

Biography of Elmer Eugene Lore Sr. (1892-1946)

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Elmer Eugene Lore was born in the village of Du Bois, in the southeast corner of Pawnee County, Nebraska on August 23, 1892. Lore was born to his loving parents, Charles Francis Lore (1860-1930) and Sarah T. Potts Lore (1868-1938). He grew up in this small town and eventually moved to Kansas where he met his wife, Mabel Sarah Clay (1885-1955), while working at the *Emporia Gazette* alongside the legendary, William Allen White (1868-1944, renowned American newspaper editor, author, politician, and leader of the Progressive Movement).

Like many Midwesterners, Elmer was drawn to California. However, while most Midwesterners in the first decades of the 20th century were attracted to California because of real estate possibilities, landscapes and weather, Lore moved his family to the West Coast in 1918 for his wife's health. Lore's family had grown and would continue to grow to include his sons Francis (1917-2000) and Elmer "Gene" Jr., as well as his daughter, Leah.

The Lore family settled into their new home in North Hollywood, Los Angeles County, California. Elmer quickly found employment as a linotype operator at the *Los Angeles Record*. As evidenced by his collection of documents, Lore was a member of the Linotype Operators Union for approximately thirty years, of which approximately eighteen years was spent in the actual profession. It was not until he entered the political arena however, that it appears Lore found his true niche.

The twenties were a time in history of major boom and development throughout the United States, but this era, known as the *Roaring Twenties*, came to a screeching halt as the decade melted into the disaster of the Great Depression of the thirties. Although California was slower than most states to be affected (its economy was not as "market-dependent" as so many of its more industrialized eastern neighbors), it would eventually feel the depression just as hard as the rest of the country. True to form, the Golden State promised a response to the hard times facing its citizens. Politicians and bureaucrats struggled to create reforms such as the *Townsend Old Age Revolving Pension Plan*, the *Ham & Eggs Pension Plan*, *Technocracy*, and the *Utopian Society of America*.

While the list goes on and on, none of the reform programs affected the life of Elmer Lore as much as the End Poverty in California (EPIC) program, spearheaded by the famous muckraker, Upton Sinclair (*The Jungle*, 1906). Lore entered the political arena as one of the many EPIC Democratic candidates elected in California in 1934. The post, which he would hold for three terms, was as a California State Assemblyman for the 42nd District – West Hollywood and Beverly Hills. While some of his colleagues would go on to gain much more notoriety in California history, such as Sam Yorty and Jack Tenney, Lore definitely made a memorable impact in the lives of his constituents.

Lore was a liberal politician, built straight from the mold of the Progressives who came before him. He was a strong supporter of the "working man" who opposed Communism and

assisted members of his party in exposing unfair and improper practices within the political system. Lore took on the position of Chair of the Assembly Committee on Social Service and Welfare, just as the second great wave of twentieth century migrants descended upon California. This wave, some 300,000 migrants in total, consisted mostly of destitute South-westerners from Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas. These were the men, women, and children who had been the victims of the great dust storms of the *Dustbowl Era*, whose lives were depicted in the epic work of John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Lore saw his mission as clearly laid out before him and he took to his humanitarian duties as if it was old hat for him. He formed and headed several committees from 1936-1940 in an effort to better the lives of his constituents. The collection of artifacts from his lifetime, housed in the Robert J. Lagomarsino Archives located in the library on California State University Channel Islands' campus, shows that his political concerns extended to such reform measures as Old Age Pension, liberalized General Relief provisions, Self-Help Cooperatives, and Organized Labor, in addition to Social Service and Welfare.

The collection of documents from Lore's political career reflects that he responded to virtually every letter he received, whether from colleagues, friends, family, or the public. The majority of the letters written to him were from constituents; tearful pleas for help in finding jobs. Without fail, Lore made every attempt to pass along their résumés, with kind letters of recommendation, to anyone who he thought might be able to assist, during a time when jobs were all but non-existent in the state.

During Lore's time in office, he communicated with the renowned labor economist, Paul Schuster Taylor, from the University of California at Berkeley, who was working with the Resettlement Administration to improve housing and health care for migrant families. Taylor also happened to be the husband of legendary American documentary photographer and photojournalist, Dorothea Lange. In 1937 Lore received a copy of a report from Taylor entitled *Synopsis of Survey of Migratory Labor Problems in CA*, along with 52 photo prints of Lange's most famous Dustbowl Era images. Lore would later use Taylor's field reports and Lange's images in order to promote relief through legislation.

After serving three terms in the State Assembly, Lore made an unsuccessful bid for Congress in 1940. Although he was not elected, his political record and articulate legislative summaries caught the attention of Governor Culbert L. Olson, who put Lore to work in his office as the Legislative Liaison to the Assembly. Lore proved to be a man of many hats, as he also served as the California Democratic Delegate to the Democratic National Convention and as the Presidential Elector from California in 1940, when he voted for Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

In 1946, Lore lost his battle with cancer on Christmas day. He was buried at Oakwood Memorial Park in Chatsworth, California, near his father and mother and was survived by his wife and children. Although he is a relatively unknown character in the grand scheme of California's vibrant political history, as his archives demonstrate, Elmer E. Lore took his role as politician very seriously and was determined to effect positive change in the lives of his constituents, resolute in making the Depression era as tolerable and survivable as he could.