

RAMSEY COUNTY
History
A Publication of the Ramsey County Historical Society

Summer 2010

Volume 45, Number 2

*“A Rented House Is Not
a Home”*

Thomas Frankson:
Real Estate Promoter
and Unorthodox Politician

Roger Bergerson

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“He Had a Great Flair for the Colorful”

Louis W. Hill and Glacier National Park

Biloine W. Young with Eileen R. McCormack

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As part of his campaign to promote travel to Glacier National Park on the trains of the Great Northern Railway, Louis W. Hill hired Winhold Reiss (1880–1953) to paint portraits of the Blackfoot Indians who lived in that part of Montana. This 1927 portrait shows Lazy Boy, Glacier National Park, in his medicine robes. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

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Ramsey County History is published quarterly by the Ramsey County Historical Society, 323 Landmark Center, 75 W. Fifth Street, St. Paul, MN 55102 (651-222-0701). Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 2010, Ramsey County Historical Society. ISSN Number 0485-9758.

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THE MISSION STATEMENT OF THE RAMSEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
ADOPTED BY THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON DECEMBER 20, 2007:

The Ramsey County Historical Society inspires current and future generations to learn from and value their history by engaging in a diverse program of presenting, publishing and preserving.

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Publication of Ramsey County History is supported in part by a gift from Clara M. Claussen and Frieda H. Claussen in memory of Henry H. Cowie Jr. and by a contribution from the late Reuel D. Harmon

A Message from the Editorial Board

James J. Hill built the Great Northern Railway as a freight line to carry America’s cargo. But his son, Louis W. Hill, attracted passengers to take the train to a new, grand destination: Glacier National Park. This issue contains an excerpt from the Ramsey County Historical Society’s new book, where Billie Young and Eileen McCormack tell the fascinating story of how the younger Hill developed the park as a tourist mecca, complete with Swiss-chalet-style housing, luring vacationers to its grand vistas. The article also delineates Hill’s complex relationship with the Blackfoot tribe, whom he simultaneously took advantage of and supported as he sought to popularize the park’s Indian heritage. For a perspective on Native Americans in Minnesota history, read Mary Lethert Wingerd’s new book, *North Country: The Making of Minnesota*, insightfully reviewed here by Professor Gwen Westerman. We are lucky to have Wingerd as a member of the Editorial Board of this magazine. This issue also contains Roger Bergerson’s biography of the Midway area’s real estate developer and politician, Thomas Frankson, and Maya Beecham’s vignette of the St. Paul Police Department’s famous “Black Maria,” horse-drawn paddy wagon, which is still available for public viewing. Enjoy!

Anne Cowie, Chair, Editorial Board

“A Rented House Is Not a Home”

Thomas Frankson: Real Estate Promoter and Unorthodox Politician

Roger Bergerson

If people today have any awareness of him at all, it is probably because of the green-and-white-tile-covered mansion Thomas Frankson built almost a century ago at the west entrance to St. Paul's Como Park. Some know, too, of the buffalo he gave to the city's new zoo. There was much more, however, to this businessman who bought and sold farmland across the United States, invested in Missouri timber and Kansas oil, and developed several Como neighborhoods. Frankson also was an independent politician, bankrolling his own political campaigns and making a defiant bid for the Minnesota governorship that failed so resoundingly he never offered his services to the electorate again.

For a time, he was thought to be a millionaire, though he was not one when he died. Nor is there landmark legislation that endures as his political legacy. Nonetheless, he led a rich, full life; his contributions were many; and his odyssey through the world of commerce and politics provides insights into an era of expansion and sometimes turmoil, both for the Twin Cities and greater Minnesota.

Frankson left no personal papers, but there is strong evidence that he was a bright, opportunistic yet principled man and a familiar name to Minnesotans in the early decades of the twentieth century. He met with his first successes in Spring Valley, Minnesota, and had he remained in Fillmore County, just north of the Iowa line, probably would have continued as one of its leading citizens for the rest of his days. Instead, restless energy and an eye to the potential of the rapidly growing Twin Cities prompted the forty-four-year-old to uproot his family and move north to St. Paul in 1913, where his future success was derived from the same talent and business acumen that had already served him so well.

Frankson Sells Farmland

The one-time country schoolteacher graduated from the University of Minnesota law school in 1900, but practiced only briefly, returning to his home county of

Fillmore to set up a real estate business. Frankson became prosperous and a well-known civic leader by being willing to spend money to make money and believing in the power of advertising, two principles he would adhere to for the rest of his life.

Almost every town of any size in the county had a weekly newspaper, sometimes two of them. The publishers of those papers tended to think highly of Frankson and it is easy to understand why. In 1904, for example, the editor of the *Spring Valley Sun* reported he had “printed a lot of hand bills for Thomas Frankson Thursday and will be hanged if he didn't go and put the same thing into the *Stewartville Star* and half a dozen papers. He makes his money by the use of printer's ink.” On another occasion, the same paper stated, “It is generally admitted that Mr. Frankson is the most successful real estate dealer in Southern Minnesota,” after only a year or two in business.

Frankson chartered railroad sleeper cars to take prospective customers to inspect land in Texas and brought others from the East to tour Fillmore County. He traded North Dakota acreage for the hotel in Wykoff, Minnesota. He loved to deal—he held an auctioneer's license for a time—and took farm machinery and livestock in trade for land. How Frankson

kept track of all these holdings is anybody's guess.

He had what charitably might be called a down-to-earth sense of humor. An advertisement, obviously his own creation, took the form of a “Testimonial From Ole Larson, Jamestown, Nort Dakota.” This was a tale told by a poor but hard-working Norwegian who lacks the resources to wed his ladylove. He sees a Frankson land ad and contacts him:

“Vell he, I tell you, be a good fella,
Has plenty land, and dealer in
Everything a man can tink of
From steam engines to a pin.”

Ole buys forty acres in North Dakota and after several years farming in “Nort Dakota land of promise, finest country ever seen,” has saved enough to send for his wife-to-be.

