

## **Charles Stedham Ripley**

### **From Offers of Kingship to Gilpin County Colorado Gold Miner**

One of Lieutenant Ripley's most cherished possessions was a document of formal notification signed by the representatives of Great Britain, Germany and the United States. It informed him that the crown of Samoa awaited him. He was the indisputable adopted son of King Malietoa. To take a place among potentates and powers, to hail as "brothers" the rulers of the world, is an opportunity that comes to few, and that is not lightly to be cast aside. Nevertheless, in the estimation of Lieutenant Ripley, to be an American was better than to be a king: the commissioners were politely but firmly informed that they must go elsewhere.

Under the title of "America Kings," IRON COUNTY RECORD., May 16, 1913, (Cedar City, Utah) discovered on the website *Chronicling America*: John L. Cowan wrote that few American adventurers and others who have attempted to set up petty kingdoms can be listed here-- "If Americans who have achieved a crown and kingdom have thus been few, the number of those who, like Caesar, have refused the insignia of royalty is smaller. In fact, history records but a single instance in which the throne of an existing monarchy was proffered to a citizen of the republic by authorities competent to make good the gift. In this unique occurrence, the throne of the Samoan Islands was proffered by England, Germany and the United States to Lieutenant Charles S. Ripley, retired, of the United States Navy, who showed his appreciation of a good thing by declining a crown rather than renounce his American citizenship."

According to a well known naval authority, "Lieutenant Ripley was graduated from the Naval Academy in 1881 and was placed on the retired list as a lieutenant April 22, 1898, as a result of disability from an incident of service. He was of seafaring stock of the coast of Maine and when only fifteen years old ran away from home and joined the navy. A matter-of-fact recital of the stirring events of his career would supply material for a source of melodramas" states the article. He was shipwrecked on the high seas, lost in the tropic jungle, snowbound in the mountains, attacked by savages and exposed to hazards on land and sea. He represented the American government in various diplomatic capacities, carried official dispatches through the wilds of Madagascar and served through the war with Spain.

"When the triangular imbroglio over the Samoan Islands reached an acute stage, making a war that would involve Great Britain, Germany and the United States appear imminent, the finest warships of the budding American Navy were dispatched to Apia Harbor. On the American warship *Vandalia* was Lieutenant Ripley. With his brother officers he paid his respects to the sorely hectored monarch, King Malietoa. Malietoa perceived in the presence of the American vessels the only hope of the preservation of his kingdom from an annihilation.

In Lieutenant Ripley he seemed to take an unaccountable interest. It appeared that a seafaring ancestor of Lieutenant Ripley's, some generations back, who was supposed to have been lost at sea, had been shipwrecked on the shores of Samoa, and had been rescued by the islanders. He became a great man among the people, courted and married a dusky Princess, and became the progenitor of a line of kings. The family history of the Ripleys dovetailed into that of the royal house of Samoa to a nicety, making it evident that the American officer's great great uncle and Malietoa's grandfather were one and the same person. Nothing would satisfy Malietoa but the adoption of Lieutenant Ripley as his son. To this proposition the officer demurred, but all his objections were overruled, and the ceremony of adoption was performed with much barbaric pomp.

Not long afterward occurred the memorable shipwreck at Apia the capital and the largest city of Samoa . Lieutenant Ripley was on board the Vandalia as she was sinking, but swam to safety, and then went back into the very jaws of death to aid in the rescue of the officers and marines on board the sinking Trenton. As a reward for his services he was sent to the United States with dispatches telling the tale of the disaster, and was given a year's leave on full sea pay. Then his duty called him to Madagascar, to China, to Alaska, to the Philippines: but never back to Samoa. Malietoa was forgotten.

Meanwhile after various vicissitudes in the affairs of Samoa Malietoa died, and the islands were left without a king. Malietoa left no direct issue, although the islands were full of collateral heirs clamorous for the crown. An international commission endeavored to decide on a legitimate claimant, satisfactory to the people, and not obnoxious to the three powers immediately concerned. It was finally decided that the only person whose rights were indisputable was the adopted son of King Malietoa, Lieut. Charles S Ripley, U.S.A. In the estimation of Lieutenant Charles Stedman Ripley, to be an American was better than to be a king: and the commissioners were politely but firmly informed that they must go elsewhere. Needless to say the unusual document he did receive became one of the Lieutenant's most cherished possessions.

After the close of the Spanish American war, Lieutenant Ripley was placed on the retired list. Then he donned the rough garb of the prospector, went to the heart of the Rockies, and began to dig for gold. His efforts were crowned with success, and he became the founder of American City, in Gilpin County Colorado.



There he built a castle ten thousand five hundred feet above the level of the sea. In 1906 \*\*he married a fair maid of Illinois, and carried her to Columbine Castle. It was probably the only home in America that had a timbered mine shaft leading down from the basement to Nature's treasure vaults.

(Pictures from DPL Western History collection)

Not only was Mr. Ripley a navy seaman, a potential King of the Samoan Islands, and a successful Colorado gold miner at American City in Gilpin County but he was also a genealogist and author of an Ingersoll Genealogy - "The Ingersolls of Hampshire: A Genealogical History of the family from their settlement in America, In the Line of John Ingersoll of Westfield Massachusetts" available at Denver Public Library. Starting page 97 – Harriett Jencks Ingersoll was born in Springfield MA Oct. 1 1835. She was married Aug. 13, 1856 to Charles Phelps Huntington Ripley. Their first born was Charles Stedham Ripley born in Brooklyn, NY, 20 June 1857. \*\* Charles S. married Katherine Margaretta Von Hause of Speyer-on-the-Rhine 15 April 1886. Yes, the parents of this interesting Charles Stedham Ripley with a family revolutionary connection, Saxon and English connections and much much more are included in this genealogy Charles wrote of his family.