

Finding Aid to the W. J. Lane Company (Fargo, N.D.) Records

W.J. Lane Company (Fargo, N.D.)

W. J. Lane Company Records, 1913-1968

4.4 linear ft.

Collection number: Mss 276

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OVERVIEW

Links: Finding aid to the [W.J. Lane Company Photograph Collection](#)

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HISTORY

William J. Lane was born on March 23, 1867 in Newark, N. J. He started his work career in Newark as an errand boy for a crockery store. He married Elizabeth Benson in Newark on July 13, 1882. They had four children. He later worked in New York City before coming to Fargo in April 1886. He acquired a job at the Hance loan office, and then worked in the Yerxa's Wigwam general store. In 1887 Lane began working for the First National Bank. He was employed there until 1897 when he worked for the Fargo Loan Agency. For a short time around 1891 he owned a photography studio. In 1902 he began the W.J.

Lane Company. His firm handled real estate loans and insurance. It was incorporated in 1916. Mr. Lane was also involved in many community activities including the YMCA, in which he served as director for thirty years. He was a member of the Fargo School Board, a trustee of Jamestown College, and active in the Presbyterian Church. He was also very active in many Fargo fraternal organizations and the Republican Party. Mr. Lane died suddenly on October 15, 1931, while speaking at a session of the North Dakota synod of the Presbyterian Church in Devils Lake.

After William J. Lane's death the firm was continued by Harry R. Arneson, Sr. Mr. Arneson had begun working for the W.J. Lane in 1904. He served as the company's president until 1972. His son, Harry Arneson, Jr., began working for the W.J. Lane Company after he returned from military service in World War II. His career was in appraisals, and apparently he established his own company of Harry Arneson, Jr. and Associates around 1954. This business worked out of the W. J. Lane Company office, handling its appraisal work. In 1972, the firm became the Arneson Company operated by Harry Arneson, Sr. and his son, Harry, Jr. After Harry Arneson, Sr. died on May 9, 1973, Harry Arneson, Jr. appears to have continued his appraisal business as well as the Arneson Company until his death on May 4, 1997.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The records of the W.J. Lane Company and the Harry Arneson, Jr. and Associates apparently were interfiled at the company office and thus remain together in this collection. The records span from 1913 to 1968. They have been organized into eight series, Correspondence, Appraisal Reports, Estate Papers, Fargo Industrial Development Corporation, Rental Property Ledger, Newspaper Clipping Scrapbooks, Advertisement and Subject File Series. Since the Harry Arneson, Jr. and Associates served as an appraisal service, the majority of the records found in the Appraisal Reports Series can be attributed to it. It was also responsible for the Newspaper Clipping Scrapbooks from 1952 to 1965. There are no records of the company after 1968, and thus no records when it became the Arneson Company in 1972.

The [Correspondence Series](#) contains correspondence from 1942 to 1968 with a majority from the years 1948 and 1954. These files follow the original alphabetical order. The correspondence deals with real estate issues of the time such as rent control laws, and veterans housing. It also reflects the business dealings of the W.J. Lane Company and the Harry Arneson, Jr. and Associates regarding the rental, appraisal and sale of property in Fargo, Moorhead and the surrounding region. This series is a mixture of correspondence, of which Harry Arneson, Sr., Harry Arneson, Jr. and other employees of the firm were responsible.

Of interest in this series is the correspondence between Pat Bosquet, an antique dealer, and Harry Arneson Sr. It contains some of Mr. Arneson's reminiscence of playing the drum for Rupert's Orchestra in the Fargo Opera House, and the 1893 Fargo fire. The Employment Applications file includes correspondence and the applications of Shirley A. Lee, Betty M. Bastyr, Helen A. Odegard, Jean A. Quirk, C.J. Rund, Merrill Triebold and Esther R. Wamre who applied for positions with W.J. Lane Company. A portion of the Fargo Chamber of Commerce file contains correspondence regarding the Anti-Parking Meter Measure voted upon in the 1948 elections. The Claude Hector file contains correspondence regarding the sale of the property of his mother, Mary Hector. Her home, the oldest in Fargo, stood at 119 4th Street South. The

Fred Hultz file contains a series of letters regarding a run-in that Harry Arneson, Jr. had with the foreman of the university chicken farm.

Some issues facing the real estate business in the late 1940s and early 1950s is reflected in the file of Joseph S. Fevold, President of the Bismarck-Mandan Board of Realtors. It contains correspondence regarding real estate license laws. The William Langer file contains correspondence dealing with several issues including rent control. Also see the files for Fred L. Chapman, Arthur Fredrickson, Wendell H. Linwell and G.A. Schultheis for real estate issues.

