

A Memorable Sentinel Journalist

The *Sentinel* has had a long and rich history dating back to the memorable Frank A. Day in the latter 1800's. Another notable individual affiliated with the *Sentinel* for many years that long time residents of Fairmont and Martin County will certainly recall with affection is the late Claude Swanson. He was a popular *Sentinel* editor and publisher who was also well known for his column, "The Lake Breezes Whisper. . .," which was originally written by Frank Day and then continued by Swanson after Day's death.

Claude N. Swanson was born on a farm in Westford Township south of Truman in 1895. His education included attending rural school, one year of high school, and a business course at Wisconsin Business University in La Crosse.

He began working at the *Sentinel* in 1914 at the age of nineteen as a printer's devil, a job that provided him no pay. A printer's devil was an apprentice in a printing establishment who performed a number of tasks, such as mixing tubs of ink. Initially hired by Frank Day, he was fired by Day the very next day for sleeping through the town's biggest fire. However, Day reconsidered when Swanson turned in a bag of money he had collected walking from farm to farm selling subscriptions to the *Sentinel*. In addition, he was provided room and board at the home of Frank Day, whom he idolized.

During the course of his employment with the *Sentinel*, he worked his way up to become a reporter, an advertising salesman, the advertising manager, the managing editor, and finally publisher in July of 1950. He was employed by the *Sentinel* from 1914 up to the date of his death in 1972, with the exception of serving as editor and publisher of the *Truman Tribune* from May of 1916 to August of 1917 and serving as a Secret Service agent for the U. S. Treasury from April of 1918 to July of 1919. This was the forerunner to the FBI, and he was extremely proud of his work with that organization. He also ran unsuccessfully as a candidate for the office of Minnesota Secretary of State in 1922 as a DFL'er against incumbent Mike Holm, who held the office for fifty years.

Swanson truly loved history which was reflected in his work of authoring the *Sentinel's* 1958 Centennial Edition. That, for Swanson, was a labor of love that became a historical compilation of events covering Martin County's first 100 years of existence. Also prominent among his journalistic talents was his column entitled "The Lake Breezes Whisper. . ." which he took over upon the death of Frank Day in 1928.

In a farewell tribute to Swanson that appeared in the May 25, 1972, edition of the *Sentinel* entitled "History buried with Swanson," Ray Stougaard wrote the following regarding Swanson's writing style: "In copyreading his editorials in the earlier days, I would run across words I'd never heard of and swear he had made them up. But there they were, in the dictionary, and he had used them correctly."

Swanson was also very civic minded and involved with many organizations in Fairmont, as well as organizations statewide. Regarding his statewide involvement, he was a member of the Minnesota Safety Council and served on the Governor's Commission on

Mental Health. Concerning statewide journalism affiliations, he served as secretary-treasurer, vice-president, and president of the Minnesota Second District Editorial Association, and was president of the Minnesota Associated Press in 1952. Locally, he was secretary and one of the organizers of the Fairmont Planning Commission, organizer and president of the Fairmont Safety Council, and he served as publicity chairman for defense bond sales, scrap drives, Red Cross, USO, and other war related activities.

From his semi-retirement in 1962, he continued as a contributing editor for the *Sentinel* writing occasional editorials and the weekly "Lake Breezes" column up until the time of his death in 1972.

Claude N. Swanson, a newspaperman from the "old school," could perhaps best be characterized as a highly respected and endeared individual in Martin County's past. His column, entitled "The Lake Breezes Whisper. . .," included Swanson's commentary and take on many things of interest, whether they be current or from the past, including personal perspectives drawn from his youth while growing up in Westford Township. In the previously mentioned farewell editorial written by Ray Stougaard, his comments also included the following: "We buried Claude N. Swanson today. And with him went one of the final ties to the early days of the *Sentinel*." Stougaard's editorial continued in emphasizing Swanson's ability with the newspaper business by stating, "Claude was among the last of the old-time editors, full of fire and brimstone, bumptious, positive, and feeling his oats." Obviously, Claude Swanson was someone who was held in high esteem by his colleagues, he was a civic minded servant to our area, and through his writing he undoubtedly touched the lives of many who read the *Sentinel* during his nearly sixty years with that newspaper.