

Chamberlain McColley's Funeral Home - Custer

Charles Cochran

(June 11, 1939 - February 03, 2019)

Well-known Custer resident and Black Hills historian Charles “Chuck” Cochran, 79, died February 3, 2019, from causes related to his battle with cancer. Chuck fulfilled a life-long dream and moved to a log home on the hill 30-years ago. Chuck’s passion for the Black Hills and the West began in the mid 1950’s when he would travel from his home in Park Ridge, Illinois and spend summers with his Aunt Lee and Uncle Ted in Newcastle, Wyoming. Chuck was an avid explorer and arrowhead hunter. Chuck collected more than 1,000 arrowheads and artifacts over 70 years. He was a recognized expert on General George Custer and a fixture on the North and South Dakota Gun Show Circuit.



Chuck was a proud U.S. Army Veteran, a 46 year member of the American Legion and a Life Member of the V.F.W. Some of Chuck’s best friends over the years, were World War II Veterans. His love of history and people, and their stories forged the many relationships that he cherished with soldiers from the Greatest Generation. Chuck spent nearly 30 years as a teacher, first in Illinois, then at the Overseas School of Rome and eventually retiring from the Fargo, ND School District in 1990. He also taught History at several Colleges. After a rocky start in his own formal education, Chuck earned his Bachelor Degree at Northern Illinois University and two Masters Degrees.

Reared in Park Ridge, Illinois, Chuck’s love of the outdoors and nature began as a young boy, when he would spend every daylight hour exploring the local woods and forests. As a youngster, Chuck spent many summer days at his grandparent’s farm in central Illinois. His interest in arrowheads began when he found a box-full of pre-historic arrowheads in his grandparent’s attic, that had been gathered over the years by his father and uncles. Chuck owned the Dakota Territory Trading Post in Custer from 1989-2000. After selling the shop he was the proprietor of “French Creek Charlie’s” gold panning camp just outside of town. Chuck was an encyclopedic resource for tourists and locals alike. Over the years Chuck informed, corrected and directed everybody who crossed his path. In 2016, Chuck was delighted to cheer on the Chicago

Cubs to their first World Series victory in 108 years. He had been a fan and dreaming of that moment for nearly 80 years.

Chuck and his first wife, Sylvia (Beyak) had five children. Daniel (1965-1987), Katherine (Marty-Palos Heights, IL), Jonathan (Cindy-Rapid City, SD) and Victoria (Tom-Chicago, IL), in addition, Chuck lost his daughter Carla shortly after her birth. Chuck was a proud grandfather of six, Martin & Isabella Walsh, Alexander & Sarah Cochran and Caroline & Kailey Molloy. Chuck visited his daughters every year in Chicago where they attended Cubs games, ate many Chicago Style Beef sandwiches and devoured Lou Malnati's pizza.

Chuck traveled with his son, Jon, to Chicago each year. The two also explored countless back roads in North and South Dakota, as well as the Black Hills. They once traveled to Arizona, but it was too hot for Chuck, once was enough! The two were truly the best of friends and their father-son excursions were a big part of both of their lives. They both loved hunting, fishing, wheeling and dealing, and most of all they enjoyed each other's company, over the many miles they traveled together in their HUNDREDS of beloved cars!

Chuck married Pamela Moos-Shotley in 1993. The couple held their wedding reception at the Flying V Ranch in Newcastle. Chuck enjoyed 25 years of marriage to Pamela and loved the life they built together in Custer.

After folding the French Creek operation, Chuck joined the Custer 1881 Courthouse Museum as a volunteer docent.

"A particularly important thing I've learned," Chuck explained in his diary, "is that at least for me, from youth through about age 35, I had all the answers...After 35, and today, I have many more questions than answers! Funny how that works.

Chuck could not have been more proud to be an American, born into what he described everyday as the Greatest Country in the World. Chuck truly felt his life was complete because of the love in his family and the fact that he was able to live and die in the place he loved most: The Black Hills of South Dakota.

Services will be held 2:00 p.m., Monday, February 18, 2019, at Chamberlain McColley's Funeral Home in Custer. Committal services with Military Honors will follow at the Custer Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, please make a donation in Chuck's name to the Custer 1881 Courthouse Museum.

Arrangements have been placed in the care of Chamberlain McColley's Funeral Home in Custer.

