



PUPPETRY ARTS INSTITUTE

The Hazelle Book Is Here!

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During the depths of the greatest depression the U.S. has ever experienced, a talented and determined young woman in Kansas City decided to attempt something never accomplished by any American before her—to begin business that made puppets, specifically marionettes. Up to that time, there was no tradition of marionette manufacturing in America, as women were certainly not noted for founding businesses, much less manufacturing businesses.

This is the story of Hazelle Hedges Rollins as how her love for children and desire to please young neighbor led her to found a business that grew to become the world's largest company specializing in the manufacture of puppets. Living home after graduating from the University of Kansas in 1932, Hazelle was literally approached by the 11-year-old boy who lived next door and asked to make a companion for his Italian-made marionette, so he could put on puppet show. Not only were Hazelle's marionettes and the boy's show highly successful, but it demand for Hazelle's cleverly designed and beautifully clothed puppets swelled.

Although she had no formal business plan, Hazelle's entrepreneurial instinct led her in 1932 to New York City, where she studied under the world-famous puppet master, Tony Sarg. Hazelle not only learned the art of marionette-making from Sarg, but also worked with him backstage in various off-Broadway marionette productions.

After her business outgrew the basement room of her family's home, Hazelle moved in the first of four increasingly larger factory buildings in Kansas City. From an initial core of employees in the first location, the business grew to more than 50 employees plus 11 independent sales reps covering the entire country. Following her heart, Hazelle made what turned out to be the most strategic move when she married Wood Rollins in 1941. After World War II, he joined the company and, with his expertise in industrial engineering, made several major contributions mechanizing the production process and improving its efficiency.

In the late 1940s, the enormously popular children's TV program, the Howdy Doody Show, hit the airwaves. Demanded for the marionettes soared. In the late 1950s, Hazelle began designing and manufacturing hand puppets in addition to the marionettes. Due to their success, she expanded in the late 1960s into finger puppets. During its final decade, her business sold more than 250,000 puppets every year. Hazelle brought joy to the lives of tens of thousands of children and adults every year with the global reach of her puppets.

This book is not just the story of one of the country's first successful female entrepreneurs. It is also the history of five decades of puppetry in America and contains an appendix which lists by name, date, and catalog number more than 500 puppets manufactured by Hazelle's company. The book is lavishly illustrated with more than 140 full color photos, most of which feature puppets and puppet brochures from the 1930s to the 1980s.



Mike Joly was a noted researcher and the author of several published articles on his favorite topic of puppetry. The first two issues of *Toybox Magazine* in 1992 carried Joly's two-part series titled "Marionettes." Joly was a professional puppeteer who lived and worked in the Detroit, Michigan area. He was considered an expert on puppetry and had one of the largest libraries on the subject in the region. His expertise ranged from puppetry history and its many technical issues to an appreciation of the artistic and philosophical side of puppetry. Joly was a member of the Puppeteers of America and the Doodyville Historical Association. Following the completion of the manuscript for this book, Joly died on June 3, 1994, at the young age of 47.

The Puppetry Arts Institute was established in Independence, Missouri, to preserve and promote puppetry through the education and entertainment of children as well as adults. The Hazelle Rollins Puppet Museum is a permanent part of the Institute and was a dream of Hazelle's. Like this book, which was Mike Joly's dream, nothing is more fun than fulfilling dreams. The art of puppetry will live as long we dare to make our dreams come true!



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