“If you know of a young man who wants to settle down,” Ole says,

“Tell him go straightvay to Spring Valley
Without delay Tom Frankson see
I know vat he can do for odders
By vat he has don for me.

“He can sell you farm in Nort Dakota,
In Minnesota, or in Tennessee,
In Mississippi or Louisiana—
It makes no difference vare it be.”¹

Frankson was an avid collector—of almost everything. When he bought a farm, there often was a Civil War-era firearm left in the barn, which soon went on display in his office or home. He returned from Tennessee with a flintlock rifle and a brick from Davy Crockett's house. Indian beads and seashells were among the curios. And then there were the animals. Frankson acquired his first buffalo in 1906. Deer, Shetland ponies, elk, and other creatures followed, all kept in what was referred to as the “zoo” at his Spring



Thomas Frankson, who was then living in Spring Valley, represented Fillmore County at the Minnesota State Legislature during the 1911 and 1913 sessions. Photo courtesy of Alice Eppel.

Valley home, a “farm house” every bit as impressive as his later residence next to Como Park.

Running for Office

Frankson’s first foray into politics came in 1906 when he sought the Republican nomination for the state senate seat from Fillmore County. (The Republican Party had dominated politics in Minnesota since the Civil War.) Frankson was solidly in the party’s progressive wing and his first campaign statement was one to which he remained true for the next thirty years. Among his positions, the thirty-six-year-old declared, “I am unalterably in favor of such legislation as will check and curb the gigantic power of corporations, trusts and consolidated monopolies organized for the purpose of controlling prices and stifling competition.”

He lost a squeaker, but drew favorable comment from the *Lanesboro Leader*—which backed his opponent—both for how he conducted himself in the race and accepted defeat: “. . . Thomas Frankson . . . is made of the right stuff,” it said. Added the *Spring Valley Sun*, “It is a notable fact that during a strenuous campaign not a single one of the hundreds of men in

Fillmore county or elsewhere with whom he has done business, could be found who had aught but words of praise for Mr. Frankson and his business methods.”

Frankson prevailed in his next attempt at public office and traveled to St. Paul in 1911 as a member of the Minnesota House of Representatives. Although generally he seemed to enjoy cordial relations with his legislative colleagues, there were exceptions. For example, as the 1911 session wound down, a controversial bill to reapportion the legislature was being debated and the *St. Paul Dispatch* described the House as being in a “dangerous humor.” Frankson chided Rep. Daniel O’Neill of Thief River Falls for siding with city interests and O’Neill responded by seizing his antagonist by the throat and bending him back over a desk. A chaotic scene ensued and the presiding officer threatened to call out the state militia before order was restored.²

Early on, Frankson joined those in favor of the so-called “tonnage tax,” a measure that several previous legislatures had failed to pass. Proponents argued that iron ore was “a natural heritage of all the people,” and that corporations such as U.S. Steel were under-taxed while they made a fortune depleting this finite, non-renewable resource.³ So forcefully did Frankson in the House and Henry Borge, Lake Park, on the Senate side, argue on behalf of the measure in the 1913 session that they were dubbed the “tonnage tax twins.”⁴ Following heated debate, the measure lost in the House by six votes. Frankson, however, was not finished with the issue.

The Como Park Addition

While Frankson served in the legislature, newspaper editorialists and writers made “Progress” a prominent theme in their publications and pointed out that both Minneapolis and St. Paul were booming. Census figures supported this assertion. In the first decade of the twentieth century, Minneapolis had grown by nearly 100,000 residents and St. Paul by over 50,000. Prompted in all likelihood by the prosperity he saw in St. Paul, Frankson pulled up stakes and moved north immediately following the 1913 legislative session and jumped into residential real estate devel-

opment. He soon found a tract to his liking on the west side of Como Park, 120 acres that the Robertson family had been farming since the 1880s.⁵ Originally part of Rose Township, the farm was bordered on the north by Robertson Avenue (Nebraska today) on the south by Ivy Avenue (now Midway Parkway), on the east by Hamline Avenue and the west by Snelling Avenue.

Patriarch Joshua Robertson, brother-in-law of St. Paul pioneer Auguste Larpenteur, died in February 1913 at the age of 91. At that point, it appears his eldest son, August, decided to retire from farming and sold the land to Frankson. At the time, St. Paul’s population was pushing outward and Frankson’s new property came on the market at about the same time as other developers introduced the Macalester Villas Addition near St. Clair and Snelling avenues and the Phalen Grove and Cloverdale Additions adjacent to Phalen Park. Even though they were within the city limits, these developments were considered “suburbs” and on the “outskirts” of St. Paul.

Very few homes had as yet been built in the new Como Park Addition, so Frankson repeatedly used the same photos of his house and two on Sheldon Avenue in his ads. *St. Paul Daily News*, July 2, 1915. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.



Frankson's barn originally stood on Bison Avenue, adjacent to a fenced in area where his various animals attracted visitors to the new residential addition. Photo, circa 1914, courtesy of Richard Brace.



About 1920, the former buffalo barn was moved up the hill to 1382 Albert Street North, where a master carpenter turned it into a handsome residence. Owners Sharon and Hiro Shinomiya (pictured) live there today. Photo courtesy of Roger Bergerson.

For his new endeavor, Frankson modified the motto he had coined when he was in southern Minnesota from “A rented farm is not a home” to “A rented house is not a home.” He then declared, “With Como Park and the fair grounds on two sides, and the other bounded by a parkway, there is no danger of encroachment on the property by factories or manufactories and this should make it an ideal home site.” His half-page newspaper ad stipulated that this “exclusive residence district” would have

no “. . . saloons, stores or flats . . .” or “colored people.”⁶

The new addition was platted and Frankson set contractors to work building a bungalow on Albert Street for his family to live in temporarily. Meanwhile, another crew broke ground for the Midway Parkway mansion. He returned to Spring Valley to wind up his affairs there, holding an auction at the farm that attracted an estimated 2,000 people.

