

Marks Family Fund for the Miami County Historical Society

Going through family photographs and videos in order to make a memorial DVD was a labor of love for Kevin Marks. He was preparing it for a dedication ceremony that he had coordinated in order to present the Miami County Museum with the fund that was created in honor of his father Otis—a long-time volunteer of the museum.

Kevin knew he'd show the DVD at the dedication ceremony. He even knew that he had Peru's Mayor, Jim Walker, coming to speak at the ceremony. What he didn't know at that point was what museum project the family would fund with the endowment.

It was while he contemplated this that a song came to mind. Old-fashioned and up-beat, he decided to use it as a soundtrack to the DVD. He also decided to contact Miami County Community Foundation for some advice on which project to fund.

After spending some time with Mildred Kopis, the museum's curator, we presented Kevin with several projects that needed some funds...but one literally struck a chord with him. The museum's Player Piano was no longer playing and was in need of major repairs. "Otie was a terrific piano player," Mildred had recalled. "When he didn't think anyone was looking, he'd go back and play one of our pianos just beautifully!"

Kevin was particularly enthused, because the style of music the piano played matched the kind of music he'd chosen to underscore the DVD. In fact, he'd just been editing a video clip of his father where he was actually whistling the song Kevin had chosen. It was as if everything were coalescing in a way that Otis would have truly appreciated.

The interest from the Marks Family Fund will go to the continued maintenance of the Orchestrian Player Piano, and the Miami County Community Foundation is working closely with Kevin and the Miami County Museum to find additional funds for its restoration.

The piano sits not too far from a place where Otis, in his signature bib overalls, worked regularly at the museum, sharing with visitors his life experiences working on the railroad, and his knowledge of Miami Indian history and circus stories. He did all sorts of work for the museum as well as giving tours.



Otis and Phyllis Marks along with Ginger.



Orchestrian Player Piano

Otis would regularly drive up from Kokomo to Peru to volunteer with his wife Phyllis. He'd even get his hair cut at the museum—taking a seat in the old barber's chair that was in the basement storage. His barber Herbie Lawrence would come over to give him a trim.

Thanks to the Marks family, Otis' love of history and music will leave an indelible mark on the Miami County Museum. Future generations will always be able to enjoy the sweet old-fashioned music of the player piano. Every time a visitor slips a quarter in to hear it's song, it'll almost be like Otis is back again playing away— like he did when he thought no one was looking.