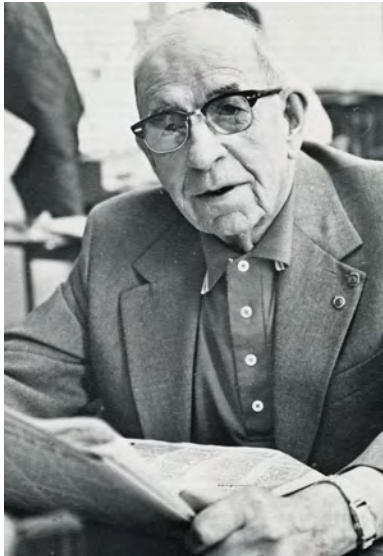


E. E. "Boo" MacGilvra (1893 – 1980)



1980 photograph – courtesy of Owen Grinde, Montana Power Co., Butte

In a letter to the editor, Foundation Director Arlen "Jim" Large wrote: "What can we say about Boo MacGilvra? Rather narrowly, we can say that he was the granite base of our Foundation, and if we are strong now, it is in great part the result of his effort. The odd thing is, he never seemed to be making any effort, or to be forcing anything. He was just enjoying life, and his enjoyment infected us all."

There has been so much written about "Boo" MacGilvra since his passing on March third, in magazines, newspapers, and newspaper editorials, that we hardly need to repeat the acclamations, other than to relate his great interest and love of the Lewis and Clark adventure, and for the strength and support he gave our organization. If this was his second fascination, and we know it was, his love for his adopted state of Montana was first and without end.

In a magazine article written for the *Montana Citizen*, prior to his death, Vivian A. Paladin, Editor Emeritus, *Montana - The Magazine of Western History*, concluded her dissertation about "Boo MacGilvra: Montanan For All People" by saying:

One does not come to the end of a recital about the interests, accomplishments, personality and worth which make up the fabric of one such person. In Boo's case, whether you're writing about him or visiting him, there is always more to tell, another facet to explore, another story to relate. Boo has been called "Mr. Montana" by many. He's that all right, and more. He represents the best that intelligence, education, experience and a strong morality tempered with humor can make of anyone.

For our members who did not know E. E. "Boo" MacGilvra, we should say that he was born 86 years ago on a ranch near Baraboo, Wisconsin, the source of his nickname. He went to school in Baraboo and for several summers during his boyhood, was a companion of Richard T. Ringling, only child of Alf T. Ringling, one of the famous five brothers who founded the circus at Baraboo. The boys traveled with the circus, providing much background for MacGilvra's later stories. MacGilvra never lost his love for the circus and acquired many mementos of "The Big Top." When he was 70, as a special compliment to him, he was invited to ride the circus train as a guest in the Ringling private car from Butte, Montana to its next engagement in Minnesota.

A retired public relations executive at Montana Power Co., MacGilvra had resided in Butte since 1935. He first saw Montana as a young University of Minnesota man touring with a group of fraternity brothers. With a degree in animal husbandry from Minnesota, remembering his favorable impression of the state, he came to Montana in 1916 where he lived the rest of his life, except for service during World War 1.

Before World War 1, he was engaged in various business interests near Zortman, in the Little Rockies, including mining, homesteading, ranching, and the mercantile business. After the war, in which he served as an infantryman, he returned again to that area, eventually moving to Polson in 1930, where he engaged in the theater and ranching businesses. Later he was active in fostering commercial production of sweet cherries in the orchards around Flathead Lake. In the same area, for many years, he owned one of the largest herds of Shetland ponies in the United States. In later years he maintained a Shetland Pony ranch five miles south of Butte.

He was elected to the Montana State Senate in 1932, and served for three sessions. He attended every session of the Montana Legislature, since his elected tenure, in one capacity or another.

He was instrumental in the organization of the Montana American Legion, and recently was awarded the 60-year Legion Pin. He received his 50-year pin in the Masonic Order several years ago. He was a co-founder of the World Museum of Mining in Butte and The Montana Heritage Foundation in Helena. For over twenty years he has been on the Board of Trustees of the Montana Historical Society, serving under five governors, and has been president of the Board four times. Boo was a member of the Masons, Elks, the Navy League in Butte, the Montana Club in Helena, the American Shetland Pony Club, and the Montana Stockgrowers Association. Also, he helped found the Pony of the Americas Club, reflecting his life-long interest in the animals.

