

John “Jack” F. White

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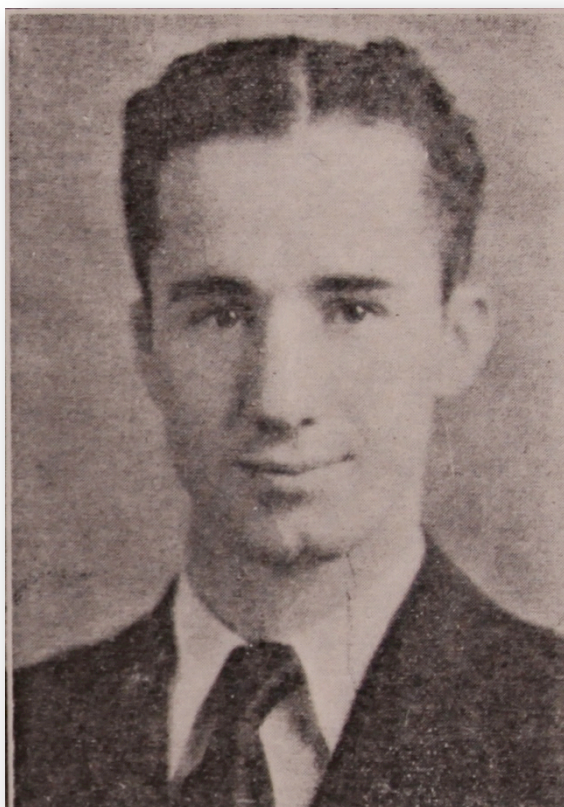
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John F. White was known to the Utah Deaf community as “Jack.” He was born to Fredrick from England and Ruth Glass from Salt Lake City, Utah on July 19, 1910. It has been said that during Jack’s delivery, the doctor did not properly grasp his head, putting a severe strain on the nerves of the ear, and he subsequently became Deaf. His parents made several attempts to find medical assistance to restore his hearing, but to no avail there was no “treatment” to make it happen. Jack remained Deaf all his life in which he created a unique legacy enriched with not only challenges but also captured opportunities and life fulfillments.

Jack’s early exposure to language was through the medium of “home signs” – a type of non-standardized sign language developed by the family to be used in their home. During the first few years of his life and being an active and curious boy, Jack acquired his language through this “home sign” system. He did not learn the formal sign language until he enrolled at the Utah School for the Deaf in Ogden, Utah at the age of seven in 1917 where he lived on a day-to-day basis, going home only on odd weekends and during holidays. He quickly acquired mastery of sign language from his teachers and his peers.



Jack F. White, 1932 Utah School for the Deaf Senior

While a student at USD, Jack's interest and love for sports grew, thanks to his eventual brother-in-law Charles Fowkes, Vida's brother. Charles, a much older adolescent, challenged him when he was only a young teenager to participate in school's sports activities or he would be thrown into the swimming pool. Jack became a sports enthusiast and he had great athletic ability and knowledge of the games; he joined the basketball, baseball and football teams for USD.

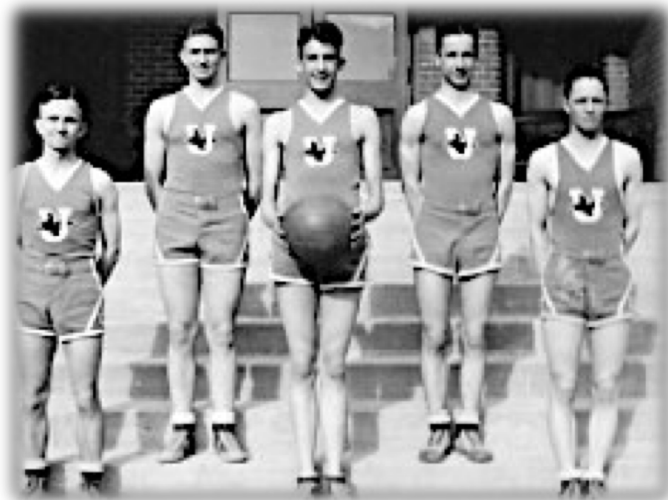
In 1930, Wayne E. Stewart, student captain of the basketball team, wrote up a report about how successful the team had been. Their record may have been 4-13, but they had done their best. Jack had contributed 12 points during the season, only having played in six of the games.



