

Acceptance Speech - 2016 winner of Individual Governor's Award for History

Thank you so much for this unexpected honor.

I do not make history. But I do celebrate it. My name will not go down in the state's annals - except perhaps in connection with a notable and historic figure - the state's first Poet Laureate and fondly remembered raconteur: Badger Clark.

I was therefore doubly surprised that this honor comes with the opportunity to make an "acceptance speech describing my work". What did I have to brag about except being Badger Clark's great, grand-niece?

So I sat down to take stock:

Aside from regular participation in history conferences, my earliest involvement was the year-long, state-wide celebration of Badger Clark's birth in 1983, which I spearheaded. This was followed up by the founding of the Badger Clark Memorial Society to preserve his memory and his works, and the writing of my "Personal Reminiscence", which was presented at every history conference that would have me. It won several awards, including Westerners, International's Philip A. Danielson Award for Best Paper of 1983. They even printed it in the Buckskin Bulletin!

The lead-up to another statewide celebration, South Dakota's Centennial Celebration in 1989, afforded the opportunity to research, write and co-produce 55 video biographies of noted South Dakotans for the South Hall of Fame, which were subsequently broadcast on SDPB. Most were 3-minute mini-biographies used to introduce the honorees at the induction banquet, and as fillers between television programming, but two were full twenty-minute treatments of influential former governor Peter Norbeck and - well, Badger Clark.

The people who influenced me on my journey read like a Who's Who of South Dakota History, beginning with my earliest years in the state: my history advisor at USD, Ced

Cummins, Dayton Canady at the state Historical Society, Bob Preszler at Minnelusa in Rapid City, Leland Case with Westerners, International, Jim McLaird, Herb Blakely, Art Huseboe, Tom Killian, Leonel Jensen, Jessie Sundstrom, Bob Lee, Dave Strain, and Watson Parker - all of whom I met while participating in history conferences, and lastly, my father-in-law, Dr. Warren M. Lee, whose original play, "The Legend of Devil's Gulch" brought history to life every Monday night at the Black Hills Playhouse.

Along the way, I've written and presented some 25 history research papers on a wide variety of topics, all of which were published by the history conferences. My work has also been published in South Dakota Quarterly and Persimmon Hill.

But if indeed I have a claim to fame I think it must be my work in tourism. First as a Black Hills sightseeing company, and now as a tour operator specializing in the historic and cultural heritage of the Great American West. Our goal is to share not only the many natural and man-made wonders of this region, but the rich heritage of the people, so visitors can gain an appreciation and an understanding of the "history that happened here".

In 1994 I introduced a series of study tours featuring what Leonel Jensen called Vanishing Trails Expeditions. Beginning with the Oregon Trail, the series has grown to include a long list of "trails" focusing on legendary figures, the Westward Expansion Movement, exploration, and the inevitable effects on the Native inhabitants, both human and animal. Today the most popular are the "Lewis & Clark Trail" and the "Custer State Park Buffalo Roundup". One of my most widely-read research papers was "The History of Black Hills Tourism - Part 1" written in 1986. In 33 pages I only got up to 1927, so I still have some work to do!

Oh yes, and I have been the President of the West River History Conference since 2007. This year's dates are October 13-15, in Rapid City. You can find us on Facebook!

Shelby Lee