

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

Updated historical marker celebrates Ripon's Utopian roots

A new Wisconsin State Historical Marker recently was placed in Ceresco Park on South Union Street between Church and North streets.

It is one of more than 630 Wisconsin State Historical Markers that contribute to the state's rich historical heritage by telling the stories about events, individuals, buildings or sites of local, state or national significance.

The Local History Outreach Program of the Wisconsin Historical Society administers the Wisconsin State Historical Marker program.

Wisconsin passed a law in 1953 that officially established the historical marker program. This formalized the marker's structure and design.

The markers come in various sizes and are made of cast aluminum, with raised cream-colored letters on a tobacco brown background. They feature the Wisconsin state badger symbol, which is embossed at the top of each marker.

Four historical markers are in the Ripon community. The first historical marker to be placed in Ripon was in 1964. It is marker No. 135, honoring the birthplace of the Republican Party and is located at the Little White Schoolhouse, 1074 W. Fond du Lac St.

Marker No. 181 about the community of Ceresco was placed in Ceresco Park in 1972. Marker No. 184 relating the history of Ripon College was installed near East Hall at Ransom Street in 1972. The fourth marker, erected in 1984, was No. 273 and featured Carrie Chapman Catt, a suffragist, in the Pedrick Wayside at the intersection of Union Street and Highway 23.

The Ceresco marker was a small marker that measured 24-inches wide by 36-inches high. The sign and the pole that held it had degraded over 50 years and it fell over in a storm during the summer of 2023.

The marker read:

"The Long House is one of the few visible remains of the pioneer settlement of Ceresco. Founded in 1844 and named for Ceres, the Roman Goddess of Agriculture. Ceresco was the home of the Wisconsin Phalanx, an experiment in communal



GEORGE MILLER (1919-2011), a former Ripon College history professor and Ripon Historical Society president and board member, stands with Ripon Mayor Mark Conrad after the Ceresco marker was installed in 1972. The sign had degraded over the years and fell over in a summer storm. It was recently replaced with a larger marker.

submitted photo



THE NEW Wisconsin State Historical Marker found in Ceresco Park includes information on Warren Chase (1813-1891). Chase was the leader of the Wisconsin Phalanx of Ceresco and had progressive attitudes about equal rights.

submitted photo

living according to the rule of the French social philosopher Charles Fourier. Under the leadership of Warren Chase, the Phalanx attracted a membership of about two hundred persons. The company enjoyed a few years of vigorous life, then declined, and disbanded in 1851. The village became a part of Ripon in 1853."