Back in St. Paul to stay, Frankson proclaimed his real estate venture a success

after several weeks of sales. “Just pause for a moment and consider,” he suggested in an ad. “If lots continue to sell as rapidly as they have in the last week, all the lots in Frankson’s Como Park Addition will be sold by October 1.” This prediction would prove to be off by at least a decade, although more than half the lots in the development were sold in the first two years.

Frankson donated some land and sold the remainder needed for the new Bethel Academy and Theological Seminary on Snelling Avenue.⁷ (Today the U.S. Department of Labor’s Hubert H. Humphrey Job Corps Center occupies this site.) Ever the promoter, Frankson offered State Fair visitors a refund of their train fare if they purchased a lot from him. On another occasion, the purchaser of a lot had a chance to win a brand new 1915 Ford, fully equipped. The lots cost \$400, with \$10 down and \$10 per month. If a potential customer did not have a car, and at the time many people did not, a Frankson salesman would come fetch the prospect.

Frankson shipped a portion of his menagerie north from Spring Valley and penned the animals in a five-acre half-circle on the north side of Midway Parkway, naming the boundary street Bison Avenue. To draw potential customers and their families, he billed it as a park “where you can see domesticated deer and buffalo, the only thoroughbred American buffalo [bison] in captivity in the state of Minnesota.”

Apparently tiring of maintaining his menagerie after a couple of years, Frankson attempted to donate the land and animals to the City of St. Paul as a “pocket edition of Como Park.” The summer of 1915 was a wet one and the *St. Paul Daily News* noted that a portion of the land in question “is low and partly under water.” Undeterred, Frankson brightly suggested that the property could be improved by establishing an artificial lake. The city’s Superintendent of Parks countered that creating an artificial lake would not be feasible until sewers were laid in the area. Eventually the Frankson buffalo were accepted as a welcome addition to the deer and elk herd at the new zoo in Como Park and their former pasture was gradually integrated into the surrounding residential community.

In the early 1920s, Frankson purchased the Park Board Office, along with the

The “House with the Lions” Catches Everybody’s Eye

To generations of visitors to Como Park and the State Fairgrounds, the distinctive edifice on the northwest corner of Midway Parkway and Hamline Avenue is a landmark, whether they know anything about its history or not.

“Somebody will ask, ‘Where do you live?’” relates Tim Dickinson. “When I tell them, they invariably say, ‘Oh, the house with the lions,’ or something similar.” Dickinson and his wife, Terri Tacheny, own “the house that Frankson built,” the green-and-white-tile mansion with the lion statuary in front where they live with Tacheny’s teenage daughters.

The neighborhood to the north and west is platted as Frankson’s Como Park Addition. When its developer, Thomas Frankson, moved his family into its new \$17,000 home in the fall of 1914, theirs was one of the first houses on what had been 120 acres of farmland. C.L. French designed the mansion and, given the scale of the structure, it seems ironic that he was associated with a builder named the Bungalow Construction Company. The highly recognizable lion statuary out front has been there since the beginning and the basic footprint of the structure remains the same, as well. The living room is basically unchanged, as is the library immediately behind it, both with fireplaces. It was the latter space that Frankson used as an office.

Dickinson estimates there are 120 windows, most with the original leaded and beveled glass with a distinctive diamond design. Most of the downstairs light fixtures, including chandeliers, are original. After nearly a century, there have been many changes to room configurations and other interior features. The butler’s pantry is gone, freeing up space for a larger kitchen. Dickinson says there is evidence that a fire damaged what originally was a conservatory on the front of the house. There’s still a dome over that space, which now is incorporated into the dining room.



In about 1916, Tom Frankson and his wife, Hannah, posed between the two lions that guarded the front walk to their new home. Photo courtesy of Alice Eppel.

In the beginning, the second floor contained bedrooms for the Franksons and their three children, but that layout has been modified over time. There’s a sun porch/parlor on the east side of the house on both floors. A bedroom on the third floor housed the Frankson’s housekeeper for many years and later was rented to college students. A two-bedroom apartment/rental unit has been added to the basement, along with a separate entry on Hamline Avenue. On the outside, there’s a moat-like feature in front of the former conservatory and a cast-iron sculpture of two deer standing in a pool in the same approximate area where a deer statue originally stood.

The large detached garage, built in the same handsome detail as the house, complete with tile exterior and roof, no

longer accommodates seven cars as it once did. A large portion is dedicated to Dickinson’s well-equipped workshop, which he says he needs in order to keep up with the maintenance of the house. He points ruefully to several bullet holes in the leaded glass windows, attributed to a former owner’s dislike of pigeons.

In 1926, Frankson sold the house to Nathan Goffstein, of Goffstein Realty Co., whose family lived there until 1945. It then became the home of the Midwest Hebrew Mission, a Baptist-affiliated organization. In the 1970s, a subsequent owner ran a dance studio in the building. From 1982 to 1993, it was owned by attorney Bill Jones, who is credited with starting the process of bringing the property back from a period of severe decline.

Despite the amount of maintenance and upkeep associated with the house, Dickinson enjoys living in a building to which so many people feel a con-



Construction of 1349 Midway Parkway took about one year, with the Frankson family moving into its new home in the fall of 1914. Photo courtesy of Roger Bergerson.

nection. Tacheny adds, “If you value privacy this is probably not the house for you. But I’ve grown to enjoy having people stop when I’m working in the yard or ring the doorbell to say that ‘I used to live on the third floor,’ or, ‘I took dance lessons in the basement.’ It’s fun to hear their stories. I feel very lucky to live in this wonderful house. On a sunny day, the light shines through the leaded glass and it’s filled with rainbows.”



One of many newspaper ads capitalizing on Frankson's animal attractions. *St. Paul Daily News*, June 29, 1915. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

Superintendent's Residence, and moved them from their sites in Como Park to adjoining lots on Midway Parkway, where they became homes on the former bison grounds. Earlier, he had moved the barn he had constructed for the buffalo to higher ground on Albert Street, across from his former bungalow, and converted it to a residence, as well.

