

Frank & Al – Local Characters to be Remembered

It has been said that Martin County has had its share of “characters” throughout its history. Perhaps two of the most colorful, as well as influential, of these were Albert Ward and Frank Day. It’s interesting to compare the two, as they both had strong followings, yet, they were in many ways exact opposites.

According to Martin County Historical Society archives and *Sentinel* articles from the past, Frank Day was said to have had a gregarious nature, while Albert Ward was all business. Ward was known as a shrewd businessman and was considered to be very frugal, while Day was more generous and didn’t hesitate to spend. Ward was a tireless worker who had no time for anyone lacking ambition. In addition, Ward’s personal habits did not include smoking, drinking, or chewing tobacco.

While Ward eventually became quite wealthy, Frank Day, on the other hand, was considered as “poor as a church mouse” in terms of ready cash. Although very generous in nature, it seems he always “owed a little something to the bank.” Additionally, it appears that he was also quite generous with other people’s money and property. An example of this relates to a family in East Chain that had lost their home and all its contents to a fire. Mr. Day was able to collect groceries for the family and clothing for the children. On his way to East Chain to deliver the donations, however, it was said that he consumed some of the groceries intended for the family. Upon arriving at the scene of the fire, he jumped out of the car and said: “I am Frank Day. Too bad about the fire, but see what I brought you.” Day’s chauffeur subsequently asked him why he didn’t give credit to those individuals and businesses that gave the groceries and clothing to the family that had lost everything in the fire. Day’s comment: “Gave it?” snorted Day, “Why should they have credit?” “If I hadn’t gone after them (to donate groceries and clothing), those poor people wouldn’t have had anything.”

Another example regarding Day relates to a bill he owed to the G. B. Goetz Clothing Store. He walked into the store and asked what he owed. The shop owner said that he owed ten dollars. Day pulled a ten dollar bill out of his pocket and gave it to the shop owner. On his way out he asked how long he had owed the money. The shop owner said he had owed it for about ten months, at which time Day grabbed the ten dollar bill back and said, “I haven’t owed you that long enough yet,” and walked out of the store.

Day and Ward were apparently at each other’s throats on a fairly regular basis. Ward had the money, and Day apparently relished telling him how to use it. Day, of course, was in favor of every conceivable improvement for Fairmont that he could envision, while Ward would oppose him at every turn.

The highpoint in their ongoing feud probably reached its zenith after *The Sentinel* started the *Fairmont Daily Sentinel*. It seems that at that time, the old *Democrat* and the *Martin County Independent Zeitung* newspapers were unable to repay their loans. Ward apparently held the loans at his bank and consequently gained possession of these newspapers. This, of course, provided Ward a vehicle from which to answer Day’s

verbal assaults as well as to retaliate with some of his own. From there on, Ward and Day exchanged insults in nearly every issue, and on one occasion, Ward sued Day for libel. Ward was awarded one cent in damages which in turn threw the legal costs of the trial on Day.

An example of Ward's somewhat eccentric nature might be the following instance of a job interview he conducted. He asked the young man being interviewed whether he went to church and Sunday School, to which the young man answered that he did attend both church and Sunday School. He then asked whether or not he ever would swear. The young man responded reluctantly that he did swear on occasion. To this Ward replied, "Well, if you do. . ., you can't work for me. Swearing sounds like hell."

It could undoubtedly be said that Albert Ward, who came to Martin County with little or nothing, became in his day one of the wealthiest individuals in the county. At the time of his death in 1931, his fortune was estimated to be between one and two million dollars. Ward was an astute businessman; however, although he developed many business interests, he was not without criticism. As time progressed and as his holdings grew, he also gained a thorough knowledge of the law. In addition, he was said to have charged high interest rates on loans, and he did not hesitate to foreclose on those unable or neglectful in repayment of their loans. Ward was also known for his interest in politics, the Ward Orphanage, and numerous other endeavors.

It appears that Frank Day and Albert Ward, although frequently at odds, were certainly interesting, especially in their somewhat lively and exuberant exchanges over the years. Although it appears quite obvious that their beliefs and ideals were frequently in contrast, in their own unique ways, both have added a great deal to the history of Martin County. Whether you loved them or despised them, there is no question as to their contributions and influence on the development and the rich history of Martin County during the years in which they lived and worked here. Their legacies remain and will be long remembered.

For more information on Albert Ward and Frank Day, visit the Pioneer Museum in Fairmont.