

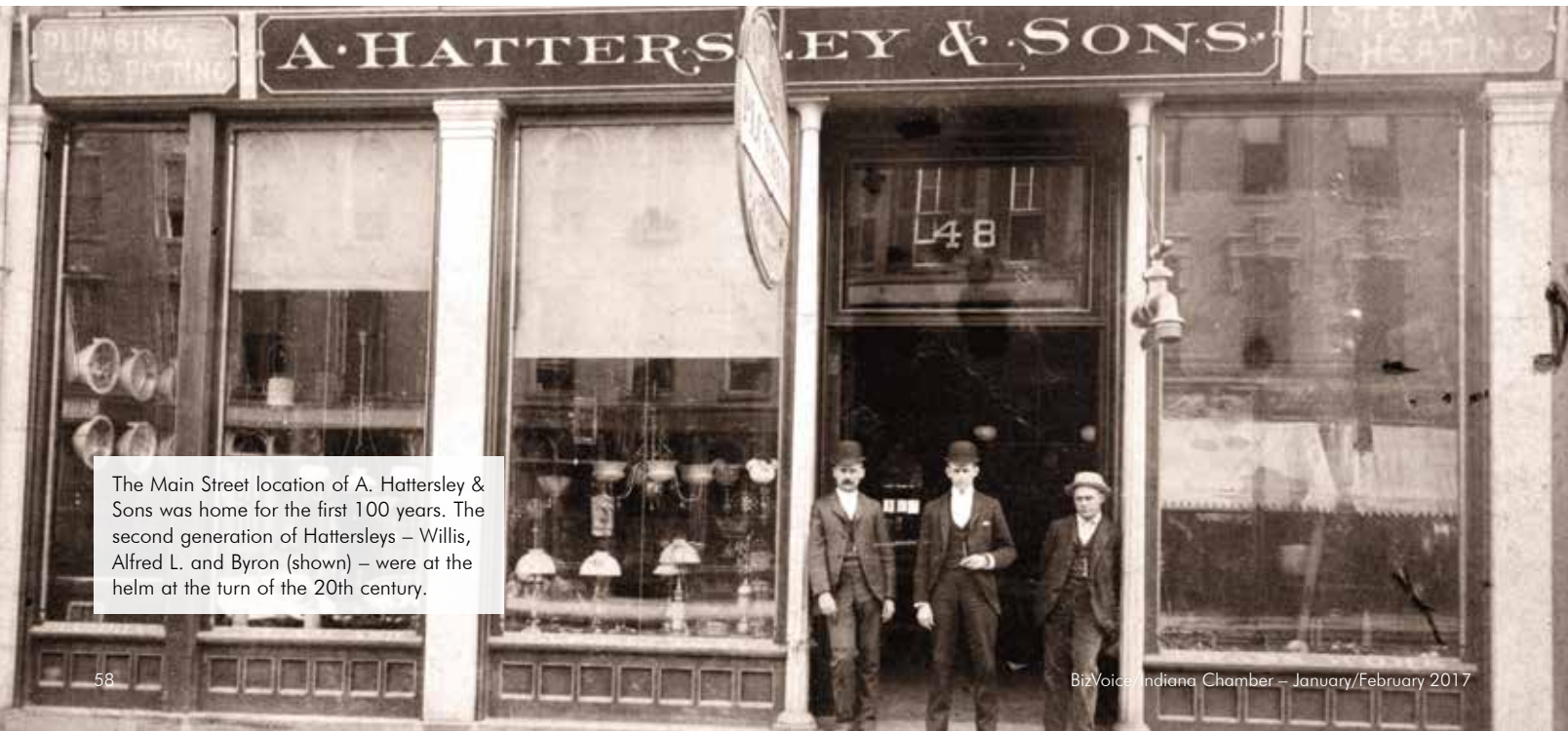
Folks in the early 1950s could not only fill their bellies at Nine Mile Restaurant but also their gas tanks at the adjoining Phillips 66.