Jack White, second from right) as Caption of the basketball team for the Utah School for the Deaf, 1929

Photo courtesy of the Richard Thomsen's Family History

In the following year, Jack became captain of the basketball team and the football team. For the basketball team, he wrote the reports for the ensuing season. He really had a knack for



Jack (2nd front row) playing basketball for the Utah School for the Deaf, 1930

sports writing and his skill only improved further reportage. His team had the most successful season until that time: nineteen victories, six losses. The team was definitely cohesive and strong for the Ogden school. Jack himself contributed 145 points within the span of those twenty-four games.

If Jack had been “mainstreamed,” chances are he would have not gotten to play the sports he loved very much. At that time, deafness was look upon very negatively and also because with communication barriers, most coaches would not have given a Deaf student fresh off the street the chance to play for the team. The communication system needed to be developed to bring a Deaf student into play was usually thought of to be overwhelming and a waste of time for most hearing sports enthusiasts, or so it would seem.

Jack was a quarterback on the football team. USD was fortunate to have his experience and leadership on the team. Often he would pass the football field at Ogden High School where the school’s football team would be practicing and holding their games. He knew his team needed a good challenge, so he approached the coach of the Ogden High School team to discuss a possible scrimmage between the hearing and Deaf teams. Back then the USD football team did not have regular uniforms or protective gears like what Ogden high school’s team had. For the game they wore thick long-sleeve shirts and jeans along with homemade cleats with deep pegs. Although the Deaf team was a smaller team in comparison to the high school team, the Deaf players developed physical strength from USD’s vocational training programs. It would seem that the Ogden High School team had a greater advantage. To the chagrin of the hearing team, the Deaf team proved to be stronger, more cohesive, and a worthy opponent of their hearing counterparts winning the scrimmage game, 20-16. With all the practice and rivalry between the two teams, Ogden High School that year parlayed the drills into their own victory: they took the state championship in 1932.



**Jack White pastes on forms, which will be photographed, stereotyped and put on high-speed rotary presses, 1968
The UAD Bulletin, Summer 1968**

At USD, Jack learned to become a printer and a Linotype operator. He graduated from USD in 1932. One of his earliest jobs was working for the University of Utah Printing Press. Before landing the job there he approached the boss of the press about working in the press. He offered two weeks of work without pay so he could prove that he had all the skills as well as being a hard worker. The boss agreed and two weeks passed he was impressed with Jack's work. He decided to hire him. With his training and experience he had gained through the school and workplace, Jack was offered a job in Salt Lake City with the Newspaper Agency Corporation. He was not alone those years he worked with the NAC. There were a total of twelve Deaf people working with him at the agency. By the time 1987 rolled around with the freight-train advance of technology, the NAC had seen many changes. Linotypes had gone the way of the horse and buggy and the computer was the order of the day. Computer literacy became a modern and required skill that many

of the Deaf printers didn't have, and the work force was eventually reduced from twelve to three of those long-time workers. Jack retired in 1987 at the age of 77, a career of 55 years in the printing industry, 42 years in the NAC to be specific.



Jack & Vida's Engagement, 1938
Photo courtesy of the Richard Thomsen's
Family History

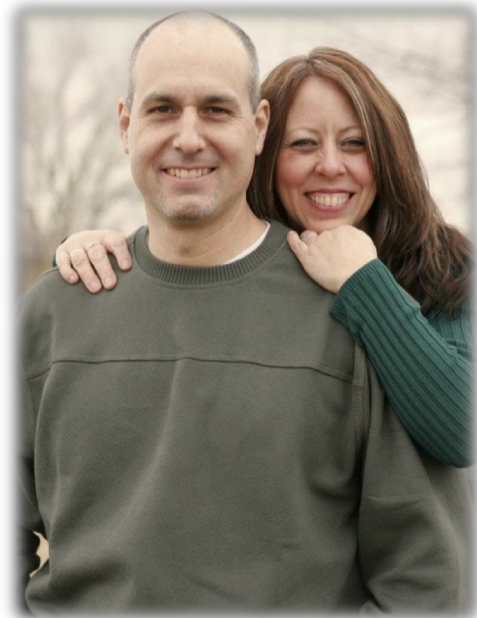


Jack & Vida walking in the field by the canal at the ranch in Almy, Wyoming, when he proposed, August 1938
Photo courtesy of the Richard Thomsen's Family History

After graduation from USD and moving to the Salt Lake area, Jack found he had a lot of time on his hands. School was over, and marriage was not a pressing item for him. His work occupied merely eight hours of a day. At home, under the feet of his parents, he needed to do something. His attention and focus turned to the "other love of his life": sports. His

initial interest in sports never wavered. There was no sports activity organized per se for the deaf in 1932, so Jack set out to rectify this. Through his ingenuity and persistence, he founded the Salt Lake Silent Club. He eventually held the posts of player, coach, and manager of the organization.