By the spring of 1916, many of the streets in the addition had been graded and utilities installed and Frankson announced the opening of his new Chelsea Heights Addition. Its boundaries were Lake Como and Phalen (now Arlington) avenues, Hamline and Idaho avenues, and Fernwood Street. Frankson probably purchased this tract from the Robertson family as he had his first addition. Records show that Joshua Robertson had farmed this land as far back as 1867.⁸ As he had done previously, Frankson emphasized that Como Park was a nearby amenity for this new tract of land by often using photos of the park to illustrate his ads. Chelsea Heights, said one ad, was "the beauty spot of all St. Paul" and "located right at the dooryard of beautiful Como Park—the playground of all St. Paul."

Elected Lieutenant Governor

While all this was going on, Frankson saw the opportunity to resume his political career by running for lieutenant governor. Historically, this was viewed as a minor office, the holder's only duties being to preside over the state Senate during the biennial legislative session and appoint its committees. Those duties had not changed, but the perception of the office may have. By statute, lieu-

tenant governors advanced to the governorship when the incumbent died in office and that had happened twice in six years. Most recently, Governor Winfield Hammond succumbed to a stroke at the end of 1915 and was replaced by the relatively unknown Joseph Burnquist. Undeterred by having been out of politics for several years, Frankson declared himself a candidate for lieutenant governor and went after the job with characteristic vigor and an unprecedented level of campaign spending, his sights set on the Republican primary in June.

In March, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reported, "Thomas Frankson expects to get out in his automobile and tour the state as soon as the condition of the roads will permit. Meantime, he will reach as many places as he can by train and a lot more by letter." His main opponent was James A. Peterson, a Minneapolis attor-

ney, an established politician who had run for office before.

As the primary vote was tallied, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* reflected that the lieutenant governor's race "has been the hottest contest on the state ticket," despite the fact that little attention had been paid to it in the past. The paper marveled that Frankson "... covered the state in advertising like a blanket, using every device known to the advertising world. Besides, he made a personal campaign such as has never before been made for that office."⁹ Newspaper ads, billboards, and mailings all came into play.

Frankson won handily, but runner-up Peterson was not finished yet. In late June, a group of Minneapolis voters signed a petition asking a Ramsey County District Court judge to disqualify Frankson for violating the Corrupt Practices Act, allegedly having spent more than \$25,000 on his campaign when the legal limit



In this newspaper illustration, Frank Wing, who was later said to have influenced the cartooning style of Charles Schultz, captured the mood of the opening day of the 1917 legislative session. *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, January 4, 1917. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

was \$3,500. The petitioners asked that the certificate of nomination be issued to Peterson instead.

Represented by Herbert P. Keller, former St. Paul mayor, Frankson retorted that his report of an expenditure of \$2,855 filed with the secretary of state's office was accurate. The Peterson camp never introduced any hard evidence to back its claim and the case was dismissed, an action that the State Supreme Court upheld on appeal. In the November general election, Frankson prevailed, with more than twice the votes of his Democrat opponent. Socialist and Prohibition candidates were also on the ballot, but they finished far back. The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* described the forty-seven-year-old Frankson as one of the younger men in public life, "both in years and length of service."

The Rise of the Nonpartisan League

Back in March 1916, a news item appeared in the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* that appeared innocuous enough but turned out to be an omen of the increasingly unsettled political climate ahead. "The Nonpartisan League . . . may take a hand in Minnesota politics," was the news out of Fargo, N.D. The unidentified reporter offered his subjective assessment: "Doubt is expressed as to whether such an organization would prove successful in Minnesota."

The League, guided by its founder and mastermind Arthur Townley, had become a powerful force in North Dakota in less than two years, something that was not lost on Minnesota's political and business establishment. Farmers angry at their perceived ill treatment by railroads, banks, and the milling interests in Minneapolis flocked to the League banner and in short order it controlled the North Dakota governor's office and House of Representatives. Now Townley was turning his attention to Minnesota, Montana, and other states, as well as the western Canadian provinces. (No doubt adding to the general unease within the business and political establishment was the fact that Thomas Van Lear, a Socialist, had been elected mayor of Minneapolis.)

By the time the Minnesota legislature organized for the 1917 session, the



Frankson in Butler County, Kansas, circa 1917. Frankson's high hopes for income from oil leases diminished over time. Photo courtesy of Richard Brace.

Nonpartisan League (NPL) claimed 15,000 Minnesota members and in March moved its headquarters from Fargo to downtown St. Paul. A number of legislators had ties to the League, among them Henrik Shipstead, a dentist and former mayor of Glenwood. Frankson must have known Shipstead because he kept an office in that city to handle sales of Pope County farmland. Although Frankson never publicly aligned himself with the League, rumors connecting him to it dogged him through much of his time in office. In addition, his later associations with Shipstead and others on the political left make it seem likely that there was some truth to the speculation.

Michael J. Lansing, a professor of history at Augsburg College, Minneapolis, is currently working on a book about the League. Although he has yet to come across anything specifically about Frankson in his research, he thinks that Frankson's rural origins and bias against Big Business may explain his possible affinity for the NPL. "Another factor might be that it seemed like the winds were shifting," Lansing notes. "The League really made a big impression on a number of Minnesota politicians in 1917 and early 1918, as these men tried to read the tea leaves and look into the political future of

the state." Frankson and the League were certainly of one mind on the tonnage tax, which was introduced once again in the 1917 session. Although this tax passed the House, it must have been galling for Frankson to look on as northern interests prevailed in the Senate, where the bill was defeated by a comfortable margin.

The United States entered World War I in early April 1917 and in a patriotic fervor the legislature established a Minnesota Commission on Public Safety, to be chaired by Governor Burnquist. The commission's ostensible purpose was to coordinate Minnesota's wartime activities, but it used its broad powers and ample funding to move against individuals and organizations it deemed subversive, among them the Nonpartisan League.¹⁰ Despite the efforts of some to tie him to the League, Frankson remained above the fray. At the conclusion of the 1917 legislative session, senators presented their presiding officer with a phonograph and he joined them in gathering around it to sing along with a recording of "America the Beautiful."

