

THE BUFFALO ARE COMING



Bob Doerk

903 Washington St.
P.O. Box 715
Fort Benton, MT 59442
(406) 622-5874

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Ron Laycock
Past President, LCTHF, Inc.
P.O. Box 3434
Great Falls, MT 59403

Dear Ron,

Thanks for your continuing involvement in the Foundation and all you have done in the past. I continue to soldier on but have had to divert my attentions primarily to my wife and her medical situation which has stabilized quite a bit. Not in a wheel chair at any rate, like she was three years ago. But the medical expenses have curtailed my traveling, by and large, but that is okay. We have seen the world!

I always regretted when I moved to Cheyenne in early 1996 that there no place to put my two five drawer file cabinets full of Lewis and Clark letters, trail information, etc. since we only had the archive storage area at the Russell Museum and that was filled to capacity. It was mostly routine adminitrave stuff anyway. May still be int he basement of the old bank I worked at but doubt it!

Box 3434 has special meeting to me as I emptied that box on a daily basis for a number of years, back int he days when we were all volunteers! Getting all the new and renewal memberships made me familair with the approximatley 1400 members back in those days. Anyway, for a bit of structure, here I go with the questions you provided:

1. Highlights are many (or low lights) with the highs outweighing the lows by a long shot! I remember being in Wilbur Werner's law office up in Cut Bank in the mid-80's when he said "Bob, one of these days, Bob Lange is going to have to give up the editorship of WPO and the only person I know of with the knowledge, the time and the editing experience to do it is Bob Saindon". Sure enough, Bob replaced Bob and on we went. Then during my term as presient (1989-91), Bob Saindon gave me the bad news that he was going to have to give up the editorship of WPO! I thought "oh, no"! We scrambled. Jim Large was an obvious choice but as he said, he lived in a touhouse one half block from the Library of Congress where he did his research, he had two 24 hour commercial free classical music stations that he listened to, and he felt the editor of WPO needed to reside in the west, somewhere along the trail! After much search and with an extremely limited budget, Marty Erickson became our editor, haveing been the editor of a magazine called "Rural Montana" put out by the Electric Coop Association. I know Marty received criticism in some circlces over the years but he did his best until we were able to better fund that aspect of our overall operation.

Another highlight was Don Nell stepping forward and helping me respond to the inquiries that started to pick up in volume...questions about Lewis and Clark that I researched and answered to the best of my ability. Most received in letter form in box 3434. He did yeoman work in responding to the queries I sent him for response as I continued to separate the

Membership applications from the checks (and sent the checks to our treasurer, John Walker, after making copies of the checks. Membership apps and renewals went to our membership secretary, Mary Partridge and Carol Cain, working as a team over in Miles City. Carol Cain was Ella Mae Howard's sister. Don Nell along with Bill Sherman were my two mentors and best friends up to the day each died, Bill on March 5, 2003 (I always remember the date, it was 50 years to the day when Uncle Joe Stalin died!) and Don on August 5, 2003.

In the days before a paid staff, it seemed that you only got fully engaged by the time your year was up so I opted for another year in the hot seat and never regretted it. By attending the annual meetings, through correspondence, and through telephone calls you felt like you had the pulse of the organization and it was hard to give up that knowledge and start over again. It just made sense at the time. A follow-up to that and perhaps another highlight is that I didn't think it was right for the person who had gone through the chairs and got the pulse of the organization down to just fade away. I felt the past president should continue to help out in non-policy ways but in ways that helped the Foundation and Lewis and Clark. Thus I became the Chairman of the Trails Coordination Committee (1991-6) when we attempted to do a complete inventory of the trail, complete with State Chairs in the Trail States and then "Segment" Coordinators under the state chairs. Did wonders in gathering data on everything from brochures, campsite locations, access, monuments, signage, etc. The NPS took it over under Dick Williams tutelage in 1995-6 timeframe.

2. So many anecdotes and happenings...just to name several. the Annual Meeting in 1990 was in Lewiston, Idaho and Jim Fazio was the chair. About a week before the meeting, he calls me in as close to a panic that "cool and calm" Jim could ever get! Since the Nez Perce aspect of the Lewis and Clark Expedition was the theme, one day was devoted to being with the Nez Perce and having a feast and a ceremony with the Nez Perce including their dancing in all their finery. It was scheduled for outdoors and everything was set. It had been a year of ups and downs for Jim in his planning what with changes in the Tribal Council, etc. We have all had those experiences. Anyway, his call was to tell me that the Nez Perce just informed him that they would not perform outdoors because they didn't want to get their moccasins dusty!!! He scrambled and it turned out we had it indoors in a high school gym, I believe and it all worked out fine.

