

erected near old freight station by Humane Alliance but now Roanoke.

## Drinking From Dogmouth Was Sure To Bring Return Of Visitor But, Alas, Loafers Spoiled Wonderful Legend

By Raymond Barnes

THE "DOG MOUTH" IS THE OLDEST public fountain in Roanoke. Situated on the northwest corner of Salem Avenue at First (Nelson) Street, SE, it has furnished drink for man and beast for nearly three quarters of a century.

As well as I can pin-point the installation of this famous font, I am of the opinion it was a gift of the Roanoke Water Company when the first market building was erected on the square in 1886. The City Council, realizing that numerous horse-drawn vehicles would crowd the farm produce sales center, required the water company to install some means by which draft animals could secure water. The Roanoke Land and Improvement Co., owner of the water works, and in effect a subsidiary of the Shenandoah Valley Railroad, was really the donor of the handsome fountain that has so ably served its humane purpose. (Dimly my memory prompts me that "horse troughs" were located on the edges of sidewalks in downtown Roanoke, but I cannot recall their location.) The popular name of the "Dog Mouth" is obvious because a small stream of water flows constantly from a metal dog's head cast into the beautiful iron work that makes up the fountain proper. It is well while the time of anyone to pause a short while to examine the detailed work of the casting.



Barnes

Around the fountain grew a legend that "anyone drinking from the Dog's Mouth will always return to Roanoke." This legend is now but 25 years short of being a century old, and is one of the few extant about Roanoke.

The market square naturally attracted large crowds and amongst these were the inevitable undesirables. In addition, some saloons in this vicinity catered to the less respectable element and many of their patrons began to loaf around the Dog Mouth. There is magic in running water and on exceptionally hot days visitors from the country delighted in spending part of their free time in the vicinity of the font.

After prohibition the "big britches" crowd took over this gathering place and, worthless almost to a man, simply loafed around wearing the peg-topped trousers that were formerly a fad around 1904-5. The loafers earned and doubtlessly merited the hard name they bore for general "cussedness" and should one appear in court as a witness, mere proof that he "hung around the Dog Mouth" cast an absolute doubt on his veracity.

Today the north side of the market has been taken over by Negroes and one no longer drinks from the Dog Mouth but employs a paper cup. On hot days the ground around the base of the fountain is littered with these unsightly containers.

Although the faithful draft animals no longer partake of cooling draughts at this picturesque landmark of old Roanoke and although its continuation may be a needless expense, I devoutly hope the waters of Crystal Spring and Carvins Cove will continue to flow through the Dog's Mouth for a century or more to come.

Around 1916 the old freight depot on Second Street north of the railroad was abandoned and converted into an express depot. A new, large freight station was built on the west side of Commerce or Second Street, which we view there today.

Back in those days there were no heavy gas-driven trucks so freight was distributed over the city in heavy duty wagons. Older residents recall the long line of these vehicles backed up against the loading platform and the multitude of horses engaged in the transfer business.

It was not until 1917 that a drinking fountain was donated that stood for many years at the eastern end of the freight station at Second Street. Several years ago this beautiful fountain, carved of red granite, was moved to the Fifth Street entrance of Highland Park.

On a recent visit the bowl was found filled with rain water, rocks, old papers and a most offensive odor was detected in the vicinity. Water formerly flowed from the mouths of three bronze lion heads. On one side is a bronze plaque bearing the inscription:

1910  
Presented by  
The National  
Humane Alliance  
Herman Lee Ensign,  
FOUNDER

Although today the beautiful fountain serves nothing but an aesthetic purpose, it could be placed in a more desirable location such as on the plot in front of the main library.

The last fountain erected in Roanoke still stands on the sidewalk facing the Norfolk and Western Depot. Somehow I cannot document the date on which the memorial was erected but if memory serves me correctly it was not many years after the first auditorium was dedicated.

On the north side of the big fountain is graven "To Him to Whom We Owe So Much—Frederick J. Kimball." Reading from west through south to east two lines each of the famous verse from Coleridge's Ancient Mariner are engraved:

"He Prayeth well who loveth well  
Both Man and Bird and Beast  
He Prayeth Best who loveth Best  
All things both Great and Small  
For the Dear God who loveth us  
He made and Loveth all."

Frederick J. Kimball was president of the Shenandoah Valley Railroad when the town of the Big Lick was selected as a connection point with the Norfolk and Western Railroad. A great friend of the new booming town, he was held in high esteem by all who knew him. In addition to being a memorial to one who did much for Roanoke, the fountain adds attraction to the square at the depot.

Roanoke fountains - 9/16/1961



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