

Now & Then in Ripon ... Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society

Saddle shop founded by Ripon native still operating

Many people come to Ripon to live and work. Some stay for generations and others stay for a brief time. One early family that made its mark on Ripon and then left was the Hamley family.

William Hamley (1814-1909) was born in Cornwall, England and immigrated to the United States around 1852. He returned to England in 1855 and married Philippa Pinch (Pynch) Hamley (1832-1914) in 1856.

William returned to America with his new wife, his brother Henry (1817-1902) and his brother's family.

It is known that the Hamleys had settled in Rosendale by 1859 because their first son is listed as being born there. The Hamleys could have first settled in Rosendale because Philippa's brother, Issac Pynch (Pinch) (?-1889) lived there. Two of her brothers, Lewis (?-1899) and Richard (1829-1893) lived in Ripon.

The Hamleys' second child was born in 1859, with the birth listed as in "Wisconsin." Their last three children are listed as being born in Ripon in 1861, 1863 and 1872.

William's obituary reads: "When the war of the rebellion broke out, he enlisted in Company B, 41st Wisconsin Volunteers, and served 100 days, returning to his home shattered in health."

Civil War records show that William enlisted on May 19, 1864, became a private and was mustered out of service on Sept. 23, 1864. The Civil War ended April 9, 1865.

The obituary also notes that "He learned the trade of saddler and harness maker, at which he worked for many years prior to embarking for America."

William is listed in the 1876 Centennial Directory of Fond du Lac County as a harness maker on the west side of Watson Street with his family living on the second floor over the shop.

Ripon Historian Sam Pedrick (1868-1964) stated in his Pedrick Genealogy Notebooks

that he remembered William Hamley "as a very eccentric character, a devout Methodist of the shouting sort with his loud 'amens' of approval while at church." Pedrick also noted that Hamley was "dry," meaning that he did not drink alcohol, "and was the subject of at least one disgraceful attack by saloon men while he lived here."

In 1883, William and Philippa moved to Ashton, S.D. where two of their children, John James "J.J." Hamley (1859-1939) and Henry Hamley (1861-1894), had established their business, Hamley & Co., which made saddles and harnesses. They moved again with their family in 1890 to Kendrick, Idaho. This business was destroyed twice in a fire.

In 1905, J.J. moved Hamley & Co. to 30 S.E. Court Avenue in Pendleton, Ore. The Jan. 14, 1935 *Ripon Weekly Press* ran an article about Hamley & Co. on the front page under the headline, "Local Boy Makes Good in a Big Way."

The article stated, "J.J. Hamley, native son of Ripon, who hied himself west some 50 years ago with what meager savings he had managed to accumulate as a worker in a harness establishment, now has one of the largest and best-known saddlery and leather goods factories in the great golden west. 'House of Hamley' products are used throughout the world, and Hamley catalogues are not only mailed from coast to coast, but to many foreign countries as well."

J.J. founded the Pendleton Round-Up, which today is one of the premiere professional rodeos in the county.

A cousin, Adelbert "Bert" Hamley (1867-1955) was born on his family farm near Rosendale and visited J.J. in 1933 for the fall round-up. He described it in a handwritten memoir from 1943 as "A good deal like the Ringling Circus. Three rings going at once all three days."

The *Ripon Weekly Press* printed two articles in 1939 stating that J.J. had passed



THIS UNDATED PHOTO shows Hamley saddles at their production facility in Pendleton, Ore. The Hamley family lived in Ripon in the 1870s and '80s and had a harness shop on Watson Street. They moved to Oregon in 1905.

submitted photo

away. Both articles note that the Hamley family lived for a time in the Little White Schoolhouse, known as the birthplace of the Republican Party.

This former one-room Ripon school building was turned into a home for a while, however, the claim of the Hamley family living in the school could not be substantiated.

Lester Hamley (1889-1963) and John Hamley (1896-1937), J.J.'s sons, joined the family business. The company stayed in the Hamley family until approximately 1980, when John David "Dave" Hamley (1916-2005), the last in the line of family successors, retired and sold the business.

Hamley & Co. is still found at the same location in Pendleton, Ore. Its website states that "Hamley Saddle Makers continues to create beautiful and functional pieces of saddle-making artistry that carry the Hamley name. Hamley & Co. also carries custom-fitted hats, horse tack, clothing, boots and a large collection of hand wrought jewelry."

Found on the second level of



THE HAMLEY FAMILY of Ripon moved to Pendleton, Ore., in 1905 and established Hamley & Co., which made saddles. The company no longer is owned by the Hamley family, but still occupies their original location in Pendleton at 30 S.E. Court Ave.

submitted photo

the Hamley store is an art gallery. The Hamley Steakhouse and Café was started in 2006.

In 2019, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation purchased the historic brand and the Hamley properties. This included the western store and the steakhouse and café. The day-to-day operations are managed by

Wildhorse Resort & Casino.

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information, visit www.riponhistory.org, facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety or instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/.



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