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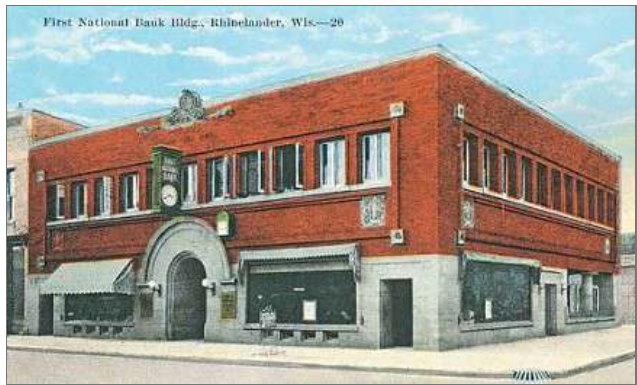
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Rhinelanders Revisited: An examination of how status factored into founding fathers' success

Stephanie Kuski of the River News

In unearthing the history of the Hodag city, a few names come up time and time again - the Browns, Arthur Taylor, Dr. Daniels, Gene Shepard. But this begs the question: what great feats did these men accomplish to be remembered as they are?

For many of our city's founding fathers, having the financial means to control resources and invest in new industries was a defining characteristic. But others earned a place in our history books not due to money or status, but rather because of their wealth of knowledge.



Many buildings in the Brown Street district that were built during Rhinelanders' infancy still stand strong today. The vacant building currently located on the corner of Davenport and Stevens streets that was most recently Associated Bank was originally founded by Dr. Alfred Daniels. It was known as the Bank of Rhinelanders when it was first established and later called First National Bank (this name can still be seen engraved on the side of the building). Archive photo.

Now, these categories are not mutually exclusive. Of course, a wise investment requires both skill and silver, but juxtaposing those who had financial backing with those who didn't becomes an interesting angle with which to introduce some of Rhinelanders' founding fathers.

But before we draw our venn diagram, let's focus on the similarities between those who held societal sway. The stereotype went something like this: well-off, young businessmen, often of European descent, who had connections to other well-to-do investors, enabling them to found different companies together. But they were oftentimes philanthropic as well, which, in turn, allowed them to get their hands in both civic and financial matters.

The Browns, as we've already touched on in this series, are a great example of a family that was involved in just about everything, but even that started at a young age.

"When Anderson was 16 and Webster was 14, they rented 320 acres from their father and ran a farm, including planting, hiring crews and taking the crops to market," Rhinelanders Historical Society President Bill Vancos commented. "This is a 16-year-old and a 14-year-old... I'm just amazed at their young age what they accomplished."

Of course, once the Brown brothers came of age and made their trek north, they were intimately involved in establishing many of Rhinelanders' major infant industries.

To name a few, we have the Brown Bros.' Lumber Co., the Brown Bros.' Sawmill and their Pelican Boom Co.; Webster Brown was the chairman of the town of Pelican when Rhinelanders was just a village, and when it was incorporated as a city in 1894, he served as the first mayor of Rhinelanders, and later on served three terms as U.S. Congressman; the Browns were primary investors in the Rhinelanders Paper Co. and the Rhinelanders

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Telephone Co.; they founded Rhinelanders' first bank, then called E.D. Brown & Sons, later incorporated as Merchants State Bank and now BMO Harris.

But there were other financially savvy businessmen who wanted to have a finger in every pie.

Dr. Alfred D. Daniels "was the first surgeon that came to town," Vancos noted, "but he was well known for his business investments."

Besides establishing his own medical practice, he started the Bank of Rhineland, which later became First National Bank and was most recently the location of Associated Bank on Stevens Street. Although Daniels invested with the Browns in the Rhineland Paper Co. when it was established in 1903, it's been said he was not fond of the Browns.

"The way the story goes is that someone asked Daniels once why he had his bank over on Stevens Street when most of all the other main businesses were located on Brown Street, and he said he'd be damned if he had his bank on Brown Street," Vancos laughed. "I guess even if you don't like certain people, there's money to be made."

