

Agnes L. Knoll

This week we are happy to name Miss Agnes L. Noll as the 121st inductee in Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present register. Miss Noll was nominated by her grandnephew, Thomas Hayden, and the North Wood County Historical Society.

Former Marshfield businesswoman Miss Agnes Noll's keen interest in her business and affairs outside of that business, her personal sense of duty, and her high ideals significantly benefited the community throughout her life.



Agnes was born August 13, 1898, in Marshfield to Frank and Sadie (Harkin) Noll. She attended St. John's Parochial School, McKinley High School, and was a journalism graduate of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. After graduating in 1921 she returned to Marshfield, where she was associated with the William Noll Hardware Store.

William Noll, her grandfather, established the William Noll and Sons Company on January 15, 1887. Five years later, the business was incorporated, as "William Noll Hardware," a name which existed in Marshfield until 1963. One of the sons, Charles died in 1902, and the founder died March 23, 1908, leaving the two remaining sons to operate the business. Frank A. Noll obtained a controlling interest by purchasing the stock held by his brother, William W. Noll in 1925. Two years later, the death of Frank Noll left the management of the business to his daughter, Agnes Noll, who had been assisting in the store for the previous two years.

The business continued with Miss Noll serving as secretary and treasurer, and her brother, Attorney Frank W. Noll of Aberdeen, South Dakota, as president of the concern, a closed corporation with all stock held by members of the Noll family.

The original store was one of the many buildings destroyed when the Marshfield fire of 1887 swept the thriving lumber town and was immediately rebuilt as a brick structure. Years later another structure of similar size was erected adjacent to it, and in 1922 the store was completely remodeled and modernized, with the double building transformed into a single large room.

In 1941, Agnes saw this single space divided into two store fronts. The hardware store continued operations in the north half of the building. Within the hardware store, Miss Noll included a small gift department featuring crystal glassware, dinnerware, pottery and other items. She expanded the gift department into the south half of the building in 1945 as Noll's

Gift Shop. The new store was operated as a separate enterprise by Miss Noll until her death in 1979. The hardware business was sold to Don and Barb Hiller in 1963.

Even as an active businesswoman, Agnes Noll's volunteerism added to the character of the community. During the late 1930s and into the 40s, Agnes, a member of the Helping Hand Society, headed the annual local sale of penny Christmas seals. Half of the proceeds of these sales went to the Wisconsin Anti-Tuberculosis Association and the remaining half was retained by the Marshfield Anti-Tuberculosis Association for use in local projects directed against the white plague.

During World War II, Miss Noll served as the city chairman for the women's division of war loan drives multiple times. Under her guidance the division raised its quota or more during every bond drive, contributing to similar successes for the entire North Wood County Drive which contributed millions of dollars toward support of the war effort.

To support the North Wood County War Bond Committee, Miss Noll, president of the Business and Professional Women's Club, led that group in conducting a Marshfield consumer survey. They completed a house-to-house canvass to obtain the names of all employed adults, the number of children in each family, and the addresses for use of the committee.

In April 1950, Agnes Noll was appointed to the Board of Trustees for the Marshfield Free Library by Mayor A.J. Reeths. She served as a resolute and hard-working board member, secretary, and president for nearly thirty years. Her efforts contributed greatly to such accomplishments as the new library building on East Second Street in 1960, installation of the Stierle Bird Collection display, and development of a wide range of services offered by the library, and particularly for the children's department.

For the new library dedication, Miss Noll wrote a 12-page history of the library with special emphasis on Amander E. Beebee, whose generosity made the building possible, features of construction, and stories of the staff who served the library and community through the years.

In addition to these, Miss Noll was a member of Sacred Heart Church, Catholic Daughters of America, Marshfield Chamber of Commerce, Operation Downtown Update's Government and Liaison Committee, Downtown Business Association, Stierle Bird Club, and the State Council of Library Development. Furthermore, she chaired of the Store Front Improvement Committee, was past president of the American Legion Auxiliary, and from 1943-45, 1948-49, and 1954-55, president of Marshfield Business and Professional Women's Club.

Marshfield lost a pioneer who had spent countless years serving the community when Miss Agnes Noll died at the age of 80 on February 25, 1979. Her service to the community was long and varied and through the years touched many, many segments of the city. Miss Noll was always a woman to speak her mind. But her talk and action and leadership were always tuned to the best interests of the community.