

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

Fundraising quilts were popular around turn of 20th century

Many people like to snuggle in front of a fire and read a good book or watch a movie in the winter months. They wrap themselves in a warm blanket and dream of the return of warmer weather.

The Ripon Historical Society has a collection of quilts dating back to 1840. However, not all quilts were used for warmth. Two quilts in the society's collection were used as fundraisers for St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 217 Houston St.

St. Peter's was founded in 1860 and is the oldest continually occupied church in Ripon. Built in a Carpenter Gothic style, the church is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1903, the Women's Circle of St. Peter's made an 86-inch-by-66-inch quilt with more than 670 names found in 48 circles each divided into 16 triangles.

The people of Ripon made a donation to sign their name on a piece of fabric, the ladies embroidered the names in gold-colored thread and then formed the pieces into the quilt.

The population of Ripon in 1900 was 3,818, so having 670 featured names on the 1903 quilt represents a large percentage of the community. The quilt



THIS CIRCA 1910 photographs shows St. Peter's Episcopal Church, 217 Houston St. The church was founded in 1860 and is the oldest continually occupied church in Ripon. In 1903 and 1916, the Women's Circle of St. Peter's made quilts to raise money for church projects. Both quilts are housed at the Ripon Historical Society. *submitted photo*

is a virtual "who's who" of the residents of Ripon at the turn of the century.

The Ladies Society made another quilt in 1916 featuring 330 names embroidered on 23 circles divided into 16 triangles. A total of 35 circles are on the quilt and some are dedicated to the church name, Women's Circle officers and other information. Half of the circles are outlined in yellow thread with the names

embroidered in black thread and the other half are outlined in black thread with the names embroidered in yellow thread.

Both quilts are hand sewn and made of cream-colored cotton. A volunteer at the Ripon Historical Society recorded each name found on the quilts and compiled an index for easy reference.

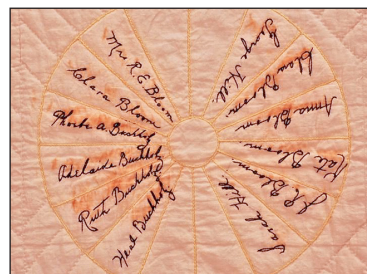
Fundraising quilts started becoming popular in the mid 1800s as women used their traditional sewing skills to raise money for various charitable activities. By the late 1800s and early 1900s, fundraising quilts became a staple of women's organizations especially church groups.

Many times with fundraising quilts, people paid more money to have their name placed near the middle of the quilt and less money towards the outside edges. If people contributed a nickel per name, with 670 names on the 1903 quilt, this would total \$33.50 (approximately \$1,206 today).

Both quilts were donated by the church to the Ripon Historical Society in 1970. They are registered on the National Quilt Index. The quilt index is a searchable data base that assists with research, education,



THE ST. PETER'S 1916 Ladies Society quilt had 35 circles each divided into 16 triangles and featuring 330 embroidered names embroidered on 23 circles. Fundraising quilts such as this one were a popular way to raise funds in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Each person made a donation to have their name added to the quilt. *submitted photos*



THE 1903 ST. Peter's Episcopal Church fundraising quilt was made by the Women's Circle and features over 670 names found in 48 circles and embroidered in gold-colored thread on cream-colored cotton fabric. *submitted photo*

and public access to some of America's best quilts.

Quilts like the two St. Peter's fundraising quilts are historically significant and tell the story of life in rural Wisconsin. Currently, the society's quilts are folded and wrapped in white sheets for storage. The society is trying to raise money to make sure each quilt can be stored in an archival acid-free box which will preserve them well into the future.

The cost of the archival boxes is \$40 per quilt. The society is asking the public to sponsor a quilt by donating funds for this

project. Donations to the quilt sponsorship fundraiser may be online at www.riponhistory.org/quilt-sponsorship/.

Checks may be mailed to the Ripon Historical Society, 508 Watson St., Ripon, WI 54971. "Quilt sponsorship" should be noted on the memo line.

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.

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