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

## Early marketing drove economic growth

Early marketing throughout America included the use of banners, business names painted on signs and hand-painted messages on shop windows.

Paid actors sometimes paraded streets to draw attention to entertainment, events, services and wares that were offered for sale — all designed to attract customers to make purchases and spend money.

During the 1800s into the 1900s, Ripon businesses followed these same practices.

Examples include Ripon's local movie theater placing sandwich-board signs on sidewalks announcing current and future shows. The majority of downtown Ripon stores advertised their events and products in the *Ripon Commonwealth*.

# Biegick Brothers advance local marketing in Berlin and Ripon

Two innovative automotive service marketers — Edward (1889-1972) and Walter (1887-1962) — were known locally as the "Biegick Brothers." They both owned businesses in Berlin and Ripon.

Their establishments included a bicycle and repair shop, multiple gas stations, tire and service sales and repairs, and eventually new car showrooms.

An example of the Biegick Brothers' marketing successes was a promotion giving away a free gallon of gasoline to customers living within a 50-mile radius of their business if they purchase five gallons of gas.

Local records note that this promotion resulted in 1,880 gallons of gas being sold and 313 gallons being provided free to



**IN JUNE OF** 1929 the Biegick Brothers' full page ad in the Ripon Commonwealth invites guests to dance in their service garage located at 333 Watson St. (now J's BBQ. *submitted photo* qualified buyers. evening of "ballroom dancing"

Another innovative and attention-getting promotion occurred when the Biegick Brothers opened a gas station and car

service in 1929 at 333 Watson

St. (now J's BBQ restaurant).
At that time, the car service bays were located on the side of the building. These bays had garage doors which have since been replaced by glass windows facing Seward Street. For their grand opening event, the

Biegick Brothers advertised an

evening of "ballroom dancing in the service garage," hiring an orchestra from Oshkosh to play live music while people were encouraged to ballroom dance in the open garage space.

Later, when Walter Biegick opened a Goodyear Tire Store, he decided that he also wanted to visit their manufacturing plant in Akron, Ohio. The Goodyear Factory in Ohio also housed the "Goodyear Blimp" which was a floating Zeppelin air machine that flew over cit-

ies, towns and sports events as an advertisement for their tire products. At this same time, a contest was created in which Goodyear tire dealers nationwide received "points-as-miles" for every sale of their tires or inter tubes. The "points-as-miles" promotion lasted nine weeks, during which Walter created an incentive for his own sales team in to help him qualify to win the contest.

This resulted in Walter winning a two-day trip to Ohio and flying in the Goodyear Blimp.

As Biegieck's Goodyear tire sales grew, Walter brought in a 12-foot-tall Goodyear tire for display that weighed 1,000 pounds. The display item cost more than \$5,000 and the tire tread was 3 inches thick.

Souvenir hunters cut pieces off of the oversized tire with their pocket knives, and then took the pieces of rubber home to show their families.

Walter received a letter of achievement wall plaque from the president at Goodyear for leading sales, and being an outstanding Goodyear Tire Dealer.

In 1936, Walter purchased a showroom north of his service garage in Ripon to demonstrate what he called a "Chrysler Caravan," featuring every model car made by Chrysler at that time. At 8 p.m. in the evenings, he featured "free-film night" in his car showroom. Film nights including movies of racing drivers, driving daredevil stunts, motor comedy and thrills.

Walter operated his car dealership, tire store and gas station business for 35 years. He officially retired in April of 1962 and died in August of that same

vear.

#### The end of an era

When he passed away, Walter obituary stated that he died of a heart attack on Highway 49 driving South to a Milwaukee Braves baseball game.

Never married, he combined his business ownership, aggressive marketing and management with serving the United States in World War I.

Walter's business interests and constant marketing caused him to move from his family's home in Berlin to 733 Watson St., where he resided for many years. Although he was survived by two of his "Biegick Brothers," Edward and John of Berlin, he was preceded in death by three other brothers and two sisters.

As part of his final legacy, although he already had passed away, Walter continued to be mentioned in the newspaper headlines of his relatives' obituaries. Examples are *Ripon Commonwealth* death notices that read: "Brother of Walter Biegick dies" and "Relative of Walter Biegick dead" before the names of those deceased.

Walter created his own marketing spotlight and reputation which made him memorable. He is buried next to his relatives in Oakwood Cemetery in Berlin.

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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