



--Dallas News Staff Photo by Bill Winfrey.

Senior soda skeets Day and Wheelis.

TWO RECALL GOOD OLD DAYS

They Tended Soda Fountain When Calories Didn't Count

By LARRY GROVE

It's hard for Tommie Wheelis and Charlie Day to decide which of them is Highland Park Pharmacy's senior soda skeet.

Tommie, the shorter of the Tom and Charlie team, started behind the fountain there in 1917—45 years ago. He tried opening a filling station once, but he didn't like that so he came back. And he was away for limited Army duty which he wasn't wild about either.

Charlie has been at the fountain continuously since 1923.

Luckily, the two artists don't argue about it. And they agree that things have changed since they dispensed their first sarsaparillas and sodas and lime-flavored Green River long ago.

THE PHARMACY fountain still is busy. At noon, customers rush in for quick lunches.

"But in the old days," Tommie says, "the drug store was a way of life. Wasn't anything to see 40 or 50 kids sitting at the tables, the boys kinda' nuzzlin' up to the girls or making calf-eyes while they sipped a soda together. Then they'd sit there fiddlin' with the straw.

"There wasn't a whole lot else to do. The drug store was their social club."

The pharmacy on Knox Street was a hangout for two generations of students attending Armstrong, North Dallas and Highland Park schools. With them, Tommie won a reputation as a veritable Rembrandt; his fruit parfaits were his masterpieces.

"PEOPLE TODAY figure the fruit parfait is too fattening. Shucks, nobody counted calories back in the 20's. Kids today, I guess, are a whole lot smarter. Look at that television up there. There's not a kid—not even the ones who can't read—who can't tell you all about calories," Shorty Wheelis says.

This concern over calories has dipped deeply into the banana split business. "Can't remember when I made the last one," Shorty says. "No call for them.

"We used to buy walnuts by the big ol' barrel for the frappes. That's all changed now. But sodas are holding up pretty good."

MANY OF SHORTY'S contemporaries are sure the late Jack Patton used Shorty as a model for his comic strip character Spence Easley during the 1920's. Shorty was what was known in The Restless Age as a jellybean. His hair still is worn combed straight back and slicked down. But gray streaks, at 59, prevents the faddish patent-leather sheen of the jellybean's hair. And Shorty used to wear the Valentino trousers, flared at the ankles.

"A soda jerk is in a good position when he's young," admitted Shorty, "to get his pick of the school girls." He said he certainly would recommend his chosen profession to the growing boy. "Develops confidence," he says.

Shorty likes to recount how

many of his early customers became successful. Many in his list became famous football stars. One became Atty. Gen. Will Wilson.

SHORTY IS ONE of the veterans in Highland Park Pharmacy who never became a stockholder. The founder, H. S. Forman, offered stock to employees when he retired. Charlie became a vice-president; R. E. Wheelis — Shorty's brother — became president. Two other employe shareholders are Lillie Mae Maple and F. F. Bell.

They try to retain some of the warmth of old-time drug-stores. Shorty is certain that some of his favorite sundaes were ruined by the synthetic marshmallows forced on the store during World War II. They shun use of synthetic ice creams, bake their own hams, whip their own cream for toppings.

Shorty still has a tendency to call a malt an "Egg Flip"—a throwback to the days when no one ordered one without the added fillip of a raw egg blended into it.

BEFORE THE SUNDAE or the deliciously fattening fruit parfait goes into obscurity like the huzzing propeller that used to fan the drug store patrons, better listen while Charlie tells us how to make it:

"Take a parfait glass — it's slender, flared at the top. Plop a scoop of chocolate ice cream in first. Shoot some pineapple fruit over that. Add a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Top that with strawberry fruit. From there, you sort of work it up with alternate flavors of ice cream and fruit. Top it with chocolate syrup and real whipped cream. Put a marachino cherry on top.

"You could really get some pretty ones. I guess I made a million of 'em," Shorty says. He can't recall he ever ate one and he's never tasted a banana split.

But then Rembrandt probably never nibbled his paint, either.