

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

Ripon’s AFK Foundry dates back more than 160 years

The Ripon Historical Society receives many requests to research the history of people, homes and businesses.

Recently, AFK Foundry, 300 Pacific St., contacted the society regarding its history. Using the information provided from the historical society, company records and by conducting more research in historical copies of the *Ripon Commonwealth Press* and the *Ripon Free Press*, one of the company’s employees was able to compile a complete history of the company. This week’s Now & Then in Ripon is an abbreviated version of this history.

Lucius Thatcher (1831-1887) came to Wisconsin in 1855 and started the first foundry in Ripon around 1860. The foundry, known as “Thatcher’s Machine Shop,” was located near the Northwestern railroad tracks between Scott and Jackson Streets.

An early *Ripon Commonwealth Press* states that he started the foundry with a man named “Luce.” This is believed to be Hosea F. Luce, a harness maker.

Somewhere between 1863 and 1865, Dan Furniss (1824-1904) became a co-owner. Around 1865, Thatcher left the business and August Zinth (1830-1901) became a co-owner with Furniss.

Furniss was a blacksmith and lived on Scott Street. Zinth had come to Ripon in 1859 and also lived on the north side of Scott Street between Blackburn and Houston streets, which was near the foundry.

The Oct. 18, 1884 *Ripon Commonwealth Press* noted that Furniss and Zinth ran the foundry “for about 10 years, manufacturing threshing machines, cultivators, seeders and many other articles of machinery. Zinth then bought out Furniss and ran the business for about another 10 years.” The foundry then was purchased in 1879 by William F. Schaefer Jr. (1857-1926) and



THIS COMPANY LOGO comes from 1953 and reads “A.F. Klinzing Co., Foundry Division, Ripon, Wis.” and below this reads “Pig Iron to Cattle Fountains.” submitted photo

renamed “The Ripon Foundry and Machine Shop.”

The granite quarry in Montello opened around 1880 and the Redgranite quarry opened in 1889. They were in need of strong durable tools which Schaefer was able to provide. The foundry and machine shop also worked together to produce stationary gasoline engines for creameries and milk plants.

The Ripon Historical Society has an invoice from the foundry dated July 5, 1886 in which the heading read: “The Ripon Foundry and Machine Shop.” The invoice also proclaimed, “Engines, Boilers, Mill, and Steamboat Works” and “Wrought Iron, Pipes and Steam Fittings.” A *Ripon Commonwealth Press* article noted, “About 15 or 20 hands were employed in the shop in its sunniest days.”

A fire completely destroyed the foundry buildings and machines in 1895. Schaefer then built a new plant on Pacific Street in the same location AFK Found-

ry is today. Schaefer moved to Berlin from 1908-1913, where he operated a similar business.

He then returned to Ripon and reopened the foundry and also operated an automobile sales and garage business with his two sons: Gordon (1885-1963) and Florian (1887-1970). Gordon and Florian took over the business from their father around 1917.

In 1945, the A.F. Klinzing Co. Inc. took over the foundry in Ripon. August Ferdinand Klinzing (1885-1958) invented dairy equipment and earned more than 15 patents for his products from 1906-1957. He invented and patented stanchions, cow watering fountains, burial urns and barn gutter cleaners. His first factory was in St. Cloud, Minn. In 1924, he moved his operation to Milwaukee.

When Klinzing took over the foundry, his company did extensive remodeling to the building and machinery. The Ripon business now included showers, drinking fountains, a new heating plant, the latest core making and sand mixing machinery, molding machines, grinders and a new copula. The machine and car repair shop remained, but was run by Frank Resheske as an independent business.

After Klinzing died, Louis Prentice (1913-1972) and George Prentice (1917-1986) became the new owners.

A Sept. 14, 1967 *Ripon Commonwealth Press* noted that the Ripon foundry produced iron drinking cups for livestock along with doing work for Speed Queen (now known as “Alliance Laundry Systems”), and other



FORMER AFK FOUNDRY owner Robert Prentice holds an iron casting of a drinking cup for cows that the business manufactured in 1996. submitted photo

companies. It produced about six tons of iron castings daily with 30 employees.