There are several files on military and veteran interests. Harry Arneson, Jr. was heavily involved in veteran affairs. Chaney Field was a housing community set up by the Veterans Emergency Housing Committee, for which Harry Arneson, Jr. was chairman. There is a file of applicants and correspondence dealing with this housing community. There is also large amount of correspondence dealing with this in the Organized Reserve Corps files. Included in these files are news releases entitled *The Digest for Civilian Components in North Dakota*. The letter from a Sergeant Ardey Peterson, written in 1943, reflects the feelings of an enlisted Fargo man at the time of World War II. The Everett W. Sprague file contains correspondence with a veteran looking for housing in Fargo.

The [Appraisal Reports Series](#) contain appraisals, the majority of which were compiled by Harry Arneson, Jr. and Associates. These appraisal reports are of property in Fargo, West Fargo, Bismarck, Christine, Grand Forks, Hillsboro, Hunter, Jamestown, Mandan, Mapleton, and Prosper, North Dakota; Dilworth, and Moorhead, Minnesota, as well as other rural locations the Red River Valley. The majority of the files are organized by town, avenue or street, and building number. Those with rural or multiple properties are listed alphabetically by property owner. The typical appraisal report contains address of appraisal, legal description, zoning, assessed valuation, market data, site and area data, improvements, cost calculations, and a summary of conclusion. In some cases correspondence and on-site notes regarding the appraisal are included. Some appraisals contained photographs. In this case, if the appraisal was for a North Dakota or Moorhead, Minnesota property, the images were removed to the W. J. Lane Company Photograph Collection (Photo 2069). A photocopy of the image was inserted into the file with the photo ID number that corresponds to each image.

Of interest in the appraisal reports are those done for the Fargo Public Schools in 1967. These appraisals were requested following the March 1966 collapse of the North High School dome in which the North Dakota State Fire and Tornado Fund failed to provide an insurance settlement. The school board, in seeking bids for a private insurer, requested that the Harry Arneson, Jr. do appraisals of all school properties.

The [Estate Papers Series](#) contains estates all dating from the late 1930s. W.J. Lane Company employee John Oliver served as administrator for these estates. Of interest in this series is the Carl F. Johnson file that contains his American passport and correspondence with his relatives in Sweden. Also the Soren Sorenson file contains an inventory of his possessions found in the room where he died at the Tweeden Hotel in Fargo.

The [Fargo Industrial Development Corporation Series](#) contains a record of this organizations work in acquiring land in the Tyler and Beardsley additions of Fargo for the purpose of industrial development in 1948 and 1949. This series contains president' reports, correspondence, property assessments, and negotiations for the Sophia Twight property in block 23 of the Tyler Addition.

The [Rental Property Ledger Series](#) contains pages removed from ledger books used to keep track of rental payments for property managed by the W.J. Lane Company. The ledgers appear to cover the time period of 1916-1948. The first three files contain an alphabetical index. The remaining folders contain the ledger pages, there are however large gaps missing from this ledger.

The [Newspaper Clipping Scrapbooks Series](#) contains newspaper clippings of real estate transactions and development in Fargo and the region. The December 1913 – November 1915 scrapbook, appears to be clippings the W.J. Lane Company real estate dealings. The remaining scrapbooks that cover the time period 1952 to 1964, were compiled by the Harry Arneson, Jr. and Associates, and are broader in scope dealing with real estate as a whole in the region. These scrapbooks are a good source of information regarding real estate development in the Fargo – Moorhead area.

A large portion of the [Advertisement Series](#) is calendars used as advertisement for the company from 1948 to 1955. There are also fliers issued by the W.J. Lane Company in the 1910s as advertisements.

The [Subject File Series](#) is arranged alphabetically by topic. There are two audit reports of the W.J. Lane Company in 1957 and 1958. There are files dealing with the bankruptcy of two businesses that the W.J. Lane Company had dealings with, the Cox Bakeries and Dalco American Enterprises. The City of Fargo land acquisition for parking in downtown file contains correspondence and other materials dealing with a 1949 land appraisal of property between 2nd and 3rd Avenues North in the 500 block. There is a file that contains a report on the Washington Hotel in Fargo. It contains a detailed description of the building along with fire and health hazards.

The *History and Recreation Potential of Devils Lake Area* was written for the North Dakota Irrigation District Association fifth annual meeting in Devils Lake, February 10 -11, 1964. This document deals with using the Garrison Diversion Project to establish Devils Lake as a permanent fresh water lake for recreational purposes. *The Preliminary Report on City Planning for Fargo, No. Dak.* was prepared by Harland Bartholomew, a City Planning Engineer from Saint Louis. This plan is undated, but clues from the document point to the probability that it was composed in the 1920s.

There are two speeches in the series, although there is no indication as to who gave the speeches. One was given on the radio for the Fargo Property Owners Association regarding an election, probably in 1948. The second speech was given to the Lions Club, regarding the Fargo zoning ordinance. This speech was undated.

BOX AND FOLDER LIST

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