoughts and cares through her banners. So, there you have the first of the three installments Deb has written about Peggy Heddleson and her artistic, yet subtly "in your face" banners challenging traditional thought through simple yet elegant banners.

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Peggy's banner asking Jesus personal questions such as "Did you like to walk on water?" – a simple yet profound concept of one's relationship with Jesus. This banner was inspired by songwriter and Peggy's mentor, Dore Previn.

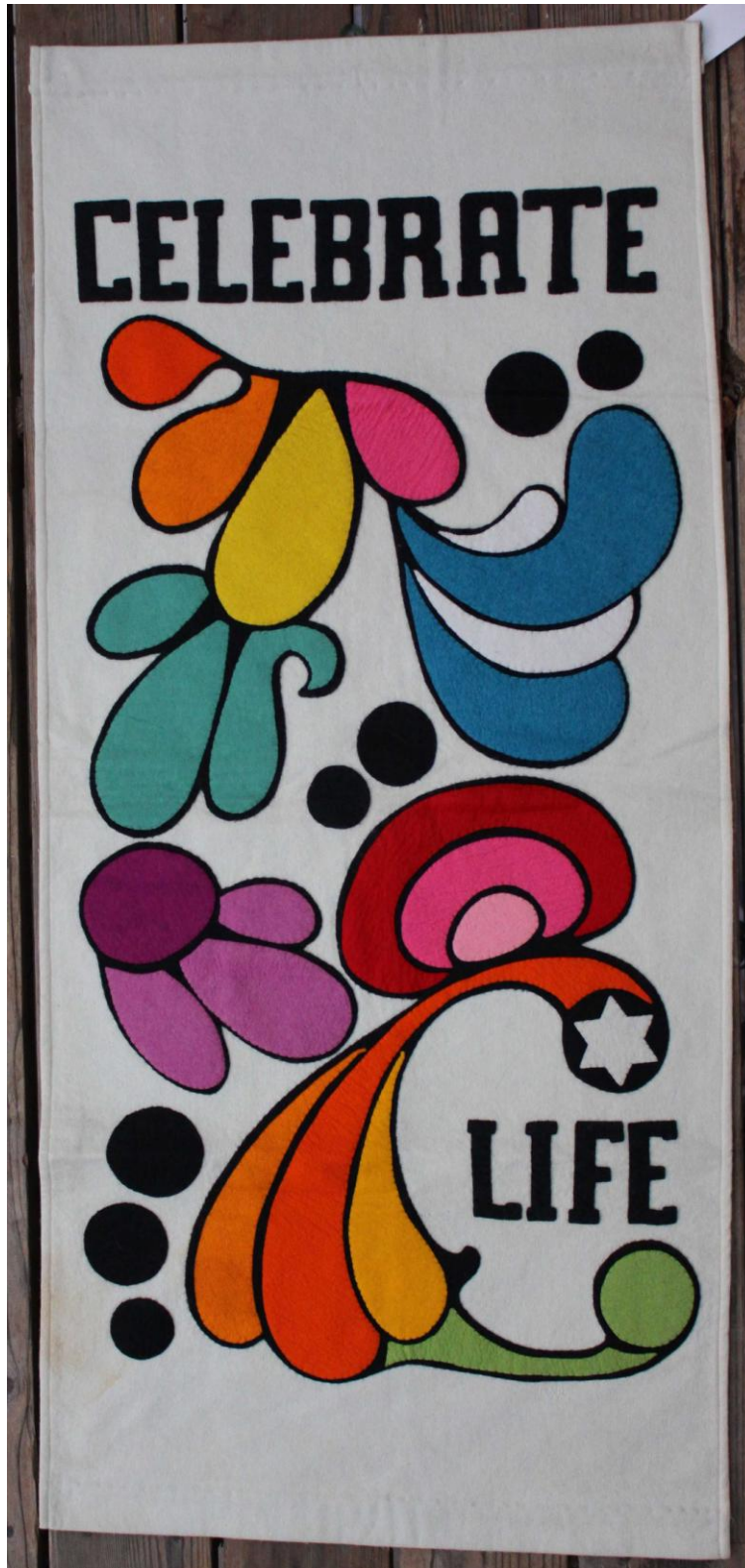
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Rejoice for unto us this day is born – a baby girl! Peggy's way to raise the questions that she felt were important to consider. Just a slight modification of a well known phrase, but a profound change in meaning and thus very thought provoking, which really was her aim.

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One of Fred's favorites, Celebrate Life! Simple but powerful.