

Being... 2

Tribute To Samuel Leask Sr.

The following story in tribute to Samuel Leask Sr., who celebrated his 100th birthday today, was written by Supervisor Robert E. Burton, longtime friend and associate of the Santa Cruz merchant.

It was December 26, 1861, the American Civil war had just started, when on a small croft of nine acres, on the lands of Lord Aberdeen in Scotland, there was born a boy, who was to play an important part in the history of Santa Cruz, Calif. He was to become our Samuel Leask Sr.—we place emphasis on the word “our.”

It is self evident that nine acres, given to oats, turnips and pasture could scarcely furnish luxurious living to a family of two parents and three children. Oats were for the people, a staple food among the Scotch; the turnips were shared with the cow, who shared the pasture with pigs and chickens. The yearly calf was sacrificed on the economic altar to pay the rent.

Like many a youth of that period, young Sam had a brush with diphtheria when 5 years old, only did he escape death by a narrow margin.

His education ended at 13. The Victorian era was then in full swing and the schools reflected its energies and ambitions. This was a period when children did not have as many complexes as they have now and, instead of whispering admonitions in their ears, parents pulled these recalcitrant ears if needed or used a ferrule on the seat of their pants. Lest we look with too much apprehension on such an educational system, let us note that by the time young Sam was 13 years old, that modest Scotch school had taught him arithmetic up to and including cube roots and mensuration, English grammar and composition, Latin through the first book of Euclid, penmanship (good to this day), history, the memorizing of selections from the best literature of Scotland and England, a collection of literary gems like Gray’s “Eulogy in a Country Church Yard” which he can still recite at 100 years of age. Then, of course, there was the usual catechism prescribed by the Presbyterian church. These were days when God and Country were always mentioned in the same breath. To the noble profession of teaching, Mr. Leask pays special tribute to two of his teachers: Mr. John Dempster and Mr. Bannerman.

It was at the age of 14 years that young Sam started a four years’ apprenticeship, as a “draper” clerk in Aberdeen, at a salary of about \$1 per week. This undoubtedly must have seemed easier than his earlier experiences on the labor market when, at 12 years of age, he had earned about \$10 as a harvest hand during a period of three weeks. This money was his first contribution to the

the next train for California and arrived in Los Angeles, bound for San Francisco. The blocking of a tunnel in the San Fernando mountains by an earthquake made it necessary for him to continue his travel by boat to Monterey, with a shipload of Chinese laborers, whence he proceeded to San Francisco by train.

His sickness, having become aggravated, he found himself room-bound in a cheap hotel. His money had been reduced to 10 cents, when he was almost miraculously rescued from this difficult position by a \$25 telegram, sent to him by a friend.

After various experiences working at his trade in San Francisco, we find him arriving in Watsonville in March 1885 to meet a new life and new opportunities. He secured a job with the Ford store at \$100 per month.

It was a derby hat, which he was then wearing while on a Sunday stroll, which caused him to turn from Main street (to escape the jeers some boys were aiming at that derby) and to meet a man who was to become his future father-in-law, a Scotchman by the name of Neil McNeil. His father having died, his mother came with his sister to join him, and married Mr. McNeil. His sister married Mr. Stephen Martinelli, who founded the celebrated apple cider firm of that name. Mr. Leask was still a bachelor and could not fend for himself, so he was boarding with a widow by the name of Mrs. Fannie S. Johnson. His interest was soon attracted to the charming daughter, Clara, who was helping her mother, and, also, teaching school. Four years later, he married Clara and for over 60 years she was his most devoted and capable companion. They were married in Watsonville, on November 3, 1892, by Rev. C. S. Haswell, a Methodist Episcopal minister.

It was while in Watsonville that he joined the Odd Fellows lodge. Therefore, he has been a member of that lodge for over 70 years and must certainly be reckoned as one of the oldest members in Santa Cruz county.

On June 22, 1892, having left the Ford store in Watsonville, he opened what is now the Leask store on the corner of Church street and Pacific avenue—a similar store in that same place having previously failed. At first it was a partnership with a Mr. Johnson. This partnership was subsequently dissolved. Up to 1905, Mr. Leask was still a renter from the Hinds family. That year, steps were taken to acquire the land and erect a new building. This building was in process of construction when the 1906 earthquake took place. No finer tribute was ever paid to Santa Cruz than that paid by Mr. Leask on that memorable day of April 6,

most suitably encountered by a conspiracy of silence.”

