

Peggy Heddleson – artist extraordinaire
(As published in *The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking* column on April 5, 2011)

Deborah Schenk continues her appreciation for the artist Peggy Heddleson, “Not only did Peggy make banners that reflected her deep religious convictions and her relationship with God, she also exhibited a most unique and highly unusual artistic ability.

“She sought to simply capture the beauty she saw in all her surroundings. She accomplished this goal by both collecting and creating in multiple mediums and art forms. However, her passion clearly remained with her banners. [This banner art is simply the most profound expression of artistic thought I have seen anywhere – Ray]

Deb continues, “One of Peggy’s earliest influences was a Norwegian folk art form known as rosemaling. Peggy was of Norwegian descent and was born in Benson, Minnesota but raised in a Norwegian community in Milan, Minnesota. [Milan was founded in 1879 by Norwegian immigrants and has retained the flavor of a small ethnic village, according to its web site – Ray]

“Rosemaling describes a style of painting, typically on wooden items. Generally, the work consists of stylized floral designs and curving scrollwork. Norwegian immigrants brought the technical knowledge with them to America as well as physical examples of the art on wooden trunks and boxes.

“When Peggy was born in 1928, rosemaling was in the midst of an artistic revival in America. Undoubtedly, she would have been exposed to the paintings on both antiques and newer items.

“Among Peggy’s many banners are about a dozen emulating the rosemaling style. Vibrant examples of color and form using felt instead of paint. The influence of this style is clear in much of Peggy’s work.

“Even when the banner is not so clearly related to rosemaling, there are stylized flowers and a flowing composition that hints of the art form. This style of art plainly had an influence in all of Peggy’s creations.

“Peggy attempted to capture anything she found beautiful. She clearly favored floral motifs throughout all of her work. There are banners in which she directly sought to copy an image, such as designs inspired by oriental rugs. One in particular she found in a magazine and even used a magnifying glass to be sure to get all the details.

“Peggy’s largest banner and her self-proclaimed ‘masterpiece’ was motivated by a magazine photograph of a garden. The banner measures eight by six feet. Using her typical black background, Peggy created an amazing composition of color and form. Each flower gorgeous in its own right, they all come together in a completed sense of harmony from chaos. The banner took Peggy nearly a year to finish and she was obviously proud of the resulting accomplishment.

“Peggy incorporated beauty into all of her art work and this is only a brief introduction to the banners she made for that sole purpose. Once again, Peggy invites the viewer to share in her passionate images of the world’s beauty, just as she shared her personal expressions of her faith.

“Lastly, we will look at Peggy’s banners that share her most personal opinions and emotions.

Oh my, we have been given insight into the growth of an artist and her influences that drove her art. Deb has gained insight into Peggy through her banners. Fred knows what Deb is discovering. He has known it for a long time. Peggy was truly a special person. She had talents and abilities that superseded her station in life and enabled her to reach far beyond the bounds of a typical life. She attained heights few of us can achieve.

Fred saw in her the great talent and skill. He experienced her frustration with the lack of understanding of by the masses of the beauty that surrounds us all. She attempted to break through using her medium of banners to awake the sleeping understanding of life in us all.

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Peggy's largest work and her self-proclaimed masterpiece

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What a work of art is woman – a whimsical play on Da vinci's drawing of man