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

# Prohibition came to an end 90 years ago this week

December marks the 90th anniversary of the end of the American prohibition era, which lasted from Jan. 17, 1920 until Dec. 5, 1933.

Following the 18th Amendment, passed in 1920, the U.S. Government prohibited the manufacture, sale or transportation of alcoholic beverages or intoxicating liquors.

Throughout prohibition it remained legal to drink alcohol, however individuals could not manufacture or sell it in America. These 13 years of prohibition affected all of America including Ripon.

#### **Prohibition advocates**

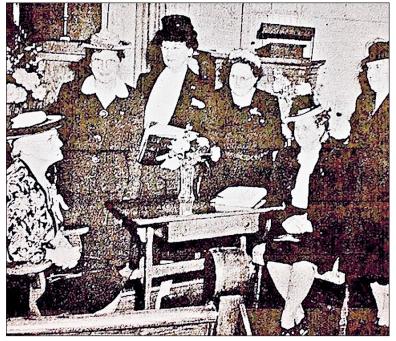
Women played an important part in the passing of the legislation for prohibition.

A nationwide group, the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), was founded in Ohio in 1874 to combat alcoholism. Its members saw themselves as "regulators of morality and advocates for other women and children who had been abused by drunk husbands and fathers."

Ripon had its own division of the WCTU. This group of women would visit Ripon's saloons to talk to the owners and to pray and sing in a room that was offered for their use by tavern owners. These women tried to change the mindsets of people regarding alcohol, and their work marked the beginning of a temperance crusade within the Ripon community.

#### Breweries converted to sell near-beer and soft drinks

The Haas Beer Brewery in Ripon was started in 1865 at 126 Jefferson St. When prohibition started, the brewery produced near-beer, ice cream and soft drinks. Near-beer is a fermented malt beverage similar to beer



**THE RIPON WOMEN'S** Christian Temperance Union often met at private homes and the congregational church. *submitted photo* 

with a low alcohol rating. By law, near-beer could not contain more than one half of 1% of alcohol by volume.

In 1933, the Haas Brewery was sold to a group of men who changed the name to "The Ripon Brewing Company" and they also produced soft drinks. This brewery re-started real beer production following the end of prohibition, but closed in 1937.

After this, the brewery building was purchased by the Frozen Goods and Storage Corp. The Haas Brewery horse stable still stands in Ripon over the Silver Creek near the corners of Jefferson and Hamburg streets.

#### Arrests were made

A new ruling by the federal prohibition department barring the sale of ingredients for making "home brew" liquor caused an arrest in Ripon during the summer of 1924. T.E. Mead was arrested after he sold a mixture which he claimed would make 4.5% alcohol content beer.

His recipe was one package of the mixture added to 1 1/2

pounds of sugar, dissolved into one gallon of water. Before he was arrested, Mead sold \$300 (which equates to \$5,322 today) of the mixture at \$7.50 per package (equivalent of \$129 today). While jailed, Mead said that "the stuff won't make intoxicating liquor anyway."

The May 10, 1929 Ripon Commonwealth Press reported that six men and two women pleaded guilty to violations of prohibition laws.

Rose Novack, the woman who was arrested, owned a restaurant and "claimed that the pitcher of liquor seized in her lunchroom was found in the kitchen where it was being used in plum puddings." The paper went onto to say that "Ripon police had received many complaints about the Novack place" and "the defendant denied that she conducted anything but a respectable eating house."

Ripon's 75th anniversary of the founding of the Republican Party celebration took place during prohibition, causing officers to break open and dump 50 barrels of illegal beer.



A CREW OF coopersmiths make beer barrels on Jefferson Street outside of Ripon Brewing Co. (formerly John Haas Brewery and Haas Brewing Co.), while men load kegs of beer on a wagon in front of the main building in the years after prohibition ended. The brewery closed in 1937 and was sold in 1939 to R-Line Foods. RCP file photo

This event made international news. The June 10, 1929 Leeds England Mercury newspaper reported, "Much embarrassment and indignation was caused by the most unwelcome activities of federal prohibition officers who took advantage of the ceremonies to conducted a series of raids throughout the town, which was declared 'notoriously wet." Being "wet" meant the selling of alcohol, and community establishments making illegal alcohol available for sale to customers.

The Friday night before the 75th-anniversary celebration, Dan Heise (1895-1950), who was working at a Scott Street "parlor," was arrested.

Federal agents claimed that they purchased several drinks of illegal liquor from him. The purchases were followed by a raid in which the federal agents seized quantities of "moonshine" and barrels of beer.

That weekend, federal agents also staged a raid on a soft-drink parlor on Watson Street owned by Carl Bonsen (1901-1930). Thirteen half-barrels of beer were seized and dumped, and Bonsen — along with his bartender — were arrested.

The June 10, 1929 *Milwaukee Journal* reported that "fuel was added to the smoldering resent-

ment of state Republican leaders Saturday afternoon, when federal prohibition agents made another raid, this time directly opposite the jubilee headquarters, as a big street crowd was awaiting the parade."

The Dec. 8, 1933 Ripon Commonwealth Press had little to say about the repeal of prohibition. A short, five-paragraph story found near the bottom of the second column on page 5 declared: "Brewery Whistle Welcomes Repeal." The first paragraph read: "The tooting of the Ripon Brewery whistle Tuesday night announced to all within hearing that the repeal of the 18th amendment had been effected." The story discussed a new type of ale the brewery was producing and had no more mention of prohibition ending.

Nationwide, beer trucks delivering barrels and bottles of beer were photographed, while people cheered and America celebrated the end of the prohibition era.

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.

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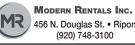


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