In 1911, he was a member of a city commission which drew a city charter. Many people will remember with gratitude that at one time Mr. Samuel Leask and Christian Hoffman bought the Santa Cruz Water Works at a sheriff’s sale on the Courthouse steps, and held it until the city could get back on its feet. It is a rather complex story. Sufficient to say that the city council, of which Mr. Leask was not a member, had turned over \$265,000. worth of bonds to a fast operator who sold them and disappeared with the money. The federal courts decided that the city had to make good. They were, therefore, to pay back \$265,000 to the bond holders, in spite of the fact that the city had never received any money. To make a long and complicated story short, Mr. Leask went to New York, at his own expense, pleaded with the bond holders who finally reduced the claim to \$220,000. On his return to Santa Cruz, he and Mr. Hoffman raised \$220,000 between them, bid that same sum for the Water Works. The creditors were paid and Mr. Leask and Mr. Hoffman held the Water Works, until at a subsequent election new bonds were passed and they were reimbursed and turned the Works back to the City. Had it not been for them, some outside dealer might well have secured that City enterprise.

During the first World War, he was an active member of the County Board of Exemption.

We cannot mention here all the many civic responsibilities he has assumed — we can only say that he has been a most loyal and valuable friend to Santa Cruz. His many friends wish him continued health and happiness.

His life has been a good example of thrift and industry. His personal wants have been most modest. To this day, he enjoys good health — probably due to his well regulated life. His food is of the simplest, and, from what he says, he has no physical pains, enjoys his food, reads and writes abundantly, and finds life still a great adventure — starting his second century with considerable zest, considering his age.

By ROBERT E. BURTON

Ernest Martin Services Planned

Ernest Martin, 81, a native of Sweden and a resident of California since he was 14, died Sunday in a local nursing home after a brief illness. He had been in failing health for about a year. He had lived in the east area most of his working years, which included 30 with the Oakland Paving company for whom he was superintendent of the quarry at Hills when he retired at the end

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hard-pressed home. Therefore, let no one think that Mr. Leask never earned his bread by the sweat of his brow.

For the sake of brevity, we must leave Mr. Sam now and meet him again in London four years later when, as a full fledged draper clerk in a more ambitious store, he received the sum of about \$175 per year with which to keep body and soul together, help the folks at home, and also maintain for himself a complete full dress to wait on customers. The close protocol of that business at that time might be inferred from the fact that he received a serious reprimand at one time for having mistaken an army officer for the purchaser of women's finery, a mistake in identity which proved a great insult to the army man.

It was on May 23, 1883, that, having bought the cheapest of steerage tickets with all of his savings and a loan of \$50, he embarked for New York. After a difficult trans-Atlantic passage, which was to remain ever after as a nightmare in his memory, he arrived in New York on June 13, 1883.

Again we must leave Mr. Sam at his various stores in New York, Boston and Memphis, where, incidentally, he found the women very frivolous after those of England, and meet him again on a railroad embankment sitting under a mesquite bush, alone, sick, wind-blown, sunburned, dust-covered, and almost penniless, near Abilene, Tex. He is the victim of a yearning, a universal yearning, to possess a piece of land and be a farmer. All the while he was wearing spats on his shoes, he was dreaming of the day he would wear spurs. Abilene, Tex., was then one of those prairie towns which had few opportunities for such a haberdasher clerk, but Sam wanted to hire out as a farm hand. Could he have foreseen the future, he might have remained at Abilene, worked at some store, and might have fitted a young man to a pair of breeches or worked on his folks' farm. This young man was to become a famous general and one of the most highly respected presidents we have had. That young man was Dwight Eisenhower. Abilene was also to become one of the educational centers of Texas. It was more than 40 years later that Mr. Sam could satisfy that hunger for land, when he acquired his first farm which he placed under the direction of his sons, Haswell and Sherwood, to be developed into one of the best and largest peach orchards in California.

At this darkest hour, there streaked by him a train bound for California. He decided to take

cal press on April 21. It said: "A long record of conditions favorable to human comfort and welfare justifies the strongest faith in the future." Such a citizen deserves to succeed. Among the members of his profession, in California, he received singular honors, and throughout the years served on many committees.

