
Alfred C. Lane (*Michigan*)

Alfred Church Lane (1863–1948) was state geologist of Michigan from 1899 to 1909. In 1893, Dr. Lane was appointed the assistant state geologist under Dr. Lucius Hubbard. When Dr. Hubbard resigned in 1899, the Board of Geological Survey elected Dr. Lane as his replacement. Dr. Lane moved the Survey's headquarters from Houghton to Lansing and refocused the work of the Survey to include more geology in the Lower Peninsula. The first thorough topographic survey of Michigan was started under his



direction. Dr. Lane was president of the Michigan Engineering Society for several years concurrent with the state geologist position. He also worked for Calumet and Hecla and other copper mining companies, a committee of the Boston Stock Exchange, and was vice president of Allen-Lane Co. Dr. Lane resigned his position as state geologist to accept a position as Pearson Professor of Geology and Mineralogy at Tufts University. He was known for research on the age of the earth, and is also known by some atomic scientists as the “Forgotten Man” of atomic research for his role in early work on splitting the atom.

He was a descendent of Thomas Dudley, a founder and four-time governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. He was born on January 29, 1863, in Boston and attended Boston Latin High School. After graduating from Harvard in 1883, he remained at the institution as a mathematics instructor. From 1885 to 1887 he studied at the University of Heidelberg, returning to Harvard in 1888 to receive his doctorate. The following year he worked as petrographer of the Michigan Geological Survey and as instructor in the Michigan College of Mines. He remained at the college until his resignation in 1936, protesting the state’s teachers’ oath. In 1940, he was the recipient of the Ballou Medal for distinguished service to education and the nation, awarded by Tufts College.

Working with Otto Hahn, a German scientist, Lane helped to inaugurate an international plan for the exchange of scientific information on smashing the atom in 1926. Lane was the first American to receive notice from Hahn about his successful splitting of a uranium atom in 1938, and he immediately passed the information on to Washington. In 1929, Lane became the first consultant in science ever appointed at the Library of Congress. Over the course of his lifetime, he published 1,087 articles and reports in both scientific and general journals.

He was a past president of the Geological Society of America and was affiliated with several international geologic and academic associations. He also supported the YMCA and was a dedicated servant of the Boy Scouts of America. A peleochoric amphibole mineral, known as lanenite, is named in his honor.

Lane Hall, home to the geology department, was dedicated in Lane's honor in 1968. There is also a memorial tablet in Goddard Chapel. Lane died on April 14, 1948, in Cambridge, Mass. He was survived by his wife and three children.

Biography adapted from Encyclopædia Britannica Online (2007), Socolow (1988), and Tufts University Digital Collections and Archives (2007).