

Louis A. Hartl

We are happy to name Louis A. Hartl as the 61st inductee in the Marshfield's 150: Heroes and Leaders, Past and Present register. Louis Hartl was nominated by his granddaughter, Paricia Allen Mabie and the North Wood County Historical Society.

Louis Hartl was committed to making the City of Marshfield and surrounding area a better place to live, visit and play. He was born October 1, 1879, in Austria, what is today part of the Czech Republic, and immigrated to the United States in May 1882 with his parents, Lorenz and Anna (Wolf) Hartl, and eight siblings.

The family came to Marshfield shortly after arriving in the States. Here Lorenz and Anna established the St. Louis House, a hotel and saloon building on the southeast corner of Chestnut Avenue and Second Street. That building was lost during the Marshfield Fire of 1887, but quickly replaced with a fine brick building.

Arriving in Marshfield as a toddler, Louis grew with the community. At the age of 13 he started to work for local grocers, Vollmar and Voelker. He also assisted his father as a boy with the day-to-day operations of his businesses. During 1900 that assistance included a hands-on-effort with developing plans and specifications for Marshfield's new armory building built during that summer just east of the Hartl Saloon.

Louis, as manager of the armory property partitioned the lower floor into two business spaces and opened the Empire Café and Bowling Alleys. The bowling alleys on the west side of the building and a first-class restaurant, the Empire Café, on the east side. Then in 1907 he purchased that building from his father, and later acquired the other adjacent Hartl properties. He retained ownership of these throughout his lifetime.

From the initial Hartl properties, Louis would substantially expand and broaden his business interests and real estate holdings.

In 1909, he invested in the new Marshfield Brewing company, which at that time was being re-organized as a stock company. Louis was elected president, a position he held until his death. As president, he immediately guided the firm through an extensive plant development and improvement program which contributed to Marshfield Brewery providing most of the beer consumed locally. During prohibition he turned to the manufacture of malt syrup and wort and soda water to keep the plant viable, and then anticipating the repeal of prohibition in 1932, he made the plant ready to produce beer again.



In 1915 he organized the Marshfield Brick & Tile Company, located one mile north of the city limits of Marshfield. Within a few years the company had specialized in the production of face brick of exceptionally high quality in a wide variety of colors. The company supplied much of the building brick used in Marshfield and within a radius of 100-miles of Marshfield. Hartl served as the president and treasurer from the time the company was organized, to its sale in May 1956.

Mr. Hartl was closely identified with banking businesses in Marshfield. In 1917 he became a director of the American National Bank, predecessor of the Citizens National Bank, today's Associated Bank. The American National Bank was closed by government order during the height of the Great Depression on March 3, 1933. Hartl was a leading organizer of the Citizens National Bank and when it reopened on May 1, 1934, he was elected its first president and served in that capacity and as a director until 1956.

In 1929 Hartl was an organizer of the Krasin-Hartl Fur Farm for raising muskrats and other fur bearing animals. The farm included 1,000 acres of land purchased from Hartl in the Town of McMillan.

In 1947 the Hartl Manor Apartment project on North Central Avenue was one of the first of 28 Federal Housing Administration -aided multiple unit deals closed in Wisconsin to help alleviate the housing shortage after World War II.

While managing multiple business ventures Louis Hartl managed to share time and talents with his community in other ways. He was a member of the Marshfield Volunteer Fire Department for 25 years, serving as captain of Hose Company No. 2, and the department's treasurer. In 1904 at the age of 25, he was elected to the first of his two terms as a member of the Marshfield Common Council. Ten plus years later he became a member of the Marshfield Board of Education.

Associated with St. John's Catholic Church he was a member of the Catholic Order of Foresters, the St. Joseph Society and for a number of years secretary of the Catholic Knights organization. He also actively participated in local fraternal organizations such as, the B.P.O.E (the Elks), the Eagles, and the Travelers' Protective Association. Louis often worked on fund-raising campaigns with these organizations to support worthwhile causes locally such as North Wood County Boy Scouting activities or nationally when he raised funds to support the United Service Organization.

In 1938 to help farmers and families he gave a Christmas present of two pounds of cheese to every school pupil, from kindergarten to high school age in Marshfield. The number of children attending Marshfield public, parochial, and high school was 2,693, which means that he gave away 5,386 pounds of cheese. The next year he gave each school age child 2 pounds of cranberries in a wooden box with two Santa Clauses etched on each side of the front.

An accomplished soft ball player, Louis was a member of the volunteer firemen's team, and later played for the Marshfield Brewery team, the "Beer Lagers." He played ball into his 50s. Besides softball, he was an accomplished Skat card player, well respected throughout the state

with his many tournament wins. He also enjoyed golf and was one of the original directors of the Marshfield Country Club when it was organized and incorporated in August 1922.

In 1910 he married Theckla Backus, daughter of August F. and Caroline (von Spiegel) Backus, of Kewaskum, Wis. Their only child, Caroline Anna, was born in 1912.

He died July 17, 1959.

As a businessman, the wages paid to employees, the cost of buying locally produced products, hiring of local service providers, and sales and distribution of products produced by his businesses all benefited the general prosperity of Marshfield.

His legacy is seen in the beautiful homes and buildings built of Marshfield Brick. The Aster on South Chestnut (former Purdy Junior High School), the Weinbrenner Shoe Factory on West Second and South Walnut, and the Oak Avenue Community Center to mention just a few.

His legacy includes the antique fire wagon on display at the Marshfield Fire Station. Louis purchased it when the fire department bought its first gasoline-powered fire truck. He wanted to preserve a piece of Marshfield history by saving the horse drawn fire wagon. It had been stored at the Marshfield Brewery for many years until his daughter, Caroline Hartl Allen, donated it to the fire department in her father's memory.

And lastly his legacy is seen at the McMillan Marsh Wildlife Area. A 1954 lease agreement between the Wisconsin Conservation Department, Louis Hartl and Thornton Green for about 1500 acres assured that this area would become one of the finest public hunting grounds in the state.

Louis A. Hartl had a significant impact on the city and community during his lifetime and left it a better place for us to live, visit, and play today.