

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

Ripon's connections to women who changed America

By Pat Grahn

leukemia, most likely due to her work on the project. in 1947.”

In 1987, a Women's History Project requested the month of March be declared "National Women's History Month." Since 1995, U.S. Presidents have issued proclamations designating this as a month to celebrate the contributions that women have made and to recognize their achievements over the course of past and current American history.

Featured here for Women's History Month are three women who have a connection to Ripon, but did not live their entire lives in the community.

These women made their mark in the nation's history in a variety of fields.

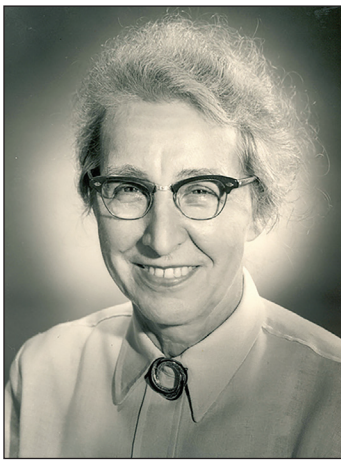
Elda Emma Anderson (1899-1961)

Anderson was born in Green Lake and earned her bachelor of arts degree in physics and mathematics from Ripon College in 1922. She then obtained a master's degree in physics from the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1924.

Anderson became an American physicist and health researcher. During World War II, Anderson worked on the Manhattan Project at Princeton University and Los Alamos National Laboratory.

She was the first person to create a pure sample of Uranium-235. Without it, the atomic bomb would not have been created.

After returning from the Manhattan Project, Anderson spoke out about the dangers of nuclear arms and educated people about the devastating effect of radiation on human health. She died in 1961 of breast cancer and



ELDA EMMA ANDERSON was born in Green Lake and earned her bachelor of arts degree from Ripon College in physics and mathematics. She went on to become an American physicist and health researcher. Working on the Manhattan Project, she was the first person to create a pure sample of Uranium-235. Without it, the atomic bomb would not have been created.

submitted photo

Carrie Clinton Lane Chapman Catt (1859-1905)

Referred to as a "daughter of Ripon," Catt was born in Ripon near the corners of Spaulding and Lane streets. She left the community at age 7 to move with her family to Iowa.

Catt is honored in Ripon with a Wisconsin Historical Marker, which is located in Pedrick Wayside at the corners of Union and West Fond du Lac streets. Out of 630 large historical markers throughout Wisconsin, Catt's is one of only seven large markers honoring women.

The marker reads, "A national leader of the woman suffrage movement, Carrie Chapman Catt was born in Ripon, Wisconsin in 1859 and spent most of her life as a tireless crusader for women's rights. A gifted organizer, political strategist and public speaker, Catt succeeded Susan B. Anthony as president of the nation's most important suffrage group, the National American Woman Suffrage Association, from 1900-04 and 1915-20. She transformed the movement into a purposeful organization and led the successful campaign for ratification of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution, guaranteeing women the right to vote. After passage of the amendment in 1920, Catt helped found and served as first president of the League of Women Voters. Her concern with women's rights was worldwide, and in 1904 she was elected first president for the International Woman Suffrage Alliance and served in the post until 1923. In later years, she was active in the international peace and disarmament movement. She died in New Rochelle, New York,



CARRIE CLINTON LANE CHAPMAN CATT was born in Ripon and moved out of the community at age 7. Catt was a leader in the women's suffrage movement, helping women to obtain the right to vote in 1920. She founded the National League of Women Voters and fought for women's rights in countries around the world.

submitted photo

Winifred Edgerton Merrill (1862-1951)

Merrill was the first American woman to earn a degree from Columbia University and the first woman in the country to be awarded a PhD in mathematics.

She was born in Ripon and her parents are found living in Ripon in the 1860 census, but not in the 1870 census.

Merrill had an interest in astronomy. Information on Merrill noted that her parents were well off enough to build her a small home observatory. She earned a bachelor of arts degree from Wellesley College in 1883.

She used data from the Harvard observatory to independently calculate the orbit of the Pons-Brooks comet of 1833. She asked permission from Columbia University to use its telescope. She was granted permission if she did "not disturb the male students." At Columbia, which was an all-male institution, she studied math and astronomy and was awarded a PhD in 1886.

Merrill was a member of a committee that helped to found Barnard College in 1889. This was New York's first secular institution to give women liberal arts degrees. She taught mathematics for several years and was offered a position as professor of mathematics at Wellesley College, but declined to get married. She went on to have four children.

In 1906, she founded a school for girls, which she directed until 1928. She was a trustee for Wellesley College, which honored the 50th anniversary of her graduation with her portrait, which was given to Columbia University. A plaque on the painting states that "she opened the door" for other women.

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, facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety/ or instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/.



WINIFRED EDGERTON MERRILL, pictured here in 1883, was the first American woman to earn a PhD in mathematics. She was born in Ripon and moved out of town as a child. *submitted photo*

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