

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

Ripon has had many sledding spots over the years

When snow blankets the ground, many Riponites look forward to sledding. The location of this popular winter activity has changed over the years.

In the earlier days of Ripon, “standpipe hill” was used for sledding. Standpipe hill was located just west of Ripon College at the top of Congress Street, which borders Hillside Cemetery. The hill received its name from a standpipe built in 1890 as a water reservoir. It was razed in 1951. Congress Street was shut down to vehicles for the purpose of sledding.

Over the years, the *Ripon Commonwealth Press* noted many “sliding parties” down standpipe hill (Congress Street). The Jan. 1, 1937 *Commonwealth* reported “there were reports this week of several persons receiving injuries in coasting spills” on standpipe hill. The hill was covered with icy snow and “sledders had little control of their sleds and hence the spills were frequent.” One person broke his leg, another “suffered severe bruises” and a third was reported to have “suffered severe skin lacerations and bruises to the face.” Other reports included “coasters suffering minor cuts and bruises.” The last mention in the *Commonwealth*



THIS CIRCA 1940 photo shows students at Ripon College sledding down the hill to the southeast of Lane Library. Both sleds and cardboard boxes were used.

Press of sledding down standpipe hill was in 1947.

Ripon College always had been a popular sledding spot. Many Ripon College students, as well as the public, have fond memories of sledding down Sadoff Hill, which was located on the

north side of West Thorne Street just east of Union Street. This tradition ended in the winter of 2023 with the opening of Ripon College’s Hopp Stadium, which now encompasses the once popular sledding hill.

Historically, students would sled down the hill to the southeast of Lane Library. Students also utilize the small hill behind Mapes Hall for sledding.

The artifacts collection at the Ripon Historical Society contains a food tray that was signed by some of the members of the Ripon College class of 1975 at one of their reunions. Ripon College students were known to utilize food trays from Pickard Commons for sledding. A member of the class of 1975 noted cardboard also was used for sledding, however, the trays performed much better. This class member also revealed that in the early 1970s, one favored late-night sledding spots was the woods next to Merriman House near the east end of Congress Street. Merriman House was razed in 2021.

Kiwanis Park located off Thomas Street, is a popular sledding spot in Ripon. This sledding hill is located near the present city water tower and was first utilized for a ski hill. In 1949, the Ripon Noon Kiwanis Club purchased 9.5 acres of land and then moved a shelter building from Ceresco Park to the bottom of the hill for a warming house.



KIWANIS PARK, LOCATED off Thomas Street, is a popular sledding spot in Ripon. It was first developed as a ski hill in 1949 and revitalized in the late 1970s. A tow rope took skiers back to the top of the hill. Today, sledders must walk back to the top of the hill pulling their sleds.

submitted photo



THIS FOOD TRAY was signed by some of the members of the Ripon College class of 1975 at one of their reunions. Their class and many other Ripon College students used food trays like this one to sled down hills around the campus. *submitted photo*

A rope tow powered by a tractor brought skiers to the top of the hill. It is unclear how long this early ski hill rope tow was in operation, but by the early 1960s it was no longer on the hill. The hill was revitalized in the 1970s and a new tow rope was placed on the hill.

In the late 1980s, the ski hill closed due to the number of people needed to run the hill each weekend and the lack of sufficient snow. The rope tow was disbanded and the hill has been used exclusively for sledding since that time.

A popular lighted sledding hill is found in Zobel Memorial Park on Highway 49, one mile north of Highway 23 near Green Lake. This land used to be part of the Zobel farm, which encompassed more than 250 acres on both sides of Highway 49. Approximately 40 acres of the land was donated to Green Lake County in 1971 by Lillian Zobel (1892-1985) in honor of her brother, Edgar Zobel (1883-1969), the second generation to oversee the farm. In 1975, Green Lake County was awarded a federal grant for the development of the park, which has been enjoyed year-round by the public for more than 50 years.

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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