

Donation of the Month

Object: Tracy Lockhart's Peddler Basket
Catalog #: 2003.51.48
Donor: Opal Beck



For several decades in the mid-1900s Tracy Lockhart (1887-1967) was a familiar figure in downtown Rogers. You name it, he sold it, from cord wood to sassafras roots, from candy to peanuts. But not dried peaches. Try as he might, he couldn't persuade area housewives to buy them.

Tracy was an old-fashioned peddler, one of several who roamed the streets of Rogers trying to make an honest dollar however they could. Born in Nevada, Missouri, Tracy had two brothers, Sam, who married and lived with his family in Texas and Avoca, Arkansas, until his death in 1941, and Bill. Tracy and Bill's lives took a different course than their brother Sam's. The two were badly injured in woodcutting accidents when they were youngsters, leaving them crippled for life. With Bill unable to work, Tracy had to find a way to earn their keep.

According to one account, Tracy began his peddling career around 1922. Living with Bill on a rented farm in the Mountain View area east of Avoca, Tracy's first job was selling farmers' wood from a horse- or mule-drawn wagon. Tracy would walk in front of the slow-moving beast and shout "Wood, wood, good wood. Get your wood for \$1 a rick." Always friendly and outgoing no matter how cold the weather or how poorly he was dressed, he'd say cheerily to a customer, "Some wood today, lady, nice seasoned wood?"

As his success grew, so did his inventory. During the winter he'd sell rabbits for 10¢ apiece, giving the young boys who trapped them a nickel for every rabbit. In spring and summer he took his neighbors surplus produce and sold it where he could, often walking the six or seven miles into Rogers or traveling further afield - Bentonville, Springdale, Fayetteville - whenever he could catch a lift. He was quoted as saying, "I start out walking, but everybody knows me, and pretty soon somebody gives me a ride."

But walking the long distance from the farm became increasingly difficult, so sometime in the early 1940s Tracy and Bill moved to Rogers, living in what some described as a one-room shack situated behind a rock house in the southern part of town (opposite the old Daisy Airgun plant which hadn't yet been built). When asked by an "impertinent newsman" whether he had "ever been on relief or received government help," Tracy flashed back, "No sir! I haven't got time - and I believe a lot of people traded with me because I haven't [received assistance]."

In his early years, Tracy used a wagon to haul his wares into town. After he moved to Rogers he began carrying an oak-splint market basket on his arm filled with all sorts of goods, including candy and gum. Singing his song, "Chewing gum, candy, right here, handy," he'd make the lunchtime rounds of the chicken plant or the canning factory. Later on he acquired a small push cart with lettering on the sides advertising Beaulieu's Hardware store.

One of the most often reproduced images of Tracy and his cart was taken by well-known photographer Hubert Musteen. Musteen, who had a studio on the southwest corner of Walnut and Second Streets, posed Tracy in front of the shop and printed hundreds of photos for him to hand out, both as a souvenir and as advertising for Musteen.

Tracy cared for Bill all his adult life, sharing what he had and making sure Bill was housed and fed. His grief was profound when Bill died in 1964 but he faced another hardship as well - purchasing a memorial stone. His strong sense of independence wouldn't allow him take help from brother Sam's children; somehow he managed to scrape up the funds to mark Bill's grave at Tuck's Chapel Cemetery.

Tracy died in 1967 and was buried alongside Bill. Longtime resident, businesswoman, and unofficial town historian Opal Beck remembers the day of Tracy's funeral, when downtown shopkeepers and professional men closed their doors so they could attend, a mark of honor and respect in her eyes. Many years later she herself was honored when Tracy's nieces and nephews entrusted his well-worn market basket to her care, a trust she has graciously passed on to the Museum.

CREDITS

The uncredited 1940 article, "Tracy Lockhart peddles with pride in Northwest Arkansas," reprinted in the *Northwest Arkansas Morning News* (5-25-1986); Mabel L. Moore's entries, "Ora Lockhart" and "Tracy Lockhart, 'The Peddler'" in *History of Benton County, Arkansas* (1991); and verbal communiques from Thornton Jacobs and J.B. Head (2002) and Opal Beck (2003).