Frankson's next business foray was in the Kansas oil fields east of Wichita. He opened an office in Independence and formed a new corporation with partners that included Adolph Eberhart, former Minnesota governor, and state treasurer Henry Rines and railroad commissioner C.E. Elmquist, among others.

The Spring Valley newspaper was still chronicling Frankson's activities, no doubt with Frankson's help, and it quoted him as saying, "Everybody in an oil field feels he is a millionaire or about to become one and the sensation is rather agreeable, even if expectations are not fully realized." Subsequently, the same paper observed of Frankson, ". . . it is said he is now in the millionaire class." And as for his political aspirations: "Quite a few have picked Mr. Frankson as a future gubernatorial possibility, but quoting a friend, he has no time for such trifles now."

The 1918 Campaign

The Nonpartisan League intended to run its slate of candidates as Republicans in the 1918 elections and there was some talk that Frankson would receive its endorsement for governor. An ugly fight was shaping

up because Republican leaders feared that a League candidate might beat Burnquist in the primary and advance to the general election. Visions of North Dakota danced in their heads. After briefly testing the waters, Frankson filed for reelection as lieutenant governor, while the League chose the candidate favored all along to lead its ticket, Charles A. Lindbergh, former Sixth District Congressman from Little Falls.

On the eve of the June primary, the mainstream newspapers left no doubt where they stood. Said the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* in a front page editorial:

When you go into the voting booth tomorrow, under which flag will you register your vote—the American Stars and Stripes, or the black banner of sedition and the red rag of socialism?

... Never mind your politics. It will keep until the fall election. Your patriotic duty comes first. Keep the Lindbergh stain off the final ballot and when November comes you can make your choice for governor among clean, loyal candidates—Burnquist and either Comstock or Wheaton. Be sure your vote counts effectively against Lindbergh and bring a smile of content to the face of your boy in France.¹¹

The accompanying sample ballot labeled candidates as “Loyal” or “Nonpartisan League.” Frankson was identified as “Loyal.”

With 150,000 votes, Lindbergh made a strong showing, though his total fell short of the nearly 200,000 recorded by Burnquist. Frankson also won handily and was well positioned for the general election in the fall. If he had ever harbored any thoughts about challenging Burnquist, the treatment accorded Lindbergh on the campaign trail must have been sobering. In his book about the Nonpartisan League, historian Robert L. Morlan states, “It is a striking commentary on the times that a widely known and respected citizen who had served his state ten years in Congress should now be stoned, rotten-egged, hanged in effigy, and subjected to an unending torrent of abuse and vituperation. Towns and even whole counties were barred to this candidate for the Republican nomination for governor, and he was constantly followed by detectives.”¹²

Frankson’s opponent in the lieutenant



On June 16, 1918, the *Pioneer Press* ran this sample ballot for statewide races in which the newspaper gave its editorial endorsement to specific candidates who the paper considered “loyal” to the Republican Party ticket. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

governor’s race of 1916 also felt the patriot’s lash. Because of an antiwar article he had written, James A. Peterson was convicted on federal charges of discouraging enlistment. He avoided a prison term through a series of appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court eventually overturned his conviction.¹³

In this atmosphere, the Frankson camp was probably nervous when in October the committee representing the NPL’s new candidate for governor, David Evans of Tracy, occupied the downtown St. Paul offices that Frankson’s real estate business had recently vacated, but the NPL left his name on the door. Said the *Spring Valley Mercury*, “The inference is that there is a connection between Mr. Frankson and the league crowd, but such is without foundation. Lieutenant Governor Frankson was among the first to disavow the league and he has been emphatic in his loyal and Republican allegiance ever since.”

Just before the November 5 election, the Ramsey County Republican Committee bought a newspaper ad with capsule biographies of the endorsed candidates and Frankson was securely in the

mix. Despite a low turnout because of a flu epidemic, Frankson was reelected with just under 200,000 votes, the highest total he would ever record.

As far as can be determined, the 1919 legislative session was an uneventful one for the lieutenant governor, but the special session called for the following September included consideration of an issue close to his heart, the tonnage tax. The measure passed, but Burnquist promptly vetoed it. He was said to have his eye on a higher office and already had announced that he would not seek reelection. Many in the Republican ranks regarded the move as a blunder that could very well open the way for the Nonpartisan League to take over the legislature. (At the time, 36 House members and 12 Senators identified themselves as NPL supporters.) Already strong in the northwest, the League was making inroads with farmers in southern Minnesota and the tonnage tax, along with guaranteed insurance for bank deposits, were among its main talking points. The *Spring Valley* paper reported, however, that Frankson was not interested in a third term as lieutenant governor, “it will be the governorship or nothing.”

In late 1919, Republican leaders were again concerned that the party would have too many candidates for governor in the 1920 election. Specifically, they worried that a crowded field in the June primary would dilute the vote and enable a League candidate to advance to the November general election, Republican nomination in hand. To head this off, the party proposed to convene an “elimination” convention to select a single candidate for the primary.

Frankson for Governor

Frankson was the first to file for governor in early December and did not divulge whether he would abide by the decision of an elimination convention. Several papers took pains to deny that there was disunity brewing among Republicans and the League’s newspaper, *The Minnesota Leader*, was not buying that notion, either. It editorialized,

Frankson is advertised to be a violent enemy of the present Burnquist machine,

which includes Gus Lindquist, private secretary to the governor and chairman of the Republican state central committee. When Burnquist vetoed the tonnage tax bill in the special session, Frankson issued a statement bitterly assailing the governor for his action. Lindquist also was attacked.

Old-time politicians, however, wink at the talk of bitterness between Frankson and Lindquist, and there is little doubt that Gus and Tom are as friendly as ever.¹⁴

Before the new year dawned, however, Frankson declared he would not abide by the elimination convention. This got his campaign off to a poor start and things went downhill from there. Said the *Long Prairie Leader*, "Frankson is likely to have little newspaper support. Papers that were for him for lieutenant governor are now either silent or against." The assessment proved true, as the state's newspapers turned on Frankson en masse and the negative commentary did not let up for the next five months.

