

David Thomas Ridge

By: Karen Bazzani Zach

Versatile would be the word to portray the subject of this column, David Thomas Ridge. A rough life from the get-go, David was born in Warren County, Ohio on leap year day in 1824. Jane, his mother died when David was seven, leaving along with him, at least eight other children. With these sole responsibilities, his father had nothing else to do but get an apprenticeship for David. This lasted seven years. During David's learning years, Joshua, David's older brother by a decade came to Montgomery County, marrying not long afterward to Lucetta Mahorney in 1839. Apprenticeship complete, David came to join his older brother in Ladoga. What a sad life this poor young man had lived, as brother Joshua, a well-known early wagon maker, passed away a couple of years after David arrived in our county. Several of these other Ridge children also ended-up in the area, including a minister, farmer, merchant and wagon maker.

Once here in April 1847, he came to Crawfordsville where he clerked in a store for close to two years, then moved to Lafayette where he did the same and a few months afterward rented a paper mill. Since the pay was insignificant, he returned to Crawfordsville to clerk in a large distillery (Matlock & Hunt) where 300 bushels of grain for the various whiskeys and wines were used daily. Happy he was until Mr. Matlock passed away. It was about this time he met a most beautiful young lady from a large local family, Elizabeth Galey, daughter of Benjamin. Next, this versatile worker and intriguing man joined Joseph F. Galey in the grocery business in Crawfordsville. In this four years, he built-up quite a trade, then ventured into the dry goods business. This was in 1857, a financial American panic year, and thus his business failed. Luckily, our adventurer went into politics and was elected the first County Auditor. Excellent job Mr. Ridge did, but politics being such, he lost the next election, even with the big push and hard work of his loyal party members. The tailor trade came next but only lasted one year. Sadly, another failure. Next, he joined the general merchandising group of McClure, Fry & Company. There, he was a partner for the next five years but was caught-up in the intriguing photography business. According to the 1893 Portrait and Biographical Record of Montgomery, Parke and Fountain County, Indiana, p. 477, this lasted two years but there is proof that he went back and forth with his photography and the tailoring business which he must have been decent in, as that was his apprenticeship. His "picture gallery" was still in existence in 1905 when he passed away the 16th of April.

David and his brothers, Joel and Joshua were completely immersed in taking care of their family as they are found in several guardian documents overseeing nieces and nephews. Evidently, David taught his son the tailoring business as William is listed in census records as such. Son Gifford ran a saloon, and David had two daughters, Emma the wife of George Carver who was in the lumber business and Mary Ridge.

So, let's tally-up David's work experiences. Apprenticed a tailor, he worked at that several years, yet he was also a clerk, store owner, grocery man, in partnership in a dry goods business, a county auditor, and an associate in a general merchandising firm. It is likely he helped his brother, Joshua in his wagon making business for the first few months in Montgomery County. He was also involved in working in a paper mill. Yet, it seems his love was really capturing life in photos. You can see here one of Ridge's photographs, a fairly early one taken in 1870. John Remley, pictured, owned and worked



Courtesy Crawfordsville Public Library

A picture of John Remley and his wife Margaret E. Gilliland taken by David Thomas Ridge. An excellent example of his photography skills.

a tanyard as well as being a farmer. His wife, also pictured, was Margaret E. Gilliland from a large family living near the Remleys. John and Margaret had one daughter, Lillian (Lilli) May who married Dr. Alonzo F. Brown. She passed away at age 23 leaving no descendants.

Both the picture taker and pictured had interesting yet hard and oftentimes sad lives. It isn't certain whether Ridge had rotten luck, or just had a mad desire to try different things, but it is an encouraging note to learn that he was an honorable, positive citizen of the community, who led an upstanding life in his own stead.

I'd absolutely love to find more Ridge photos, so if any reader has a Ridge photo please let me know – karen.zach@sbcglobal.net.