

DEADWOOD WALL OF FAME

2018

Paul John Akrop

Born: August 3, 1912
Lead, South Dakota

Died: October 22, 1966
Deadwood (Buried at Rose Hill Cemetery, Spearfish)

Paul was born in Lead to Anna Natrlin and Joseph Akrop, Croatian immigrants from Cavtat and Sinj, then Yugoslavia. When Joseph - who owned a liquor and cigar store to support his young family - died of influenza in 1917, he left four-year old Paul as the eldest of four children.

After graduating from Lead High School in 1932, Paul worked in the Homestake Gold Mine then went on to study at Chadron State College in Nebraska and San Jose State College in California. During World War II, Paul served in the Seabees, naval construction battalion, and was stationed in Iceland, France, Scotland, and Okinawa. In 1943, Paul married Genevieve DuChene. After his military service, Paul returned to the Black Hills and began working with Albert DuChene - his new father-in-law - at Deadwood Granite & Marble Works, a monument shop DuChene helped establish in 1906.

Paul quickly became one of Deadwood's leading citizens. He served on the Deadwood City Council and the advisory board of Saint Joseph's Hospital, he was president of the Deadwood Rotary Club, and he was Grand Knight in the Knights of Columbus Council. He was also an active member of the Deadwood Elks Lodge and the Deadwood Chamber of Commerce.

Because of his civic leadership, Paul played an important role in the development of Deadwood during the 1950s. For instance, following the construction of a new multipurpose gathering space in the National Guard Armory in 1955, the future of Deadwood's old auditorium was in doubt. Paul and other members of the local Rotary Club thought the historic 1912 building could be repurposed into a community recreation center with an indoor swimming pool and basketball court. Paul and the Deadwood Rotary Club helped to convince the community to fund the project, which was eventually approved. In 2010, the original building was expanded, and it's now known as the Deadwood Aquatics and Recreation Center.

In 1957, Paul and Bill Swanson, both Rotary members, with the rest of the club created a ski and sledding hill at a public playground on Charles Street that's now known as Martha E. Bullock Park. They also worked with the Black Hills Power & Light Company to erect a lighted star on top of White Rocks - a mountain peak visible from around Deadwood - during the Christmas season. Paul and his fellow Rotarians jokingly dubbed the star Rotnik in a nod to the Russian satellite Sputnik 1, which had recently been launched into orbit.

Paul's professional work also had a lasting impact on the community. In 1951, he worked with Crazy Horse Monument sculptor Korczak Ziolkowski, who had recently been commissioned by the Deadwood Chamber of Commerce to create a

bust of Wild Bill Hickok. Paul lettered the granite plates that were installed in the base of the sculpture, which still stands at the corner of Miller and Sherman Streets. In 1953, Paul was asked by the Society of Black Hills Pioneers to create an enlarged granite replica of the Thoen Stone, a local sandstone artifact discovered near Spearfish in 1887. Paul's replica is on display near the grounds of the former Black Hills Passion Play. There is an arrow on the monument pointing to Lookout Mountain where the original marker was discovered by the Thoen brothers.

Paul died in 1966 at the age of 54 while working in Mount Moriah Cemetery. His children David, Greg and Mary Ann continue to operate Deadwood Granite & Marble Works in its historic location on Sherman Street.



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SOUTH
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A National Historic
Landmark