

Governor William H. Upham

Nominated by The North Wood County Historical Society

The North Wood County Historical Society based at Upham Mansion would like to nominate former Governor William H. Upham for consideration as a member of Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present.

Upham (1841-1924) played a pivotal role in the growth and continuation of the city of Marshfield in its earliest days as the owner of Upham Manufacturing Company



He arrived in Marshfield in 1878 (back then "a veritable shanty town," as described in a tribute written by a fellow West Point classmate and friend, General Charles King) and established a sawmill, shingle mill, power plant, grist mill and a furniture factory. Attuned to the needs of the town, he also built a bank, school, general store, and church, not to mention the water works and electric lighting system.

As a successful businessman, Upham also played a role in the city's direction as an alderman, mayor for three years, and clerk of the School Board for 13 years. He also served as Wisconsin's 18th governor from 1895-1897. Before leaving that office, he built the State Historical Building at the foot of Bascom Hill in Madison.

After serving one term as governor, he chose not to seek re-election. Instead, he chose to return to the community he loved, and which loved him, to assume leadership again of his Marshfield businesses.

Charles King's tribute records this account of Upham's local fame: "When we needed a Mayor, we unanimously decided on Upham, who held the office until so busy he could hold it no longer. There was a time, according to the oldest inhabitant, when Upham filled six offices on the salary of one and paid that himself. Finally, when a grateful populace decided Marshfield to be a misnomer, Upham having drained the marsh and built up the field, the almost unanimous choice for the name was Uphamton, until it was vetoed by the Mayor, who was sustained by the Board of Aldermen, composed principally of Upham employees."

After a fire started in the lumber mill spread and destroyed much of the city in 1887, Upham decided to remain and became a leader in rebuilding Marshfield.

A citizen in the April 7, 1927 issue of Marshfield News-Herald recalled that in the early evening of June 27, with the ruins of his factory smoking less than 200 feet away, "Gov. Upham hoisted a flag in front of the old 'Band of Hope' building, located opposite his late residence and with acumen unknown to defeat, urged the anxious gathering of men, thrown suddenly out of employment by Marshfield's greatest fire, to 'Stay right here! I will find plenty of work for all of you.'"

Another former Wisconsin governor, Lee Sherman Dreyfus, writing about Upham's charmed life in 2004 wrote, "Few communities of 20,000 population or more today can point to one man and say he is the person responsible for our existence, but Marshfield can." Dreyfus goes on, "Governor Upham lived until he was 83. His reputation will always be as a builder and creator of enterprises more than as governor. The city of Marshfield is his permanent monument."

Without Upham's influence it is certain the city would be a shadow of what we know it to be, or not exist at all today. While his legacy is preserved in his residence, the Upham Mansion, an important connection point to the city's past, honoring William H. Upham as a member of Marshfield's 150, Heroes and Leaders, is certainly appropriate.