



THE LATE W. S. BERGER, a ventriloquist-banker in Fort Mitchell, is shown standing in the midst his collection of dummies, some nearly 100 years

old. Berger, who died last year at age 94, left a trust for a new building to house his collection of about 400 dummies.

Museum established

Ventriloquist's dummies get Fort Mitchell home

Associated Press

FORT MITCHELL, Ky. — They sit mute, staring eerily, preserved for all time.

The 400 ventriloquist dummies collected over nearly a century by ventriloquist-banker William Shakespeare Berger will be housed in a new museum here after June 30.

Berger, a board member of the Covington, Ky., Trust and Banking Co., died last year at 94. He left a trust fund to house the dummies collected over his lifetime.

Ray Evans of the First National Bank of Covington, a director, said Berger left an estimated \$225,000 in the trust fund.

Berger, son of a German Shakespearean actor, operated the Vent Haven Museum at his home here for many years. He received noted visitors like Paul Winchell, Edgar Bergen, The Great Lester and Rudy Vallee.

Berger became interested in ventriloquism actively at the age of 16. His father entertained him as a child with little shows using handkerchiefs wrapped around his hands painted to emulate faces.

Berger not only began collecting the dummies but performed in area theaters

as well and compiled what is thought to be a complete history of the ancient art.

Many dummies he bought, others were willed or given to him.

He called the museum a "haven" because he considered the dummies "orphaned" by their masters.

"That's what this museum is for," he said before he died. "To take care of figures for ventriloquists who have passed on."

There are Chinese, frilly lasses, soldiers, bellhops and many nationalities and walks of life represented in the haven. Some wink or wiggle their ears when operated by a master. Most came from vaudevillians.

"They get under your skin," Berger had said of the dummies he used in his shows. He said he became the dummy character while working it. "His voice comes out so easy. That's your ego."

"I think Berger must have the same thing with Charley McCarthy."

Associated Press