

Home & Family

Adams Family brings more of the past to historic Delavan

By Dennis West

Just as they did 100 years ago, vehicles rumble past on the cobblestone street in front of the photo studio at 323 E. Walworth Avenue in Delavan. Inside, people sit for portraits that would look right at home on your great-grandmother's mantle.

Although they spend the school year in academic pursuits, James and Margaret Adams spend their off-months and evenings doing what they have always wanted to do; help clients travel back into the past at their historic photographic studio.

Margaret teaches Spanish in Elkhorn, while James is in charge of information technology for the Elkhorn School District. Several years ago they decided it would be fun to operate an old-time photo studio when they retired. Margaret began collecting and making suitable costumes for historic photos and they began taking portraits at their home in Elkhorn. Soon it became apparent that they were running out of room for the costumes they were accumulating, and that the roll-down backdrops they were using — though they seemed to satisfy their customers — weren't what they really wanted.

"We decided we wanted to purchase a commercial building," says James. "We found the perfect location on Walworth Street in Delavan. A building that housed (name) was for sale and

had an apartment on the second floor."

The Adams' sold their house and bought the building. They tore out the drop ceiling in the shop to expose the tin ceiling above it. Then they began to build sets for their photo studio.

When they opened June 1, they were able to offer customers a sheriff's office, complete with jail cell, a Victorian parlor, a snow scene with a sleigh that is particularly appropriate for Christmas card photos; a laundry/bathroom with a claw-foot tub; a Western saloon complete with bar and poker table; the Acme Storage Company, complete with Tommy guns and other 1920s gangster-era props; a Victorian boudoir; and an outdoor garden scene. They also have costumes to fit every situation, including striped prisoners' uniforms that they had to buy from the company that makes them, mostly for Southern jails, because Margaret couldn't find wide-striped black and white material to make her own.

They also drove to Wyoming to acquire costumes from a studio that had gone out of business.

"People have a wide variety of choices," says Margaret. "They can dress up as a mobster in a zoot suit with a tommy gun or as a flapper in a fringed dress. They can relive the Wild West as the sheriff, a bank robber, a gunslinger, a madame, or a saloon girl.

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Margaret and James Adams pose in period costumes in the Victorian Parlor set at Adams Family Features in Delavan. The couple have several settings and hundreds of costumes that capture that old-time feeling at their downtown Delavan studio. (Photo furnished)



Posing prior to the wedding ceremony at Adams Family Memories on Wednesday, July 15, are (from left) maid of honor Joleigh Folkers, Bride Michele Hagberg, groom Michael Caldwell and best man Damien Caldwell. (Beacon photo)

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RED HOT BUYS

Adams Family

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"Or perhaps they fancy themselves as a Victorian gentleman or lady, envision themselves in the Old South as a Southern gentleman, a union soldier, or a Southern lady in an elegant hoop skirt.

"We dress people in the period of their choice and take their photos," explains Margaret. "We print a photo in minutes in an antique sepia brown tone, in black and white, or in antique color."

"Old Time photos make great anniversary, birthday, and Mother's and Father's Day gifts," says James. "Old Time Photos also provides a fun activity for family reunions, or any kind of get together."

For instance, when Michele Hagberg and Michael Caldwell came in to see the shop, Michele was immediately taken with the idea of having their impending wedding there.

"We had planned to have our wedding on the lawn of our century-old house in Delavan," she said, "but as soon

were dressed by Margaret Adams in suitable Victorian costumes.

Before the ceremony, members of the wedding party posed for photos in various sets in the studio, including the laundry/bathroom where Michael pretended to scrub Michele's feet. Michele and Joleigh posed in the Western saloon next to a sign that reads "Beware - This establishment frequented by pickpockets and loose women."

Judge Farnsworth united the couple in holy wedlock and Mr. and Mrs. Caldwell posed for more pictures.

Although old time photos are 90 percent of the business, James Adams works as a disc jockey and produces video programs for wedding receptions in which he uses photos of the bride and groom while they were growing up for the benefit of guests who haven't known both of them all their lives. He also produces memory DVDs for such occasions as anniversaries, birthdays and funerals. Then there are videotapes of theater productions and music recitals. He can produce DVDs, CDs and training videos, too.



Michael Caldwell pretends to bath his bride's feet in the Victorian claw-foot tub, under which is placed a bearskin rug. Note that this was before the ceremony. (Beacon photo)



Maid of honor Joleigh Folkers and Bride Michele Hagberg point to a sign on the wall of the Western saloon set that warns patrons to beware of loose women. (Beacon photo)

as I saw the studio and the costumes, I changed my mind.

"We love the studio and this way we didn't have to worry about the weather ruining the occasion," Michele said.

Asked if they could host a wedding, the Adamases said yes. When the bride said she wanted a dusty rose gown, Margaret made one for her.

The couple were married in the garden set at the studio on Wednesday, July 15. Village of Darien Municipal Judge Roger Farnsworth officiated. Joleigh Folkers was maid of honor and Michael's son, Damien, was the best man. Everyone in the bridal party except the judge, who brought his own robe,

The studio is open Tuesday through Sunday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. through Labor Day, after which the hours will change to 4-8 p.m. Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. - 7 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Their phone number is 728-3686. See more on the Web at www.adamsfamilymemories.com.

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