

Dennis and Carol Nelson
Nominated by North Wood County Historical Society

The North Wood County Historical Society nominates Dennis and Carol Nelson for membership on Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present Honor Roll.

The Nelsons were influential members in the early growth and success of the Historical Society. Their efforts were critical to opening and operating Marshfield's first historical museum in 1972 and instrumental to acquiring the former William H. Upham home and having it listed on the National Register of Historic places in 1977. They also contributed to the mansion's restoration, operation, and ongoing care as Marshfield's only historic house museum.



After organizing in 1952, the Historical Society sought a building or room to use as a permanent museum space. While the Society searched, temporary exhibits were created and displayed in Central Avenue store windows, exhibition building booth spaces, and, in 1971, a locally manufactured mobile home at the Central Wisconsin State Fair. The Nelsons often planned and coordinated these exhibits.

Anticipating the City of Marshfield's centennial celebration in 1972, the Historical Society established a building committee consisting of Carl Dregne, Robert Breseman and Dennis Nelson and tasked them with finding a permanent museum space. Nelson took the lead and, when no suitable space was found, he guided the Society through a building project to create a permanent museum where the community's history could easily be shared.

Plans called for a 24'x54' foot dual purpose building to serve as both the Historical Society's museum and a tourist information center at the entrance to the city. The new museum was dedicated and opened to the public on June 11, 1972. During the dedication, then society president John Parkin, paid special tribute to the many members of the community who had given generously of their time to make the construction possible. He also recognized the efforts of the building committee and, specifically, those of Dennis Nelson.

Even before the museum doors opened to the public, as chairman of the building committee, Nelson was challenged, along with Lloyd Zimmer and John Parkin, with raising \$10,500 to retire the remaining debt on the new building. A year later, during the first anniversary celebration, with the money successfully raised, the museum mortgage was burned.

In early 1975, with the passing of Grace Upham Hambright, the former home of William H. Upham became available for the Historical Society to buy. Nelson guided the society's evaluation of the building's structural integrity, potential value as a historic resource for the community, and the likely costs for restoration and renovation work to prepare the house as a museum. During this time, Nelson also arranged financing and the fundraising to make the sale possible. The purchase was completed during December 1976, with restoration work continuing through the summer of 1978. The new North Wood County Historical Society Museum in the renovated Gov. William H. Upham house opened to the public June 24, 1978 with approximately 600 people attending the ceremonies.

The Nelsons remained active members of the Historical Society for many years. Dennis remained closely associated with the care and upkeep of the Upham Home as the house manager, and Carol filled different leadership and key committee positions for the society. Together they were simply extraordinary supporters of Marshfield history and the mission of the society.

In December 1990, a "Special Friends Night" was held at the Upham House. Then Mayor David Koepke attended to recognize the Nelson's work on behalf of the North Wood County Historical Society and to proclaim the next week as the "Carol and Dennis Nelson Appreciation Week" in Marshfield.

While their efforts with the Historical Society were significant, it's also important to note that they represent only a portion of the Nelsons' greater service to the entire community.

During the 1970s Dennis served as a member of the Marshfield Common Council, and later as a member of the Marshfield Fire and Police Commission. In the 1980s, as the downtown adjusted to competition from a new northside mall and the loss of important stores in the downtown area, Nelson was elected president of the newly organized Downtown Business Association. In that position, he guided the business community through difficult times only to have it emerge as a stronger more cohesive alliance.

During that same time, Carol served as president of the local chapter of the Americans Abroad Program of the American Field Service. She managed routine operations of the chapter and provided assistance and support to both AFS students and the host families during their exchange experience. More than once the Nelson family welcomed exchange students into their home as the host family.

Along with organizations already mentioned, the Nelsons were active with the Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Marshfield Athletic Club, Marshfield Music Parents (of Marshfield High School), and others.

Dennis and Carol owned and operated Nelson's Shoe Store in Marshfield together for 51 year until Dennis's passing in 2007. During that time, the couple also operated Nelson's Biking and Camping as well as Nelson's Hobby Store. Carol continues today to serve customers at Nelson's Shoe Store now in its 65th year of business.

The Nelsons never requested any special recognition for their many acts to serve the people of Marshfield. Yet, as the city celebrates its 150th anniversary and we reflect on those who contributed to the character of the community, it seems only appropriate to recognize Dennis and Carol Nelson for their extraordinary efforts on behalf of the City of Marshfield by adding their names to the Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present Honor Roll.