A couple other anecdotes that I recall don't relate to my presidency but occurred during that time when I would get letters to respond to, if I cared to...ones I didn't send on to Don Nell. One was from an 88 year old woman who had just read that the dog's name was "Seaman" and not "Scannon". She was irate...she said that his name was Scannon, that is how she had known him and to get our god damn records straight!!!! I dutifully responded, enclosing Don Jackson's research on the name change as outlined in a 1985 WPO article. She sent me a letter back scolding me even more severely saying she didn't give a damn about any make believe research, he deserved his rightful name!!

Another letter I received was from an elderly man who lived along the Missouri River. We were getting good publicity on Lewis and Clark in the papers, journals, and on television. This guy wrote saying "What is the big deal with this Lewis and Clark stuff...they just pissed in the river and moved on!!!!"

Many more but will resist at this point.

3. My first annual meeting was the one we hosted in Great Falls in 1984. We hardly know how to spell Lewis and Clark as we formed the only active chapter at that time, the Portage Route Chapter, in 1983. It was a great meeting, something like 244 attendees, a new record at that time. Great field trips. When we were down on Portage Creek, for example, where the portage began out of the creek and up the draw, there was a thunderstorm in the distance with thunder and lightning. It was thrilling...never did rain. And on top of the Ulm Pishkun, we had a feast and the Lord's Prayer was sung by three women with instruments while Sacagawea did the Lord's prayer in sign language. It was terrific. Not a dry eye in the place.

Annual meetings during my term included the one in Bozeman in 1989 when I was handed the

gavel at the end of the banquet so i won't comment on that one, although it was a great meeting as they all were in terms of the ones I attended after 1984. Our 1990 meeting was in Lewiston and it was great, field trips and lectures were memorable. Highlights included the banquet where Myla Lawyer, great-great-granddaughter of the one of the three young boys that greeted Clark on Weippe Prairie (and thus descended from Twisted Hair) sat next to Peyton C. Clark, Jr., "Bud" being the great-great-great- grandson of William Clark. To have the two seated next to each other was a great moment! The jet boat ride by Wally Beamer, 70 miles up the snake river over 55 rapids or falls was a great day. It was a pre-meeting option. Also, believe it or not, Mary and "bumped" the Governor out of his quarters at the Convention headquarters and he took another room while he was there! Didn't know it at the time. Jim Fazio did a great job as chair.

1991 meeting was In Louisville and Winnie George was the chair with a great assist from local folks. She succeeded me as president but, alas, died all too soon after her term. Seeing Locust Hill, the Mulberry Estate location, the unveiling of Goerge Rogers Clark's placque on the north side of the Ohio River were all highlights. We had a boat trip on the Ohio, good lectures, field trips, book fairs, etc.

I went to annual meetings from 1984 through 1995 and in those 12 years you basically got up and down the trail and saw it all "close up and personal". Great way to do it. Every annual meetign I attended exceeded expectations. It was like a family affair in those days as the old timers were all there. It was an annual "family" reunion. The last one I attended was in 2000 in Dillon, I was a bus tour guide for field trips. It was almost too big but that is wha success brings with it. Not the same feel but still great. Can't have that closeness when you have 500 attendees as opposed to 150-225 which is what is was like in the earlier days. Of course, I heard old timers say in 1984 that these annual meetings were getting too big... not like when only 75 came in the late 70's and early 80's!!!

4. As I recall, the Chairman of the Annual meeting put together the program with consultation with others. I don't think we had a committee for the Annual Meeting at the Foundation level but I'll bet we did. Certainly the Chairman was from the community where the annual meeting was to be held so they could get the logistics done. In Winnie George's case, being from St. Louis with the annual meeting in Louisville, she needed local help and got it. It was always a cooperative effort. Might have some lcoal talent speak but then the main experts were always on hand, whther it be John Logan Allen, Ronda, Moulton or others.

5. Lewis and Clark buffs were the mainstay of the Foundation membership when we had 1200-1400 members. There was always a thrust to get more members but my observation was, the more aggressive one was in getting friends involved int he Foundation or giving gift memberships, the weaker that group was, many not renewing. In orther words, it had to come from "within" and have a real desire to join. All the old timers knew each other and guys like Frenchy Chuinard, Bob Beal, the Strong's, they all stayed in touch. Ralph Rudeen, Strode Hinds, Hal Billion, there were many who were involved. Like a fraternity. there were gals involved too with Bev Hinds always being a stalwart as she is today.