Within a few weeks, the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* declared, "Not that the Republican leaders fear Frankson. He is a thorn in the flesh, but he stands no chance, they say, of nomination or election. What they fear is that he will get just enough votes to prevent the Republican convention choice from obtaining the nomination and just enough to enable Townley to control the Republican primary."

Frankson assured the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* and *Minneapolis Tribune* that he was not a "Leaguer," although the *St. Paul* paper noted the rumor "was as persistent two years ago as it is in the present campaign."¹⁵

In mid-January, 300 members of the Lincoln Club of St. Paul met at a smoker held at the Ryan Hotel. Julius Schmahl, the secretary of state who was regarded as the front-runner for the Republican gubernatorial nomination at this point, urged support for the elimination convention. Frankson countered, "Who is to do the eliminating . . . a crowd of self-constituted eliminators? You condemn Townley's methods. Are we to adopt them? I say the people are the ones who will do the eliminating." This was received, according to the reporter on hand,

"with such a deep silence that it was almost painful."

Since he did not have to wait for the elimination convention, Frankson's campaign could get started right away. He kicked it off by returning to Fillmore County for a speech on a Saturday afternoon at Preston and that evening delivered the keynote in Lanesboro. Although Frankson was not regarded highly as an orator, *Levang's Weekly* gave him credit for being "a good, straightforward talker." At one point he declared, "The man who votes his party ticket right or wrong is not a loyal citizen." He railed against the "sinister influence of big business" and called the *Duluth News-Tribune* "the mouthpiece of the steel trust."

His critics, in turn, were just as resolute. The *Cannon Falls Beacon*: "Tom Frankson's boom for governor is more noticeable by the holes punched in it than anything else." The *Baudette Region*: "Frankson is flooding northern Minnesota with his literature. It will bring the same result as sending a paper collar to a steam laundry." The *Worthington Globe* contended that a postcard sent out by the Frankson campaign "inadvertently, but nonetheless aptly, illustrates one of the things that is the matter with Tom. The card shows a highway leading to the Capitol Building, with three automobiles traveling in that direction. In the front car is Tom, showing his head enlarged to about twice the size of his body."

Frankson probably did nothing to silence speculation about his League sympathies when he requested that the *Minnesota Leader* publish his platform in full. Among other things, he declared himself "opposed to government rule by a class; the people are supreme" and promised "a square deal for the soldier, farmer, laborer, merchant, manufacturer, producer, consumer and all the people, be they rich or poor." Frankson also advocated "liberal aid for all educational institutions . . . teachers' wages to be consistent with the cost of living," protection of state lands, good roads, and, of course, the tonnage tax.¹⁶

Jacob Preus, the state auditor, who was a late entry into the Republican contest for governor, steadily gained strength and in May was the choice of the elimination convention. Henrik Shipstead was endorsed

to run under the League banner. Despite his business presence in the Glenwood area, Frankson had little support from the Republican majority there, which was not surprising. Shipstead's dental practice had been boycotted when he ran for Congress with League backing in 1918.¹⁷

Even the *Spring Valley Mercury* accorded Frankson only grudging respect:

When Mr. Frankson first broke into the big game as lieutenant governor, it was via a line of newspaper and board advertising that astonished, and it has been his one best bet ever since.

. . . he goes at the game just like he buys and sells land and it has been said that he has had more than the average man's success at the latter. His idea has been to make the name of Tom Frankson a household word and if it does not get him the governorship his activities have at least given him a prominence that will be lasting. Tom is not a newspaper favorite in this campaign and what he gets in this respect he pays cash for.

One has to admire the man for his insistence and perseverance, if nothing else.¹⁸

From the start of the campaign, it generally was agreed by pundits on all sides that Frankson would get at least 50,000 votes. Instead, with 27,000 votes, Frankson ran a dismal third to Preus (133,000) and Shipstead (125,000). Once the favorite son of Fillmore County, he even lost to Preus there by a two-to-one margin.

After the Debacle

The *St. Paul Pioneer Press* declared his political career to be over and it was. The *Litchfield Review* predicted that, from then on, the "indorsement" [sic] convention would prevail," adding that there would be no more "Frankson" candidates. "The purely selfish office seeker has been relegated to the rear. The party is again larger than the individual."

This political debacle proved to be a turning point for Frankson. Although there is no record that he ever renounced the Republican Party, his independent streak became more and more apparent in the years ahead. He actively campaigned for Shipstead in 1922, when that candidate of the new Farmer-Labor Party upset incumbent Frank B. Kellogg in the contest for U.S. Senate. In doing so, Shipstead

became the first non-Republican U.S. Senator from Minnesota since 1863.¹⁹

In August 1923, Frankson hosted a remarkable event at his summer home on Clear Lake, north of St. Paul, a gathering of men with whom he would not have dared associate only a few years earlier. It was a send-off for Minnesota's two new U.S. senators, the once vilified Shipstead and Magnus Johnson, also a Farmer-Laborite, who were headed to their first session of Congress. The *New York Times* recently had referred to Johnson as "the standard bearer of the allied radical element in [the] State electorate." Among those in attendance were Henry Tiegan, former secretary of the North Dakota state Socialist Party and current secretary of the Nonpartisan League; Oscar Keller, a left-leaning congressman from St. Paul indicted a few years before for allegedly inciting a labor riot; and State Senator Arnold Devold, a Socialist from Minneapolis. If anyone needed convincing that the former lieutenant governor had parted company with rank-and-file Republicans, the photos and full-page coverage of the festivities in the *St. Paul Daily News* would have left no doubt.²⁰

Following his failed bid for governor, Frankson returned to his real estate business with typical vigor. There were still lots to sell in his two developments near Como Park and he platted Frankson's Garden Plateau north of Roselawn Cemetery in Rose Township. He also purchased eighty acres between Turtle and Snail Lakes in what is now Shoreview and subdivided a former farm into five-acre plots he promoted as "truck farms."

