Former UWO history professor dies

by News Bureau - Tuesday, January 22, 2013

http://www.uwosh.edu/today/24653/former-uwo-history-professor-dies/

Beloved Black Hills historian Watson Parker, 88, of Rapid City, passed away after a long battle with pulmonary fibrosis, at his home on Jan. 9, 2013. Parker was an professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh.

Respected for his research on ghost towns and mining history, he published numerous books and papers on the Black Hills and Deadwood. He was well-known to the historical community for his conviviality, strong opinions and breadth of knowledge.

Born in Evanston, Illinois to Troy and Janet Parker, Watson moved to Hill City, South Dakota, where the family ran Palmer Gulch Lodge, a family resort and dude ranch, from 1927 to 1962.

After high school, Watson entered the Army, serving as a Staff Sergeant in the Medical Detachment of the 1248th Engineer Combat Battalion. Following the war, he received degrees from both the University of Chicago and Cornell University.

Watson married Olga Glassman in Warren, Pennsylvania, 1950. He and Olga had three children, James, David and Rebecca.

After managing Palmer Gulch Lodge (1950-1960), Watson attended the University of Oklahoma where he earned both his master's and PhD in American History. His doctoral thesis became the basis for his first book, "Gold in the Black Hills". In 1965, Watson and his family moved to Oshkosh, where he taught at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh. "Black Hills Ghost Towns" was published in 1974, co-authored by Watson and Hugh Lambert. A third book by Watson followed, "Deadwood: The Golden Years".

In 1986, Watson retired as Professor Emeritus from UW Oshkosh, and moved with Olga back to Palmer Gulch permanently. That year he also received the Dakota History Conference Award for Distinguished Contribution to the Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of South Dakota and the Northern Plains. In 1993, he won the Rodman Paul award for mining history, awarded by the Mining History Association. In 2007, Watson received the West River History Conference's Herb Blakely Award. Watson was awarded the Westerners "Living Legend" in 2009, and in 2011 he was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame.

Watson was an avid Rotarian and Mason. He remained active in the Masonic Lodge up until his death, serving as the Chaplain of the Tin City Lodge in Hill City for several years. He was also a member of the Scottish Rite.

No funeral is planned at this time. A memorial service will take place in summer at the family ranch in Palmer Gulch, near Hill City. In lieu of flowers, family suggests memorials to: The Journey Museum, 222 New York Street, Rapid City, SD 57701 (attn: Ray Summers); Minnilusa Historical Association, 222

New York Street, Rapid City, SD 57701 (attn: Reid Riner); or Deadwood History, Inc., P.O. Box 252 Deadwood, SD 57732 (attn: Mary Kopco)

- *This post was compiled using information from Parker's full obituary, which can be found* here.