

LEWIS AND CLARK TRAIL HERITAGE FOUNDATION EXPERIENCES
by Steve Lee, January, 2011

How I got involved with the Foundation.

I think it is important to start this essay with an explanation of how I came to a member of this organization that led to my involvement on committees, organizing annual meetings and serving as treasurer for three years.

In 1986 long-time member Ruthann Caylor gifted a membership to me shortly after I had relocated to Boise, Idaho, to work on the political campaign of Governor Cecil D. Andrus. I had expressed a desire to retrace the trail to her so Ruthann realized that Foundation would be the next best step. For many years, Ruthann had been a willing and interested companion to her husband John's Lewis and Clark activities and trips. John was instrumental in getting the Idaho Governor's Committee formed and had also taught the first college class strictly devoted to the Corps of Discovery at Boise State College in the '60s.

When I received the information on the upcoming annual meeting planned for Bozeman in 1989, it appealed to me with field trips to areas that I was familiar with having grown up in Butte, Montana - namely Helena, Dillon and Lemhi Pass. Ruthann and I made plans to attend that meeting. The Bozeman meeting turned out to be a wonderful experience and, it made me want to return. I remember talking to one of the stalwarts of the organization, Bill Sherman, and he quizzed me about my background and interests in the organization. He indicated the Foundation was always in need of members to step up and be involved and now I appreciate his efforts on behalf of the organization. At the meeting, I was impressed with the many folks who extended their friendship and didn't care how much I knew about Lewis and Clark. This, and the fact that there was a meaningful agenda and great field trips, had caught my interest. However, there was another reason that I would be at the next meeting – it was planned for Lewiston, Idaho and Idaho Chapter president Jim Fazio readily enlisted all Idaho attendees to help with the effort.

Idaho Chapter President.

In 1991 I had other vacation plans (my first trip to Europe!) and skipped the annual meeting. However, another action in early 1992 would lead me back into the thick of the Lewis and Clark organization. That year, Ruthann, with the help of State Treasurer Lydia Justice Edwards, being concerned that the Idaho Chapter had gone dormant after the departure of Jim Fazio to Nebraska in 1990, insisted that I become the president at the spring meeting in 1992. Hesitant at first, I couldn't say no and immediately set out to learn more about the trail and to provide leadership to the chapter. The nice thing about being president is I could then explore the trail in Idaho and do it on my terms – I wanted to camp on the Lolo Trail. I would serve as chapter

president until the fall meeting in 1999. By then, I had moved a couple of miles across the Idaho border into the state of Washington, and felt it best to relinquish the job. However, before I passed the reins on, the Chapter had sponsored and participated in the National Trails Day events in Salmon, experienced campouts along the Lolo Trail, donated money to keep the Spalding-Allen Nez Perce artifacts in Idaho and raised money and distributed Lewis and Clark videos to every school district in Idaho.

Elected as treasurer.

In August of 2000 at the annual meeting in Dillon, Montana, I was elected treasurer by the board of directors. By this time, I had attended eleven annual meetings and served on the Young Adults Committee. I was eager to give my time and talents to the Foundation. Little did I know what awaited the staff and board in the year ahead. As we arrived in Dillon, the members met Sammye Meadows, the Foundation's second full-time executive director as well as several other employees. In just a few years, the organization had gone from a mostly volunteer organization with two part-time employees to one with four full-time employees. We also learned that Sammye had tendered her resignation as executive director after two and a half years. Later on in the year after Cari Karns was elevated to executive director, we learned that the budget had been constructed on the premise that a large portion of it would be funded by several unsecured grants. This was how we were supposed to support the full-time staff! Most of those grants never materialized although Cari did a good job of putting together several smaller proposals together with cost cutting we were able to keep the organization solvent. We all learned a great deal on how to pinch pennies and cut our expenses drastically.

Unfortunately, finances would be tough for the next three years that I was involved with the budgeting process as treasurer. This included a big drop in the stock market that shrunk our endowment funds. It also didn't help that Kari would leave the executive director position. It did help that new executive director Carol Bronson stuck around a lot longer than previous directors. The reoccurring problem during this period was that the Foundation expanded the staff in 2000 without ever finding a stable funding means of supporting that much staff let alone finding a way to fund the programs they were asked to direct – mainly the library/archive operations and the field or trail outreach program. The three budget-setting sessions that I participated in were painful exercises. Each time personnel cuts were considered as the easiest way to make budget. However, the budget committee and leadership were able to keep everyone employed but it didn't leave much discretionary spending.

It was during this time that I took on a role that I never envisioned myself in – that of “resident curmudgeon”. I became the board member that had to say “no” to spending. I recall a board meeting when early in the session the board approved a bare-bones budget and turned around later in the day and proposed spending a bunch of money that was not in the budget. I found it amazing that we could have that discussion on the same day as adopting a budget!

Educating the board in the basics of budgeting and endowments became a regular task for the treasurer. I was always telling the staff and board that it wasn't going to happen.

