

Humason Was a Showman With Ice Cream and Opera

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Lufkin—When Mr. and Mrs. Harry Kerr, both 78, crank up their ice cream freezer they think of William P. Humason, early-day ice cream maker and showman. You couldn't think of him without thinking of his ice cream and opera.

While they are chasing away the summer heat with the cream, which they had hoped would taste like Humason cream, the Kerrs recall the days of the Lufkin Opera House and Humason's connection with it. He played the violin and directed the six-piece orchestra and plays at the opera house, on the southwest corner of Herndon and Frank streets.

The old opera house is gone and so is something which made Humason cream something special to the eye. He furnished parties with brick ice cream embellished with decorations of flags, roses and other designs. The designs were embedded in the cream so that when the bricks were sliced each guest had a colorful emblem.

The Humason Ice Cream Co. (often called "the factory") was located at the corner of Bonner and Grove streets. The building now is without paint, sagging and boarded up, a far cry from the spotless structure of earlier years.

William P. Humason built the company around 1910. The family (William P. was a youth then) had come from Mississippi.

"They were artistic people," said Mrs. Kerr. "Will Humason used his talents in many ways. He was always creative and original."

The Kerrs had four children and it always took a gallon of cream to go around.

A gallon in a wooden bucket containing crushed ice cost from \$1 to \$1.50 a gallon. The bucket was returned to the plant after the cream was used.

The Humason family added much to the life of Lufkin. O. N., brother of Will, became mayor and Humason St. is named for him. Will was the

first manager of Hotel Bonner, now no more.

St the time Will Humason was connected with the opera house, Kerr was head usher and stage carpenter. The house presented home talent and traveling drama companies.

Passenger trains brought in so many customers that some had to sit on top of the passenger cars if they wanted to see the performances.

The fame of the opera house spread when it presented such big productions as "The Two Orphans" and "Flower of the Prairie," a lavish musical.

It was during the performances of "The Two Orphans" that Kerr and Louis Goldberg, who became editor of the Austin American, had the job of working above the stage to drop handfuls of confetti to simulate a snow scene.

One time Goldberg ran out of snow and Kerr, in an attempt to divide with him, dropped the box and it fell to the stage. This ended the sobbing of the women in the audience, brought on by the orphans being driven from home by a cruel landlord.

The frame opera house was destroyed by fire in 1922. Will Humason went to Arizona, where he died.

Kerr, part owner of a sheet metal company, became a member of the Hoo Hoo band, was fire chief for 23 years and was an instructor in the fireman's training school at Texas A&M University. He is past president of East Texas Firemen's Assn. and is active in Red Cross first aid programs and Boy Scouts.

Mrs. Kerr helps her husband in the sheet metal company office and recently was awarded a 50-year service pin from the Pythian Sisters.

Both keep busy with business and friends, but one of the most pleasant parts of their lives is when they recall their association with Will Humason, who made ice cream pleasant to the taste and the eye.



Photo by Margie Kirkland, Chronicle Correspondent

"NOW, TRUCKS AND WAGONS USED TO BACK UP HERE"

The Kerrs at Old Ice Cream Firm Building