During World War II, MacGilvra was part owner and operator of the Mike Horse Mine near Lincoln. It was the largest lead producer in the state and was second high in zinc output. It also yielded gold, silver, copper and cadmium. In 1946 the mine was sold to the American Smelting and Refining Co.

Always interested in history and the westward expansion of our country, Boo was a serious student of the Lewis and Clark Expedition. He had traced the exploring party's routes through Montana and the west, and was involved, with other Lewis and Clark enthusiasts, in locating the 286 campsites used by the Expedition while traveling in Montana.

During the life of the congressional Lewis and Clark Trail Commission (1964-1969), MacGilvra served as a member of the Montana State Lewis and Clark Committee. In 1969, when the Commission completed its work, and it was suggested that some organization take over the effort begun by the Commission, Boo was one of thirteen, from the eleven Trail States, who journeyed to St. Louis, on June 27, 1970, for the specific purpose of organizing the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc. He had served as a director for the Foundation since that time. Except for illness, which caused him to miss the 1977 Annual Meeting, he attended all annual meetings of the organization. In 1975 he refused the nomination for president of the Foundation,

preferring to continue a long (then in the fifth year) project dear to his heart, the preservation of Beaverhead Rock, the geologic landmark near Dillon in southwest Montana, which closely connotes to the Lewis and Clark Expedition. The privately owned 84-acre landmark and adjacent land was about to be quarried for riprap for flood control use along the Beaverhead-Jefferson Rivers. Boo prevailed on the Montana State Legislature to appropriate \$30,000 as matching money for an equal amount from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, and then testified at the condemnation hearings. He convinced the jury that the landmark had "unlimited historic value" and victoriously reported its decision that "Beaverhead Rock is saved!" (See also, *WPO*, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 9-10; Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 11.)

More recently, together with Past President Wilbur Werner, Cut Bank, Montana, he shared in underwriting (\$10,000) the Foundation's "Meriwether Lewis and Our Dog Scannon" bronze project (see *WPO*, Vol. 3, No. 3, p. 1; Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 16). We continue to be able to publish *We Proceeded On* because of the success of the bronze project and other grants which fund the production, printing and mailing costs for our quarterly publication.

For all these activities in the interest of preserving the history and heritage of the Lewis and Clark story, and his contributions to making our Foundation what it is today, the Awards Committee, in 1976, honored Boo MacGilvra at the Annual Banquet at the Eighth Annual Meeting, Great Falls, Montana, with the title "Honorary Past President". Previously, in 1972, at the Foundation's Fourth Annual Meeting, Helena, Montana, he was the recipient of the Foundation's Award of Meritorious Achievement.

Boo's innumerable extemporaneous lectures or talks about the exploring enterprise were usually titled: "One Man's Love Affair With the Lewis and Clark Adventure." Known for his story telling, he was a favorite at any gathering. His usual expression at his "vesper services" (vespers in Boo's lexicon meant the cocktail hour) was "my most pious regards" as he lifted his glass. A morning greeting invariably was "... if you don't like bourbon and water, breakfast is over." The subjects of many of his stories, Vivian Paladin says:

... always turned out to be characters with such colorful names as Dull Razor Dick (a barber), Airtight Johnson (a close-to-the-vest poker player), Two Dog Moore (a well equipped sheepherder), Squeaky Swede (a burly legislator with a high-pitched voice), and Shotgun Maggie (a rancher's wife whose nose tilted so far forward that looking at her full in the face was "like looking at the end of a double-barreled shotgun").

Unlike the unschooled buffoon or the unsavory jokester, he was not given to dashing off pungent sayings for their shock value. His "Booisms" became part of the fabric of his conversation, regardless of the subject or the era of the event.

Last December 23rd, the editor and Foundation Vice President Irving Anderson telephoned Boo to wish him a "happy birthday." In the course of the spirited conversation he admitted to his 86 years, but added that "I really don't recommend middle-age to anyone."

MacGilvra married Edna Poitras of Butte, July 1, 1944. She survives, along with several nieces, nephews and a sister-in-law, Mrs. Rita Staples of Butte. To you, Edna MacGilvra, we send our

heartfelt sympathies for enduring strength, as we join you in savoring and expanding memories of this warm, affectionate, and remarkable man.

from *We Proceeded On* 6(2):4-6 (May 1980)

(MacGilvra was a Director of the Foundation, 1970, 1973-1980; and Vice President, 1971.)

Prepared by Bob Gatten, 2011