

# Donation of the Month

**Object: Diamond Jubilee Badges**  
**Catalog #: 1975.443.5, .4, & .8**  
**Donor: Benton County Historical Society**



For a few days in the summer of 1956, Rogers celebrated its 75th birthday - its "Diamond Jubilee." In honor of this milestone citizens went all out to compare Rogers' pioneer past with the modern city it had become. From August 29 to September 2 pageant organizers paid "respectful and fitting tribute to the wonderful pioneers of our glorious past and the grand senior citizens of today who, through their foresight, ingenuity, industry and civic pride, have made Rogers the Garden Spot of the Ozarks

That summer Jubilee fever struck Rogers. To recreate an old-fashioned atmosphere in town, citizens were encouraged to wear old-timey clothing such as string ties and derby hats or long dresses and bonnets. Everyone got into the act including young Karen Ann Morgan and her kitten "Posey," both of whom dressed in matching outfits. In downtown Rogers wooden nickels became legal tender and store windows displayed "old relics" and other items from Rogers' early days.

Organizers planned a variety of events to engage local residents and attract crowds of nearby neighbors and tourists. A parade kicked off the Jubilee and was soon followed by band concerts, a fishing derby, a fiddlers' contest, Little League games, an old-timers picnic, fireworks, square dancing, and a community-wide interdenominational religious service. Joyce Wilson reigned as "Miss Jubilee;" in addition to the honor and ride in the queen's float during the parade, she received numerous gifts from local merchants and a weeklong trip to St. Louis.

But the highlight of the Jubilee was the pageant. Parker Zellers of the John B. Rogers Producing Company of Fostoria, Ohio, wrote and directed "Rogerama." Requiring ten trucks filled with costumes, props, lighting, and scenery, the play told the story of Rogers in 16 vignettes including: "A Home in the Wilderness" (the settlers' arrival by covered wagon); "A House Divided" (the Civil War and the Battle of Pea Ridge); "The Advent of the Iron Horse" (the arrival of the first train in Rogers), and "Taught to the Tune of the Hickory Stick" (early education).

For four nights several hundred local dancers, singers, musicians, and actors occupied the huge outdoor stage constructed in the Rogers High School athletic park on West Walnut Street. Special lighting and multiple stages allowed for each historical episode to take place sequentially, with minimal disruption for scene changes. As the narrator told the story of each pantomime an organist and 50-voice choir provided

background music. Fortunately the rains that fell during the pageant didn't seem to dampen the participants' spirits, although they did do a number on the scenery.

To raise funds for "Rogerama" and related festivities the Jubilee committee offered an assortment of novelties bearing the official Jubilee logo, drawn by local artist Elsie Sterling. Derby hats, bumper stickers, bonnets, string ties, badges, and other items were sold by downtown merchants. In addition, contestants for the "Miss Jubilee" contest were encouraged to sell advance-ticket coupons for the big pageant as a way of "buying votes."

Another source of income - and hilarity - were the grooming rules imposed upon the populace.

In June Rogers Mayor Harold Roberts issued a proclamation. After declaring how "all of us are anxious to have the city look as it did 75 years ago, and to reflect the struggles and sacrifices of our forefathers," he proposed that the men of Rogers stop shaving for a few months.

*The growth can be either a beard, goatee, chin-whiskers, van dyke, mutton chops, mustache, sideburns, or any other acceptable facial hairy growth of such length and full luxuriance as to be readily seen at a distance of eight paces. These worthy men shall henceforth be known as Brothers of the Brush . . .*

Soon hirsute men were seen all over town. Even Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus was drafted into the Brothers of the Brush when, during a campaign visit to Rogers, he was presented with his very own hat and string tie. (He was allowed to remain clean shaven.)

Anyone caught flouting the Mayor's proclamation was issued tickets by "Ye Keystone Kops," a secret society who levied fines through "Ye Awful Judges of Ye Kangaroo Court." But whiskers weren't enough to keep male residents from being fined. They also had to wear derby hats and "Brothers of the Brush" membership badges, the latter costing \$3. "Ye Olde Hoosegow," set up in Frisco Park, consisted of a jail cell and dunking tank. C. Jimmie Carter, who took the Brothers' pledge against shaving, was caught in the act one morning and received a penalty dunk.

Not everyone got into the Jubilee spirit, however. The Mayor received several angry letters decrying how it wasn't democratic to force people to grow beards or wear certain kinds of clothing. One woman feared for her husband's weak heart should he be dunked in the tank. Shortly after reports of these grievances hit the newspapers the Mayor issued another proclamation - this one aimed at women. They were encouraged to join the "Sisters of the Swish" and dress like their grandmothers by forgoing the use of "cosmetics, jewelry and other embellishments." As one newspaper wag remarked,

*Undoubtedly, the sinister idea evolved from the workings of a masculine brain, for what woman could subject her sisters to the torments of a shiny morning face, disappearing eyebrows and lifeless looking lips. . . . The consequences are bound to be shocking . . . Bleached blondes will have multi-colored hair, girls with healthy rouged complexions will suddenly become pale, and long, alluring eyelashes will be scrapped in favor of the real thing. Happy homes and families may even be broken up because of this restraint.*

Soon hairy men were joined by plain women on the streets of Rogers. And like their Brothers, the Sisters of the Swish had their own secret society to crack down on cosmetic-wearing scofflaws. High jinks prevailed during the Sisters' turn at holding a Kangaroo court. Martha Keck was convicted of being overdressed and sentenced to being burned at the stake (in reality a smudge pot was placed before her feet while she was tied to a tree). Kay Calvin's violations for being dressed as a man and not having the proper shaving permit resulted in the punishment of writing "I am a woman" 500 times. When she took a bar of soap and began writing her sentence on the window of a downtown store, she was caught yet again by the Kops and forced to wash the window. Janie Herndon was accused of wearing a falsified cosmetic-permit badge. Her sentence - to be hit in the face with a cream pie - was never fulfilled because she ducked in the nick of time. Too bad the judge wasn't so lucky.

Of course all of the dunkings and other punishments were perpetrated on willing participants as a way to

entice local interest, advertise the Jubilee, and have a bit of good-natured fun. Men and women who couldn't (or wouldn't) adhere to the clothing and grooming strictures were able to buy shave and cosmetic permits and just enjoy their friends' and neighbors' antics. In the end all the hard work and silliness paid off and the citizens of Rogers had "Ye Grand Olde Time."

**CREDITS**

*Rogers Daily News* clippings compiled in a Diamond Jubilee scrapbook in the Permanent Collection of the RHM (1975.443.2) and "Rogerama Souvenir Program" (1956).