"Farm lands are the fundamental source of all wealth," Frankson declared. "Banks, trust companies and other commercial enterprises may fail, but money invested in small acreage near the Twin Cities is absolutely safe. No one can take it from you; you need carry no insurance; it cannot burn up nor blow away; and taxes average only about 80 cents per acre." He also conceded "city property is selling slowly and [there is] little demand."

Frankson had vacationed in Florida since at least 1908—he is said to have hated cold weather—and continued to do so through the 1920s, at one point serving as president of a "Minnesotan Tourist



A mixture of progressives, or leftists, depending on one's point of view, gathered at Frankson's summer home in August 1923. The guests of honor were Minnesota's first two Farmer-Labor U.S. Senators, Henrik Shipstead and Magnus Johnson, standing, fifth and sixth from the left, respectively. To Shipstead's immediate right is U.S. Representative Oscar Keller, a Republican. At the far right is Arnold Devold, Socialist member of the Minnesota Senate. Those seated included Henry Tiegan, far left, Socialist and former Nonpartisan League official whom Johnson hired as his secretary in his Washington office. On Tiegan's left is Tom Frankson. William Gerber, former Ramsey County sheriff and Republican Party official, is seated fourth from the left. At the far right is Frankson's son, John.

Society" which claimed sixty-five members. He acquired more than 2,000 acres near St. Augustine and offered ten-acre plots for the consideration of those who would join him on a "winter excursion" in early 1923 aboard a private railroad car. Frankson pledged that each plot, properly tended, would provide a yield equal to 160 acres in Minnesota.

In the fall of 1926, the Franksons sold the mansion on Midway Parkway and moved around the corner to a new pink stucco bungalow on Hamline Avenue on what had been the mansion's grounds. He and his wife moved again in 1930, to another modest home out on Lexington Avenue, north of Roselawn Avenue, in Rose Township.

For twenty years there had been talk about building a golf course in Como Park. By the late 1920s the project was nearing reality, although the land that was available would not accommodate a full eighteen-hole layout. Frankson

owned thirty acres of undeveloped land just south of Hoyt Avenue, in the vicinity of today's 11th, 12th, and 13th holes. He sold the land to the city for \$3,000 less than the appraised value and donated \$2,000 to get the course started. A plaque displayed at the course dedication honored donors such as Frankson, Herbert Bigelow, Otto Bremer, Louis W. Hill, and Frank B. Kellogg.

Frankson was approaching his sixtieth birthday in mid-August 1930, his spirit of adventure and appetite for travel undiminished. He and his friend Ed Kaldahl, owner of the Kaldahl Kamp Resort on Lake Minnewaska in Glenwood, were heading for Europe, but they planned to do so on their own terms. Frankson purchased a new Chevrolet Coach from a Spring Valley dealership and the two converted the rear of the car into a bed in which they could sleep along the way, rather than staying in hotels. They drove nonstop to New York City, completing

the journey in forty-eight hours, loaded the car on an ocean liner, and sailed off across the Atlantic.

Once the ship docked in Oslo, Norway, Frankson and Kaldahl set out on a six-week, six-thousand-mile sightseeing tour. They visited ten countries along the way and experienced only two flat tires. "In the mountains of Norway, the little Chevrolet's performance was simply marvelous," Frankson recounted in a letter to the dealership that was reprinted in the Spring Valley newspaper. "It had the necessary pep and power and in fact, it performed as if by magic." This, he continued, is "a good, peppy, powerful, dependable, easy riding and economical car. I speak from actual experience when I say you will make no mistake if you buy a Chevrolet Six."²¹

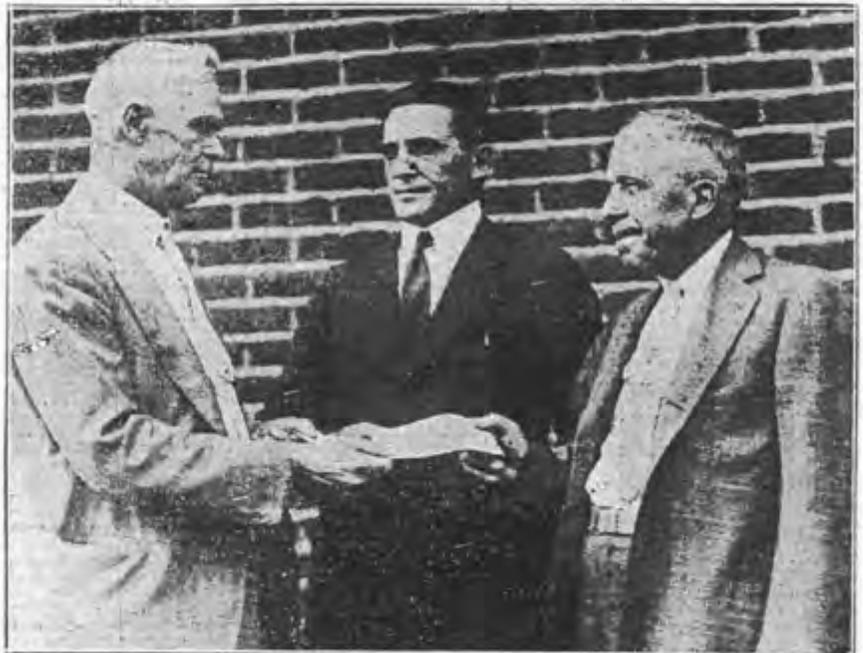
There was one disappointment associated with the trip. Frankson's hope to be granted an audience with the deposed German ruler, Kaiser Wilhelm, now living in exile in the Netherlands, went unfulfilled. In response to his inquiry, an aide to the former emperor wrote to say that, although "his Majesty, the Emperor" appreciated Frankson's interest, such a visit would not be possible. He sent Frankson a volume of the Kaiser's memoirs instead.²²

Frankson's Later Years

For the gubernatorial election of 1930, Frankson continued his unorthodox political ways by endorsing Floyd B. Olson, the former Hennepin County attorney, who went on to become the state's first Farmer-Labor governor. When the Olson administration offered to appoint Frankson as the secretary of the Rural Credit Bureau, business reversals may have prompted him to accept. Land values, both urban and rural, had slumped even before the Great Depression.

