

Ellsworth C. Plumstead (1863 - 1938)



Ellsworth C. Plumstead lived in Birmingham with his wife Isabel and their 4 children. For many years, Plum, as he was called by friends, made his living as an actor and entertainer. He was well known on the Chautauqua circuit around the country.

Chautauquas were traveling educational shows which brought performers to small towns from the late 1800s until the 1930s. They performed in tents in the summer and lyceums in the winter. Daily shows included music and literary readings.

Plumstead was one of only a few actors known as “impersonators” who dressed like the characters in their stories. They applied wigs and greasepaint while talking to the audience. They might change costumes and their appearance several times in one performance.



***Ellsworth Plumstead was
“The Wandering Raggedy
Man” in 1904***



An *Eccentric* article in 1910, (“Birmingham Impersonator”) said of Plumstead, “He is to the Lyceum what Maurice Chevalier is to the larger world of entertainment.”

Local resident and historian Hartland Smith relayed how local businessmen had to underwrite Chautauqua tickets and guarantee at least 150 sales. Smith said his grandfather, who owned a lumber yard in Birmingham, was never very happy about this, because they never sold all the tickets and had to cover the cost.

Why I was inspired: I was delighted to learn from Hartland Smith that Birmingham was on the Chautauqua Circuit and one of our very own residents was a well-known performer.

--Submitted by Pam DeWeese