

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

The Diedrich House is a rare gem on Watson Street

Following up on the number of responses and inquiries received relating to a prior Now & Then in Ripon article about modernist architecture (“Ripon Horicon Bank building features award-winning architecture, Jan 6, 2022), the Ripon Historical Society looked further into this same architectural design genre throughout the history of the Ripon community.

In 1952, a modernist home still known as the “Diedrich House” was built at 954 Watson St. At that time, Harry (1893-1977) and Muriel (1913-2005) Diedrich were known for entertaining and sought to build a residence with a large sweeping great room and flow for their family and guests. This led them to review open-concept living and Prairie Style architecture exemplified in the work of famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). In fact, the Diedrichs had the house designed by American architect Russell Barr Williamson (1893-1964), who was an apprentice, draftsman, and later chief designer and project planner to Wright from 1914 to 1917. After Williamson left Wright’s

employment, he started his own architecture firm in Milwaukee and designed many buildings, including the Eagles Club in Milwaukee, the Iserman houses in Kenosha, along with other homes in Fox Point, River Mills, Mequon, Beaver Dam and the surrounding areas. The house at 954 Watson St. is the only known Russell Bar Williamson design in Ripon. He did design two homes in Green Lake and three in Fond du Lac. New owners and conservators alike The home stayed in the Diedrich family until 2009. The second and current owners, Dave and Rebecca Reeves, always wanted to own a Williamson-designed home. The couple searched throughout Wisconsin several years to find a Williamson home and were excited to find one in Ripon. The interior of the home includes rare Pecky cypress wood, large modern windows, original built-in modernist furniture and mixed materials, including wood and stone, giving it the modernist and Prairie-style feel the couple

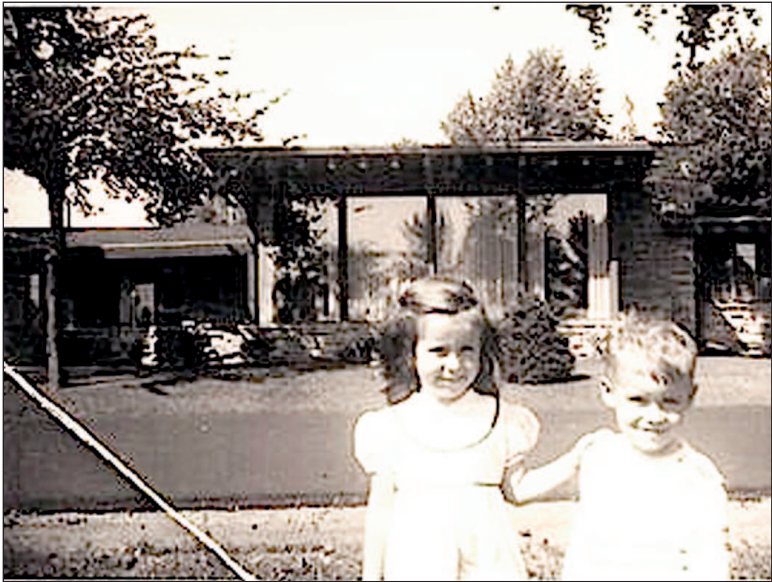


THE EXTERIOR OF the house at 954 Watson St. remains intact as it originally was designed in 1952. submitted photo

were seeking. The house’s clean design lines and simplistic feel make it timeless — a classic formula, although unique among Ripon’s widely-known antique and Victorian-era houses.

Little Known Facts

The house was offered for public tour in 2010 and 2016 as part of public events. Visitors were impressed at the amount to light coming in through the large receiving room windows that face Barlow Park and the condition of the built-in modernist furniture. The house also has been featured in a book written by architect Williamson’s son, Russell Barr Williamson, Jr., in 2000. The book includes many stories and photos, including the house at 954 Watson St. in Ripon. This book may be searched online and may periodically be found used, for sale, on www.



CHILDREN PLAY OUTSIDE 954 Watson St. on Labor Day in 1954. submitted photo

amazon.com among other sites. is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. For more information follow us at Facebook/riponhistory or www.riponhistory.org. The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It



THE DESIGN INTEGRITY of the house’s interior includes mixed materials and many built-in pieces of furniture submitted photo

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