



## Ellsworth Frederick Clark

August 5, 1931 - June 2, 2020

Ellsworth Frederick Clark leader of The Clark Band, farmer, teacher and a member of the National Old Time Fiddler's Hall of Fame succumbed to congestive heart failure (June 2, 2020). Clark had been residing in long term health care from results of a stroke that occurred May 2018.

Clark was born in Sheffield, Iowa on August 5, 1931 to Ira and Rose (Freudenberg) Clark. The Clark family were farmers and musicians of Rockwell/Sheffield and Ellsworth Clark would go on to follow his father and his grandfather (Eugene Clarence Clark) in family farming and generations of well-known Clark fiddle players. Clark attended rural route school and developed a passion for western and big band music that he listened to daily on the radio of the era.

Upon graduation from eighth grade (1946), Clark entered Sheffield High School where he drove the family pickup daily to participate in the "Claydigger" music program. During high school, Clark enjoyed great friendships, agricultural studies, religious programs, and was named a two time Iowa All State High School Band Honoree sitting as the principle trumpet and was named a member of the Iowa All State Chorus as principle baritone and was featured in a quartet with a young Andy Williams. Clark learned the old time fiddle tunes from his father (Ira) and developed a proficiency playing guitar, piano, drums, and steel guitar. Clark's ear written transcription (1948) of Hoagy Carmichaels "Stardust" would go on to be printed in over 200 music books. Upon graduation from Sheffield High School (1950) Clark was offered a full scholarship to the University of Minnesota and was offered a job in New York City to join Guy Lombardo's celebrated orchestra and begin a career in radio and records. Clark turned down these offers choosing to farm 2.5 miles south of Rockwell/2.5 miles north of Sheffield. In 1950 Clark helped start what would become north Iowa's most popular dance band: The Six Crackerjacks. Using five to eight pieces The Six Crackerjacks played hundreds of homecomings, proms, fairs, charity events at high school gymnasiums and were a local sensation, playing hillbilly music at first and with the birth of rock and roll moving from dance band tunes, square dances, and waltzes to the growing popularity of rockabilly and boogie woogie music.

In 1958, The Clark Family Band with Ira Clark (father), Rose Clark (mother), and brother, Clarence (drums) began playing the Mason City senior citizens weekly dance every Wednesday. This weekly appearance would last 55 years and feature the best of north Iowa's celebrated musicians. Clark also booked his band for the next 50 years as Ellsworth Clark and the Notables or The Ellsworth Clark Orchestra and was always willing to job with dozens of well-known north Iowa and southern Minnesota country, polka and dance bands. In 1967, Clark upon introduction from his brother Clarence, would meet Karen Rose Haverly (Wesley, IA) on the dance floor of the Surf Ballroom. After an immediate attraction and brief courtship Ellsworth and Karen Clark were married at the Wesley Catholic Church on April 25, 1968. With the exception of hospital stays and the death of Karen Rose Clark (May 14, 2018) they would never spend a day apart. Clark often referred to his wife Karen as a "peach". Clark often booked his bands with 6 to 12 pieces but dancers in north Iowa will recall the Clarks appearing as a couple. During their 50 years together the Clarks would continue the dedication to senior citizens events and appeared regularly at hundreds of nursing homes. The Clarks were active in many community events, fundraisers, church gatherings, and charity functions and were always willing to play and sing even if their schedule was packed with a full slate of bookings. Several long term jobs included annual dances on New Year's Eve at the Swaledale Community Center, Fourth of July week at the PM Park, at the North Iowa Fair providing square dancing shows, and for twenty years every Saturday night at the Knights of Pythias in Des Moines. In the early 2000's the Clarks cut an album (Scenes from an Iowa dance hall) in Nashville, TN reuniting the family band with sons James and Jason. As a couple, the Clarks were active in Holy Family Catholic Church, Sacred Heart Catholic Church, and many community organizations as teachers of music, square dancing, and cultural history employed by NIACC and Iowa Arts. Clark is recognized as having shared and taught 200 fiddle players songs of Scot Irish and European fiddle history taught to him as a boy from over eight generations of Clark fiddlers. In 1970, Clark was persuaded to participate in the Iowa State Fair Fiddler's Contest. Despite opposition to competition among fiddle players, from 1970 to the mid 2000's he would go on to place in the top five fiddlers in Iowa over 35 times. Clark also participated in the Yankton, SD Fiddler's Contest from his love of listening to old time opry barn dance shows and the Yankton radio shows of his youth. Clark's love of friends and well known fiddle players would lead to a lifetime achievement award from the State of South Dakota, appearances on records, and an invitation to be recorded by the Smithsonian Institute (Washington, DC). Clark was always willing to be a gentle and kind teacher for any young fiddle player interested in learning an old time tune, waltz, polka, or schottische. Clark spent a lifetime inviting people to dance with an appreciation of family, friends and laughter. Clark's love of fellow working musicians and dancers who attended dances daily, was a driving force in continuing to

