

Frank A. Vanderlip: Japanese propagandist or proponent?

By Monique Sugimoto
and Dennis Plotrowski

The storied history of Frank A. Vanderlip's 1914 purchase of the Palos Verdes Peninsula is widely known. Less well known however is his dedication to furthering understanding and bettering relations between Japan and the U.S. during a turbulent period of American and world history.

Vanderlip was so involved in these activities that he was mentioned in several issues of the "Weekly Situation Survey," a series of reports compiled by the Bureau of Investiga-

tion, now known as the FBI.

Created just six years before Vanderlip's purchase, the Bureau initially investigated white-collar and civil rights cases, including antitrust, land and banking fraud, and naturalization and copyright violations. Over the next decade it focused on national security and protecting the country against sabotage and subversion.

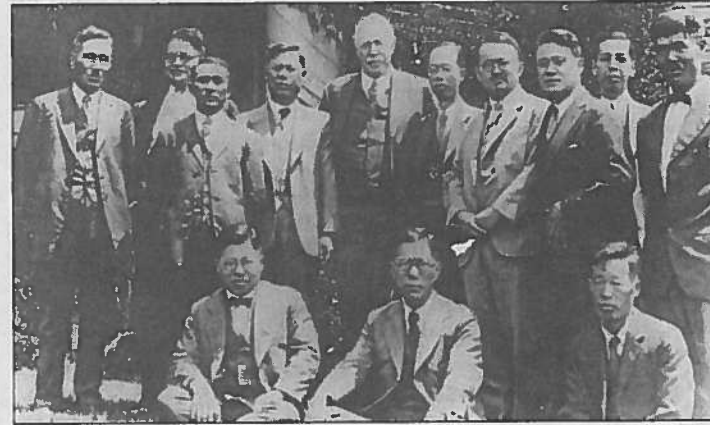
After World War I with the nation in the grips of the "Red Scare" and widespread economic and labor unrest, the Bureau monitored the activities of anti-immigration groups, labor activists and radical groups including the "Wobblies"

and the Ku Klux Klan. Included in this sweep was Frank A. Vanderlip.

In the July 28, 1921 Weekly Situation Survey under the section "Anti-American Activities (Other than Radical)," the Bureau identified Vanderlip as "one of the most prominent pro-Japanese propagandists in the United States."

Trouble on the Hill

The report mentioned an incident in which farmers on Vanderlip's ranch were said to have blocked the road from White Point to Redondo Beach, allowing only Japanese to pass. The area caught the Bureau's attention because the



In 1928, Frank Vanderlip met with visiting Japanese dignitaries, including Nobusuke Kishi who served as prime minister from 1957-1960. PHOTO COURTESY PVLD LOCAL HISTORY ROOM

land was close to Fort MacArthur — one of the most important areas to coastal defenses in California.

With anti-Japanese sentiment at a fever pitch and the passage of the California Alien Land Laws in 1913 and 1920 prohibiting "aliens ineligible of citizenship" (essentially all Asians) from owning or leasing land, Japanese farmers in the area were of particular concern. At the time there were approximately 70 leases.

The first mention of Vanderlip in the Weekly Situation Survey was in June 1921. This time he was mentioned in a newspaper clip from a Japanese newspaper in Hawaii. As the President of the Japan Society, a position he held from 1920-1922, Vanderlip was raising funds for a professor exchange program.

In May of 1920, Vanderlip accepted an invitation from the Japan Welcome Association to bring a group of business leaders and their wives to Japan. Though an

unofficial group, Vanderlip met with high ranking government officials, business leaders, and had frank discussions on topics ranging from immigration, trade, Japan's occupation of Shantung and its actions in Korea. They were even entertained several times by the Imperial family.

Vanderlip gave several speeches during this visit. Speaking to an audience of more than 6,000, Vanderlip received a "ringing ovation" when he said "Japan should be kept unmilitaristic and democratic." The speech was so popular, he repeated it to thousands of spectators waiting outside the meeting hall.

In June of 1920, Vanderlip addressed the members of the San Francisco Commercial Club and the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, reporting on his trip to Japan a month earlier. He called the Japanese the "most ambitious people" of any people he had ever seen, and applauded them for their universal educaion

system.

The largest problem facing Japan, he claimed, was how Japan would feed its growing population and transition from an agricultural nation to an industrialized one. He ended his message expressing the hope that Americans would adopt a spirit of "world-wide citizenship" noting that "[it] is time for a broader comprehension than America has ever had of the world's problems."

Reaction in Japan

Vanderlip was well regarded in Japan. The Japanese heartily welcomed the news when word broke that Vanderlip might be considered a candidate for ambassador to Japan in 1921.

Vanderlip passed away in 1937, just prior to another tumultuous period in 20th century history.

Monique Sugimoto and Dennis Plotrowski are Adult Services librarians with the Palos Verdes Library District.