

Frank R. Wilson

The story of Frank R. Wilson is typical of many men who were born, nurtured, and educated in the Hawkeye State and then went out to attain fame, and sometimes fortune, in their chosen fields. Distinguished Iowans by the hundreds who achieved renown far from their native hearth can be numbered in the ministry, in education and journalism, in banking, insurance, and industry, in medicine, law, and other professions, and as executives and administrators in our own federal government and throughout the world.

Although Frank Wilson accomplished Herculean tasks during the course of his lifetime, his name rarely appeared in the headlines. His work was that of a promoter for others — an “idea” man, a “leg” man, a super salesman. It was largely his task to push notables into the limelight in order to achieve some objective that would redound to the common good. This was particularly true whenever he was called upon to serve the federal government. Mindful of Wilson’s contributions to the war bond sales during World War I, Secretary of the Treasury Carter Glass wrote him as follows on September 16, 1919:

I can not permit you to leave the department which you

have served so well without committing to writing an expression of my genuine appreciation of your loyalty and devotion to the interests of the Government. You entered the Treasury in the service of the Federal Farm Loan Board where your intelligent work attracted the attention of my distinguished predecessor who gave you the opportunity for the greater employment of the admirable talents with which you are endowed by your appointment as Director of Publicity of the War Loan Organization. In that work you displayed the finest qualities of direction in campaigns that required imagination of the highest degree and a full understanding of all the elements of popular appeal. I am happy to have the privilege of saying that you were equal to a task that was of very great importance in the program of war finance and that I know of few men who could have done so well and none who could have excelled. In the years to come it will be a comfort to you to realize that you served your Government with the enthusiasm and loyalty of a patriot in your country's period of greatest peril. You leave the Treasury with the deepest regret of those who have been associated with you, and I know I speak the mind of all when I say that you will carry with you into private life their every good wish for your health and happiness.

During much of his active life Frank Wilson served the federal government in various capacities for little compensation. Indeed, most of Wilson's personal estate was built up during the fabulous 1920's when his keen imagination, his driving energy and courage in the face of insuperable odds allowed him and his associates to reap rich rewards in the newborn motion picture industry. It took a man of rare insight and organizing ability

to achieve the success he did before the financial debacle of 1929. Even then, Wilson had foresight enough to convert much of his paper stock into real estate, thereby saving some of the fruits of his labor.

Iowans will always be indebted to Frank Wilson for the deep interest he took in his native state. According to the Council Bluffs *Nonpareil*:

He never lost his interest in Iowa. Today he probably knows more about each Iowa city than most of the local residents.

As chief of publicity he always works on Iowa statistics first. He just can't wait to see what has happened to corn production, hog production and other activities in the greatest agricultural state in the Union.

The *Nonpareil* hears from him frequently, with information about Iowa crop production.

Frank Wilson played such an important role in the United States Census Bureau that a special act was required to prevent his mandatory retirement until the government could benefit from his ability to interpret the census of 1950. Little wonder that, upon his retirement from the Census Bureau, Frank Wilson received a gold medal for outstanding service, the highest award which the government offers its civilian workers. Secretary of Commerce Charles Sawyer made the award to Wilson for his unique service as Director of Information of the Bureau of the Census. Wilson was the first government information man to receive the award.

Hugh H. MacMillan of the *Detroit Free Press* praised Wilson for his "unselfish devotion" and his "constant courtesy and kindness" to newspaper men. Douglas Taylor, president of the American Association of Newspaper Representatives, lauded his "thoughtfulness, helpfulness" and "intelligent understanding of our interests." Roy V. Peel, former Director of the Census Bureau and now of the University of Utah, described Wilson as "indefatigable, ingenious, industrious — and incomparably the best information man in Washington." Letters in a similar vein came from such men as W. W. Waymack, editor of the *Des Moines Register*, Robert W. Burgess, Director of the Census, and Sinclair Weeks, Secretary of Commerce.

Perhaps the outstanding tribute was the following resolution adopted by the Board of Directors of the National Newspaper Promotion Association:

WHEREAS Mr. Frank Wilson is retiring from his position as Director of Information for the United States Census Bureau thus terminating many years of valuable public service; and

WHEREAS Mr. Wilson has contributed extensively to the promotion of newspaper advertising and circulation by his unexcelled co-operation in making available the services and statistics of the United States Census Bureau to newspapers, advertisers and advertising agencies; and

WHEREAS Mr. Wilson has on innumerable occasions personally participated in newspaper programs and meet-

ings designed to enlighten newspaper promotion management concerning the availability and utilization of the valuable and factual data released by the United States Census Bureau; now therefore

BE IT RESOLVED that the National Newspaper Promotion Association extend to Mr. Frank Wilson its highest expressions of gratitude and appreciation and in token of its esteem extend to him an Honorary Life Membership that he may ever know of the high regard and affection in which he is held by all.

WILLIAM J. PETERSEN