

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Independence Day is more than a celebration; it's a tribute

TO THE EDITOR:

As we approach the 4th of July, let us pause to reflect on the meaning behind the fireworks and festivities. Independence Day is more than a celebration — it is a tribute to the courage, sacrifice, and unwavering commitment of those who came before us to secure the freedoms we enjoy today.

As members of the VFW Ladies Auxiliary, we

are dedicated to honoring the legacy of our veterans and educating our communities on the importance of patriotism. This holiday is a time to remember the brave men and women who have defended our nation and to pass along the values of duty, honor, and country to the next generation.

We encourage everyone to proudly display the American flag, participate in community events,

and take a moment of silence for those who have served and those who continue to protect our liberties.

Happy Independence Day!

— Dana Corkran-Eckstein
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Now & Then in Ripon ... Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society

July 4th celebrations once consisted of carnivals

John Wilson (1901-1990) moved to Ripon with his parents in 1906 and graduated from Ripon High School.

He was Ripon's mayor from 1956 until 1960, worked at Speed Queen (now known as "Alliance Laundry Systems"), and lived in his childhood home at 562 Metomen St.

From 1946 until the mid-1960s, Wilson was a freelance writer for two local newspapers.

In July 1965 he wrote about the Fourth of July in Ripon for his column "Old Ripon Revisited" in the *Ripon Commonwealth Press*. Some of that column is reprinted here.

"Years ago, Ripon annually observed the glorious Fourth of July with a public celebration. Sometimes a professional carnival would be set up on Ripon's Main Street with free acts. I can remember a ladder approximately 85 feet high for a daredevil high diver. This was located between the old Northwestern freight depot and the Pin Bowl (located near the corner of Blackburn and East



THIS PHOTOGRAPH FROM the archives of the Ripon Historical Society was taken on July 3, 1909 of a Fourth of July carnival and daredevil.

Jackson streets). The diver was dressed in red leotards, shirt and helmet with two horns representative of a daredevil. It was a tank dive into water with a gasoline like substance which was set ablaze at the time of the dive. Another celebration featured a balloon ascension which took place on Mill Street.

"Sometimes there was no professional carnival and local organizations had their own

concessions. Bandstands were erected on the street for band concerts played by various bands including the Ripon City Band, Markesan band, Berlin band, Green Lake band and the Brandon band. The stands were all decorated with bunting of stars and stripes.

"It is recalled that another high-diving ladder of about 85 feet was erected on the street near the former Beigick garage (now J's BBQ, 333 Watson Street). A lady made a 50-foot net dive while the man dove from the top of the ladder into the net. These Fourth of July celebrations used to attract huge crowds from all over the area.

"And of course, during this period, firecrackers of various sizes were exploded all over the community. Fireworks of various types were exploded by the old and young alike. There were the torpedo's which came packed in sawdust padding. They were thrown against a hard surface to explode. Firecrackers of various sizes from tiny to giant were fired. They were especially good under tin cans. Then there were cap pistols and canes that exploded when stamped to a hard surface.

Usually, there wasn't any public fireworks in the evening as most families had their own. There were sparklers, skyrockets, rocket wheels that usually were fastened to hitching posts



FORMER RIPON MAYOR John Wilson (1901-1990) is shown here talking to Otto Griebing, a clown with the Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey Circus. Wilson, who joined the circus as a trapeze flyer, wrote about Fourth of July daredevils and carnivals in a 1965 issue of the *Ripon Commonwealth Press*.

Circus World Museum Photo

and roman candles.

"... Ripon had many enterprising merchants in this period. Store windows were often engaging. On one occasion the local hardware merchant had a hypnotized man pedaling a bicycle in his window hours each day which advertised the name of the vehicle. Another case was a hypnotized man at slumber in a bed in a window. Needless to say, this always attracted much attention.

"One Ripon grocer exhibited behind glass in a window, a large spider or tarantula which had crept into his order of bananas and was discovered without too great an incident."

Perhaps these types of Fourth of July activities in Ripon influenced Wilson as after attending business college from 1923 until 1926 in Fond du Lac he became a trapeze flyer for

the Sheboygan-based Seils-Sterling Circus. Then in 1933, at the age of 32, he became part owner of the Holcum-Gollmar Circus.

Wilson was a member of the Circus Fans Association and served as its chairperson from 1958 until 1963. In 1969, he was offered a job at the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wis. He worked at the museum until he returned to Ripon to retire from the circus for the second time.

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information, visit www.riponhistory.org, facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety or instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/.



THE FOURTH OF July meant celebrations in Ripon including a carnival. This 1909 photograph shows a Ferris wheel set up on Watson Street.

Ripon Historical Society photo