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ACROSS THE ISLAND

Man Born In DeSable Held Big U.S. Posts

By NEIL A. MATHESON

ONE OF the more interesting stories of Island born men who hit top circles in other countries centers around Franklin Knight Lane, a man who was born in DeSable in July 1864, and was boosted by some prominent people as a candidate for president of the United States before he died in May 1921.

For this story I want to thank my long time friend, Rev. Blair MacPhail, Wellington – his father Malcolm MacPhail, later owned the farm where Lane was born - and Sterling Lane, Charlottetown a more recent acquaintance. It was this man who brought me “Imprint of the Maritimes” which carries a short item on this former Islander.

In brief the item says Lane went to the Pacific coast in his youth – his family moved there, I believe – studied law at the University of California, for a time was a correspondent for the New York Times, and later editor of the Tacoma Daily News in Washington.

Early Interest In Politics

SHOWING AN early interest in government, Lane was a candidate for the Governor of California, was defeated, and served five years as corporation counsel for San Francisco. Later he was named to the interstate commerce commission by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906.

When Woodrow Wilson was inaugurated in 1913, Lane served as his secretary of the interior through both of the Wilson administrations. In that capacity the former Island man made a concerted effort to improve the lot of the American Indian, among other things.

“Imprint of the Maritimes” – I do not now have the author’s name – said “In the months preceding the 1920 Democratic convention the name of Lane often appeared in American newspapers as a logical choice to succeed Wilson, however he was ineligible as he had not been born in the U.S.A.

Malcolm MacPhail Writes

I WAS interested in several short items of correspondence between Malcolm MacPhail and Franklin K. Lane. Malcolm’s son Lane – he is now a surgeon in Montreal – was born in the same room as Mr. Lane had, so Mr. MacPhail named the baby after the former DeSable man, and sent him a note advising him of that fact. It brought this reply:

“I am obliged to you for the courtesy of your letter and the photograph of the baby who will, I trust, rise to a merited distinction. I recognize the spot on which the photograph was taken and would like to see the lilacs in blossom. I am very proud of the old farm; it showed so much good taste on the part of my grandfather and grandmother.” That letter was written in June 1913.

On July 10, Mr. Lane's secretary wrote thanking Mr. MacPhail for photographs of Mr. Lane's old home. The Secretary of the Interior was observing his 50th birthday, his staff were giving him a party and they felt pictures of his boyhood home would be appreciated.

Personal Glimpses

I WANT to add some intimate personal glimpses of the man and his own philosophy of life. I found them in a newspaper clipping written by Dr. Fred Landon in the London Free Press in 1968.

The part I want to feature here concerns a manuscript written the day before Mr. Lane's death, and found by his bedside. It contains speculations on death and the future life. These few paragraphs I take directly from Dr. Landon's reference:

He began his thoughts by wondering whom he would most like to see in the other world. "No doubt first of all I would have sought the few loved ones whose common life with me had given us matter for talk and whom I had known so well that I had loved dearly."

There would also be a few great men whom he would enjoy meeting – Aristotle, for example. "There," he wrote, "would be a man. I think that I would not expect that he could tell the reason why the way began, nor where it would end. The way up which we've stumbled."

With Lincoln On Riverbank

I LIKE particularly Franklin Lane's references to Lincoln who, apparently, had been one of his favorite historical people. Mr. Lane wrote this final tribute, believed to have been the last words his hand ever shaped.

"But for my heart's content in that new land, I think I'd rather loaf with Lincoln along a river bank. I know I could understand him. I would not have to learn who were his friends and who his enemies, what theories he was committed to, and what against.

"We could just talk and open out our minds, and tell our doubts and swap the longings of our hearts that others never heard of. He wouldn't try to master me nor to make me feel how small I was. I'd dare to ask him things and know that he felt awkward about them, too.

"And I would find, I know I would, that he had hit his shin just on those very stumps that had hit me. We'd talk of men a lot, the kind they call the great. I would not find him scornful. Yet boys that he knew in New Salem would somehow appear larger in their souls, than some of these that I had called the great. His wise eyes saw qualities that weighed more than smartness. Yes, we would sit down where the bank sloped gently to the quiet stream and glance at the picture of our people, the Negroes being lynched, the miners' civil war, labor's hold ups, employers' ruthlessness, the subordination of humanity to industry."

What an interesting man Franklin K. Lane must have been, how I would have liked to have known him.

Hall Of Fame

I HAVE received a number of nominations to the P.E.I. Sports Hall of Fame and just want to make a few comments.

Letters of nomination should have all the facts that are available on the man, or the woman, being nominated.

These letters must present to the directors who will be considering the nominations, as clear a picture of the person nominated for consideration, as is humanly possible.

It is not enough, for example, to say "I am sure, Neil, that you must know this man and of his feats." I am not trying to be sticky, or difficult, but the six men, along with myself, who will conscientiously be considering the election to the Hall of Fame of three persons this year, need all the information that you people can give us.

The other thing is that the nominations close in time for us to consider them at a meeting here on the afternoon of June 21. There are only a very few names in yet, we want as many as possible. I hope to get a lot of names coming this way before Saturday of next week.