6. Biggest challenge I faced was getting an editor to replace Bob Saindon, one who was willing to do the work with very little compensation. Had to be a labor of love. the age before computers, the age in which I still live in as a matter of fact!

7. No regrets...we felt we were making progress and getting better and better. After my presidency, I still emptied box 3434 and I would ahve to say the biggest regret I had was when we started hiring staff "by committee". Unfair to the committee. I knew some of the folks who put their hat in the ring when we haired our first part time Executive Director. ended up hiring a gal out of Colorado. What a disaster she was. Just ask Jim Peterson. Sammy Meadows who followed her wasn't much better. Just can't hire folks based on resume's. Got to know them, have worked with them, etc. I had too much experience with all this in the Air Force and then in banking. Resume's mean nothing when it comes to getting the job done. Very disappointing when I saw who was selected early in the game. Nobodies fault, did the best they could but it didn't work out to the benefit of the Foundation.

8. I really can't think of what I would have done differently. With me, it was truly a labor of love. Worked from 6 to 8 in the morning on Foundation matters, usually Saturday mornings and some evenings. Good support from Mary, my wife.

9. I guess getting board members to chair or be on committees was my biggest thrust in the change or policy arena. Felt that some board members simply were appointed and had no role. Hard to do long distance. We tried to have a geographic spread among board members. By getting board members involved on committees you got a pretty good idea of who the worker bees were and who had the stuff to proceed up the chairs. In my day you had a Second VP for a year and then he/she moved up to 1st VP and then Pres. three year commitment unless the president extended for an extra year. Worked well but you didn't want to be stuck with a resume builder with little desire to apply sweat equity to the job.

10. Hot button item was WPO editor. We were deriving a good stream of revenue from Wilbur Werner's efforts with the Scriber bronzes, both Lewis and Seaman and Clark the surveyer. they helped underwrite WPO (the sales from the bronzes). Great project! I recall a slight dues increase. Always controversial as well as memberships for families, students, etc.

11. A whole new ball game. We liked the all volunteer aspect but knew, at the same time, that we were outgrowing this way of doing business. Whole new ball game today with all of the paid staff/professionalism we have, permanent offices, etc. That is what we hoped for and through the efforts of all those active members to date, it became a reality. We worked our way through "founders syndrome" which we did have with Bob and Ruth Lange. But bless them for setting the standard and giving us high ideals to follow!

12. Be committed, have fun, study the journey, and realize that we all have strengths and weaknesses. Select the right folks for the right jobs and you save yourself all sorts of headaches. The academic type have a role to play but in the organization staffing, look for the skills you need even if their knowledge of Lewis and Clark is shaky. Use attorneys, financial guru's, accountants, marketing specialists, etc. Build local support through tying in the Lewis and Clark story with economic potential of tourism in local communities. It is what "turns the crank" of the locals, even those with no interest in history. It pays in the end.

FINAL ANECDOTE: Here is an example of how one man can make a difference. In 1983, there was a gal from Los Angeles who came to Great Falls to run a three day forum at the request of the local Chamber of Commerce. It was a goal setting forum for the community. My good friend, Bob Bivens, attended this forum. He had retired from the Air Force in early 1983, went into real estate, and made Great Falls his home. I did the same, retiring from the Air Force in 1982 and went into banking (trust department). On the last afternoon of the three day forum, the lady said "you have heard from me for three days, now I want to hear from you...what 'bugs' you about Great Falls?" Bob raised his hand and said it bugged him when a visitor comes to Great Falls and asks where the Great Falls of the Missouri is and is invariably pointed to Black Eagle Falls, the one closest to downtown Great Falls. And that is not the Great Falls of the Missouri and that "bugs" me. She said why don't you do something about it and he said anyone interested, see me at the back of the room. A half dozen folks did and they agreed to meet at the Russell Museum the next week. Bob called me because I had an interest in history and we met, formed an informal committee and then found out that such a thing as the Foundation existed, formed a chapter and ended up hosting the 1984 annual meeting. And that began the resurgence of the Lewis and Clark interest in the Great Falls area. At the 1984 meeting Bob Bivens introduced a resolution, passed by the Foundation, to create a Lewis and Clark Interpretive Center in Great Falls, Congressman Marlenee carried the water and the rest is history. My point...what if Bob Biven didn't raise his hand at that meeting? Who knows? But one person CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE. Bob passed on in 1991 after a long bout with cancer. Keep up the good work!!!!

Bob Owen