Logo

Description automatically generatedBill Lane Jr. was born in 1919 in Des Moines, Iowa, where he spent his childhood years. He first started riding ponies there on the Lane’s small farm. In 1928 his father purchased Sunset Magazine from Southern Pacific Railroad, resulting in a family move to Burlingame, California. Bill attended Palo Alto High school where he was student body class president. At Pomona College in 1937, Bill studied drama and debate, and was also a member of ROTC. In 1940 he decided he wanted to go into the family publishing business, so he transferred to Stanford University where he studied communications and journalism.

When Pearl Harbor was attacked in 1942, Bill graduated from Stanford, joined the Navy and was sent to Harvard University for the first class of Line Officers’ training. Due to a delay in training, he was able to go to Yosemite where he broke horses for the summer. After training, he was proud to serve his country as aide to the Commandant, 12th Naval District, and USN Gunnery Officer on a troop ship in the Pacific Theater during WWII.

Bill also served his country in some capacity in every presidential administration prior to the Obama Administration, beginning with President John F. Kennedy. He unselfishly gave much of his time and energy to others and was proud to be an American. Bill was appointed Ambassador-at-large and Commissioner General for the First International Ocean Exposition in Japan by President Ford 1975-76, and as Ambassador to Australia and Nauru by President Reagan, 1985-89.

In his business profession, Bill was Co-Chairman of Lane Publishing Co., and Publisher of Sunset Magazine, working alongside his brother, Mel Lane, Publisher of Sunset Books. Bill held many offices in the publishing industry. He represented the Lane family to receive the Publisher-of-the-Year Award from the Magazine Publishers Association in 1974. Bill worked tirelessly to preserve the western culture and lifestyle through stories and philanthropy. He was dedicated to the community and an avid horseman.

Bill was instrumental in the incorporation of the Town of Portola Valley where he and his wife, Jean, had their home for 54 years. He was elected the first Mayor of Portola Valley, and remained a community leader to the last month of his life. He was proud of his role in the development of the Portola Valley trail system and was a passionate defender of trail rights.

His lifelong love of horses led him to be one of the most loyal and longest-term members of the Mounted Patrol of San Mateo County, The Shack Riders, and Los Rancheros Visitadores of Santa Barbara County where he rode with President Ronald Reagan. Bill rode into his 80s. At Stanford he funded the establishment of the Bill Lane Center for the American West, he was instrumental in preserving the Stanford Red Barn and the Folger Stable, and he donated generously to many other horse related activities.

The Bill Lane Scholarship was originally established from a grant by Bill Lane to the Mounted Patrol Foundation to honor one high school student recipient whose activities will help preserve horsemanship and the western lifestyle. This tradition has been maintained to honor Bill Lane for all of his service to our country and to continue his legacy of preserving the western traditions that he so much loved.