

William Henry Roddis

Nominated on behalf of his granddaughter, the late Miss Augusta Roddis.

“William Henry Roddis (1844-1920) who for a number of years was a prominent manufacturer and businessman of Marshfield, and whose character as a citizen, public official and high-minded Christian gentleman was one of which the city had reason to be proud, was born in Troy, New York, January 5, 1844, the son of Thomas and Mary (Stout) Roddis.” Thus begins the biographical sketch of W.H. Roddis in the “History of Wood County” published in 1923. When W. H. Roddis was four years old, his parents moved to Milwaukee where he was educated, graduating from the Milwaukee Academy. His entry into the business world was as a bookkeeper, then he became a cashier and then entered into real estate business in Milwaukee.



In 1894, W. H. Roddis came to Marshfield from Milwaukee to buy an interest in and to assume the management of the Hattenberg Veneer Company, which was on the verge of failure. Within five years he had completed the purchase of the company, changed its name to Roddis Veneer Company and made it the second most important manufacturing enterprise within the city after the Upham Manufacturing Company. During the next 21 years, it eliminated cheese boxes from its production, expanded to Park Falls with a sawmill there for the production of lumber and added manufacture of flush doors to the output of the Marshfield plant.

At the time of his death in 1920, he was praised for having brought the company through two disastrous fires, established the company as the city's most important manufacturing plant, and for producing plywood and doors that had a national reputation for excellence.

In addition to his business success, W.H. Roddis was very civic minded and served several times as an alderman and later as the city mayor beginning in 1908. Mr. Roddis was also a devoted member of the Episcopal Church and was largely responsible for the erection of the church building in Marshfield in 1898 and for the establishment of an organized parish, of which he served as senior warden for 26 years. He was also active in Episcopal Diocesan affairs and was elected a Deputy to the General Convention (the governing body of the Episcopal Church), twice and held other Diocesan positions including a term on the Board of Missions.

Mr. Roddis also had broad cultural interests and had one of the most extensive private libraries in Marshfield filled with the classical and historical works of many well-known authors.

Following his death, the Marshfield News included the following tribute to William Henry Roddis on its front page.

“Marshfield will not seem the same without Mr. Roddis. For many years was a prominent figure in the city, sympathizing with our people in their trials and misfortunes and rejoicing with them in their successes. There are many in town who owe their well-being to him, for he was ever ready to help those in need or distress and give advice to those in quandary. This is especially true of some of his employees, all of whom love him, in fact, his unassuming, kind and generous traits endeared him to all who knew him.

“He was an ardent lover of his country and a true patriot. During the war he used his plant to help the cause of humanity.

“His relations with his customers were notably just. If there was a legitimate doubt, he believed in giving the patron the benefit of the doubt. In dealing with his employees his cardinal maxim was that justice and liberality will be answered by loyalty and efficient services. He held that every employee deserved from his employer encouragement and generous aid to develop the best there is in him.”

Taken from a story written by Miss Augusta Roddis for The Marshfield Story, Piecing Together Our Past, 1872 - 1997.