

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

Ripon, 'gem' city of Wisconsin, celebrated in 1904 keepsake

The 1904 book "A Souvenir of Fond du Lac County, Wis." was printed and sold for \$1 (equal to \$36 today). The book included five pages of Ripon photographs and a four-page pull out panoramic photo of Ripon's Watson Street. In addition, it included three general pages about Ripon. Although printed 121 years ago, the descriptions of Ripon as a vibrant community still ring true today.

The Ripon section of the book began by saying, "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid," and Ripon, the little 'gem' city of Wisconsin, certainly has not hid her light under a bushel." It noted that "In 1858, Ripon was duly incorporated as a city, and ever since has been steadily, but surely growing, the latest statistics according her population of nearer five than four thousand."

The book goes on to note that "The history of this small world is unique, and of more than local interest ... linked to the name of this 'loveliest village of the plain, where health and plenty cheer[ed] the laboring swain.' Like its prototype Ripon, England, with its park-like appearance, magnificent trees and close-cleft flower-decked lawns, it is preeminently a city of homes, where a love of the beautiful is inculcated and

fostered."

It also talked about the "many excellent lines of goods manufactured within her borders." This included two manufactures of hosiery, leather gloves and mittens, wagon factory, a pickle company, flour mills, box factory, creameries, foundries, machine shops, harness shops and a brewery.

The book bragged that Ripon had four hotels, an excellent education system "afforded by college and public schools," along with a soon-to-open public library.

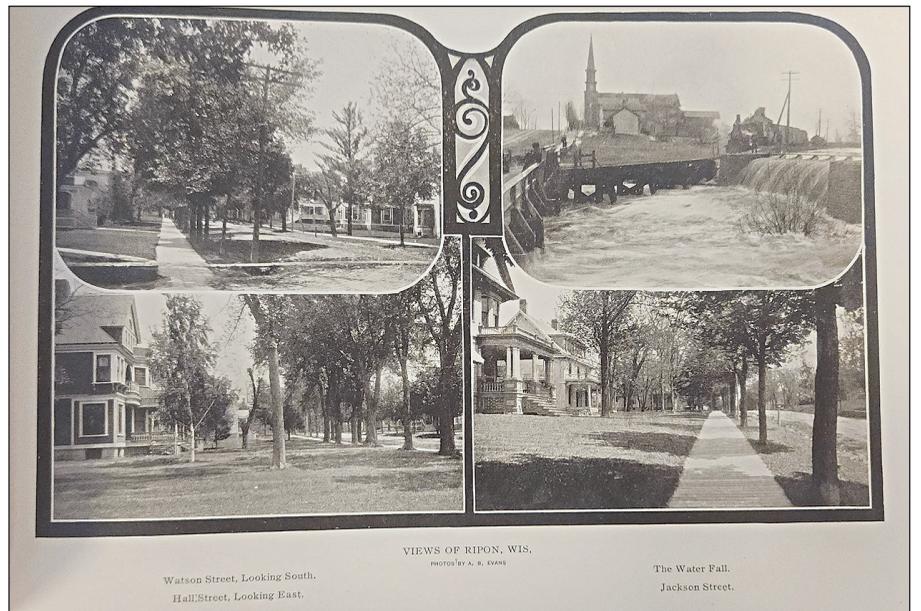
"A large music club, a civic association and several ladies' clubs are expanding the ideals of the citizens along higher lines of art, literature, beauty and progress," the book read.

The Ripon pages ended noting, "Once, long, long ago, the merry and every facetious 'drummer' called Ripon the 'Sleeping Beauty,' but since the Fairy Prince of Progress has touched and kissed her into life, she is wide awake and has pushed steadily forward into new and fresher fields and extended her influence."

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.



THE 1904 BOOK, "A Souvenir of Fond du Lac County, Wis." shows what is now known as Rotary square in the 100 block of Watson Street. The upper nighttime photo shows the square after 1901, when cobblestones were added. The photos below it show Watson Street from the days of unpaved dirt streets. *submitted photo*



SEVERAL RIPON HOUSES were pictured in the 1904 book "A Souvenir of Fond du Lac County, Wis." *submitted photo*



NONE OF THE three schools featured in the 1904 book survived to today. *submitted photo*



RIPON COLLEGE, FOUNDED in 1851, was featured on the last page about Ripon in the "A Souvenir of Fond du Lac County, Wis." *submitted photo*



EIGHT CHURCHES WERE featured in the Ripon pages of "A Souvenir of Fond du Lac County, Wis." The First Baptist Church in the upper left-hand side of the page is now the American Legion Post at 113 E. Fond du Lac St. The Catholic church and the German Evangelical Lutheran Church have been razed. The German Methodist Church is now a private residence at 320 State Street. The First M.E. Church, formally the Ripon Community Church, is up for sale at the corners of Ransom and West Fond du Lac Streets. The other churches are still in use. *submitted photo*