My experience as treasurer firmed up my belief that a more stable source of funding was desperately needed. At this time I learned the value of the Foundation's endowment funds. The establishment of an endowment or restricted fund for each major activity the Foundation conducts became a long-term goal of mine in dealing with the funding shortcomings. I felt that I should at least plant this idea in as many decision makers as I could. The existing endowments of the Foundation consisted of the "Bronze" fund that benefitted the publishing of *We Proceeded On*, the "Fellows" fund that contributed to an executive secretary's position and the "Burroughs" fund that had been contributed by Mr. Burroughs for youth activities. The first two helped fund those two important items of the budget although larger endowments would have helped even more.

Even though finances were tough, one big accomplishment at this time was the establishment of the Shattuck Fund. Robert Shattuck, a long-time loyal member and frequent annual meeting attendee, passed away but remembered the Foundation in his will. The organization would receive the proceeds of two insurance policies. When the payments ended, I was able to take the idea of a restricted fund and a draft resolution to the board meeting where the board passed and established the Robert Shattuck Restricted Fund in the Foundation endowments. This fund was to fund small grants for Lewis and Clark research.

I also attempted to establish an "annual meeting" fund in the endowments with the proceeds from the 2000 and 2001 annual meeting profits. In both cases, the board wished not to include those proceeds in the budget's general operations fund. However, some in leadership didn't want another fund – and didn't understand that an endowment usually has many, many restricted "pots" of money in it. One of the reasons I pushed this idea was the fear among the board that the 2003 Philadelphia annual meeting might lose money. They had planned for 800 attendees with the start of the bicentennial occurring that year. However, in the end, only about 300 people showed up. As a result, there was some serious re-negotiating with vendors that took place but fortunately, the Foundation did not lose any money over it. I thought that if we used the "profits" from annual meetings and placed them in the fund, we would have a cushion that would protect the Foundation's general operations.

Little did I know that eight years later I would have another chance to promote this idea. That occurred when I completed co-chairing the 2010 annual meeting in Lewiston. As the treasurer of that effort, we were able to return the proceeds of \$7,100.00 from the 2010 meeting. Once again I promoted the idea of the "annual meeting" fund in a form of a draft resolution that accompanied the check and was sent to every board member. It provided that the fund would supply the seed money of \$2,000 to future annual meetings, provide for stipends for youth to attend annual meetings and provide a fund to absorb any losses from annual meetings. As of the date of this writing, no action has taken place from the board. (See Appendix A)

During my time as treasurer, we budgeted funds for some Bicentennial activities for the kickoff of the Bicentennial in 2003 at the first signature event. That event was held at Monticello and the Foundation and the Thomas Jefferson Foundation partnered in this endeavor. The Monticello event was highly successful and provided a grand start of the four year bicentennial. This led me to place “seed” money in the last budget I presented to the board for upcoming signature events. It was my hope that the Foundation would continue to be involved in future events and, at a minimum, host a “free” event at each one for membership and potential members. I also thought that these events presented us a grand opportunity to host fundraisers for the Foundation at such locations where interest would be high for Lewis and Clark. I figured, why not take advantage of these targeted audiences of Lewis and Clark enthusiasts from coast to coast and expand our profile? The Foundation did host some membership gatherings but, I don’t believe the efforts during the bicentennial made much headway in significantly boosting membership or fundraising.

After looking back at this experience, I would like to see the Foundation host a major fundraiser once a year to increase the existing endowment funds. It is important to ask the members to support the annual operations of the Foundation, but it wouldn’t hurt to once each year target the long-term future of the organization. One idea I had would be to let the donors “vote” for the fund they would like to contribute to - much like a ballot. This would give each of the funds a bit of publicity since the donors might not be aware of many of them. Such a fundraiser could be held just prior to the start of the annual meeting and be the one time each year that the membership would be asked to increase these funds. An event like this, if held at the annual meeting location, would present the opportunity to reach new members and donors in many different geographic locations.

As I left the treasurer’s position in late 2003, I was pleased that I was able to give my time and ideas in helping maintain a great organization. It was great working with very capable individuals in executive directors Kari Carns and Carol Bronson and with Presidents Barb Kubik, Jane Henley and Larry Epstein. I feel we have a special organization and I remain a devoted member and continue to enjoy *We Proceeded On*, the other events and annual meetings it offers. Because of this interest, I have continued to be active in Foundation activities. But, as a result of these, I also have some concerns for the organization and offer a review of those at this time.

New roles in service to the Foundation.

After leaving the treasurer’s position, I continued to volunteer my time to the Foundation. For the next six or seven years, I served as the Foundation’s fiscal person with the National Park Service for invoicing Challenge Cost Share grants associated with the Foundation’s cooperative agreement. Whenever a grantee submitted their expenses for reimbursement to the Foundation, I would in turn submit the paperwork for reimbursement from the NPS. However, while active in this role, I learned first hand what several other individuals I know experienced in dealing with the Foundation – there has been a trend to discourage volunteering within the

organization. One day, in talking with the executive director to get some of the grants invoiced, I was asked if I wanted to continue in this position. I replied that it was not my decision as I served at their pleasure but that I was glad to help out. I never heard another thing and never received another request to invoice. A simple response or even a “thanks for your time” would have been most appreciated. Unfortunately, my own personal experience is not the only one that I am aware of. This is a strange development from an organization that originated as an all-volunteer organization in the beginning. It is vital that volunteerism continue as volunteers can help relieve the workload of staff and well as conduct other activities that are beyond the staff’s realm and expertise. It needs to be encouraged – not discouraged – yet it continues to this day.

