

The Martin Brothers: Herbert (Herb) and Harold (Pepper)
Nominated by Richard K. Martin

My father, Herbert (Herb) Martin, was born in Marshfield on April 11, 1911. His brother, Harold (Pepper) Martin, was born in Marshfield on May 14, 1913. The brothers were sons of John and Loretta (Bouliou) Martin and grandsons of Marshfield pioneers, John and Elizabeth (Weber) Martin and Felix and Sarah (Willett) Bouliou. Felix was the first caretaker of the Marshfield Zoo. Herb and Harold attended Sacred Heart Grade School and McKinley High School.



Herb and Harold were working as grocery clerks for other grocers when, in July 1937, a few days after my Herb's wedding, the brothers acquired East Side Grocery, a neighborhood grocery store located on the northwest corner of S. Peach Avenue and E. Fourth Street. In addition to selling groceries, fresh fruits and vegetables, and packaged meats from the Koller Meat Market, the store also sold gas and oil. This may have made East Side Grocery the first mini-mart in Marshfield. With the purchase of this store the brothers began their 35-year career as Marshfield businessmen.

The brothers did not remain in this location long. Eight months later, in March 1938, they closed East Side Grocery and opened a larger store, Martin's Grocery, in the Southside Bakery building, located at 420 (now 440) S. Central Avenue. After building a successful business with Martin's Grocery at this location, they opened Martin Bros. Supermarket in March 1946 in Marshfield's downtown central business district at 153-155 S. Central Avenue. The store was a vacant Weber's store that had closed in 1940 when all four Weber's stores were consolidated into a new Weber's Supermarket located on the northeast corner of E. Fourth Street and S. Central Avenue. To make Martin Bros' Supermarket self-service, the brothers completely renovated the store, installing the latest in shelving and mirror-type fruit display fixtures. The store also had a full-service meat department with new cases and equipment, offering fresh cut meats on site.

During the golden age of the supermarket in the 1950s, throughout the country, supermarkets began to open outside the central downtown business districts. This was also true in Marshfield when the brothers constructed a 9,000 square foot supermarket

on Marshfield's south side at 1502 S. Central Avenue, the first such store in Marshfield. The store was named Parkway Food Center in reference to its proximity to Marshfield's Wildwood Park & Zoo. This would be a full six years before the opening of the Karau's Supermarket in Washington Square. Its opening ad touted its "magic doors" and "magic electric-eye checkout machines" as being the first of its kind in Marshfield. It also provided ample free off-street customer parking. Herb managed the Parkway Food Center while Harold continued to manage Martin's Bros. Supermarket.

The brothers closed Martin Bros. Supermarket in Spring 1956 and then added a second Parkway Food Center at 120 N. Central Avenue in April 1957. The stores were renamed South Parkway and North Parkway Food Centers. Herb continued to manage the South Parkway store while Harold managed the new North Parkway store.

Parking at the South Parkway store was restricted by a vacant root beer stand adjacent to its parking lot that was surrounded by a snow fence. Customers were required to exit the parking lot by way of an alley north of the root beer stand that was advertised by a large sign that read "Parkway Food Center Circle Drive." To alleviate the parking problem, the brothers acquired the vacant root beer stand property in early 1961 and removed the snow fence and circle drive sign. During that summer the brothers entered the fast-food business with the reopening of the root beer stand, often advertising weekend specials such as "hamburgers at 5 for \$1" and "hot beef sandwiches with fries for 55 cents." The venture lasted only this one year. In 1962, they rented out the property to Peterson Aluminum Sales and two years later, in 1964, they sold the building to the Petersons who moved it to 1713 East Fourth Street.

In the early 1970s, the grocery industry was beginning to change with the opening of warehouse supermarkets and their discounted no-frills pricing. In keeping with this concept, a Karau's Warehouse Foods store was opened on Marshfield's north side in 1972. Not wanting to make the necessary investment to adapt to this new business model, the brothers sold their stores to Angeli Foods of Iron River, Michigan on July 9, 1972.

Herb was not able to enjoy his retirement very long. He contracted ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) soon after his retirement and died on August 4, 1975 at the age of 64. Harold died on June 15, 1989 at the age of 76.

The Martin Brothers represented innovation and quality under a family name to the Marshfield community for nearly four decades, securing their place among the most important people to the city.