

Helen Kelley



(1927-2008)

Inducted into The Quilters Hall of Fame in 2008 in Marion, Indiana

Born April 28, 1927, in Englewood, New Jersey, of English and German heritage, Helen Kelley was familiar with a sewing machine from youth, and developed a love for theater while in high school. She taught herself to quilt as an about-to-be bride in 1946.

In 1972 a story about a family quilt she had made from quilt blocks garnered from friends around the world for her daughter's wedding was featured in the Minneapolis Tribune, the city she had made her home since 1962. The news coverage opened unexpected opportunities to teach quilting in the Minneapolis area. Consequently, Kelley became a founding member of the Minnesota Quilt guild in 1978 and its organizing president 1980-82. An international teaching career was born soon thereafter. Criss-crossing American, Europe and New Zealand, Kelley spread her love of quilting and her love of the relationships they engendered wherever she went. Her total number of quilts would eventually top 150, thirteen of them commissioned, and each one carefully and thoroughly researched. A columnist since 1983 with Quilters Newsletter, the oldest continuously published magazine dedicated to quilting and quilt history, she would eventually also write 7 books. Her book, *Every Quilt Tells a Story*, is a compilation of her column "Loose Threads" and was such a success that a second book, *Joy of Quilting*, was released in June 2008.

Among the many honors that Kelley received throughout her career in quilting and service to her community were: 1995—Artist of Distinction, Fiber/Metal Arts of Minnesota; 1998—Minnesota Quilter of the Year; 1999—"Renaissance" was selected by a prestigious national committee of quiltmakers and quilt historians as one of the 100 best quilts of the 20th century, a project organized by the International Quilt Association ("Renaissance" is now in the collection of the Minnesota Historical Society); and in 2000 Kelley was selected to receive the Minnesota Textile Center's Spun Gold Award. Kelley continued to lecture, teach, and exhibit her work right up to her sudden death September 1, 2008. A 30-year retrospective of her work was on exhibit in Marion, Indiana, during her induction into The Quilter Hall of Fame as its 38th Honoree, July 17-19, 2008.