

J. Ben Wing

Nominated by John Wing

Ben Wing, one time proprietor of the Wing Drug Company, was more than an excellent Marshfield businessman. He was also well-known as a kind and good-hearted gentleman who gave generously of his time and talents throughout the community.

After graduating from high school in Abbotsford, Wing entered Carroll College at Waukesha for pre-pharmacy studies and later enrolled in the Minnesota School of Pharmacy. He received his degree and passed his state board examination in 1929. He was first employed as a pharmacist by Lee Winterburn, a Marshfield druggist of the time.



The Wing Drug Company was founded in Marshfield in 1897 by Wing's father, Frank B. Wing, who in 1901 moved the company to Abbotsford. Ben joined his father in Abbotsford in 1933 and then came back to Marshfield three years later, this time to purchase an interest in the Winterburn Drug Store. The Wings became sole owners of the business, under Ben's management in 1938. Ten years later, Wing expanded the drug store to almost twice its former size. In 1963, they moved to 301 South Central Avenue where the size of the store was again more than doubled.

In 1958, Wing, along with business associates, Reinie Karau, Ivo Umhoefer, Elmer Schreiner, Bill Uthmeier, Henry Maurer, and Tony Knott purchased the former Washington School block between Sixth and Seventh streets on South Central Avenue for development as a downtown shopping center.

Wing served in many civic posts. He was a member of the Board of the Marshfield Housing Authority and a member of the Fire and Police Commission from 1948 to 1955, serving as its president the last two years. He was president of the Commercial Club that later became the Chamber of Commerce and served as a director of the Marshfield Area Chamber of Commerce and the United Fund.

Active in many service clubs, Wing was influential in the organization of the Big Brothers of Central Wisconsin. Fraternally he was affiliated with the Masonic Tripoli Shrine and Blue Lodge, the American Legion, the Rotary Club, the United Commercial Travelers, and the Elks Lodge.

Professionally he was a member of the Advisory Committee for Education of the National Association of Retail Druggists. He was also a member of the Marshfield Clinic Foundation and St. Joseph's Hospital Lay Advisory Committee.

After Ben Wing's death May 21, 1971, the Marshfield News-Herald shared the following tribute.

"In the premature and entirely unexpected death of Ben Wing, the Marshfield community has suffered a grievous loss. He was much more than a good citizen, a good neighbor and a good family man he was also one of that breed of community builders who are steadily declining in numbers although they are so greatly needed.

"John B. Wing, as his parents named him, became a member of the Marshfield business fraternity nearly 40 years ago, and few men have carried a greater load of community responsibility than he bore during his decades of residence here.

"He built his business with care, making it an asset to the city and a service center to the people of other communities for miles around. He contributed generously of his time and talents to the Chamber of Commerce and was consistently among the leaders in every attempt to improve Marshfield.

"He did not limit his efforts to the development and expansion of the business community, but willingly accepted more than his share of obligation for the civic chores that must be performed in every city but are avoided by so many timid business and professional men who fear to antagonize the ever-present gripers and foot-draggers standing in the way of progress.

"Ben Wing served on municipal boards and commissions, as trustee or director on the boards of a variety of charitable bodies, as a supporter of his church, and as a promoter or participant in every kind of drive or campaign designed to help people or improve conditions for living in Marshfield. There can be no doubting that he had a deep interest and affection for Marshfield and its people, and that the feeling was reciprocated.

"It is one of those bitter ironies of life that his passing occurred just as his friends in the Rotary Club which he once headed had completed their plans for public recognition of his qualities as a citizen and good neighbor.

"Operating on the theory that it is better to sing a man's praises while he can still hear them, the service club has had a delightful habit of honoring outstanding individuals on occasion with a banquet tribute which it calls "Roses to the Living." Ben Wing was to have been honored in this manner tonight. No one had told him, but we would like to think he sensed what his friends were about and was therefore aware of their esteem for him.

"To the members of his family circle, we can offer little consolation for so great a loss, other than the hope that the burden of their grief will be a little easier to bear because it is shared by so many."