

Robert Ernest Lange (1915-1991)



By Irving Anderson

A strong voice in assuring the preservation and perpetuation of factual Lewis and Clark Expedition history has been stilled. Whether it involved serious historical works, movie docudramas or media expressions in any form, Bob Lange had no tolerance for apocrypha when it came to his heroes, the two commanders and their partners in discovery. For more than half a century, Bob distinguished himself as an outstanding student, writer and trustee of our nation's cherished legacy: the first recorded knowledge of natural resources, peoples and lands extending from the Mississippi River west to the Pacific Ocean.

Born in Portland, Bob lived in Oregon his entire life, except for four years of military service during World War II, which included duty as an X-ray technician in the Burma-China-India theater of operations. In 1953, Bob married Ruth Kincaid, whom he had met during the time he was in training at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. By profession, Bob was a lighting engineer specializing in lighting design for schools, athletic fields, factories, and stores. Employed by Eoff Electric Company, he worked up in various levels of administration, holding the position of operations manager of the Portland branch at the time of his retirement in 1980.

Bob's interest in the Lewis and Clark Expedition was introduced to him and nurtured in him during his teenage years while involved in Boy Scout activities at Camp Meriwether on the Oregon coast. As his interest in the exploring mission expanded, he became immersed in the pure form of its documentation, checking out from the State Library each successive volume of the Thwaites Edition of the journals to take with him on his sales trips across the state of Oregon. His serious study of the Expedition led to his acquisition of a fine collection of the explorer's published journals and related literature.

Bob became active in the Foundation's movement in 1971 and attended every annual meeting from then through 1990. In 1973 he was elected Foundation president. During his tenure the Foundation moved from an informal confederation of individuals interested in the Lewis and

Clark story, to the formally structured, vibrant, orderly organization it is today. He initiated the program format for annual meetings which feature field trips to important Lewis and Clark historic sites.

In 1974, Foundation officers authorized publication of a quarterly magazine. Ingeniously christened *We Proceeded On* by its founder, Dr. E.G. "Frenchy" Chuinard, versatile Bob Lange volunteered to be its editor. Under Bob's skillful editorship the magazine became a fine professional product, recognized nationally for its literary vignettes of little known gems of Lewis and Clark history. Bob became "Editor Emeritus" of *We Proceeded On* in 1987. Following his retirement as editor, he remained as chairman of the publications committee, giving his assistance to researchers and writers, and corresponding with school children seeking information about the Expedition. The latter, especially, afforded him much pleasure.

In addition to his Lewis and Clark history interests, Bob pursued several other activities and hobbies. One of these interests was astronomy, including grinding lenses, building telescopes and participating in star studies under the auspices of Harvard University. Another was classical music. He built a vast collection of records and tapes, and regularly attended piano and symphony concerts performed in Portland. He had a life-long interest in botany and grew orchids and other plants in his greenhouse, together with cultivating bonsai trees. He was a philatelist of many years standing, and possessed an extensive collection of U.S. issue stamps.

Robert E. Lange was a many-faceted person imbued with the worth of old fashioned idealism. His vast knowledge of Lewis and Clark history, gained from original research through rare, antiquarian books, maps, and other primary source materials, assures him a lasting place among trans-Mississippi-west history authorities.

Bob is survived by his wife Ruth, who reinforced his life's achievements, and matched his love of the outdoors. To you Ruth, the Foundation membership extends its deepest sympathy for a loss that we share with you, as we bid a final adieu to our esteemed colleague and friend.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Lewis and Clark Mail Heritage Foundation, Inc., Award of Meritorious Achievement. Conferred at Great Falls, Montana, 1976.

The Captain Robert Gray Medal, the highest award of the Washington State Historical Society. Conferred at Tacoma, Washington, 1983.

Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc., Distinguished Service Award. Conferred jointly to Bob and Ruth at Pasco, Washington, 1983.

Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc., Award of Meritorious Achievement. Conferred jointly to Bob and Ruth at Bozeman, Montana, 1989.

Appointed a life member of the Honorary Council, Oregon Historical Society, 1988.

A memorial fund has been set up in Bob Lange's name. Please send contributions to: Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Box 3434, Great Falls, MT 59403.

from *We Proceeded On* 17(4):28-29 (November 1991)

(Lange served as Vice President of the Foundation, 1972-1973, and as President, 1973-1974.)

Prepared by Bob Gatten, 2011