Daniels, like the Browns, was also heavily invested in the lumber industry. In 1889 he partnered with his cousin J.D. Day to found Day & Daniels Lumber. He was also a founder of the Rhineland Refrigeration Co. as well as the Wisconsin Veneer Co., a wood making enterprise later known as Atlas Plywood, located where Trig's is today.

Later in 1915, Daniels founded Daniels Manufacturing Company with his son, Joseph.

The company manufactured napkins, crepe and wax paper. The plant was originally located on Thayer Street on the Soo Line right-of-way (where a concrete condominium building is located today), but when the Wabash Screen Door Factory burned down in 1901, Daniels moved his factory to Kemp Street. After Daniels' reign, the company got into printing plastic wrap for candy bars and toilet tissue, eventually selling out to Printpack many decades later.

Because so many of Daniels' investments exploited the exploding logging industry in this area, and because many of those enterprises overlapped in the same market, Daniels is remembered today for his savvy investments coupled with his status as a surgeon.

In a similar manner, Arthur Taylor was another prominent figure who invested in early industries, but his philanthropic efforts are what earned him a place in our history books.

Taylor, a native of England, made soft drinks in Marinette throughout the 1880s in partnership with his brother Walter and started his own business when he arrived in Rhineland in 1890.

In 1891, he purchased a small soda manufacturing business then located on Messer Street, but today is Evergreen Court, near Boom Lake. In 1905 he built a new larger building adjacent to a spring on Stevens Street, becoming one of the first - if not the first - to own a Coca-Cola franchise in the state. But before production ever began, the first purpose of that building was actually to house homeless families after a catastrophic fire wreaked havoc on the north side of town that same year.

By 1920 his company name changed to Taylor Beverage & Candy Co., as Taylor added a wholesale candy department in addition to the cola, orange crush and ginger ale he already specialized in. Many decades after Taylor's passing, Coca-Cola Bottling Co., Inc. of Rhineland moved to its present location on Iverson Street in 1964.

In addition to owning his own company, Taylor was also involved in a number of other efforts across the community.

He was a founder and president of the Rhineland Telephone Co.; president of the Rhineland Building & Loan Association; member of the Rhineland Rotary Club and member of the Oneida County Board, and later chairman. His time serving in the latter position earned him a connection with some of the most progressive movements in the county, including his efforts to erect the second (current) courthouse.

Taylor was a big advocate for replacing the first wooden courthouse with a concrete one so the records there wouldn't be lost to fire, a common concern at the time, but not everyone was on board. When Taylor heard that representatives from outlying areas were having second thoughts about investing in a new courthouse, he fought back with some quick thinking.

"So Art gets on the phone right away and calls the other supervisors," Vancos explained. "Even though the bylaws called for the County Board to meet at 9 o'clock, they typically didn't meet until 10 or 10:30, it was just a habit."

"So he organized his fellow County Board members that were supportive of the courthouse to meet at 9 o'clock," he continued. "So they met at 9 o'clock and they reaffirmed the new courthouse. When they finished that at about 10 or so, all these other guys came in thinking they're going to derail this, and by then the subject had already been voted on."

"There was nothing more they could do, because the bylaws called for them to actually meet at 9, they just hadn't been doing it. So he (Taylor) was smart enough to figure out how to end run his opponents," Vancos laughed. "This courthouse wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for his actions and his smart thinking."

The current courthouse that was erected in 1911 is said to be one of the finest buildings in all of Northern



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Wisconsin. They moved that first courthouse back one block (to where St. Mark's Lutheran Church is located now), and the building was then repurposed as the Oneida County Normal School, where young women were educated and later became teachers in one of the many one-room schools in the surrounding rural area. Of course, Taylor was also a major advocate for this venture as well, serving as their first president.

For Taylor, Daniels and the Browns, their early investments and philanthropic efforts earned them a detailed chapter in our history books, but there are others who contributed to our community in profound ways. However, they are not always remembered in such great detail.

Stay tuned for the next installment in this continuing series. Visit rivernewsonline.com for previous installments.

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