Work continues on scholarly Lawrence Welk biography

By Carol Richley

"Success demands singleness of purpose," wrote legen-
dary football coach Vince Lombardi in his diary of a week coach-
ing the Green Bay Packers. As my husband and I walked through reconsecrating Law-
rence’s struggles to establish himself as a bandleader in the late 1930s and 1940s, it is clear
that Lawrence Welk understood the need for singleness of purpose in order to succeed
decades before Lombardi penned these words.

While Lance continues to write the narrative, I re-
search online for references to Lawrence in newspapers and magazines. In addition
to searching Google, NewspaperArchive.com, and the Library of Congress’s Music Na-
tional Archival History database, I also check on music industry publications such as Billboard, Radio
Daily and Variety.

AmericanRadioHistory.com is an invaluable source which contains thousands of
issues from radio and music publications. What is most amazing is that the website is
roughly contemporaneous to Lawrence, rather than a preservation project of
one individual, retired broadcasters like David Cohen. The website now contains
six million pages of AM, FM, and TV broadcasting history.

For many years, the Bill-
board weekly have contained
Orchestra Roster and Bands
on Tour advance dates, and through research, one can retrace Lawrence’s many engagements throughout
the years. All of these references are listed chronologically in a document so that Lance
can see at a glance where Lawrence was playing at any
given time. Separate docu-
ments detail newspaper and
magazine articles about Law-
rence for the 1920s and 30s in
North Dakota and
in
North Dakota. Yet, by the 1940s and 1950s, has already surpassed

north Dakota Secretary of State Al Jaeger of Bismarck,
left, visits with Dr. Lance and Carol Richley of Fort Wayne,
Ind., last fall at an event honoring Michael Miller for his
50th anniversary of joining the North Dakota State Uni-
versity staff.

Since my last update, Lance has completed the first
half of the book. Chapter Four covers Lawrence’s career
from his debut on WNAX in Yankton, S.D., in late 1927
until his marriage to Fern in 1931. Chapter Five explores their years of travel and hand-
shaking through the Great Depression,
when Lawrence almost left the music business to run a
hotel in Dallas before finally
returning to Yankton as a terry-
type bandleader. Lawrence’s
decision to leave Yankton,
first for Omaha and then to Pittsburgh, where his year
at the William Penn Hotel finally helped establish him
on the national scene, is
examined in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven recounts Law-
rence’s career at the height of
the Big Band era, when all
of his bands and material
were
in Chicago at the Trianon Ballroom in the years immediately
before World War II.

After trying to reconstruct a timeline of Lawrence’s
umerous performances from the
time he left home in 1924, it is clear just how much of
his life was spent on the
road, away from his fam-
ily. Lombardi’s inspirational
quote about success is often
repeated, but what is rarely noted is what Lombardi did in order to achieve his
targeted goals. When he explained the mental toughness that is the key
to his success: "I think it is singleness of purpose, and once you have agreed upon
the price that you and your family must pay for success, it enables you to
forget that price."

While Lawrence focused on becoming a successful
bandleader, Fern focused on their family, and she well understood the price they paid for
his success. With a single
ence of purpose all her own, Fern supported Lawrence in his
career while working to
provide the stable home en-
vironment for their children
that they recognized they needed.

And while you may not be a Green Bay Packers fan, you can still recognize that Lombardi became the
cornerstone of the greatest coaches in NFL his-
tory through his determina-
tion and drive to be the best.

We hope you enjoy our
continuing research into the
lives of Lawrence Welk
and his wife Fern, and hope
you will continue to follow along as we seek to
bring Lawrence Welk to
life.

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