

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

## From pioneers to modern creators: Ripon's art legacy lives on

People started settling the Ripon area in the mid 1840s and art has always been a part of the community's heritage.

Today, Art MidWisconsin is an organization in the area that supports and promotes artists in the greater Ripon and Green Lake area.

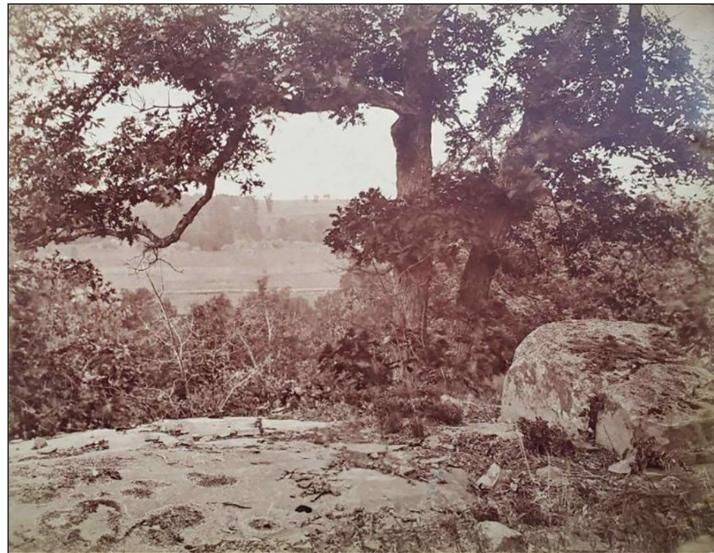
During the summer months many of its members may be found at local art fairs. In the fall, members work with children from the Boys & Girls Club of the Tri-County Area for the Arts & Crafts fund raiser. Throughout the year, exhibits of Art MidWisconsin's work are on display at places like Green Lake's Town Square and Thrasher Opera House.

From Jan. 23 through Feb. 13, Ripon College will host "Art MidWisconsin, A Collective of Visual Artists" as a learning experience for students in Professor Travis Nygard's classes.

The exhibit will be held in Ripon College's Caestecker Gallery, which is located within the C.J. Rodman Center for the Arts. A public talk and reception will be held on Friday, Jan. 30 from 7 to 8:30 p.m.

One early painter and photographer to Ripon was Joshua H. Wyckoff (1825-1909). Wyckoff came to Ripon in 1854 with his parents, siblings, and wife, Mary E. Wyckoff (1832-1904), who he had married in 1852.

The 1859 Ripon City Directory lists Wyckoff as an artist and shows the family liv-



**THIS 1873 PHOTOGRAPH** by Ripon photographer Joshua Wyckoff is of the Utley Granite Bluff. Utley is a community that no longer exists and was located south of Ripon near Fairwater.

*Joe Walker photo*

ing at Fond du Lac Street and Jefferson Street. The 1868-69 city directory lists Wyckoff as a photographer living on "Oshkosh Road, two doors west of Washington."

The Wyckoffs had five children: Charles (1858-1892), Bertha (1860-1863), Addie (1862-1873), Grant (1864-1878) and Mary Wyckoff Gardner (1867-1957).

The *Ripon Spur* of Jan. 25, 1856 reported, "We spent an hour, a day or two ago looking over the fine drawings and paintings of Messrs Wyckoff & Brother of this place. One of them has been mainly engaged in painting and drawing for the last seven or eight years and has some beautiful landscapes, portraits, etc. in various styles

of art. A number of scenes from nature — a portrait of Washington, a drawing of Hope and some others, peculiarly excellent."

