

Otto Ullrich Memorial Trust Endows Yankton County Historical Society's Mead Project

Otto Ullrich was a lifelong resident of Yankton County, living his early years on the family farm north of Yankton and after moving "into town", working for Wilson Farworthy Company, the Yankton Police Department and for the Manhattan Bar and Café. He was behind the counter of the café for more than 30 years; after retirement he still kept busy with his projects: apartments that he owned and managed, parking lots that he sealed and for a short time he installed fire safety equipment.

Born in 1915, Otto was the perfect age to strike out on his own in the mid-30's, see the world beyond Yankton County and join the millions of others around the country who were seeking a way to earn a living. After working at CCC camps in the Black Hills for a short while, Otto, Bernie Hunhoff and Sylvester Wagner climbed into a 1928 Chevrolet which took them west to small towns in Wyoming and Utah where they'd stop and ask for work. Otto got \$2 a day for stacking hay and the other two got \$1.50 per day for cutting, raking and working with horses. Always hungry, but never telling anyone, they worked their way to Oregon where they traded the car in on a 1928 Model A, picked up another Yankton boy or two, picked potatoes in Idaho and eventually arrived back bringing life lessons home with them.

The lessons they learned were about the importance of helping other people when you meet someone in need, and Otto kept those lessons in the front of his mind all of his life. Otto only completed school to the 8th grade, but he was educated by the work he did, the people he met, and the hardships he encountered and overcame. He was briefly married and has one son, Dr. James R. Ullrich, who lives in Missoula MT with his wife, Cathy. Otto was a devoted son, taking care of his mother until she died.

Otto cast a big shadow in more ways than one. Standing at more than 6 feet 6 inches and with a broad shoulder span, folks looked up when Otto entered the room. He was called "Slim", "Big Otto" and similar friendly names, but he earned everyone's respect with his noble principles and his dedication to giving back. He was very modest and had moderate habits, so as he accrued more of the world's wealth, Otto began showing appreciation to the community which he loved. His philosophy was that he made his money in Yankton and wanted to leave it in Yankton, During his lifetime he made donations to many Yankton organizations, but his largest was to the Yankton County Historical Society.

Otto passed on May 8, 2006 and in August of 2008 the Otto Ullrich Memorial Trust was established, administered by Dr. James Ullrich, Richard Kulbel and Duane Frick. Each year the governing group receives requests from worthy organizations and then selects those which they feel Otto would have chosen, had he still been living. Kulbel and Frick have a long history with Otto, going back to childhood for Duane, who remembers delivering papers in downtown Yankton and going into the Manhattan Bar where Otto was behind the counter and "bargaining" with him for a nickel candy bar or gum. As both men "matured", they often

played cards together at the Elks Lodge, Otto always insisting that they play “for money”. The Kulbel family included Otto in their family Christmases for more than 2 decades and cared for his needs as he grew older and less well. Dick and Theresa Kulbel were with him when he died.

The Trust Administrators generously donated \$25,000 for 2013 and \$25,000 for 2014 to the Mead Building Restoration in exchange for naming rights for the 3rd floor balcony and veranda. As they stood on that balcony, facing to the south and looking at the amazing vista reaching nearly to the river, Duane and Dick agreed that Otto would say “job well done”.