

Texarkana's National Humane Alliance Fountain

By: CLINTON S. THOMAS, TH.D. | July 17, 2017

Texarkana, AR– Herman Lee Ensign of New York died in 1899, and with his passing another wealthy philanthropist from that time passed away into history. In addition to building his wealth off of advertising, Mr. Ensign was also an early anti-cruelty to animals' advocate. After his death, his stories were published in a book, *Lady Lee and Other Animal Stories*. It would be published in 1901 to a modest review. The book, like the man's name and advertising company would virtually melt into history. The book, in first edition format, can still be purchased today through antique dealers and online through EBay for a modest \$25-\$30 which as any collector can tell you does not raise the book to any great elevation in the world of book collectors. It is simply another book and is now even available online through many free eBook programs. But it is not Mr. Ensign's business, or his book that has had the most enduring impact on American history and on Texarkana in particular as it is his love of Animals. In the end, Mr. Ensign's love for animals would reach out to well over one hundred cities after his death, and Texarkana was one of those fortunate cities.



When Mr. Ensign died in 1899, it was two years after he had founded the National Humane Alliance. That foundation received a great portion of Ensign's money with very specific directions. Ensign indicated in his donation that the money must be used to build animal drinking fountains for any city, anywhere, that wanted one. The requirements were simple for a city. The city had to request the fountain, provide an appropriate spot for it, maintain it, and ensure a constant water supply was provided. The city could not charge for the use of the fountain, and it had to be free for horses, cats, dogs and any other animal that might require a drink while passing through the city which received the fountain.

After Mr. Ensign's death, the National Humane Alliance began making the fountains available. Somewhere between 1904 and 1912 over one hundred cities across the United States, Mexico and Puerto Rico took advantage of the free offer. The fountains were built in Vinalhaven, Maine by the Bodwell Granite Company.

Mr. Ensign could not have foreseen the impact that the auto industry was going to have on Americans and the way they would travel. Most of the major cities that applied for fountains suddenly found themselves with a huge, water producing, potential hazards for new drivers. Some of the cities put the fountains away in storage, others moved them to parks, and still others have been lost to the bureaucratic red tape of government and its ability to ever relocate, store, or even give away, and forget about what they have acquired through the years.

Despite the fact that over one hundred were initially issued, there are still about 70 fountains in operation to this day. There are multiple websites that show the fountains, all similar in design, and even give the coordinates for visitors to go see the fountains. Texarkana, Arkansas currently maintains its own fountain.

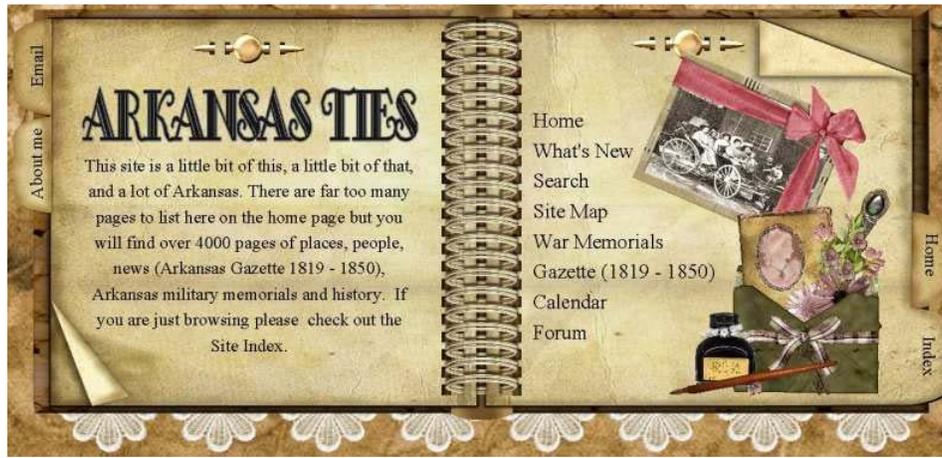
Reports from locals indicate that the fountain in Texarkana was once located downtown, near the original Federal courthouse. It was later moved up to what is the Albertsons parking lot on Stateline Avenue – before Albertsons was located there. At the Albertsons location there was a circle drive around the fountain. This was likely done to keep the fountain out of the way of the new automobiles, but still allow horse and those using them for transportation to seek water while getting off the main roads.

Today the fountain is located in what is called "Memorial Park" at the corner of Stateline Avenue and 7th Street in Texarkana, Arkansas. The fountain has an additional lower section on it that others do not have. The fountain is fully operational and has only been down for repairs a few times over the past few years. A beautiful garden surrounds the fountain with a walkway provided right up to the sides. The plaque notes that Texarkana received its fountain in 1909. Most of the fountains found around the United States have been placed on historical registers and have plaques indicating that placement located nearby. The Texarkana fountain does not have a plaque, but

it would certainly qualify with appropriate paperwork and history records if someone should pursue it. The fountains continue to be known as National Humane Alliance Fountains, Herman Lee Ensign Fountains, and sometimes just as Ensign Fountains.

Mr. Ensign's National Humane Alliance considered its work and mission completed in 1921. They closed their doors at that time and so closed a chapter of history that will not likely be repeated in modern times. Mr. Ensign's mission was a success. Fountains had been placed in over 100 cities across North and Central America. Texarkana is honored to have one such fountain in operation. Mr. Ensign and the National Humane Alliance would be proud to know that the requirement to have a fountain – provide a spot for the fountain, maintain it, ensure it has water and provide it free for any animal to use – is still being honored by the city 108 years after the fountain was placed free of charge for all animals in Texarkana to use.





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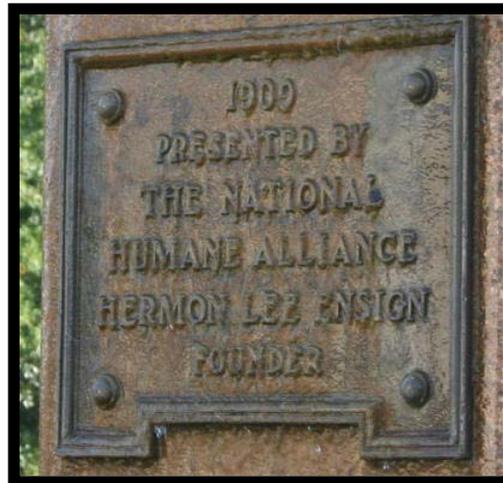
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Herman Lee Fountain Memorial
Texarkana, Miller County, Arkansas



1909 Presented by the National Humane Alliance
Hermon Lee Ensign, Founder

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