

# Historical Ramblings

## Ed Beard - From Popcorn to Paint

Every town has its characters. One of Lompoc's most popular characters was Ed Beard. He was born on August 20, 1886 at the Beard home adjacent to the Santa Ynez River, just north of the intersection of West Central Avenue and V Street. When Ed was five years old, his mother died. His father moved to Washington State, but Ed stayed in Lompoc with his sisters until he decided to see the world by hitching a ride on a passenger train. During his sojourn, his leg was caught between train cars and was subsequently amputated. His disability, however, never slowed him down. Skillfully maneuvering with a crutch, he was able to become an accomplished artist, poet and sign painter.

Beard became a downtown fixture when he returned to Lompoc in 1908, operating a popcorn and peanut stand on the northwest corner of Ocean and H Street, in front of the current Lilley Building. He knew every kid in town by name and often gave them free sacks of popcorn or peanuts as they passed by his stand. He diversified with a shoeshine stand, resembling an ice cream parlor chair, with a footstand and trays for polishes. This chair is now in the collection of the historical society. Beard also operated a wooden, two seat shoeshine stand in front of a barbershop and hotel on West Ocean Ave. According to records, he also shined shoes on South H Street at the Hotel Arthur and in front of the Watts and Laubly store. In 1925, he was operating a candy store on the east side of the 100 block of South H Street. The store's popular attraction was the taffy machine placed near the front window. His ad in the March 13, 1925 Lompoc Record listed "Walnut Taffy, Creamy Fudges, Brittle and Assorted Hard Candy and Home Made Horehound Candy."

Ed Beard's talents also extended into poetry and art. He was a self-taught artist, painting landscapes, portraits and caricatures. His sketches and caricatures were regularly featured in the Lompoc Record. He became a muralist long before Lompoc's current mural program began. In 1934, the Lompoc Record reported, "Wielding a brush with skill no one, even himself knew he possessed, Ed Beard, local sign writer and painter, demonstrated his prowess as a painter of murals when he created a scene of Mission La Purisima Concepcion on the rear wall of the little stage in the music room at the Lompoc Elementary School. Using merely a postcard

view of the mission as it appeared a generation ago, he painted the scene 12 feet long and 8 feet high. He completed the assignment in 4 days.” He painted another mural on the east wall of the children’s section of the Lompoc Library (the current Lompoc Museum).

His creativity was further demonstrated in his sign painting. Many young artists were inspired as they watched Ed rest his hand on his arm and draw with tiny brushes finely etched lines that developed into signs on many local shop windows. He was also an accomplished billboard artist, painting advertising along the highway for Lompoc stores. He learned sign his painting techniques from old books that also helped him master different styles of lettering. When Ed retired from painting, he gave the books to his friend Juan Flores who was Lompoc’s premier sign painter for many years.

Beard was quite a linguist who could speak Swiss and a bit of the Siwash (Washington State) Indian language. He learned Spanish from a book he purchased and was able to converse with local Hispanic citizens. In his spare time, he worked crossword puzzles. It seems he always needed a challenge, so he bought a book and taught himself to play the violin!

Ed Beard died January 26, 1957 in Santa Barbara at the age of 70. There are still many residents who remember him, his sense of humor and his talents. His sense of humor is summed up in one of his poems:

*“Some folks use horse for chow; I’ll steak my choice on cow.*

*And if I ever get a holt of any cooked colt,*

*I’ll prefer it not rare, be it stallion or mare.*

*Let’s divide it in half – you take colt, and me, calf.*

*Now, if I were to dine with an old friend of mine,*

*I surely would feel very silly.*

*If, after I ate, I found that my plate*

*Had been filled, not with heifer, but filly.”*