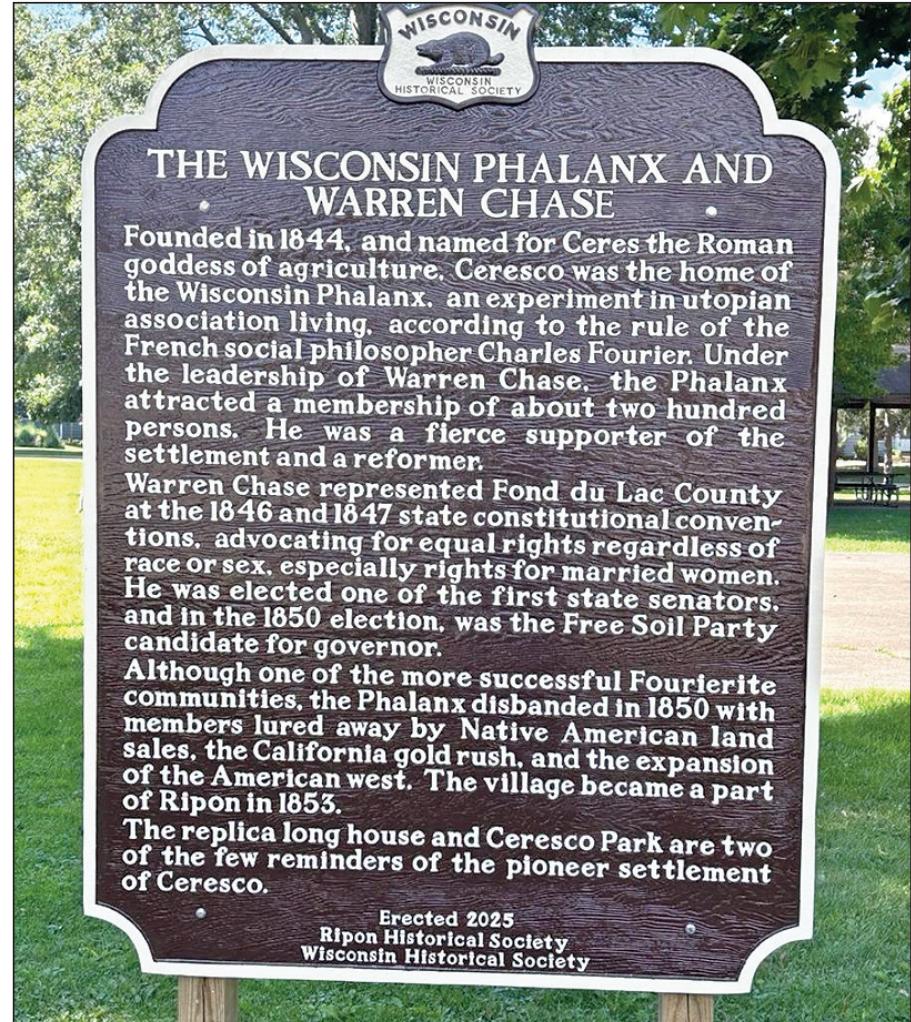
Former Ripon High School teacher Allan Mortenson, who wrote his master's thesis on the Wisconsin Phalanx, wanted a larger sign placed in Ceresco Park to honor Warren Chase (1813-1891). Chase was the leader of the Phalanx and had progressive attitudes about equal rights. He was a supporter of the temperance, abolitionist and spiritualism movements, helped to found Ripon College and was a politician.

Ripon Historical Society Archivist Carol Sachen and Museum Director Caron Sisko collaborated on the text for the new, larger marker. After many revisions, they were able to both commemorate the settlement of Ceresco as one of the more successful Fourierite communities and Chase's accomplishment. When the text was written, Sachen consulted with Mortenson and The Wisconsin State Historical Society, both of whom endorsed the marker text. A new marker then was ordered. Mortenson was the major donor for the new marker, which cost \$7,220.

A new 72-inch-by-54-inch, 200-pound marker recently was installed by the Ripon Public Works Department in Ceresco Park off Union Street. It is now known as marker No. 629 and titled, "The Wisconsin Phalanx and Warren Chase."

The marker reads:

"Founded in 1844, and named for Ceres the Roman goddess of agriculture, Ceresco was the home of the Wisconsin Phalanx, an experiment in utopian association living, according to the rule of the French social philosopher Charles Fourier. Under the leadership of Warren Chase, the Phalanx attracted a membership of about two hundred persons. He was a fierce supporter of the settlement and a reformer."



THIS LARGE 72-inch-by-54-inch Wisconsin Historical Marker recently was installed in Ceresco Park, replacing a smaller marker from 1972. The major donor for the marker was Ripon resident Allan Mortenson. The sign was installed by the Ripon Public Works Department.

submitted photo

Warren Chase represented Fond du Lac County at the 1846 and 1847 state constitutional conventions, advocating for equal rights regardless of race or sex, especially rights for married women. He was elected one of the first state senators, and in the 1850 election, was the Free Soil Party candidate for governor.

Although it was one of the more successful Fourierite communities, the Phalanx disbanded in 1850 with members lured away by Native American land sales, the California gold rush, and the expansion of the American west. The village became part of Ripon in 1853.

The replica long house and Ceresco Park are two of the few reminders of the pioneer settlement of Ceresco."

The Ripon College marker now is the

only small marker left in Ripon and the Ripon Historical Society believes it should be considered for replacement.

The Carrie Chapman Catt marker is one of only seven large markers in the state which feature women.

A list of all Wisconsin historical markers can be found through the Wisconsin Historical Society at wisconsinhistory.org.

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](http://riponhistory.org), facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety or instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety.

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