

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

Reichmuth's, where Ripon's youth gathered

By Pat Grahn

In 1982, Franklin B. Farvour (1919-2006) wrote down some of his memories of growing up in Ripon.

One of the places he remembered was Reichmuth's, owned by Carl "Tubby" Reichmuth (1898-1968).

"The establishment was the perfect example of the soda fountain where the youth gathers," Farvour wrote.

Often found in pharmacies or restaurants, soda fountains had started in the 19th century with a counter-service apparatus that dispensed carbonated soft drinks by mixing flavored syrup with chilled, carbonated water. Soda fountains were traditionally popular with teenagers.

However, Farvour stated that "This didn't really come about until the early to mid '30s. Before that the place was run by Tubby's father Herman Reichmuth and was anything BUT a teenage hangout. Instead from my earliest recollections it was the finest of confectioneries. All their candy and ice cream were made at the store, and the products were indeed the best that could be made. Lunches too could be bought, but the prices were higher than at other main street dineries and the lunch trade formed the minor part of the business."

Reichmuth's was started in 1865 when Ferdinand Reichmuth (1832-1913) and his wife, Johana Clotilde Graf Reichmuth (1835-1895), moved



THIS CIRCA 1869-1871 photograph is of Reichmuth's, a Watson Street business for 77 years. Pictured are, from left, Ferdinand Reichmuth (1832-1913) and his sons Herman (1859-1937), Charles (1861-1931) and Edward (1855-1922).

submitted photo

to Ripon to open a confectionery and bakery. A family history found in the archives of the Ripon Historical Society states that Ferdinand operated a bakery at 213 Watson St. and his family lived above the store.

The history went on to say that "The bakery and confectionery business was also an ice cream parlor had moved to the east side of Main Street (100 block)."

Fire destroyed this block of Watson Street in the late 1860s and new buildings were built around 1870. National register paperwork for this building notes that Reichmuth's occupied 115 Watson St. starting around 1870. This is the former location of Watson Street Wear and is now the northern section of Grant's PackageHub which has its main entrance at 117 Watson St.

In 1888, Herman turned his business over to his sons Hermann (1859-1937), Charles (1861-1931) and Edward (1855-1922). Edward moved to Colorado in 1903, leaving Herman to run the family business.

Herman's son Carl, known as "Tubby" in Ripon, had graduated from Ripon College in 1920 and eventually took over the family business.

Undated menus for Reichmuth's found in the archives of the Ripon Historical Society state that the restaurant was "Ripon's Sanitary Soda Fountain."

One menu noted, "We make the purest and best Ice Cream in Ripon; have the largest assortment of candies; and serve meals and lunches which cannot be equaled." The menu listed "So-da-

licious soda, ice cream, candy, lunches, fruit, gum, cigars, cigarettes, pennants and postcards" at "a cool, clean store."

Farvour stated that during the Great Depression, which ran from 1929 until 1939, "fine confectioneries were simply too expensive for most of the populace and that business withered to near extinction. The only thing left was to crank up the ice cream machine and put the candy kettles on the shelf. It didn't take the kids long to find out there was a welcome haven at Tubby's and there they did flock indeed."

He continued, "A rather unique aspect of the place was that both college and town kids patronized the place but in all my recollection there never was any trouble between them. Actually at that time the college kids didn't have any more money than the townies, the depression was a very great equalizer!"

"Anything in a small glass - Coca-Cola, root beer, lime phosphate or any other soft drink or milk cost a nickel," Farvour recalled. "Big ones were a dime, but few of those were sold. Everybody (almost) brought his drink at the counter and carried it to the back room where the booths and the jukebox were. If you had a date and really wanted to put on the 'dog' you could get booth service."

Farvour noted that booth service cost "a nickel extra." Five cents in 1935 is equal to approximately \$1.21 today.

Farvour continued his memoir by writing "The jukebox was of course strictly 78 RPM records, and each play cost a nickel. Every afternoon after

SODA FOUNTAIN MENU	
"Good Things to Drink"	
Ice Cream Sodas	
Chocolate	15c
Vanilla	15c
Pineapple	15c
Lemon	15c
Orange	15c
Green River	15c
Maple	15c
Ice Cream Sundae	
Chocolate	15c
Vanilla	15c
Lemon	15c
Pineapple	15c
Marshmallow	15c
Orange	15c
Special Sundaes	
Surprise	25c
Fudge Almond	25c
Strawberry Whip	25c
Banana Split	25-30c
Miscellaneous Drinks	
Phosphates	9c
Orange Crush	9c
Coca Cola	9c
Green River	9c
Chocolate Milk	9c
(Luxury Tax Extra)	
Beauty Special	25c
Chocolate Special	25c
Chocolate Special	15c

THIS UNDATED MENU from Reichmuth's is found in the archives of the Ripon Historical Society. Reichmuth's was in business for 77 years from 1865 until 1942 and owned by three generations of the Reichmuth family.

submitted photo school the place was absolutely jam packed. Many evenings a date was just a trip to Tubby's for a coke, and there was just NO other place to go after a movie.

"What it amounted to was that Tubby was maintaining a youth center, and it was a truly magnificent public service that he performed," Farvour stated. "No liquor was served and anyone wandering in showing the effects of a bit too much was politely asked to leave."

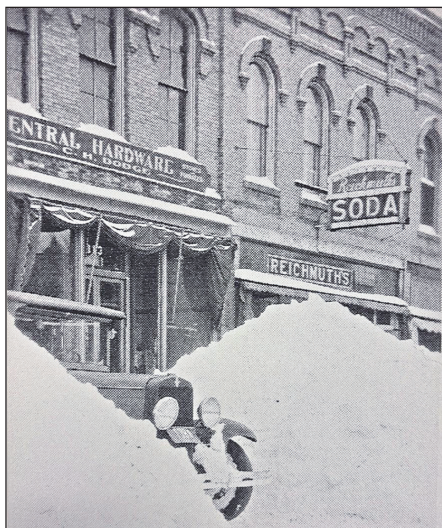
Farvour also noted that "Everybody admired Tubby" however the business did not make much money.

America's involvement in World War II started Dec. 8, 1941, and after that time Farvour noted that there were "not many kids around."

After 77 years, the business — which had been run by three generations of Reichmuths — closed in October 1942. He also reported that "The lure of war work was too strong for Tubby to resist" and he moved to California in 1943.

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/.



THIS CIRCA 1920'S photograph shows Reichmuth's in a winter storm when it was located at 115 Watson Street. The business moved to this location around 1870, but was started as a bakery and confectionery shop in 1865. It changed over the years, discontinuing the bakery and adding an ice cream parlor, soda fountain and restaurant.



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