

Hamilton Roddis

We are happy to name Hamilton Roddis the 82nd inductee in Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present register. Mr. Roddis was nominated on behalf of his daughter, the late Miss Augusta Roddis.

Hamilton Roddis succeeded to the presidency of the Roddis Lumber and Veneer Company upon his father's death in 1920. He had worked in the plant for two years before going off to law school at the University of Wisconsin in Madison and then had stayed home for over a year between his first and last years in law school following the disastrous fire of 1897 to help his father get the new plant going. Following his graduation from law school in 1899 he went out West for three months where he considered setting up a law practice in Spokane, Washington. However, his father persuaded him to return to Marshfield, and in September of 1899 he rejoined the company and was made secretary of the corporation as well as head of factory production. He served directly under his father in sales and was responsible for company brochures and advertising copy. His versatility and experience in all facets of the business enabled him to assume the responsibilities as sole head of the company in a smooth transition after his father's death.



Hamilton Roddis also maintained the high quality of the company's products which his father had established, and it was this high quality and reputation for integrity and business acumen plus his tireless efforts and those of his employees which enabled him to get through the Great Depression. The sympathetic treatment of the Citizens National Bank of Marshfield and other area banks was also helpful during this trying period.

As an example of his unquenchable spirit, despite having just passed through the most difficult and burdensome years of the Depression, Hamilton Roddis, in a full-page Roddis Lumber and Veneer Company ad in the Marshfield's News Herald's 1937 Golden Anniversary Edition of the Marshfield Fire, expressed his undaunted enthusiasm for his business, his sustained desire to produce the best possible products and his thorough identification with Marshfield of which he was proud to be a citizen.

Hamilton Roddis was in many ways a very paternalistic employer. Just before World War I, he arranged for many of his factory employees, beginning with the foreman, to buy their houses on land contracts guaranteed by the company. He also employed the widowed daughter of a Presbyterian minister as a daytime "housemother" for the women employees during World War I and afterwards. In a further effort for his employees, he arranged to have some houses built on Apple Avenue for them following World War II, when there was a great shortage of housing. He even acted as matchmaker for his secretary of the early

thirties by producing a new beau for her, his young and personable plant manager. This resulted in a happy marriage that lasted for over 60 years.

Hamilton Roddis was honored locally on two important occasions. In 1940, the 50th year of the firm since its founding by Mr. Hatteberg in 1890, Mr. Roddis was honored at a Rotary dinner where the News Herald noted "Expressions of gratitude for the years of hard work and tireless effort put forth by the Roddis family in making their factory the greatest of its kind in the world were offered by members of the Club chosen to speak for the group."

In responding Hamilton Roddis described the traits of his father that enabled him to surmount the many obstacles along the way. "An insatiable thirst for knowledge, a sternness tempered with an understanding and love of humanity, and an inexhaustible supply of energy, all these were responsible for the growth of his great enterprise."

In his closing remarks at the Rotary dinner, Hamilton Roddis expressed his appreciation of the fidelity, thrift, and good citizenship of his employees who have served him so faithfully and well.

Hamilton Roddis and the Roddis Plywood Corporation were also honored at an "Industry Appreciation Night" in June of 1956, the first of which the Chamber of Commerce inaugurated. The editorial in the Marshfield News-Herald the next day, said "Marshfield is fortunate to have had men of energy and faith during the 84 years of its existence. It takes many resolute and useful people to build a community, but more than that, it takes sound economic leadership. Since the death of his father, W. H. Roddis in 1920, and for several years before that, Hamilton Roddis has provided a wealth of such leadership. The tribute paid him last night was richly deserved."

Hamilton Roddis also continued his father's interest in civic affairs and served as an Alderman before World War I. He was also active in the Republican party for many years. Among his civic endeavors, he served as Chairman of the Water Advisory Committee during the late forties to help find a solution to the water shortage the city was experiencing due in large part to a severe drought.

Hamilton Roddis also continued his father's interest and devotion to the Episcopal Church. He followed his father as Senior Warden of St. Alban's Church for 26 years. He was also elected six times as Deputy to the national governing body of the Episcopal Church, its General Convention which meets every three years. Hamilton Roddis also served in various Diocesan capacities over the years.

Hamilton Roddis also had broad cultural interests as did his father before him. He was an avid student of history, and he had a tremendous knowledge of English and American literature and of the Bible and Christian hymns. His extraordinary memory enabled him to recite poetry and passages from the Bible that he had learned years before in school. Like his father, he too, had an extensive private library filled with classical and historical works.

In 1952, Hamilton Roddis established the Hamilton Roddis Foundation so that his family could continue his religious, educational and charitable benefactions, a goal the Foundation is continuing to pursue.

Upon Hamilton Roddis' death on March 27, 1960, the Marshfield News-Herald praised him "for piloting the Roddis firm through economic seas that wrecked other companies, for taking an active interest in his community, and for his religious and educational philanthropies." After his death he also received an accolade from his accountant of many years, Rollin Mabie of Stevens Point, who said that Mr. Roddis was the most honest man he had ever known.

Taken from a story written by Miss Augusta Roddis for The Marshfield Story, Piecing Together Our Past, 1872 - 1997.