

# Donation of the Month

**Object: Apple Blossom Festival Crown**  
**Catalog #: 1975.2.56**  
**Donor: Vera Key**



There was a time when Northwest Arkansas had its own queen. Queens, actually, for in the mid-1920s the Apple Blossom Festival was held in Rogers for a few days every April. Full of pageantry and spectacle, the Festival delighted thousands with its orchard tours, marching bands, graceful dances, elaborate floats, lovely costumes, and winsome beauties, for after all, what's a pageant without a queen?

From Fayetteville to Gravette to Eureka Springs, each town in Northwest Arkansas selected or elected a Maid of Honor to represent it at the Festival. In Rogers the Maid was chosen by a monetary vote to raise part the finances needed to carry out the event. A few days before the Festival the Maids of Honor gathered to select their queen. In an oral history interview given to the Museum in 1992, Dot Webb remembered the experience this way:

*When it came time for the Festival all the girls were there from each community and they drew the Queen's name from a hat. My name was drawn. I was only 16 years old. . . . I was so young and shy that I really kind of wished I hadn't won. To me, Rogers was just a huge city. To a girl from the country it was just really the equivalent of New York City.*

At the inaugural Festival the queen wore a crown which looked like the stereotypical image drawn by a schoolchild—a short column topped by jagged spires. The first pageant's success ensured continued Festivals, so a regal crown was designed, as detailed in the April 17, 1924, edition of the *Rogers Democrat*:

*Of unusual interest are the Crown and Scepter to be used in connection with the crowning of the Queen of the Apple Blossom Festival April 25, by Senator Joe T. Robinson. They are on display in the window Mrs. Pollock's millinery store on Walnut Street. Following is a brief history of the component parts of the regal tokens of Her Royal Majesty, which were designed and decorated by Mrs. [Dea] F.M. Lowery:*

- Pearls from the White river, donated by Mr. and Mrs. Carl Starck, and Miss Vera Key.
- Copper frame for the crown and scepter donated by the Adams Bros. tin shop.
- Silicate donated by Carl Stark and melted into shape by the Leslie Scott Machine Works.
- Nuggets from the Page copper mine donated by Mr. Page.
- Staff of scepter is made of apple wood, donated and made by Mr. Van Wagner.
- Steel bars in staff donated by E.C. Lone.

*The contour of the crown typifies the Ozark mountains, while the open spaces form the apple blossom petals. The crown, which is constructed entirely of Arkansas products, is expected to be a permanent*

*crown, to be used from year to year, and the name of each queen will be engraved on the inside, beginning with the 1923 queen.*

Today the crown looks bedraggled, a dim shadow of its former beauty. Gone are its pearls and copper nuggets, their former positions marked by corrosion and adhesive residue. But the crown's silica apple blossom still remains, as does a small piece of folded cotton cloth attached to its interior in an attempt to make the hard copper frame a bit more comfortable during the long pageant. Unfortunately, the names of the Queens were never engraved.

The crown was donated by Vera Key, one of the Museum's co-founders. How she came to possess the crown is not certain, but as one of the organizers of the Festival and a leading area historian, it's not surprising that she should have had it.

For the first three years the Queens' coronation ceremonies were held on the Rogers Academy campus, where Tillery Elementary School is located today (bounded by Elm, Fifth, Poplar, and Seventh Streets). But the crowds grew too large and by the fourth year the Festival was moved to a natural hollow dubbed the "Apple Bowl," just east of the intersection of Poplar and Arkansas Streets. Five young women were crowned Apple Blossom Queen: Ruby Robinson of Rogers (1923); Dot Webb of Pea Ridge (1924); Helen Duckworth of Siloam Springs (1925); Lillian Ivy of Fayetteville (1926); and Dorothy Butt of Eureka Springs (1927).

The Queen's coronation was an elaborate affair. After a graceful processional to the throne, she was crowned by a dignitary and then honored and entertained by dozens of young girls representing trees, butterflies, breezes, and other symbols of nature. Wearing costumes made of cloth or crepe paper, their dances blended traditional English May Day folk dances with interpretive movements made popular a decade or two earlier by Isadora Duncan, the originator of imaginative, free-form dance. The April 26, 1923, edition of the *Rogers Democrat* described the first pageant this way:

*The scene of the festivities changed to Campus Park at 10 o'clock when the trumpeter blared shrill notes announcing the coming of the queen and party. As Her Majesty appeared from behind a natural green cluster of shrubbery and flowers, and gracefully stepped upon the elevated platform and took her place on her throne. "Long Live Ruby, Queen of the Apple Blossoms," shouted 1,000 voices of schoolchildren assembled on the campus and then the spectators took up the cry and the echoes resounded throughout the surrounding mountains...*

*Governor McRae, as a representative of the entire state, came forward bearing the queen's crown and placed it on her head.... Forty-eight high school girls under the personal direction of Miss Marjorie Rood and Miss Susie Baldwin of the expression department, U. of A., executed a brilliant folk dance on the great lawn...*

But rain plagued the Festival, eventually forcing its cancellation after the 1927 event. Crowning a queen under adverse conditions was a challenge, as described in the May 1, 1924, edition of the *Rogers Democrat*:

*We'll say it rained! It rained Thursday night; it rained Friday morning, Friday afternoon and Friday night. As a rain, it was a 100% success... But a small fraction of Friday's visitors saw the actual crowning of the Queen... for it was generally understood that this feature had definitely been abandoned because of the continued rain. It was felt, however, that a queen without a crown was an impossible situation, and it was hoped the heavens might take pity on the situation and let the rain-maker take a brief vacation. But it was evidently on the program that it was to rain all day—and it did. And while the Queen's coronation was held with but a moiety [half] of the pomp and glory as arranged by the committee, Queen Dot was officially crowned by Senator Robinson and took her position upon her royal throne—in the rain.*