

Mark Reese Sumner (June, 1923 – June, 2017)

How many of us can claim to have been the sole leader and undisputed authority of a national theatre movement? I know Mark Sumner never claimed that (nor would he ever), but I claim it for him.

Mark was, for 25 years, the director of the Institute of Outdoor Drama (IOD) at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. As such, he oversaw the expansion and nourishment of the American Outdoor Historical Drama Movement, a body of theatre companies that occupy a unique niche in our canon of theatre. Simply put, these theatres produce plays in amphitheatres that dramatize significant events in our history, and they are produced on the sites where the events actually occurred.

Best estimates are that Mark was instrumental in helping establish some 30 outdoor dramas in 20 states, and sustained many more that span the country from *Ramona* in Hemet, CA (established in 1927), to *The Lost Colony* in Manteo, NC (opened in 1937) . . . both of which are still running.

But as you may know, Mark was a man of many accomplishments in his 93 years. He had undergrad and grad degrees in theatre; he received numerous awards and honors (including the Davis Award from SETC); and he served as a combat infantry soldier in the U.S. Army during WWII, most notably in the famed Battle of the Bulge where his courageous actions earned him two Bronze Stars and from France, the Legion of Honor.

Mark was a playwright, a director, a producer and a distinguished professor. His career included service in professional stock, university and community theatre, and saw him in leadership roles for ACTF, SETC (he was a former president), and the National Theatre Conference

among many others. He was also a proud member of Equity, the Dramatist Guild and SSDC.

On his retirement from the IOD in 1990, the agency honored him by establishing the Mark R. Sumner Award, the only national recognition for distinguished achievement in the American outdoor drama field.

Mark Sumner was a man of gentle spirit, high standards, and of great decency. He helped us unify and hold together our outdoor theatres during years of enormous change. Mark Sumner was the marrow in the bones of the American Outdoor Historical Drama Movement, and we proudly called him valued colleague and mentor.

Hail brother, and farewell.

Scott Parker