

Earline Heath King, creator of sculptures in

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Earline Heath King, creator of sculptures in Winston-Salem, dies

Ken Keuffel
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Earline Heath King

Chris English

Ken Keuffel

Long before the city's current push for public art, Earline Elizabeth Heath King

was contributing to the city's artistic landscape.

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King, a prolific sculptor who died Monday at the age of 98, created many works of art now standing in Winston-Salem, her native city, including several statues of city leaders.

"She was a good friend to all of us," said Milton Rhodes, the president and chief executive of the Arts Council of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County. "She was way ahead of her time, in terms of public art."

King's statues in Winston-Salem include those of the late R.J. Reynolds, the founder of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co., and the late Simon G. Atkins, the founder and first president of the Slater Industrial Academy, now Winston-Salem State University. The Reynolds statue is at Second and Main streets, and the Atkins statue is on the WSSU campus.

King also created statues of the late John M. Gold, Winston-Salem's city manager in the 1950s and '60s, and of the late Bowman Gray Sr. Gray was a major benefactor of what was once the Bowman Gray School of Medicine, now the Wake Forest School of Medicine.

King created sculptures of many celebrities unconnected to Winston-Salem, from Armand Hammer, the late business tycoon, to Jim Hunt, a former governor of North Carolina. Children were also favored subjects.

King completed 345 commissions over 43 years. But it wasn't until she was 50 that she took her first class in sculpting at the Arts and Crafts Association, now the Sawtooth School for Visual Art. A friend, Sophie Cody, urged her to do it. Before then, King, a graduate of Reynolds High School, had sung well enough to do it professionally.

"It goes to show that there's art in everybody," said Sherri Nielson, Sawtooth's executive director. "It's just a question of bringing it out. She had an illustrious

career after the age of 50. She was a beautiful woman."

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King was married to Joe King, also an artist. The Kings entertained publicly for a time on the vaudeville circuit; she sang, and he was a ventriloquist. They put their talents to use at USO shows for Navy men about to be shipped overseas during the World War II years.

A memorial service will be held July 9 at 2 p.m. at First Baptist Church on Fifth Street. King had been working on a statue of Jesus at the church.

KING WINSTON SALEM - Earline Elizabeth Heath King May 11, 1913 - June 27, 2011 Earline Elizabeth Heath King, born May 11, 1913 in Winston Salem NC met her Lord while sleeping peacefully. She was the only child of Earlie Edgar Heath and Zeola Billings Heath. Earline graduated from R.J. Reynolds High School and continued her education at Greensboro College after winning First Place in the Soprano category of the Statewide vocal competition, which included a scholarship in Voice Training at the College. In the meantime she married Joseph Wallace King who was her school-mate at R. J. Reynolds. In 1934 they both moved to Washington D.C. There, Earline worked, at first as a colorist in a photographic studio and then started performing as a vocalist along with Joe, a ventriloquist, professionally in Clubs, Hotels, theaters, etc. During the Second World War, they both volunteered their talents to entertain our troops along with the Navy Band at army, navy and marine bases throughout the area. They have also become entertainers at USO clubs. In 1945, Earline went to New York, N.Y. to work with the famous milliner, Lily Dache. During her stay, an agent encouraged her husband to come to New York. Joe and Earline were booked on the vaudeville circuit from Baltimore to Maine to appear as the team of "Joe and Earline King with Brandywine" the ventriloquist's dummy. In 1946, a portrait commission for Joe brought them back home, to Winston-Salem. During that time Earline did all the public relations to promote Joe. Her career as a sculptor began with the enrollment in a sculpture class with Gardner Gidley at the Hanes Community Center. Three years later she won the First Prize in the Art Council's annual competition. Her works were very well received and quickly followed with commissions for busts of people's children and other known personalities. In forty three years Earline completed 345 commissions and numerous limited editions which are still in demand. During that time she also completed many public art works such as the statue of R. J. Reynolds on a horse, downtown Winston-Salem, busts of Sir Winston Churchill, Governor James Hunt and others. Her other public works are the "Alive, Beautiful and Victorious", a tribute to women cancer survivors, at the Allegacy Federal Credit Union water park, the Statue of Bowman Gray in front of the Bowman Gray School of Medicine, main campus, the statue of Dr. Simon Green Atkins at Winston Salem State University, and the statue of Jesus under construction for the First Baptist Church on Fifth Street. In 1993 she had a one man Exhibition at the Galleria Luigi Bellini in Florence, Italy. She also exhibited her works in galleries throughout the United States. Member of the First Baptist Church, she served on the Boards of the Mozart Club, the Winston-Salem Symphony, Piedmont Opera, as well as life-member of the Brenner Childrens' Hospital, Charter Member of Amos Cottage and life member of the Twin City Club. In 1997 she served as the first woman President of the Twin City Club in Winston-Salem, for two terms. The Rotary Foundation of Rotary International made Earline H. King a Paul Harris Fellow "in appreciation of tangible and significant assistance given for the furtherance of better understanding and friendly relations among peoples of the world." The Greensboro College presented Earline with the Alumni Excellence Award, 1991, for her "sensibility and considerable talent as a sculptor, teacher and observer of human expression earning her international recognition." For 23 years Earline offered sculpting classes to aspiring sculptors throughout the world. Thanks to her, many young sculptors are now productive gaining fame and recognition for their art. In 2003, Earline was conferred by the Board of Trustees of Greensboro College with the degree of Doctor of Fine Arts. On her 90th. Birthday she was presented by the State Governor, Michael F. Easley, with The Order of the Long Leaf Pine, one of the highest honors the governor can bestow on a North Carolina citizen. Her name shall remain immortal courtesy of the Arts Council by commemorating the Sculpture and Pottery Studio in her name in the new Arts Council Center. Earline has had a full life creating, promoting and inspiring all who crossed her path. She will be missed but never forgotten. In lieu of flowers please send

donations to the Hospice and Palliative Care center, Forsyth-Winston-Salem, 101 Hospice Lane, W-S 27103. The Memorial Service will be held on Saturday, July 9, 2011 at 2:00 p.m. at First Baptist Church in Winston-Salem with Dr. David Hughes officiating. A reception will follow at the church in Kelly Auditorium. Salem Funeral Home is assisting the King family.