

Hazelle Hedges Rollins

Puppet Creator
1910-1984

by Barbara Magerl

The first puppet that artist Hazelle Hedges made, as a new graduate of the University of Kansas, was for a young neighbor boy. Soon so many requests came for her imaginative creations that she started a puppet business, Hazelle, Inc., in 1933. By 1935 she was doing an international business!

Hazelle married industrial engineer John Woodson Rollins in 1941, who took charge of sales and production machinery for the factory which became one of the largest puppet firms in the world. Some years it produced over 50,000 large puppets and nearly three times more finger puppets. Hazelle also became a founder of Puppeteers of America.

The artist developed 75 characters and animals which were widely used by hospitals and the Head Start program for preschoolers. She created a very popular puppet family of father, mother, brother, sister, and baby. Her colorful factory was a favorite place for children's tours.

A keen businesswoman, Rollins was the first woman chairman of the Kansas City Advisory Council of the Small Business Administration and was also a director of the Women's Chamber of Commerce. She was a director of Camp Fire Girls and belonged to the Kansas City Branch of the National League of American Pen Women. A world traveler, Rollins was president of the Women's Commission for International Relations and Trade and a member of People to People International.

In 1975, after producing over a million puppets, she sold the company and retired. Most of her collection, which included rare antique puppets, went to four institutions including the Kansas City Museum and the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. The Puppetry Guild of Greater Kansas City later obtained some of her puppets and they now remain in their hometown.

A lifelong Kansas Citian, Hazelle Hedges Rollins died in 1984 and is buried at Mt. Moriah Cemetery.



Sources

"Puppet Manufacturer Hazelle Rollins Dies." *The Kansas City Times*, 26 March 1984.

"Puppets Populated Her Life." *The Kansas City Star*, 16 June 1993.

Who's Who of American Women, 4th ed. Chicago: A. N. Marquis Co., 1966.

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