

## LAWRENCE A. THIBODEAU (1995)



Larry Thibodeau, president of Maine Farmers Exchange of Presque Isle, Maine, has marketed 60 crops of Maine potatoes during his distinguished career. He has been an outstanding public servant serving on numerous industry boards, civic organizations and university committees. He has served the Potato Association of America as a member of three local host committees, attended and supported the Potato Utilization Conference held for many years in conjunction with the PAA annual meeting and has maintained active or sustaining membership in the organization.

Lawrence A. Thibodeau was born October 11, 1915 in Caribou, Maine of French-Acadian parents and graduated from Caribou High School in 1933 where he was very active in three sports. As a youth during the depression he worked as a messenger boy for the postal telegraph in Caribou. In 1935 he opened his own potato brokerage office in Caribou, becoming the youngest person in the country to hold a produce brokers license. Maine author Helen Hamlin in her book, PINE, POTATOES and PEOPLE, published in 1948, describes a movie date she had with

Larry Thibodeau when he was 18 years old and was working as a potato broker. She indicates Larry would leave the movie theater intermittently to complete potato deals. He actually made a buy early in the show and sold those potatoes at a modest profit before the movie was over. Ms. Hamlin wasn't too bothered by Larry's distractions as she confided the movie wasn't that good anyway, but her insight into Larry Thibodeau's enthusiasm for potato marketing was quite telling since that energy has not waned to this day.

From 1937 to 1943 Larry Thibodeau was employed with Bishop and Babin, one of Maine's largest potato brokerage firms, and during that service he spent nearly two years developing a potato marketing center in the Steuben County area of New York later to become known as "Little Maine." In 1943 he joined Maine Potato Growers, a large grower service and marketing cooperative in Presque Isle, and rose quickly to the office of potato sales manager for the firm. Over the next 15 years he developed the cooperative into one of the largest potato marketing organizations in the United States. He helped develop the Blue Goose national cooperative produce brand, led the effort to establish a federal/state marketing order for Maine potatoes and was instrumental in establishing the forward selling of Maine potatoes on the New York Mercantile Exchange.

In 1958, Thibodeau left the cooperative to establish his own potato marketing firm, Maine Farmers Exchange. Over the years his firm has grown to include a potato farming operation in Fryeburg, Maine, a real estate brokerage business, an agricultural consulting business, and a commodities marketing firm with seats on the New York Mercantile Exchange. In 1988 he purchased full ownership of a produce brokerage firm in Dover, Delaware which allows his company to supply retail and wholesale customers on a year-long basis. His was one of the first firms to successfully market chipping potatoes from Maine and to develop international sales of Maine seed potatoes. Currently his firm markets a high percentage of Maine tablestock and seed potatoes as well as large portions of the Delaware, Virginia and North Carolina fresh crops.

As an active supporter of the potato industry, Larry Thibodeau has served on the board of directors of the Bangor and Aroostook Railroad, Aroostook Valley Railroad, Katahdin Trust Company Regional Bank, and Husson College in Bangor, Maine, and has served as a citizen advisor to three deans of the University of Maine College of Agriculture and Agricultural Experiment Station. He has been a long-term member of the United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association and is a past director and past chairman of the Potato Division. He has been an active member of the Produce Marketing Association. He has served as a member and chair of numerous committees of the former Maine Potato Council, Maine Potato Commission, the Presque Isle Chamber of Commerce, the Aroostook Medical Center and Rotary International.

Thibodeau has been honored with distinguished citizens awards by the University of Maine, the Boy Scouts of America, the Future Farmers of America and Aroostook County Farm Credit Service.

Thibodeau and his wife, Audrey, are the parents of four children, two sons, Lee and Donald, and two daughters, Ann Seitz and Bunny Andrews. They have nine grandchildren. Thibodeau is an active outdoorsman, enjoying upland game hunting and fly fishing.

Edwin S. Plissey, Nominator