EMBRACING THE HISTORY

By Rebecca Patrick

Allen County Business Legacies Live On

The light bulb, jeans and basketball are just three 19th century inventions that remain staples today. In Allen County, several businesses fall into that same category. *BizVoice*® highlights two that persevered through major wars and economic hardship, transformed with the times and are still a part of the Fort Wayne fabric.



The Main Street location of A. Hattersley & Sons was home for the first 100 years. The second generation of Hattersleys – Willis, Alfred L. and Byron (shown) – were at the helm at the turn of the 20th century.

A. Hattersley & Sons, mechanical contractor – 1856

The oldest continuous company in Allen County began when English immigrant Alfred Hattersley purchased the B.W. Oakley & Son firm. He relocated the store to Main Street in Fort Wayne and showcased in his windows prized possessions of the time like gas lamps; he was quick to adapt to the latest inventions and customer needs.

“Steam heating was becoming popular and we had moved out of the cistern bathrooms to going inside with plumbing as that started coming into existence,” explains current president Jack Koehne, one of three Hattersley co-owners.

Another, Jim Gill, a vice president who has been with Hattersley for nearly 30 years, adds: “When electricity came along, they hired electricians and did that work as well. They were also doing terrazzo work.”

One famed project was the Embold Theatre (now Embassy) and hotel of the late 1920s. Hattersley team members did the plumbing for both and company lore from Gill says they also completed the terrazzo in the theatre.

As operations grew more on the contracting side and away from a storefront, the headquarters moved in the 1950s to what’s now near the Interstate 69 Lima Road exit and in the thick of things on the northeast side of town.

“Back then, when this was built, there was nothing out here but a dairy farm,” Koehne quips.

The façade and interior have undergone the expected changes in the decades since, but the company history is firmly embedded in the hallways. Whether it’s a giant photo of Alfred Hattersley and family outside the original location or a picture of the early staff that is indicative of the melting pot that existed here and across the country at the time.

“You can pretty much tell where people came from by looking at the hats they wore,” Koehne points out. For Hattersley, it was Germany in addition to England.

But it’s the display case that’s a real window to the company’s origins. You’ll find accounting books, time sheets – all very formal and written neatly with ink.

“To see how they paid men back in the early 1870s ... this was after the Civil War and some of them only got \$2 a week. A workday was 10 hours and the workweek was six days. Thank goodness Sundays were around,” Gill marvels.

“Obviously those (making \$2) were the helpers. But even the apprentices, I think, didn’t get more than \$30 a week or \$5 a day. That’s what the market could bear then.”

The mini museum also features old customer receipts, more photos and some components that were used on the job.

“Back in the day there wasn’t a hardware



The 1950s ushered in much change at Hattersley & Sons – a new location on Fort Wayne’s then undeveloped northside and Harmon O. Hensley took over management.



“To the each family’s credit, they always looked for and prepared for the continuation of the organization. They didn’t just keep it in the family; they had other shareholders.”

– Jack Koehne
president and co-owner

store or what we would call a supply house to go to – you would have to manufacture your own valves and things like that,” Koehne tells. “As opposed to now, where we go to a wholesaler to buy that. So they were also making the stuff they had to install – that’s how long we go back. It’s amazing.”

Hattersleys owned and ran the company for approximately 100 years, followed by the Hensley family for the next 50 – up until just two years ago when the current trio of owners (also including vice president Brad Jenkins) took the helm.

It was the first Hensley, ex-marine Harmon O., who set the company on the path to its current success.

“After about only a year or two, he was able to show the Hattersleys how they could incorporate their company – state corporation rules had changed. Basically, he was the one who got them started showing more profit,” Gill offers.

“When I first came here (which briefly overlapped with Harmon O.’s tenure), we

were doing about \$8 million a year; now we are doing about three times that.

“We did a lot of growing the last three decades, and a lot of that obviously had to do with the Hensleys (Harmon Jr., nicknamed Harmie, succeeded his father and then his brother Brian was president until his untimely death in early 2015).”

Koehne says after 160 years, there isn’t much the company hasn’t seen and done. That experience counts for a lot, as does the culture that longevity instilled.

“My understanding and the stories that have been told and passed down about Harmon and even the stories about the Hattersleys – although those are a little grayer – is that these were people of integrity. They were handshake kind of people. Their word was their bond,” he stresses.

