

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

Printing ran in the blood of the Howe family

It's been said that like many industries "printing gets in your blood," meaning if you work hard and enjoy the printing industry you'll never give it up.

One such printer was Elmer Lyman (E.L.) Howe (1848-1909), born in Galena, Ill.

At age 20, he apprenticed in Madison as a typesetter at the office of the *Wisconsin State Journal* newspaper. He then went on to work as printing foreman in La Crosse, Wis., at the *Republican Leader* before joining the *Daily News* in Elgin, Ill.

All of these experiences led E.L. to establish his own *Cambridge News* in Dane County, Wis., in 1885, which he sold in 1889 when he moved on to found the *Fenimore Times* and *Lancaster Reporter*. He sold these publications to arrive in Ripon in 1895 at age 47 to purchase and run an already established *Advance Press* weekly newspaper.

He served the community until his death in 1909. And the paper would continue under the direction of his grown children and successors.

Active in the community, E.L. belonged to the Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Eastern Star and Calanthe Member. He also was active in establishing the Odd Fellows Lodge at Cambridge and Order of the Eastern Star in Ripon.

Howe family in Ripon

Married twice, E.L. had six children and various family members who also joined the printing industry.

Those individuals include:

- Henry Edwin Howe (1871-1944);
- Jesse Howe Helfer (1873-1960);
- Helen May Vimje (1888-1961), who attended Ripon High School;
- Randall Edward Howe



EMPLOYEES OF THE E.L. Howe Printing Co. and *Ripon Weekly Press* stand outside of their office at 121 Blossom St., circa 1930. *submitted photo*

(1891-1939), who attended Ripon High School and Ripon College;

➤ Russell Sinclair Howe (1893-1951);

➤ Velma Howe Bannach (1901-1933), who attended Ripon High School.

Ripon newspaper evolution

In 1900, E.L. changed the name of the newspaper from *The Advance Press* to the *Ripon Weekly Press* in order for Ripon to appear in the masthead.

This publication later evolved into the *Ripon Times* from 1901 to 1905, then became the *Ripon Weekly Press* from 1905 to 1953.

E.L. printers' name is found in local Ripon vintage newspaper advertising, Ripon High School and Ripon College yearbooks,

special event brochures and, of course, newspaper publisher credits.

This is because, like most printers, the E.L. Howe Printing Co. had the need to diversify in order to leverage the assets of its business, which primarily were printing presses, ink and paper into multiple products and programs — including the manufacture of fine stationery, business receipts and invoices, note cards and greeting cards.

Family member succession

R a n d a l l "Ran" Edward Howe (1890-1939), who was born in Madison and came to Ripon with his family as an 8-year old boy.

He attended public schools and graduated from Ripon High School in 1910. Randall went on to attend two years at Ripon College when journalism courses were first offered.

Randall also was a member of many organizations which benefitted the community, including the First Congregational Church, Masons, Shriners, Rotary Club and five other organizations in both Ripon and Berlin.

Married in 1922 to Viola Sydow of Columbus, Wis., Randall and his wife lived at 623 Watson St. Randall assumed the role of president at the E.L. Howe Printing Co. upon the death of his father and operated the *Ripon Weekly Press* newspaper until his own death of a heart attack in 1939. More than a hundred people attended his funeral and he is buried south of Madison in the Howe family plot at Prairie Mound Cemetery.



THIS PHOTO OF Russell Sinclair Howe ran the Sunday morning after his accidental death in 1951. *submitted photo*

Like his older brother Randall, Russell "Russ" Sinclair Howe (1893-1951) came to Ripon at age 5, attended Ripon schools and went on to military academy in Illinois.

He purchased the *Omro Herald* in 1913, which he ran until he was drafted into World War I in 1917. When that war ended

he returned to Ripon to live with his mother. Unmarried, he and his mother lived at 503 Watson St. Following the death of Randall, he was selected by his family members to lead the company, including the *Ripon Weekly Press*. He died following a car crash when he hit two parked cars



THIS VALENTINE'S Day advertisement for the Howe Stationery Store ran in the newspaper. *submitted photo*

while he was driving on Watson Street in 1951 at age 58.

Like his family members he is also buried in Prairie Mound Cemetery, nearby Madison.

The loss of Russell appears to have marked the end of an era of the Howe family owning the Ripon newspaper and printing businesses. He was survived by his sister and his mother.

The Howe Printing Co. in Ripon was sold.

Two younger step-brothers, Henry and James, purchased the *Courier Press* newspaper located in Prairie du Chien, Wis., which went on to be owned and operated by four generations of Howes spanning 108 years.

At the same time period when the Howe family relatives bought that newspaper business, they also purchased the Mississippi Valley Printing Co. that published the *North Iowa Times* in McGregor, Iowa, the *Guttenberg Press* in Guttenberg, Iowa and the *Clayton County Register* in Elkader, Iowa.

The Ripon Historical Society interviewed the longtime owners of Prairie du Chien and Iowa newspapers, including descendant Gary Howe, who said that he and his brothers were finally retiring from the printing industry in 2019. Their businesses were sold and they remain grateful to their ancestors for creating a printing business model that they were able to lead and manage throughout their lifetimes.

The Howe family was in the printing business 151 years.

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 follow us at Facebook/riponhistory or www.riponhistory.org.



RANDALL "RAN" HOWE, right, leans forward during the 1924 National Editorial Convention in California. *submitted photo*

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