Soon after Jack's graduation, he had a slew of girlfriends, but one special lady caught his eye from the school for the deaf: Vida Fowkes, whom he married in the Salt Lake LDS Temple on October 31, 1938. Their marriage lasted 67 years until Jack's death in 2005. They had 3 children - two daughters and one son. While raising their family the whole household communicated in sign language, and all three children signed before they spoke. The eldest child, Carol, has a son named Dan Mathis who is Deaf like his grandparents. The entire family of Jack and Vida through to their youngest great-grandchild has used or learned to use some sign language. Another interesting family note: Vida Fowkes and Kenneth C. Burdett were first cousins.



Jack's grandson, Dan Mathis & his wife, Stephanie, 2011

Getting friendly competitive games was a real challenge at first. Jack would go to apply for his team to be in league membership. Many hearing people thought this was a joke! Deaf people in sports?? Sure, they could play other deaf teams, but the deaf play the hearing?? Not all hearing people were ready for that one. Finally, through the help of some wise and understanding folks at the Salt Lake County Parks and Recreation Division, the Silent Club was accepted into a league. Jack personally would counsel and coach the referees on how the deaf would be watching him for signals throughout the game, what signs meant what, and since most of the referees had some ability to signal with game-related signs, the transition appeared to be a smooth one. Jack would go on to step up basketball games between the Silent Club and other hearing teams in the area. The Silent Club continued its illustrious career until the summer of 1945.

The year 1945 brought news of a sports federation operating out of Los Angeles: the Far West Athletic Association of the Deaf. At the same time the American Athletic Association of the Deaf was founded in Washington, D.C. Jack informed his group of an upcoming tourney in Los Angeles, and the fees that would be involved to go and play in that invitational.

Not everything went as smoothly as one might imagine. Jack informed four of his team's best players about the tourney, only to find later that the L.A. Deaf Club team had successfully convinced all four to move to Los Angeles, find better jobs than what they had in Utah, and become part of their team! Jack was very incensed at this theft (or "betrayal") and decided he

would not be defeated by this blow, so he went around to eight other people at the club whose skills at basketball were not quite as good as the four members who had defected. He managed to raise a team for the tourney in a relatively short time.



Jack #9 with members of the Utah Athletic Club for the Deaf in Oakland, California, 1947

When it came time to actually go to the tournament, more problems arose. Many of the eight could not afford transportation, housing, and food for such a trip from Salt Lake City and back. Jack, out of the faith he had in the team and the love he had for the sport and its accompanying competition, took about \$200.00 out of his own personal savings to pay for the expenses, which would be incurred on the trip. The team did their best, winning the consolation trophy for their 2-1 record. Not a bad showing for a recently constructed team!

After the tournament in 1945, Jack returned home to organize the Utah Athletic Club for the Deaf, signaling the demise of the Silent Club. In 1947, the Utah team, which Jack still coached, drove to Oakland's second FAAD tournament. As president of UACD, he was asked by the FAAD officers to arrange the 1948 FAAD tournament in Salt Lake City. He organized new committees to arrange parties, dinners, and raffles to help build up their UACD fund for the tournament. He rented the old Deseret Gym for \$200 for two nights. They had enough money to pay transportation for other teams. The tournament was a big success.



Jack (far right) with members of the Utah Athletic Club for the Deaf, 1948

The group competed with mainly hearing teams until around 1956 when a new organization came into being: the Northwest Athletic Association of the Deaf. The NWAAD was comprised of deaf teams from Northern California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana, and Utah. No longer were the deaf teams forced to play their hearing counterparts. Now they could compete against each other and become a force unto themselves in the athletic world.

The UACD continued to contend with hearing teams through the Monday Nights Sports Program with the Salt Lake County Recreation Department. While the teams in the Deaf circuit, Far West Athletic Association of the Deaf, and Northwest Athletic Association of the Deaf, and American Athletic Association of the Deaf were deaf only, individual teams could compete against whomever they wished.

Taking the championship at the 11th annual NWAAD games in San Francisco, California, the UACD proved that they were a definite force to be reckoned with. Jack made sure that this

team followed every regulation set by the NWAAD – which proved to be their advantage. When the UACD went up against the team from Oakland, the games were very well played, but the game was later forfeited in favor of the Utah team. Oakland had too many team members on the floor at one time, and that was declared in violation of NWAAD regulations.