When George had a heart attack not long after Lewis’s death, he sold out 50% of the company to Vernon Hoppman (1913-1997) and Lewis’s widow Inez Slaterry Prentice Stamm (1913-1999).

Prentice and Hoppman split the company in 1976 with Prentice retaining the Ripon foundry and Hoppman taking over the company’s other facility in Fond du Lac. During this time, the foundry work went from doing everything manually to automatic. After Prentice died, the company was taken over by his son, Robert Prentice, who had been working in the industry.

In the late 1980s, Robert started taking flying lessons. He met Corey Schram, a teenager who also had a passion for aviation. The two became friends and eventually Prentice persuaded Schram to work at the foundry.

Schram started as a general laborer. In 2014, Schram bought 50% of the stock from Robert and co-owned the Ripon foundry for a few years until 2019, when he took over 90%. As of 2023

Schram is full owner.

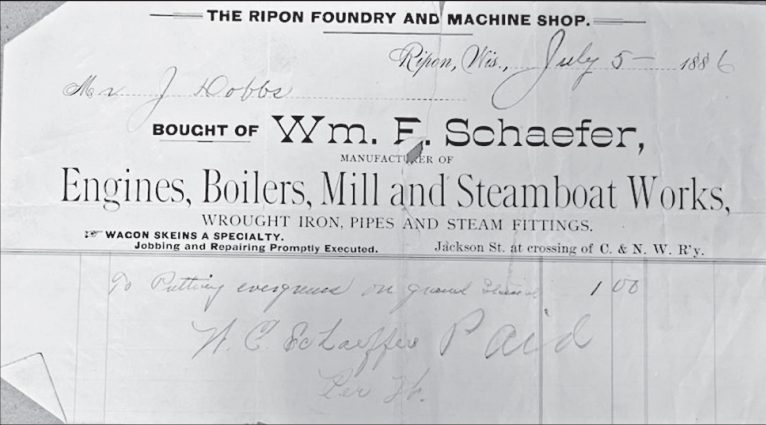
The foundry specializes in gray and ductile iron castings. *Reuters* reported that today “nine out of ten durable goods contain metal castings, which are made by pouring liquid metal into forms to create parts that are then trimmed and polished before they move onto other factories.”

Approximately 2,950 metal casting companies exists in America, employing about 225,000 people. Most of these companies are small businesses like AFK Foundry.

Metal casting was one of the 10 largest industries in America at the start of the 21st century. However, over the last 20 years many foundries have closed and fewer and fewer castings are made in America. Ripon is fortunate to still have AFK Foundry as an active business.

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 follow us at Facebook/riponhistory or www.riponhistory.org.



THIS 1886 INVOICE from the Ripon Foundry and Machine Shop owned by William Schaefer Jr. (1857-1926) was found in the archives of the Ripon Historical Society. submitted photo

Answers to the Crossword Puzzle from the July 24th issue of The Commonwealth Express

ABROGATED	SPIRAL	SHIH
SOAP	OPERA	PESETA
PRUSSIAN	BLUEMOON	ELSA
SNL	LAS	ART
BONEWHITE	TECHRISTMAS	
TUROW	EAT	HOIST
ETAL	OMAR	STIPE
ROYAL	PURPLERAIN	TEENS
RPM	ATM	UNA
AIOLI	MEALS	DOBE
CANARY	YELLOW	SUBMARINE
ENDS	ASKS	RELIC
SAP	NIB	TIP
CAMEL	MOCHA	BROWN
LLOSA	INALL	ATON
APR	SNEER	SST
SHOCKING	PINK	HOUSES
PASHAS	DOT	RAT
EBEL	SLATE	BLACK
RELO	AERIAL	CHEER
STYLE	NICELY	HELD

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