When I agreed to be co-chair of the 2010 annual meeting in Lewiston and work on the financial aspects of the meeting, I was surprised to learn that several previous annual meetings had not kept separate books but that the expenses and income had been co-mingled with the Foundation’s finances. It was always our intention that the Idaho Chapter would keep separate books but cooperate with the Foundation in all aspects of the meeting. We agreed with President Jim Mallory that we would end the meeting with complete disclosure as well as a surplus – however our goal was to also give the membership a reasonably priced meeting. Ironically, in the end, completing this report became difficult due to the fact that we had to work with the Foundation staff. I was unable to get receipts or any accounting for several major expenses that were charged to the 2010 committee (costs were deducted from our credit card income when the Foundation remitted the proceeds to the 2010 committee). Finally, in the end, I withheld the check for the profit until we were able to resolve the issue – and the Foundation “resolved” it by writing us a check for those deducted expenses after being unable to come up with a single receipt! Once this was provided, I turned around and gave them back their money along with the complete report. Strangely, no one in leadership ever commented on this very unusual series of events. In light of this situation, it might explain the very incomplete financial report that was provided at the business meeting at the 2010 annual meeting.

Another concern I had in conjunction with the 2010 annual meeting was the meddling in the programming of the meeting by the staff. At a meeting with the executive director, both meeting co-chairs were told that a “problem” had arisen but that he had resolved it - without consulting us. There were several other situations like this, too. Now, don’t get me wrong, I firmly believe the annual meeting is conducted for the Foundation – not the organizing committee. The staff and board had several blocks of time in which they were given complete responsibility for scheduling and staffing. However, micro-managing programming details, changing late fees and sending out mass-mailings changing meeting details without the courtesy of running it by the meeting co-chairs should have been avoided. And, whatever happened to communication? It is a shame that such disputes had to happen like this. I do believe the Idaho Chapter showed that local groups of volunteers are still very capable of planning and conducting informative, productive and financial sound annual meetings – events that are still such a vital and important aspect of membership in the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation.

In conclusion, I want to relay a concern I have about the organization as well as a continued belief in the organization. I recently came across the letter that was sent out to all members on July 14, 2009. It is very illuminating on how we all must come together during difficult times and work for the benefit of the organization. The startling item to me in this letter was the individuals named in it: first it mentioned President Jim Brooke's resignation in June; that Margaret Gorski was elevated into the position of president-elect; that the interim staff consisted of Rebecca West as office operations manager, Jessica Godfrey for library services and Wendy Raney for publications; and it was signed by President Chris Howell. A year later, none of those people were in those positions – turnover was 100%. Luckily, Jim Mallory stepped up and provided clear leadership while guiding the Foundation through this turbulent time and through two successful annual meetings.

These concerns may be minor, but in these days of tight finances, it is important that the Foundation make changes and strive to be a more efficient operation. These short-comings all can easily be overcome and make us a stronger organization. I have very fond memories of the twenty-two years that I have been actively associated with the organization. The Foundation has always been a source of great friendships and great experiences and I believe it will continue to do so in the future.

Appendix A - ANNUAL MEETING RESTRICTED FUND RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, holding an annual meeting is a requirement under the laws of Missouri for incorporation as a non-profit organization and,

WHEREAS, the Foundation has a tradition of holding informative and high quality annual meetings for its membership at the lowest possible cost and,

WHEREAS, the Foundation asks annual meeting committees to organize and put forth the specifics of the meeting including the necessary registration fee for the next annual meeting seven months prior to the event and,

WHEREAS, the Foundation encourages the youth of the organization to attend such meetings and,

WHEREAS, the Lewiston, Idaho 2010 Annual Meeting Committee returned \$x,xxx from its meeting,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc. establishes among its endowments a fund titled "Annual Meeting Restricted Fund" endowed by the profits of annual meetings beginning in 2010 and,

FURTHER RESOLVED that future annual meeting committees, beginning with a grant of \$2,000 to the 2011 Omaha committee, be granted "seed" money at an amount set by the board of directors and,

FURTHER RESOLVED that should the amount in the fund allow, the board of directors may establish an amount of the fund to be used to subsidize part or all of the registration costs for the youth of the organization (ages 17 and under) to attend such meetings and,

FURTHER RESOLVED that in the event that an annual meeting committee is not able to cover all of its costs, the board of directors shall direct the fund to make up the deficit so as not to impede the general operations of the organization.

It is hereby certified by the undersigned that the forgoing resolution was duly passed by the board of directors of the Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation, Inc., on the ___ day of _____, 2010, in accordance with the by-laws governing the organization and the articles of incorporation and that said resolution has been duly recorded in the minute book and is in full force and effect.