work professionally until May 10, 2018 when a stroke ended his career. Despite being bound to a wheelchair while in long term nursing care, Clark's last days were spent enjoying visits from friends, musicians, and people interested to learn of his experiences on the bandstand or of his years in the field farming. Clark never missed an appearance by an entertainer appearing at the nursing home and encouraged all talent. Clark's last days were spent addressing letters, notes, and calls from dancers and musicians nationwide. Clark joined the Mason City Musicians Union (local 230) in the early 1970's to book his band in a five state region. Clark's support of live music, dancers, and musicians led to a chance substitute delegate position on the musician union's local elected board. From this chance meeting Clark became involved with the musician's union as a delegate for the North Iowa Area District Labor Council. Clark was elected over 35 times to the NIAD Council and received a lifetime achievement award for his service and being elected unanimously over 17 times. After a lifetime of farming, Clark concentrated on the fellowship of good will and his appreciation of the many dancers and friends that frequented his bands' shows and dances. Clark's last thoughts were of the hope that people enjoy their love for each other and continue to dance.

Clark is survived by a son Jimmie C. Clark, (Clear Lake, IA Nashville, TN) a nephew Clifford Pedersen, Ridgeway, and grandnieces.

Clark was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 50 years Karen Rose Clark, a beloved son: Jason (Jake) Keith Clark, Mason City, his parents, a brother: Clarence Clark, Mason City, a sister: Inez (Clark) Pedersen, Swaledale, a brother who died in infancy, and an aunt: Ruth (Freudenberg) Knapp, Thornton.

Jimmie Clark and Clifford Pedersen invite friends to attend a Celebration of Life and Dance in honor of Ellsworth F. Clark at Fiddler's Lounge, 468 N. Shore Dr., Clear Lake Saturday, June 13, 2020 at 5:00 pm.

Expressions of sympathy may be sent to Jimmie at Fiddler's Lounge, 468 N. Shore Dr., Clear Lake, IA, 50428.

# Events

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**JUN**   **Celebration of Life**                      05:00PM  
**13**

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Fiddler's Lounge

468 N. Shore Dr., Clear Lake, IA, US, 50428

# Comments

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“ In years gone by Vicky and I rented a piece of farmland west of Rockwell from Ellsworth and Clarence. We made a lease the first year but every year after it was a gentleman's agreement. I don't have a bad word or memory of Ellsworth, Karen or Clarence. They were exceptionally kind and easy to agree with.

Dave Klang

Vicky is deceased. She always wanted to dance and I didn't. I'll bet her and Ellsworth are dancing in heaven.

Dave Klang - June 05 at 09:11 PM

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“ Sending my Deepest Sympathy Jimmie. Your parents were wonderful people. I so much enjoyed your mom and dad. We had a lot of great conversations. (winning or losing ! ) Loved your dad's smile and gentle ways. They shared their talents and so much time with so many people all those years. They radiated love wherever they were. "Always Together" Their time spent in later years with all the "elderly" was so much appreciated. God's got a special place for them and you should be proud. God's Blessings.

Sylvia Hildman - June 05 at 02:46 PM



“ Awesome, kind , humble. Talented  
Rest In Peace

Randy Park - June 09 at 11:03 AM

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“ Kim Poulson and Tracy Herron purchased the Beautiful Dreams for the family of Ellsworth Frederick Clark.



Kim Poulson and Tracy Herron - June 05 at 12:14 PM