“Perhaps legal experts today would say they were a little too informal about how they did things but again I think that’s how they stood in the community and it worked.

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Embracing the History

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Nine Mile Restaurant remains popular with residents in the Hoagland and Poe areas, but it is still less well known to Fort Wayne residents, according to local historian John D. Beatty. One of its specialties: barbecue ribs.

“And I would say it’s still working. That’s what makes us so appealing to some people. We still have some, dare I say, old-timey values. But we still bring it into the 21st century in terms of how we go about conducting our business and relationships with people,” Koehne surmises.

Hattersley customers today are primarily in northeast Indiana, along the boundary of Local 166, the union plumbers and pipefitters it has arrangements with. Occasionally out-of-state projects, as far away as California, are completed for private companies.

Most of the work is institutional – schools and hospitals – and large commercial or industrial such as shopping centers. The only residential the company does is apartment buildings.

Notable structures the firm has worked on include Parkview LaGrange Hospital, Fort Wayne Museum of Art, Manchester College Science Building and Concord Junior High School in Elkhart.

At the time of this interview in late November, Hattersley was set to begin a new marquee project: Skyline Park, a \$91 million mixed-use development planned for downtown Fort Wayne, which includes office and residential towers.

In their relationship-driven business, Koehne stresses, “It’s not just a matter of competing for the sake of competing and being a lower-priced commodity, but how do we differentiate ourselves to enhance our relationships with our clients, our employees, vendors or subcontractors – everyone who comes within our sphere of contact.”

Yet with Hattersley, it all comes back to the very beginning.

“Founded in 1856” is branded in the company’s logo. “Who else is saying 1856?” Koehne asks.

“There is a legacy ... everyone knows Hattersley because we’ve been around for so long. Pressure isn’t the right word (for current staff), but you have a sense of place if you will.

“And it may say 1856 and we are proud of that, but to compete and to more importantly provide value for our customers, we have to keep evolving – and we do.”

Nine Mile Restaurant – 1837

If you are going southeast from Fort Wayne on U.S. 27 to Decatur, you pass this country establishment along the way.

John Karn opened his tavern on the site in 1837 on what was then called the Piqua Road in an area near Root. Thirteen years later John Holmes purchased the property, added an inn portion and renamed it the Nine Mile House because of the distance to the Allen County Courthouse.

“The site became one of the most important gathering places in the southern part of the county – a place where (stagecoach) travelers spent the night and where pioneers met to exchange news over a pint,” recounts John D. Beatty, a librarian at the Allen County Public Library Genealogy Center.

Beatty also served as the principal editor for the 2006 effort, *History of Fort Wayne and Allen County, Indiana, 1700-2005*, the first such history produced since 1917.

A parade of owners followed Holmes. It was once called Bubb’s Nine Mile after then-owner Anthony Bubb.

Remarkably, the original roofline from the Holmes rebuild of 1850 is still visible.

“They have built up and around it. So there are timbers in the walls and part of the roof that go back to that structure,” Beatty offers.

“(Admittedly) it’s a little off the beaten track. Today, there is the bar and also family-style dining. It’s just a wide range of food – perfectly fine to bring the family to. People who live around there know about it – the real locals.”

The Nine Mile Restaurant has received good reviews from area food critics. The last one, via *The News-Sentinel* in 2015, adorns the wall entering the dining room.

Beatty shares that his wife’s family is from Marion Township, where Nine Mile Restaurant is located.

“I had never heard of it, but we decided 10 years ago that we should try it out. It was a nice restaurant. We don’t go there that often, but we were able to go in and (we) think she probably had an ancestor that came here 100 years ago! It’s just an interesting place and good food,” he concludes.

Beatty believes it’s the oldest restaurant in northern Indiana. “I’ve heard the St. James up in Avilla claims they are the oldest but that dates to the 1870s. It’s a great restaurant too but doesn’t quite date as far back as Nine Mile.”

RESOURCES: A. Hattersley & Sons at www.ahattersley.com | John Beatty at www.genealogycenter.org | Nine Mile Restaurant at www.ninemilerestaurant.com