

A tale of the two Holliday brothers  
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Editor's note: This is part of series on Laramie's history.

Long before the days of Wal-mart, the W.H. Holliday Company Store ruled the Laramie marketplace. The store, which eventually grew into a four-story retailer, was one of the largest in the region, according to a June 30, 1928, Laramie Boomerang article.

"Few communities in the country the size of Laramie can boast of the size and character of the W.H. Holliday company store," the 1928 article says.

The store's beginnings showcase the entrepreneurial will of two brothers, William Helmus (W.H.) Holliday and Jethro Tabor (J.T.) Holliday. They were sons of Eli and Annetta Bogart Holliday and born near Miami, Ohio. After their family made a couple moves, W.H. came to what is now Albany County from Denver to work at a sawmill. After a year or two, he decided to start a sawmill of his own, according to the 1928 article.

The sawmill was located in Sherman near Dale Creek.

"... they started the business of getting out ties for the Union Pacific Railroad," according a 1961 Laramie Boomerang article by Leslie Cook.

Tie Siding became the central hub for the handling of ties, with as many as 1 million in storage there between 1869 and 1875, according to the 1961 article.

W.H. opened an office and a hardware store for his sawmill in Laramie on South Second around 1867. The business blossomed into a general contracting business, and the lumberyard was expanded to house a mill. Many of Laramie's homes and businesses at the time, including the Conner Hotel, parts of the St. Matthews Cathedral and the Fox Theater, were manufactured by the Holliday firm. W.H. officially formed the W.H. Holliday Company in 1872. After starting a few short-lived lumberyards in Greeley, Colo., and Cheyenne, J.T. joined his brother in business as vice president in 1879.

In the spring of 1880, the W.H. Holliday Company building was destroyed in a fire, and around 1881, a new, three-story building was constructed on South Second. The 60,000-square-foot building was very modern, according to a 1901 Laramie Republican article.

"Many modern devices are noticeable here, such as a system of stand pipes with hose for protection against fire, cash carrier system, a complete private telephone system connecting its main office with each department and floor," it states.

The basement of the building served as a warehouse for the company. The salesrooms for

hardware, groceries, carpets, drapery, crockery, glassware and offices occupied the main floor as well as a paint room, tin-shop, salt room and grain and flour room.

An addition on north side of the company had farming implements, buggies, wagons and lighter building materials.

The second floor showcased all of the furniture for sale, and there was a lot of it.

“Every available square yard is occupied by furniture representing the latest styles and patterns – plain, showy and elegant ...” the 1901 article said.

For a few years, the top of the building was used as an opera house, considered to be a good venue.

“For several years this was the scene of surprisingly good theatrical productions,” the 1961 article stated.

Eventually the upper floor was turned into a storeroom for furniture.

W.H. managed the retail part of the business, while J.T. took care of the construction end.

In addition to the retail business, W.H. was also in the business of politics.

He served as a member of the University of Wyoming Board of Trustees from 1886-1891, according to an American Heritage Center biography. He also was a member of the 3rd, 5th, 8th and 10th Wyoming Territorial Legislative Assemblies for Albany County as a Democrat in 1873, 1877, 1884 and 1888. In 1892 he was elected to the Wyoming State Senate but resigned to run for governor, and lost the election. W.H. Holliday also served as legislator for Albany County in the 2nd, 10th, 11th, 13th and 14th state legislatures in 1893, 1909, 1911, 1915 and 1917.

He was regarded highly by the Laramie Daily Sentinel in 1873.

“Mr. Holliday is a self-made man in the broadest sense of the term – one of Laramie’s best and most honorable citizens. He is a clear thinker, and a bold earnest advocate of his opinions and principles, and an earnest and zealous worker. At the same time, he is exceedingly sociable, liberal and courteous. Albany County may rest assured that her interests will be well guarded and her welfare closely looked after, with a gentleman like Mr. W.H. Holliday in the General Assembly,” the article said.

Only about 20 years later, in 1910, the brothers built another building, this time four stories high on the corner of Garfield and Second Streets.

By 1925 both brothers were dead and their retailing empire was broken up between W.H.’s two sons.

With all of these services the brothers provided over the years, it is safe to say the Hollidays had a large impact on Laramie.

“It is a small wonder that generation of school children have found it easy to misspell the word ‘holiday,’” the 1961 article said. “Since the first there has never been a time when the word ‘Holliday’ in big letters has not attested to the fact that without the Holliday family Laramie would be quite different from what it has become.”