Frankson may have hesitated before he decided to accept the offer because this was no plum of an appointive position. The Bureau had been mired in controversy ever since it was created in 1923 to deal with the rising rate of farm foreclosures. Frankson's predecessor lasted less than three months in the job and by the time Frankson came on board, things looked dire. The State of Minnesota was

CHECK BUYS 30 ACRES FOR COMO GOLF COURSE



In August 1929, the St. Paul Daily News ran this photo showing Frankson, left, accepting a check from businessman Arthur Caines, right, chairman of the Golf Improvement Association, as Herman Wenzel, commissioner of Parks, Playgrounds and Public Buildings, looked on. The money to buy an additional 30 acres of land for the new Como Golf Course had been raised by staging a festival in the park and by donations from St. Paul firms and individuals. Photo courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society.

said to own 2,500 farms at this point and critics charged that the Bureau had made too many loans on over-valued farm property, land that was now being dumped on the market. Frankson agreed that bad loans had been made and that losses were inevitable, but contended that the state was better off getting what it could for the farms, rather than holding on to them and continuing to lose money.²³

Senator Anton J. Rockne of Zumbrota, a powerful Republican conservative and chair of the Senate Finance Committee, had the Bureau squarely in his sights when he convened a special investigative committee during the 1933 legislative session. He charged that the Bureau was packed with Farmer-Laborites and was particularly hard on Frankson, rudely cutting him off during one hearing and during another declaring, "You can hoodwink the public, but you can't hoodwink me." (There was some irony here because in 1919, when Frankson was the lieutenant

governor, he was criticized for reappointing Rockne as Finance Committee chair after Rockne's cuts to the state forestry department budget were linked to devastating northern fires.)

The Olson administration and its allies attempted to save the Bureau, but their efforts failed and it was abolished by the legislature, an action few regretted. Once again, Frankson rejoined his real estate business, which his son John had been running, and there is no indication that Frankson ever really retired from the business.

Today, his surviving grandchildren fondly remember their times with Frankson in the 1930s. "He was a fun guy to be around and was always laughing," says John Frankson Jr., of Chisago City. "He took us pheasant hunting and fishing, never a quiet moment." The former real estate developer and politician was said to love family get-togethers, horseshoe pitching, and playing whist. Alice Eppel of St. Paul, John Jr.'s twin, harkens back to trips to the

Clear Lake summer home when Frankson would stop along the way to buy a case of soda, strapping it on the rear of the car.

Dick Brace of Bessemer, Mich., recalls his grandfather's custom of bouncing a birthday boy's rear end on the floor, one bounce per year. "I really dreaded my tenth birthday," he says. He also remembers the "museum" in the Lexington Avenue home with a sense of wonderment. "It was my favorite place in the world for years, filled with stuff I hadn't known existed," he says. "There were beautiful bronze sculptures, Stone Age axes, flint knives, Civil War weaponry, fossils, mineral crystals, coins, campaign buttons, and beadwork."

"He was really a driver and I think he wanted to instill a work ethic in us," reflects John Frankson Jr. "He'd hire us to work on one of his houses and pay \$1 a day." Adds Brace, "Grandpa used to say that he could buy an old house, paint it, and put a picket fence around it and triple his money." Brace remembers that Thomas Frankson loved to burn stubble fields and recalls his own father telling of the time Frankson came into the kitchen of the Lexington Avenue home,

eyes red and eyebrows singed. "Well," he told his wife, "we don't have to paint the chicken coop."

His energetic ways and the need to keep busy may have played a role in Frankson's death. A storm in early June 1939 left a wide swath of damage across Minnesota, including broken limbs in a tree in Frankson's front yard. On the afternoon of June 7, the sixty-nine-year-old climbed a dozen or so feet up into the tree to remove the branches and was found a short time later unconscious on the ground. A heart attack was thought to be the cause of the mishap because there was no sign that he had attempted to break his fall. Frankson died early on June 8 at Bethesda Hospital.

Following the funeral at Como Park Lutheran Church, he was buried in Roselawn Cemetery. It no doubt reflected the respect in which Frankson was held that his honorary pallbearers included old foes Joseph Burnquist, now attorney general, and Julius Schmahl, now state treasurer.

Frankson was by no means impoverished when he died, though probate records show the estate he left was a mod-

est one. There were odds and ends of land holdings in Florida and Minnesota, some oil shares, and shares in his real estate business. While he once gave his son John a Stutz Bearcat, the premier sports car of the 1920s, at his death he himself was driving a well-worn Essex.

Thomas Frankson packed a lot of living into his sixty-nine years. He loved both wheeling and dealing and time with family and he made sure there was room for both. If his natural aggressiveness clouded his political judgment and he overreached in his bid for governor, so be it. He accepted his loss and moved on, seemingly none the worse for the setback. A fair assessment would seem to be that Thomas Frankson knew how to enjoy life, which is no small accomplishment by itself.

A former newspaper reporter and long-time freelance writer, Roger Bergerson lives on Frankson Avenue in St. Paul. He is the author of Winging It at a Country Crossroads, the story of Curtiss Northwest Airport at Snelling and Larpenteur, 1919-1930.

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Published by the Ramsey County Historical Society
323 Landmark Center
75 West Fifth Street
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55102

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German-born artist Julius Seyler (1873–1955) spent the summers of 1913 and 1914 at Glacier National Park, where he painted landscapes and portraits of Blackfoot Indians. His landscape, **Many Glacier Valley**, was completed in 1914 and was used to promote travel to the Park. Painting reproduced courtesy of the William E. Farr Collection. For more on Julius Seyler and Louis W. Hill's work in the creation and development of Glacier Park, see page 3.