

Clarence H. Decker (1917-1984)



Services were held on October 8, 1984, at Wood River, Illinois, for Clarence H. Decker, 67, prominent businessman and community leader, and a former president (1976-1977) of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc. He had also served the Foundation as treasurer since 1974. Decker was killed on October 4th at his East Alton, Illinois home, apparently during the course of a robbery. An intensive search and investigation is underway to apprehend his attacker, but specific details are not available at the time of this writing.

The Foundation has suffered a loss of one of its stalwart members, who over the years has taken a keen interest, first, in the 1964-1969 Congressional Lewis and Clark Trail Commission, and presently, since the inception of the Foundation, when it succeeded the Commission in 1970. At the time of his death he was also a member of the National Park Service Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Advisory Council.

Decker's untiring efforts to fund and develop the construction of a fitting memorial at the location of the Lewis and Clark Expedition's point of departure for the lands to the west culminated in the dedication of an elaborate memorial structure in Illinois' Lewis and Clark State Park in 1981.<sup>1</sup> Earlier a group of local citizens had been instrumental in acquiring land for the park. The park is located directly across the Mississippi River from the mouth of the Missouri River, a few miles south of East Alton, Illinois, where Decker owned and operated the well-known Lewis and Clark Restaurant. In spite of the changing course of the rivers, over some 180 years, the Expedition's Camp Dubois-Wood River ("Camp Wood") site is in the same relative position as was the exploring party's 1803-1804 winter establishment, and creates the feeling of esthetic integrity for the site.<sup>2</sup>

Clarence Decker's service to our organization in handling the financial administration and investment portfolio for the Foundation has been outstanding and a great contribution to the organization's monetary stability. His annual financial reports made to the board of directors and the membership at annual meetings have shown steady gains and have been presented with Clarence's usual vitality and humor.

He was born in Chester, on the Mississippi River in southwestern Illinois and graduated from Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Illinois. Prior to coming to the East Alton-Wood River area in 1941, he taught school in his hometown of Chester. Entering the business field in 1939, he was employed in the auditing department by the International Shoe Company in St., Louis. Transferring to the company's tannery operation at Wood River, he was employed as an administrative assistant. Later he became vice president of the E. H. Goulding's Sons Co., a jewelry firm in East Alton. He purchased the Lewis and Clark Restaurant in the same city in 1963, and for some years also owned and operated the Lewis and Clark Lodge (motel) near the restaurant, as well as a large motion picture theatre complex in the city. At the present time he was a principal in the Lewis and Clark Realty Company and the owner of the Decker Apartments.

During recent years Decker has held positions and participated in the activities of: The Alton-Wood River Community Chest (Board of Directors, Treasurer); The Wood River Planning Council (President); Wood River Lions Club (President); Loins of Illinois (District Governor); Lions Club Blind Activities Committee (member); Lions International (International Director); Wood River Township Hospital (Chairman of the Board); Boy Scouts of America, Piasa Council (Executive Committee); National Committee for Higher Education (Trustee); Valparaiso University (Advisory Board); First National Bank of Wood River (Board of Directors); and the Illinois T.B. and R.D. Association (Executive Committee, Secretary).

He is listed in *Who's Who in the Midwest* and the *World's Who's Who in Commerce and Industry*. He was the recipient of the Wood River Township Chamber of Commerce's Outstanding Citizen Award.

At the time of his death, in addition to his activities with the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation and the National Park Service's Lewis and Clark National Historic Trail Advisory Council, noted above, Clarence was a Past International Director and Life Member of Lions International. He was a member of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Wood River. He also remained active as a member of the Wood River Lions Club and the local Chamber of Commerce.

He is survived by a son, Robert C. Decker of Germantown, Tennessee; two grandsons, and two sisters, Ella Decker and Lydia Decker Pautler, both of Chester, Illinois.

The editor's personal friendship and business relationship with Clarence was characteristic of the pleasant associations all officers, directors, and members enjoyed. His enthusiasm for Lewis and Clark matters, strong conviction to detail, integrity, and valuable council, along with an infectious feeling of having a good time were apparent always. In 1977, during his presidency, when the Foundation's Ninth Annual Meeting was held in St. Charles, Missouri, these admirable leadership qualities of his were most manifest. The meeting was an outstanding gathering and program for members and guests. It is certain that he would have played a most important part in the meeting planned for 1985 in St. Louis. The Foundation will miss his presence in the years to come - he was a respected and dedicated contributor to the success of our Foundation.

Several members have contributed memorials in Clarence's name to the Foundation. Such contributions may be made to the Foundation and should be directed to The Clarence H Decker Memorial Fund, 5054 S.W. 26<sup>th</sup> Place, Portland, OR 97201.

<sup>1</sup> For more information and illustrations related to the Memorial see: *We Proceeded On*, Vol. 5, No. 4, pp. 1, 3; Vol. 7, No. 4, p. 3; and Vol. 8, No. 2, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> See reproduction of an aerial photograph of the confluence of the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers in *We Proceeded On*, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 7.

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*Prepared by Bob Gatten, 2011*