

# Soda jerking, 'bee's knees' slang in past

By RENA PEDERSON

You don't hear many orders for a "Dobbin" or a "Waco" at pharmacies these days.

But back in the 1920s and 1930s, when soda fountains were the popular place for everyone to sip and spoon, that's how a barbecue sandwich and a Dr Pepper were ordered. Two barbecues with nothing else on them became a "Pair of Dobbins, hold everything but the heat."

Because soda jerks usually drifted from town to town, the fountain slang spread by word of mouth and became

## "Shoot one frowning!"

a nationwide craze. It was just the "bee's knees" to order an "American on a bicycle" and get a grilled cheese to go.

Some of the slang—like "BLT" for a bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwich or "Bowl of Red" for a bowl of chili—is still in use.

But there are only a half dozen soda fountains operating in Dallas pharmacies today, and the slang is just a memory for the soda jerks who didn't drift on.

Dora Newton and Martha Saunderson have been working the fountain at the Country Club Pharmacy for more than a dozen years and still remember many of the phrases passed on by their teachers.

"'Shoot one' was a Coke," said Mrs. Newton, "and 'Stretch One' was a large Coke.

Likewise, Mrs. Saunderson chimed in, "'Shoot a wild one' was cheery Coke, 'Shoot one frowning' was a lime Coke and a 'Shanghi' was an iced tea."

The two said "Squeeze one" meant a lemonade, "Draw one" called for a coffee and "Vanilla Dust" was actually a malt.

Charlie Day, who's been "jerking sodas" at the Highland Park Pharmacy for 51 years, recalled that a "400" used to be universal language for a small milk and an "800" was a large milk, of course.

He also explained a Dr Pepper was called a "Waco" because the drink originated in Waco. "Because they bottled Coca-Cola in Dallas, they called a Coke a 'Dallas.' If you had an order for one of each, you called the double order a 'Waxahachie,' be-

cause it was halfway between Dallas and Waco."

Day also recalled such specialties as a lemon Coke ("Shoot one yellow") and an ammonia Coke ("It was ½ teaspoon ammonia in a Coca-Cola. You don't hear of them anymore, but they would sure straighten you up in the mornings!").

The ammonia was a compound used in some medical preparations, not that used for cleaning, which is dangerous if taken internally.

Other bygone specialties included "California" for orangeade, "Shoot one honest" for a cherry Coke and "Shoot one blond" for a vanilla Coke. If you ordered "choc on" you got the chocolate sauce on a sundae, but if you said "choc in" you got the sauce in a chocolate soda.

Day's apprentice, 17-year-old Andy Turk, said he's learned a lot of phrases from customers requests. They include "Palm Beach" for pimento cheese sandwich, "mince" for ham salad, "Black Cow" for chocolate milk with a dip of ice cream, and "Black on White" for a chocolate soda with vanilla ice cream.

Gerald McMinn of Adams Oates Plaza Pharmacy remembered water was not only called "H2O," but "81" or "82" or "83," depending on how many glasses of water you needed.

"It was a lot of fun yakking it up," he said. "It's a shame to see all the old words die away. Soda fountains are becoming obsolete, and the new work force is so mobile you just can't pass it on in the few places left."

Paul Hatley, who runs "the only soda fountain in Oak Cliff," Hatley's

## "Shoot one yellow!"

Stevens' Park Pharmacy, agreed. "I don't remember much of it myself, but we used to have a code word for everything."

Indeed, Day confided the soda jerks even had an inside code for pretty girls that stepped up to the soda fountain, identifying them by "nice 21" or "19," depending on their age.

"When the boss came in, we'd yell 'Hold everything!'—which also meant leave off something—so the guys would look up and see he was coming," he said. "You probably shouldn't put that, though, it was supposed to be a secret."



Dallas News staff photo by Eli Grothe.

Dora Newton (left) and Martha Saunders show off their soda jerk talents at the Country Club Pharmacy.