Jack at that time was manager for the UACD, chief fund-raiser, and overall enthusiastic promoter for the club. Using his natural link to his work at the newspaper and the publicity that the club could afford, Jack began putting out visual all-points-bulletins to raise funds to send the



Jack (far right) with members of the Utah Athletic Club for the Deaf, 1964

deaf champions to the AAAD national tourney coming up in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This would be the very first trip for a Utah team to that national meet. In honor of their valor, the team was awarded the 1964 “Sportsmanship Trophy.”

Jack was invited to continue his involvement on the national level. Five times he was elected as a delegate to the AAAD games in the capacity of a member of their administrative body. In the course of his fifth time as delegate, he placed his bid for the opportunity to host the 1977 AAAD games in Salt Lake City. The bid was accepted with rousing support.

The 33rd annual American Association of the Deaf national basketball tournament materialized in Salt Lake City in 1977, the first ever held in the state of Utah. In the program of the events at this meet, a special dedication to John F. White and Rodney W. Walker is found, honoring these two for their many years of dedication and service to the promotion of sports among the Deaf on a national level.

Jack wore three hats during the 1977 tournament. Not only did he serve as regional president, he also was the coach for the UACD, as well as secretary to the administrative committee. With all the work involved, and not many people volunteering to shoulder the massive workload, Jack vowed “Never again!” The out-of-pocket funds alone stretched the Salt Lake City team and its supporters to the maximum. With Jack’s adept leadership and management skills, the

Tournament was somewhat of a Pyrrhic victory: it was a definite coup for the UACD, but the expenditure of money and manpower almost made it not worth the effort!

The competition (not competitions) between the deaf teams and other teams continued just as (not s) they had in the past. Finally, in 1982, Jack had his first turn in many future awards. In the January 25, 1982, edition of the Salt Lake Tribune, John Mooney interviewed the Deaf inductee to the NWAAD Hall of Fame for his byline, *Sports Mirror*.



**Members of the Utah Athletic Club for the Deaf, district champs of Northern Athletic Association, pose with trophies: front from left, Roy Cochran, Roy Milborn, Carl Obson, middle: Bruce Harvey, Ronald Perkins, Leon Curtis, coach: Ed Bell, John White, manager: back, Norman Williams, Robert Bonnell, Jay Christensen, Eric Przybyla, and John Murray
UAD Bulletin, February 1964**

For his many years of dedication and leadership, Jack was feted and made a member of this august group of Deaf sportspeople.

In 1991, the Utah Association for the Deaf recognized Jack for his lifetime of work and

support of his community. The inscription on the plaque with which he was awarded reads as follows:

Utah Association for the Deaf, President's Award, given to John F. White for his many years of service to the Utah Deaf Community in Sports – 1991.

With his advancing age and myriad health concerns, Jack retired from his involvement with sports in 1992. Even then, his interest in sports was unflagging. Two years later in 1994 at



Vida & Jack by Robert L. Bonnell

the AAAD Golden Anniversary National Basketball Tournament held in Akron, Ohio, Jack was inducted into the national Hall of Fame. He was one of the six inductees.

During the Utah Athletic Club of the Deaf 50th Anniversary Celebration on September 27, 1997, Jack received an UACD Sportsmanship Award for his lifetime contribution to sports activities for the Deaf.

Jack had been active in Utah sports for more than 40 years. He held all offices in the NWAAD but was the best remembered for his years as player, coach, manager and athletic director of UACD teams. He also held nearly all the offices of the UACD and had always been a stalwart booster of the club and community. He had been an AAAD delegate 5 times to national tournaments.

Jack's contribution to the climate of sports and sportsmanship has left an indelible mark on the lives of many. Within not only the Deaf community in Utah, but nationwide, here is an heretofore untold story for all sports-minded people of one who changed the face of sports not only for the Deaf but for the lives of many hearing people as well.

Jack's life included being a dedicated husband to Vida and a devoted father to Carol, Jack and Sherri. He loved to see his grandchildren and great-grandchildren's successful life endeavors in academics and athletics. Other than spending time with family, his lifetime passions were reading newspapers (especially the sports section), going to Utah Jazz and University of Utah football and basketball games, having pets (cats and dogs), doing yard work, and traveling. He was also an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and held a number of callings and positions serving in the Deaf congregation.

Jack passed away on December 23, 2005 at the age of 95 in his hometown, Salt Lake City.



Jack in 2000
Photo courtesy of the Richard Thomsen's
Family History

Note

Dan Mathis, e-mail message to Jodi B. Kinner, July 1, 2009.

Bibliography

Leavitt, Gary L. "The Silent Sportsmanship: John "Jack" F. White" for the history course at the University of Utah, 2005.