

Directory of Birmingham Businesses

Thumb-nail Sketches of Birmingham Business Leaders

Because he was once an eye witness to a traffic fatality in which a man lost his life when hit by a street car, James J. Kelly has made his business that of selling life insurance.



Mr. Kelly

Mr. Kelly was employed by a canning company in Detroit, the manager of which was determined to keep him permanently in the business, but he himself was undecided and had given some thought to entering the insurance field.

While riding with a friend one night, he saw the street car accident just a few yards in front of him.

"That fellow probably didn't have any insurance, Jimmy," the friend remarked. "That's why you ought to be in the business."

The following week, Mr. Kelly became a member of the selling force of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. He has remained in the business throughout the eight years since that time, including two years in Detroit, after which he came to Birmingham where he established his own agency three years ago.

Mr. Kelly, who was born in Watertown, N. Y., and attended Syracuse University, plays the banjo for diversion—and plays it with ability. Four years ago he played for the radio weekly in regular broadcasts with the Red Apple Club from a Detroit station.

Cattle and pork are two words which have significant meaning in the life of W. I. Wood since his early childhood.



Mr. Wood

Mr. Wood, now owner of the dairy there which bears his name, was born in Galedonia, Mich., and was raised on a farm near Grand Rapids, where he early learned to develop that scientific interest in the feeding and care of livestock which has motivated practically all of his business endeavors.

After being graduated from high school, he attended Michigan State College and later was appointed manager of a pure bred hog farm in Kansas City where he reared products which drew national prizes in the National Sving Show.

In 1921 he came to the William T. Barbour Estate in Blomfield Hills as manager of the dairy there. As secretary of the Michigan Poland China Breeders Association, which office he held for three years, he promoted the largest show ever held in Michigan, staged in Detroit in 1923.

Mr. Wood remained at the Barbour Estate for 5 1/2 years, remaining in 1927 to establish the independent business of distributing dairy products which he has conducted ever since.

Modesty makes R. H. Lee, proprietor of the Lee Chemical Company, reluctant to talk at length about his World War Record, but any sketch of him would dwell profusely on that subject.



Mr. Lee

A senior at Queens University, Kingston, Ont., when war first broke out, Mr. Lee enlisted immediately in the Canadian Army and saw four years of action.

In 1916, when a sergeant in machine gunnery, he was recruited for the Royal Aviation Corps to do duty with the Second Canadian Division, for the most part between Ypres and the Somme. First an observer and later a pilot in a two-seater, he finally became a pursuit pilot and in 18 months was credited with shooting down 27 enemy planes single-handed.

He was wounded three times, the last time just two months before the Armistice. While on patrol duty in a mile and a half between the German lines, he was attacked simultaneously by five enemy planes. Although badly wounded, his left wing nearly torn off by an anti-aircraft gun, he succeeded in turning back and landing safely with the tail of his plane putting over the front Allied trench.

After returning to America and completing his course at Queens, Mr. Lee served as an electrical contractor for the Michigan Bell Telephone and Detroit Edison Companies before becoming manager of the Birmingham branch of the Detroit Salt Service Company, which he bought out and established as an independent business a year ago last May.

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