

# Photo of the Month

## Rogers Centennial Posse



Beard Judging, Rogers Centennial Beard Growing Contest  
Rogers, Arkansas  
May 1981  
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“What’s with all the scraggly faces, anyhow?” The Rogers Democrat posed this simple question in January 1981, but much more was afoot in the town of Rogers than a widespread outbreak of facial hair. Rogers marked its centennial in 1981 with community celebrations, festivals, and nostalgic and fun activities that celebrated the notion of the “old days.” One activity revolved around the collective community contest of growing beards—at least by the men—by the May 1981 centennial anniversary of the founding of Rogers (which as we all know occurred on May 10, 1881 with the arrival of the first Frisco train).

Pictured at right is the official judging of beards by bonnet clad women and one male representative. The contest entry fee was only 50 cents and the judges included Maxine Creech, Vicki Wells, Kenneta Rasmussen, Vic Bradford, and Bob Johnson. It should be noted that many women also chose to don bonnets as part of the celebration and in honor of their heritage. On May 11, 1981, also recognized as “Iron Horse Day,” Dr. Robert Matlock presented the grand prize for the best beard to Dale Mortenson.

While the contest was organized in good-natured fun, it was also “well regulated and strictly policed.” Many men stepped forward to perform their duty as good citizens and were sworn in as duly appointed Deputies of the Rogers Centennial Posse. The Posse served to bring in or fine law breakers who flouted the beard and bonnet rule, which said that men were to wear beards and women were to sport bonnets. Children were not exempt and expected to be seen in an engineer’s cap, a bandanna, or a fake beard.

“Coercible” citizens who violated the law could easily find themselves fined the grand sum of 50 cents or incarcerated in the local jail, which was a nearly clean horse trailer loaned to the Posse for such use. However, permits for shaving could be purchased for one dollar at local pharmacies and bonnet permits could be acquired at the Farmers and Merchants Bank. This was a tradition that carried over from the Rogers Diamond Jubilee in 1956, when at that time the bearded men were known as the Brothers of the Brush.

Members of the Posse included Ed Houston, Gene Ramsey, Dan Rayniak, Charlie West, Walter Prowell, Robert Storey, Francis Billings, Guy Wallis, Rick Murphy, John Mack, Perry Butcher, H.K. Scott, Rob Brothers, Steve Roberts, Forrest Slavens, Jim Reeves, and Rob Brothers’ “cardboard wonder horse” called “Corrugate.” Ed Houston served as the High Sheriff and Francis Billings was named as the Low Sheriff. Armed with Daisy repeating air rifles and pistols, a Posseman discharged his sidearm into the ceiling of the Chamber of Commerce following the swearing in ceremony. And as the Posse “rode out,” Low Sheriff Francis Billings was assigned the important task of “Official Centennial Pooper Scooper,” who followed Rob Brothers and his cardboard horse Corrugate around town.

Arrests were made in the course of their duties. A May 10, 1981 Rogers Democrat article reported the arrests of two individuals. Marshall Bailey was apprehended for ignoring the beard law and Beck Scott was captured following his daring theft of the Centennial Jail. It was found near 13th and Walnut Streets after Deputies followed their noses to the site. Both individuals were brought to justice in a mock hanging in Frisco Park.

Although a questionable light was thrown on High Sheriff Ed Houston’s time in office based on his reputation as a “crooked Texas Longhorn fan,” the complaint was anonymous and he was eventually pardoned of all charges of wrong doing by the Centennial Committee. Looking back, one can only imagine the wildness of the streets of Rogers during those days as bearded men ranged free. We certainly owe the Posse a debt of gratitude for contributing a great deal of fun and enjoyment to an important event in the history of our community.