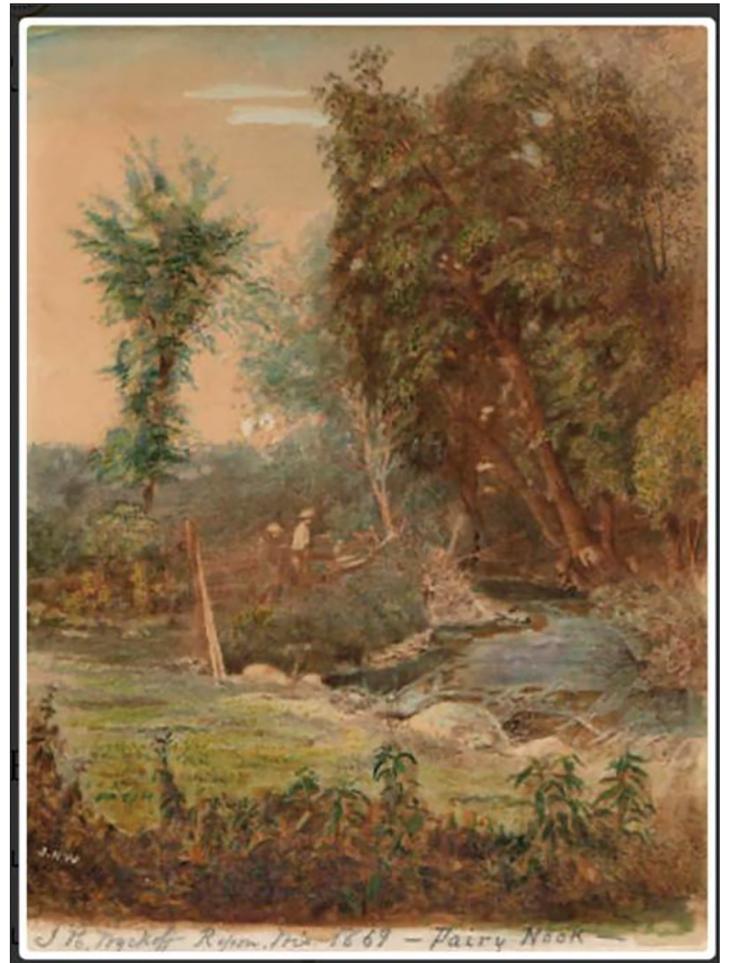
A small watercolor of Wyckoff's recently was on exhibit at Ripon College. The painting was dated 1869 and signed in the lower left corner "J.H.W." In the lower margin written in pencil is "J.H. Wyckoff — Ripon, Wis — Fairy Nook."

At the time Wyckoff was a photographer in the 1860s, photography was changing. Daguerreotypes had been the dominant process in photography for about two decades. The 1860s saw the introduction of wet-plate photography and other new and innovative techniques.

In 1868, Wyckoff and his brother, William K. Wyckoff (1827-1885), were approved for a patent to improve the use of photographic cameras. They called their invention the "Curvilinear Multigraph," which was an apparatus with a cone-shaped light conductor.

This enabled photographers to capture and direct sunlight, and to scale the size of photographs to make them smaller than the standard picture size without the use of two photo tubes that were needed for cameras at that time.

From Oct. 20, 1865 until Dec. 14, 1866, Wyckoff ran



**THIS SMALL WATERCOLOR** dated 1869 was titled "Fairy Nook" and painted by early Ripon artist Joshua Wyckoff. Wyckoff left Ripon in 1879 and by the 1880s was an artist in Denver, Colo. The painting is from the collection of Jaye Alderson.

*Ric Damm photo*

advertisements in the *Ripon Commonwealth* for a retail store. The ads all read, "Wyckoff & Co. — Art Union Gallery, over Coe Brothers Store, Ripon. Pictures made of all kinds and sizes, from a ring to life size. Paintings in Oil or Water Color and India Ink."

Wyckoff moved his family to Jackson, Mich. in 1879.

The Jan. 24, 1889 *Ripon Free Press* stated that "Joshua Wyckoff, the artist, who formerly resided here, is now located at Denver, Colo."

The Feb. 14, 1889 *Ripon Free Press* reported that more than 40 people from Ripon had moved to Denver and this included a mention of Wyckoff.

Ripon historian Sam Pedrick (1868-1964) noted in his Pedrick Genealogy Notebooks that "Mr. Wyckoff spent the last 15 or 20 years of his life as an artist in Denver in a back-office studio, where I called on him several times in the winter

of 1893-[9]4."

Pedrick stated in his historical research that "I recall, when a boy, George C. Taylor telling of finding in an old barn or building on Oshkosh Street, a lot of old photograph plates, stored away and apparently abandoned, which the youngsters of the neighborhood had cleaned off and used for windowpanes. These were doubtless the early day photographs taken by J.H. Wyckoff, which if preserved to this day would be invaluable."

*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://www.riponhistory.org), [facebook.com/riponhistorical-society](https://www.facebook.com/riponhistorical-society) or [instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/](https://www.instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/).*



**WRITTEN ON THE** back of this undated photograph is "Ceresco, Wis. Photo by J.H. Wyckoff with globe lens — moist process, Ceresco Mill." Ceresco was a community started in 1844 and located around the Ceresco Park area off Union Street. It disbanded in 1850 and combined with the community of Ripon.

*Dan Freimark photo*

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