We must now leave the store to its own devices and return to the man now comfortably established at 120 Green street, where, since 1923, he has presided as head man of a clan of four boys and one girl: Haswell, Samuel, James and Sherwood, and daughter, Margaret—all with homes of their own and each playing his and her part in their respective committees. We shall wait until their 100th anniversary to tell of their achievements. It was a household bountifully blessed with love and affection and companionship, until recently when Mrs. Leask passed away.

One of the best ways to judge a man is by the books he reads. They give us an indication of what he thinks. One hundred and twenty Green street has a baronial interior; its walls are lined with books. There is the Bible, and it looks as if it was read, various treatises on religious topics flank it on each side. There are, of course, an array of the classics from Scotch and English literature; there is an unusual amount of essays on economics, social welfare, etc. Being the next oldest member in years of membership in the San Francisco Commonwealth club, there is considerable material from the very fine organization. Far from restricting himself to the task of self improvement, which by the way he still carries on at his great age, he has kept a great interest in local political and social problems. His correspondence on these subjects is still what would be considered voluminous by some.

Our present library was due in part to his efforts. In 1901, 17 years after he had left New York, he was back pleading with another Scotchman in the employ of the Carnegie corporation. The result was a \$20,000 grant, subsequently augmented by \$7500 for branch libraries. The stones for the building came from our hills, near the headwaters of Bear creek where there is a Butano formation. The building program was completed within the allotted funds.

As a member of our city school board of education, he took active part in floating a \$50,000 bond issue for the Bay View school and repairs to others. Please note the cost of that eight-room building. Governor Young appointed him on a commission to study the problem of school administration. At his own cost, he traveled to such far away places as Nebraska, Iowa, Minnesota, Chicago, Ontario, Virginia and Florida, to gather material on school consolidation. A voluminous report was published. Mr. Leask's analysis of what happened may well be summed up by a sentence he wrote elsewhere: "But the encroachment of a group of laymen on a field which the teaching profession and its organizations had made peculiarly their own was evidently regarded as a presumption, the effrontery of which could be

of World War II after 1944. He had resided at the Casa del Rey hotel for about the last year.

He is survived by his brother, Carl R. Martin of Yakima, Wash.; two sisters, Mrs. Anna Swenson of Vallejo and Mrs. Martha Larson of Los Angeles; and many nieces and nephews, including Mrs. Mildred H. Leydecker of Menlo Park and Lester W. Jorgenson of Berkeley.

He was a past master of Alameda lodge 167, F&AM, and a member of the Orient chapter 177, OES, both of Fremont.

Funeral services will be conducted tomorrow at 11 a.m. in the Ferguson mortuary chapel with Santa Cruz lodge 38, F&AM, officiating. Private cremation will follow in the IOOF crematory.

John A. Grant Dies In Felton

John Alexander Grant, 75, a native of Nova Scotia and a resident of Felton since 1938, died Sunday in his home there. He had been a contractor in San Francisco for many years.

He is survived by his widow, Bertha Grant of Felton; a daughter, Mrs. H. A. Fauske of San Jose; three grandchildren, John A., Sharon and Katherine Fauske of San Jose, and a sister, Mrs. Stewart of Massachusetts.

He was a member of the First Presbyterian church of San Francisco, and Golden Gate Lodge 30, F&AM, of San Francisco.

Funeral services will be conducted Friday at 11 a.m. in the Wessendorf and Thal chapel with Santa Cruz Lodge 38, F&AM, officiating. Inurnment will follow in the IOOF crematory.

DAIRY and POULTRY

San Francisco, December 26—Butter prices to retailers: First quality, 1 lb. print, 70-72½; ¼ print, 70-72½.

Fresno (AP).—Northern California live poultry, f.o.b. ranch: Fryers 16½-19½, mostly 16; hens, light type, 5-6, mostly 6; heavy type, 10½-13; broilers, 20; roasters 25.

Squabs—75.

Turkeys—No price.

Egg Quotations

Nulaid Eggs invoicing prices of bulk eggs to retail trade; add .03 for eggs in cartons:

Large Grade AA	44-49
Medium Grade AA	42-47
Small Grade AA	33-38

San Francisco FSMN Quotations:

Large Grade A	41-48
Medium Grade A	39-46
Small Grade A	31-37

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