

Hazel Bain (1905-1993)



By Martin Plamondon II

Hazel Bain was born Hazel Williams July 14, 1905, at the town of Kelso, Washington. Hazel graduated from Kelso High School in 1923, along with other Lewis and Clark devotees, Dr. Eldon (Frenchy) Chuinard and attorney Mitchell Doumit. All three of these people would eventually become presidents of the National Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation.

Hazel began college at Western Washington University but a job in the real estate division of Long-Bell Lumber Co. took all of her time. She worked fourteen years for Long-Bell. In 1930, Hazel married Fred H. Bain of North Dakota. She continued working for Long-Bell for a time but quit when the children came; two daughters and one son. Fred Bain passed away in 1951, leaving Hazel with three small children to raise and put through school. She did this by working for the Longview School District until her retirement in 1971.

Hazel also found time for community work, including Soroptimist International of Longview, president of the Pioneer '23 Club and member of Longview Ladies of the Elks. She was director of the Cowlitz County Historical Society and member of the Washington State Historical Society, the American Legion Auxiliary, and the First Presbyterian Church of Kelso.

It is not known when Hazel's interest in Lewis and Clark began but we do know that Governor Daniel Evans appointed her to the Washington Governor's Lewis and Clark Trail Committee in 1973. The same year she joined the National Lewis and Clark Trail Heritage Foundation. In 1975, Hazel was successful in efforts to have the owners of Longview's historic Monticello Hotel rename one of its banquet rooms to honor Lewis and Clark. The room was properly redecorated, and dedicated March 1, 1975. In 1976, Hazel was serving as secretary of the State Committee and accepted the position of membership secretary of the National Foundation. In 1978, she was active helping the Washington committee put on the 10th Annual Meeting for the foundation.

The following year, 1979, the National Foundation awarded Hazel the Distinguished Service Award, but Hazel was already at work on new projects. After much effort at the legislative level Hazel was able to put together a ceremony for July 6, 1980, whereby the great cantilever bridge crossing the Columbia River at Longview, Washington, was formally named the Lewis and Clark Bridge. The following year saw Hazel elected to vice president of the National Foundation and in 1983, she moved up to the position of president. She was the fourteenth president and the first woman to serve in that capacity. As president, Hazel brought the foundation to her home state, to Pasco, Washington, for the Fifteenth Annual Meeting.

The years saw Hazel move to the position of treasurer in the Washington committee where at every meeting she faithfully reported the few cents of interest that accrued each quarter. The years also saw Hazel's health fail as she suffered a number of small strokes. When the Twenty-Fourth Annual Meeting was held in Vancouver, Washington in 1992, Hazel was quite frail. She had been attending the state committee meetings with the aid of Ralph Rudeen or family members. So it was when she came down to Vancouver for the Saturday night Get Acquainted Social.

The many strokes had left Hazel susceptible to falls and she fractured her hip in December, 1992. Her recovery was looking very well until she developed pneumonia. Hazel died peacefully January 22, 1993.

Hazel was our grand lady in the Washington committee. Generosity, concern, compassion, and humor came easily to her. One spring Hazel attended a regular quarterly meeting of the State Committee held that quarter in Walla Walla, Washington. In the confusion of leaving home Hazel forgot her luggage. Hazel was quite amused when she showed up in Idaho without a change of clothes and the story circulated the committee. Hazel was late arriving at the meeting on the second day. When asked why she was so late, Hazel replied that she could not decide what to wear.

In Hazel's honor, the members of the Washington Committee made a generous donation to the Columbia Gorge Interpretive Center soon to be built in Stevenson, Washington. The tribute was a measure of the feelings of the committee members for a very dear friend.

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*Prepared by Bob Gatten, 2011*