

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

Many houses once put up fences to keep animals out of yard

On warm summer days one can hear lawn mowers cutting lawns around the community and catch the smell of freshly cut grass. However, this was not always the case in Ripon as farm animals kept by people living in the city roamed around freely eating grass, gardens and shrubs.

Ripon Historian Sam Pedrick (1868-1963) noted that one of the biggest issues in early Ripon was getting animals off the city streets. After Ripon was founded, one of the common uses of the streets was, as Pedrick stated, “pasturage by the owners of livestock.” If they could afford it, people put fences around their homes and properties to keep animals and their waste off the lawn and away from the house.

One reminder of these days is the Italianate house found at 538 Watson St. This house, which was built in 1878, still has an iron fence surrounding the property.

“An early ordinance, No. 10, enacted August 6, 1858, made the first move toward the regulation of the use of streets in this manner,” Pedrick wrote. “It ventured to prohibit the running at large of ‘neat cattle, horses, mules, goats, sheep, and swine’ between 8 o’clock in the evening and 4 o’clock in the morning.”

This meant that these animals could still roam anywhere in the city during the daytime. In November of that same year, the city council passed ordinance No. 12, stating that none of these animals could “run at large” after Nov. 1. For some unknown reason,

mules seemed to have been omitted from the two ordinances and could run free at any time.

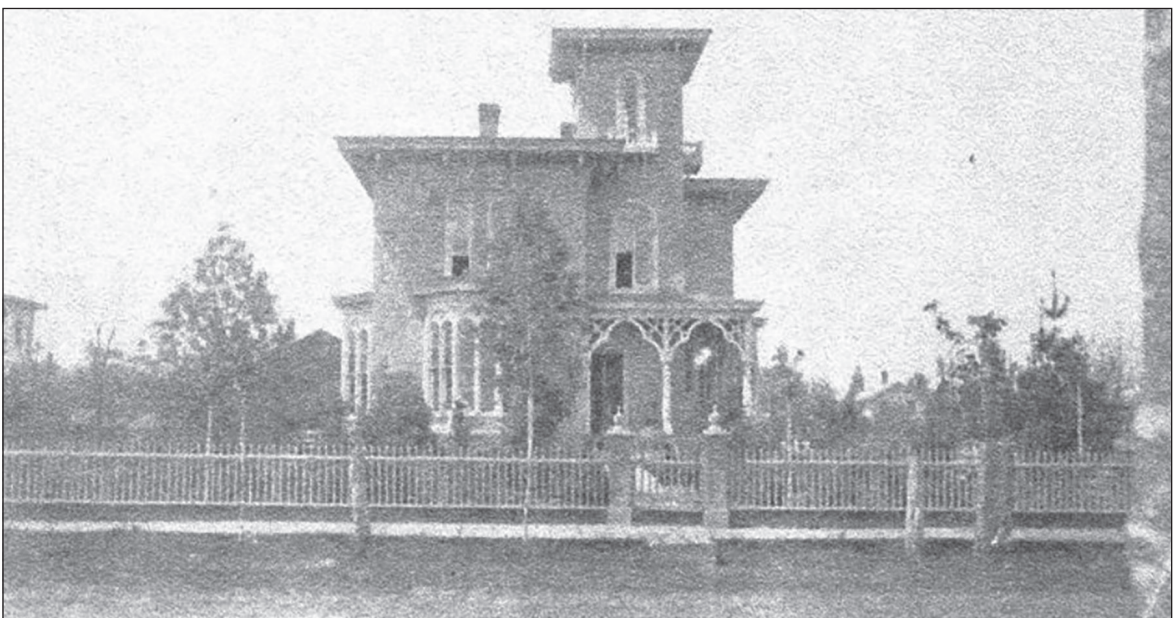
People paid no attention to this new law and still allowed their animals to roam the streets.

In May 1859, a new ordinance was passed that created a new city officer, known as a “pound master.” The pound master could collect and detain animals found roaming the streets in violation of the ordinance. To do this, the city built a fenced in animal pound near Jefferson and Washington streets. In this half acre of land, stray animals were kept under city supervision until they were claimed or could be disposed of.

The new ordinance also stated that pigs could not roam the streets. It also enabled people to take animals that were not theirs and who had wandered onto their land to the city animal pound.

By 1859, ordinance No. 19 prohibited horses from running loose on the street. However, cattle, goats and sheep could still roam where they wanted to during the daytime in the spring and summer months. Two years later, the city tried a new ordinance to regulate “swine, sheep, horses, colts, asses, mules, goats and neat cattle” from roaming the city streets. However, “milch cows owned by residents of the city of Ripon” were allowed in the streets if the owner provided, “some suitable person or persons to take charge of the same.”

In May 1868, all animals were banned from the city streets if



THIS UNDATED PHOTOGRAPH shows the home at 614 Watson St., built in 1865, with a fence around it. Before 1880, animals were allowed to roam the streets of Ripon, so many homes had fences surrounding their yards to keep animals and their waste off of their lawn. *submitted photo*

they were not “at large” and watched over by someone. But by 1873, animals were prohibited from the streets “with or without a driver, header or keeper.”

Pedrick noted that “The local papers made frequent references during the intervening years to the nuisance of animals in the street.” By 1880, the city began cracking down on violators and issuing tickets to owners of animals found roaming the streets.

The Ripon Improvement Association was also formed in 1880. This group of citizens worked with both the city and residents to promote and improve the beauty of the city. This included tree trimming, tree planting and promoting the idea of planting and maintaining grass lawns and adding flower gardens.

A Ripon Improvement Association pamphlet found at the Wisconsin Historical Society dated March 1881 stated, “More than thrice as many lawn mowers have been sold in the city within the year as were formerly owned here; and every sign indicated that increased attention will be paid to grass plotting in the future.”

The pamphlet goes on to note, “The fences in front of not less than 10 or 12 properties have been removed” and plans had been made to remove other



THE FIRST ADVERTISEMENTS for lawn mowers were seen in the 1880 spring and summer issues of the *Ripon Free Press*. *submitted photo*

fences “in the coming season.”

Pedrick noted that the first advertisement that he could find in the local newspapers for lawn mowers was from April 22, 1880.

The Ripon Improvement Association pamphlet noted, “But best of all, the streets have been redeemed from the condition of waste covered with the strolling herds of cows and cowboys, and now devoted to public uses

solely. We can now see women and children in the streets when their business or pleasure may call them.”

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



A FENCE SURROUNDS 538 Watson St. After animals such as cows, sheep, horses, and pigs were banned from Ripon’s streets, most home owners took their fences down. *submitted photo*

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