

DAKOTA IMAGES

Watson Parker

Dr. Watson ("Wat") Parker was a renowned historian of the American West, primarily the Black Hills Gold Rush and ghost towns. He has been deemed "the dean of Black Hills history."

Watson Parker was born 15 June 1924 in Evanston, Illinois, to Troy and Janet Parker. Raised in Hill City, South Dakota, Parker helped his family at Palmer Gulch Lodge, a dude ranch and summer resort they operated from 1927 to 1962. Parker himself would manage the lodge from 1946 to 1960. There he developed a love for the Black Hills, and at an early age he began accompanying his father to meetings of the Black Hills Corral of Westerners International, an organization that celebrated the heritage of the American West.

After serving in the U.S. Army during World War II, Parker earned degrees from the University of Chicago and Cornell University, followed by an MA and a Ph.D. in Western American History and Plains Indian Cultural Anthropology from the University of Oklahoma. Watson met Olga Glassman at the University of Chicago, and the two married in 1950. Olga helped Parker prepare his works and typeset many of his writings.

Parker became a professor at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh in 1965, where he taught a wide range of courses, including the history of the American West, military history, and historical methods. Parker's books on the Black Hills Gold Rush are regarded as essential reading on the subject. In 1974, he and lifelong friend Hugh K. Lambert published *Black Hills Ghost Towns*, which recorded the rapidly vanishing history of the myriad settlements of the region.

In 1986, Parker retired from teaching. He and Olga moved to Rapid City and continued to spend their summers exploring the Black Hills and entertaining family at Palmer Gulch, or "Happy Valley," as they called it. His interest in the region's history never faded. In retirement he continued to research and write and attended regional history gatherings. The recipient of numerous awards for his scholarship and research, in 2011 he was inducted into the South Dakota Hall of Fame.

Watson Parker passed away on 9 January 2013 at his home in Rapid City.

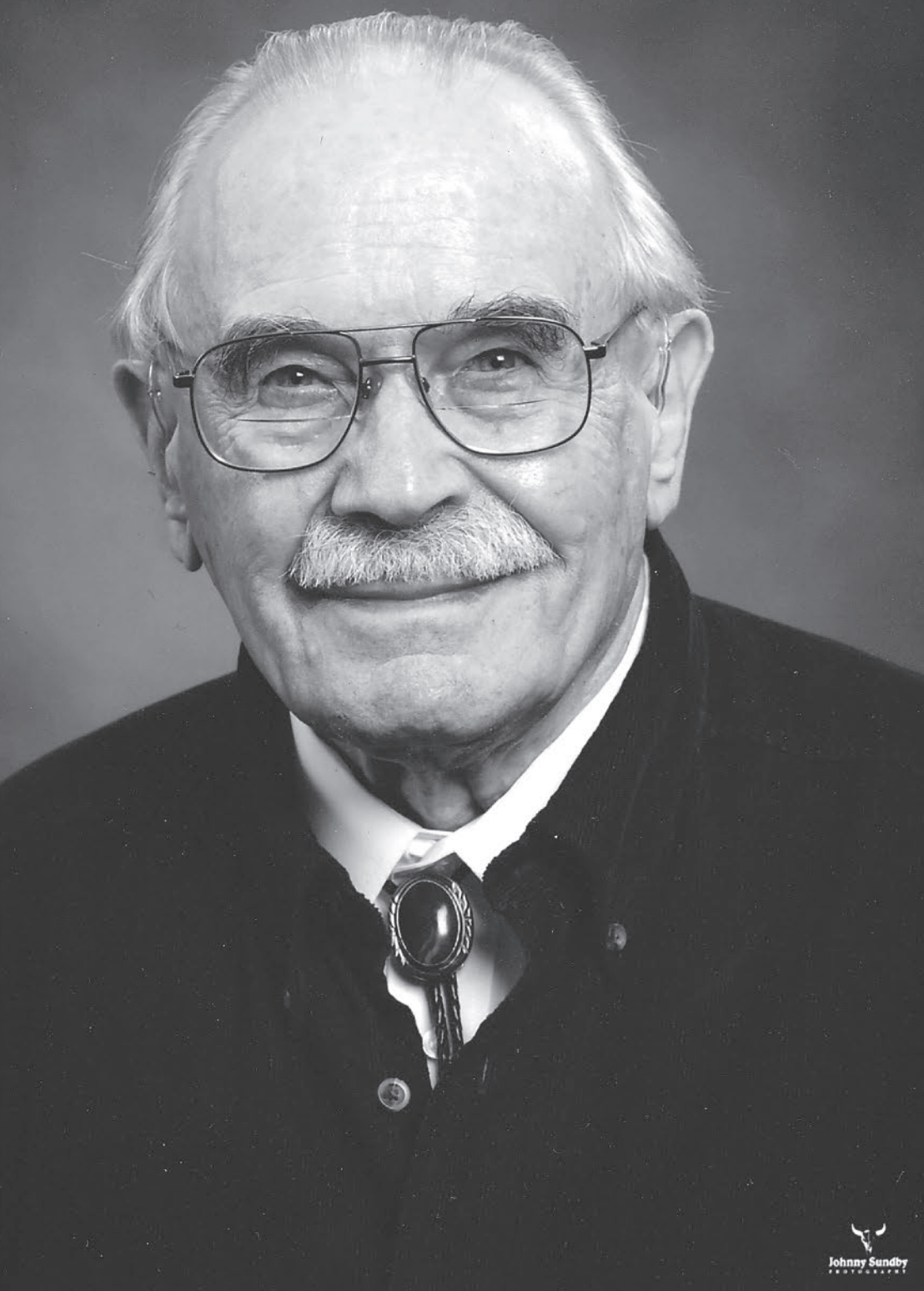


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On the cover: On 13 September 1931, a fire swept through the Warren-Lamb lumber yard and destroyed \$130,000 of lumber. Some suspected arson by disgruntled workers.

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