

Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation
Anecdotes of Past President John Greenslit

As President of the Foundation in 1971-72, I had the joy of serving the State of North Dakota on the Presidential Commission as well as serving as the 2nd President of the Foundation. Sherry Fisher had served as the initial President or Chairman of the Board.

It was an amazing appointment by Governor William Guy to represent North Dakota, as a youthful member of his Cabinet while serving as the Director of the Outdoor Recreation Agency, located in Bismarck.

The Agency was created to serve as a liaison with the U.S. Department of Interior, after the creation of the Land and Water Conservation Act funding program via the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation. 13 department heads comprised the Agency Board, including Game and Fish, Water Resources, State Parks, Historical Preservation, Travel and other related agency director's. Apparently, Governor Guy saw a direct connection between funding outdoor recreation acquisition and development projects and the potential recognition of the Lewis and Clark Trail as a critical lynch pin to expedition and North Dakota's recognition of the historic and economic place in history.

Most of the fellow Commissioners of the 11 States included in the federal advisory group and the formation of the Foundation were legendary in their respective positions. Many had a direct relationship to either Lewis and Clark family ties, others had outstanding credentials as historians, some managed State agencies that had responsibilities to manage natural resources along the Trail or offered public policy leadership through careers with state and federal government.

I truly walked with giants in a similar mission to recognize and celebrate the vision of Thomas Jefferson to find and report back to the nation their findings from Wood River, Illinois to Astoria, Oregon. As a rookie participant under the age of 35, one could not have had better mentors or guidance for fellow colleagues on the Commission. My initial appointment was confirmed by the White House and President Ike Eisenhower. Congress, however, did not re-authorize the Commission. Thus, the need and easy decision to form the Foundation.

As I ascended offices within the Foundation, I became Chairman of the Board in 1971. Shortly after that partial term, I resigned my position in North Dakota to take a similar position as Executive Director of the Michigan Recreation and Park Association in Lansing. The relocation seemed appropriate to require active participation from residency within the Trail States, thus I stepped down from the Lewis and Clark Trail Foundation with deep regret.

Personal memories linger with the wonderful camaraderie within the membership and staff of the Foundation. One of the more amusing events while serving as President was a major article being published in the Readers Digest. In a letter of appreciation to their editors on behalf of the Foundation, I thanked them for the tremendous coverage and pointed out a rather serious omission, that being not mentioning the participation of the expedition from Wood River, Illinois. The Digest indicated only 10 States were involved in the Trail.

The Digest responded with a terse note that there “editors were certain the reports were correct as they had consulted 3 encyclopedia’s.” I responded that “I had consulted the Lewis and Clark Journal’s” and suggested that might be a better source! The media picked up the minor tug or war, and the Digest took some bad press. The issue was closed with a final note for Digest editors who indicated “if we ever do another article on the Trail, we certainly will include Illinois!”

Another highlight was the winter of 1971 as National Geographic visited Bismarck/Mandan to feature a re-creation of the winter visit of Lewis and Clark in 1804. We attempted to prepare a meal over an open fire in one of the mud lodges at Fort Mandan, with National Geographic writers, cameras, and State history buffs. As the temperature hovered around the -20 below, we finally gave up and headed for the nearest Holiday Inn for dinner!

We managed to create a variety State Parks along the Missouri River, as well as paved access roads all the way to the Montana borders. Much of the route has been submerged by the Garrison Dam on the Missouri, plus the near extinction of the Hidatsa, Arikara, and Mandan tribes that hosted the travel party along the way. The tribal history literally is history! Vanished.

One might recall a variety of highlights in the future, as many of the minutes, correspondence and press reports have been stored and filed almost into oblivion. My deepest appreciation to Bob Gatten to seeking me out, and inviting me to contribute to the archives.

While most of the current leadership is unknown, I do have a sense of dedication and appreciation for keeping the story of the Expedition alive. Congratulations and Thank You,

John F. Greenslit
Lansing, Michigan
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