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Historical Society Foundation new Guardian for Works of Badger Clark

PIERRE, S.D. -- The work of South Dakota's first poet laureate will continue to be available for future generations, thanks to the merging of organizations dedicated to keeping history alive.

The Badger Clark Memorial Society has merged its operations into the South Dakota Historical Society Foundation, the nonprofit partner of the South Dakota State Historical Society at the Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre.

"This combination of efforts will allow the books by Badger Clark and materials about him to continue to be offered to the public," said foundation President Michael Lewis. "The South Dakota Historical Society Foundation is proud to be able to carry on the mission that was started by the Badger Clark Memorial Society as an addition to our work in 'Keeping South Dakota History Alive!'"

The foundation will oversee the reprinting and distribution of Clark's five volumes of work as well as other materials about Clark. In addition, the foundation will continue the Badger Clark Memorial Society's work of partnering with Custer State Park officials to manage Clark's home, known as the Badger Hole. The Badger Hole is located in Custer State Park and open to the public from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

The Badger Clark Memorial Society was created in 1984 to preserve and distribute Clark's works and to keep and preserve the Badger Hole. Clark's five volumes have been reprinted many times, with the last printings being a hardback version with matching covers. The late Jessie Sundstrom of Custer, a society member, wrote Clark's unofficial biography, "Badger Clark, Cowboy Poet with Universal Appeal." It, too, was republished in a hardback version in 2014 shortly after her death.

"The Badger Clark Memorial Society's work to promote Badger Clark and help to keep the Badger Hole open to the public has been a great accomplishment during the 30 years since it was formed," Lewis said.

Clark was born on Jan. 1, 1883, and christened Charles Badger Clark after his father. To his admirers, he was simply Badger Clark, "The Cowboy Poet." His tales of life in the mountains and on the open range rang true to those whose life he glorified. In a few verses, Clark was able to capture a feeling of the Old West that appealed to all types of people: young and old, rich and poor, city folks, and, of course, cowpokes.

Clark was named South Dakota Poet Laureate in 1937, but he preferred the nickname "Poet Lariat." Clark produced several books as collections of his works. The earliest, "Sun and Saddle Leather," was published in 1915. The novel "Spike" was published in

1925, with “Sky Lines and Wood Smoke” following in 1935. “Boots and Bylines” and “When Hot Springs was a Pup” were printed after his death in 1957. Clark is most remembered for “A Cowboy’s Prayer” and “Ridin,” which were widely published.

Clark’s books are available at the Badger Hole, the Heritage Stores in the Cultural Heritage Center and the Capitol, both in Pierre; and through the website www.sdhsf.org.

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The South Dakota State Historical Society is a division of the Department of Tourism. The Department of Tourism is comprised of Tourism, the South Dakota Arts Council and the State Historical Society. The Department is led by Secretary James D. Hagen. The State Historical Society, an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, is headquartered at the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center in Pierre. The center houses the society’s world-class museum, the archives, and the historic preservation, publishing and administrative/development offices. Call (605) 773-3458 or visit www.history.sd.gov for more information. The society also has an archaeology office in Rapid City; call (605) 394-1936 for more information.