

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

## What is it? Identifying historical Ripon objects

History shapes, inspires and informs the present. The Ripon Historical Society shares and preserves a collection of artifacts that help to tell Ripon's history.

Some of these objects document the technological development and the evolution of materials that impacted the domestic lives of previous generations so that present and future generations can learn about the ties the objects represent.

The collection at the historical society even has a few thought-provoking items that cultivate peoples curiosity even in perhaps a peculiar, bizarre, unique or unconventional way.

The Ripon Historical Society collection policy states that it accepts "Objects that have enduring and evidentiary value, that tell stories, convey interpretations and lend themselves to multiple points of view regarding

Ripon's history and culture, and its place within the history of Wisconsin and the nation. These include historical, cultural, aesthetic or natural objects that have been made and/or primarily used in the city of Ripon or surrounding area; are associated with a person, place or event in the city; and for which the society can care under standards acceptable to the museum field at large."

When school children visit the Ripon

Historical Society they play a game of "what is it?" They are asked to identify various objects from the historical society's collection. They guess what the item is, how it was used and are asked if you can still purchase the item today.

Featured here is the second of two articles highlighting some artifacts housed at the historical society that the general public might not be familiar with.

### Cookie mold

The historical society has a round brass mold used to make animal-shaped cookies at Ripon Foods, home of Rippin' Good Cookies.

The mold was put on a machine and cookie dough moved under it making the dough into the shape of animals.

Ripon Foods was started in 1930 and established Ripon as the "Cookie Capital of the United States," and the city became known as "Cookie Town USA."

A new production facility was built in 1947 at 420 E. Oshkosh St., (the current home of Accurate Controls).

By the late 1960s, Ripon Foods employed more than 450 workers, who baked 5 million cookies per day in 60 varieties. About 50% of the cookies baked at Ripon Foods were marketed under the "Rippin' Good" cookie label, while others were made for a variety of private labels.

Many people's fondest memory of the



**TWO SECOND GRADE** students from Barlow Park Elementary School look at a cookie mold from Ripon Foods, which was located in Ripon for 86 years from 1930 until 2016. These students were born in approximately 2017 and would not remember the smell of "Rippin' Good" cookies being baked in Ripon.

cookie factory was the smell of baking cookies wafting throughout the Ripon area. A cookie outlet also was opened at the factory, which made Ripon a popular Midwestern destination for people seeking specially priced cookies.

The cookie factory

closed in 2016.

The Ripon Historical Society has a collection of artifacts, photographs and papers from Ripon Foods, including the Rippin' Good Cookie outlet sign which sat for years along Oshkosh Street/Highway 44.

*submitted photo*

### Pen wipe

Pens have been used since ancient Egyptian times. Pens were fashioned from the stems of reed plants, sharpened to a point and split at one end to form a nib. They were then dipped into ink. Excess ink would sometimes build up on the nib and various items were used to wipe off this ink and clean the nib.

Pen wipes, also known as "nib wipes," once were commonplace.

In the Victorian era, patterns for various types of pen wipes could be found in both children's and adult books and magazines.

A patent was issued in 1809 for a pen with an ink reservoir, called a "fountain pen." The patents and production of fountain pens increased in the 1850s. The ballpoint pen that is utilized today was first developed in the late 1930s and did not come into common use until



**THIS MIGHT LOOK** like a child's ball or cat toy, but instead it is a pen wipe. It would have been used to remove the excess ink from the nib of a dip pen.

*submitted photo*

the 1950s and 1960s.

Pen wipes still are available today and are utilized by people who use traditional ink pens for various types of art and calligraphy.

### Decorative planter

When an artifact that looked like a historic washboard was donated to the Ripon Historical Society, both the donor and the artifact's curator did not know what it was or where it came from.

Printed across the top was "Soap & Towel 5¢, Ripon Washboard Co. Rt. 2, Ripon, Wi." No Ripon Washboard Co. has existed in Ripon's history, and the item looked more like a decorative planter than a washboard.

Unable to identify the item, the society posted a photograph of it on social media. Various people identified it as a decorative piece made for less than 10 years in the 1990s at the Ripon Area Service Center, which now is known as "Diverse Options."

Diverse Options is a private, non-profit organization committed to enhancing the quality of life for individuals with disabilities in Ripon and surrounding areas. It was founded in 1975 and was known as the "Ripon Area Service Center" until 2004. In the early 1990s, the Ripon Area Service Center started a woodworking shop producing and distributing decorative items and unfinished, wooden crafting kits under the "Add-Your-Touch" label.

These items mainly were sold through AC Moore (a crafting supply store) and Ben Franklin stores. The Ripon Area Service Center also maintained a storefront in downtown Ripon where the define-your-inspiration kits were sold. The woodshop production center was closed in 2000.



**THIS ARTIFACT FOUND** at the Ripon Historical Society looks like a historic washboard. However, after research, it was determined to be a decorative item made for less than 10 years during the 1990s by the Ripon Area Service Center, now known as "Diverse Options." *submitted photo*

This artifact shows that not everything donated to the Ripon Historical Society needs to be old. This modern-day artifact gives a unique perspective into a recent decade in Ripon's history and provides insight into contemporary society.



**THE METAL CAGE-like** object shown in the bottom left-hand side of this photograph is a bar soap recycler. As a bar of soap wore down, the smaller slivers of the bar were placed in the recycler so no soap would be wasted. This soap recycler is found in the sink at the historical kitchen of the Ripon Historical Society. *submitted photo*

### Soap recycler

Found in the historic kitchen of the Ripon Historical Society is a metal bar soap recycler. This small object has a handle with a metal cage on one end.

As bars of soap were used up, the small slivers of soap that remained were placed in the recycler. This allowed none of the bar to be discarded.

The cage full of the soap pieces could be swirled in hot water to make soapy water for washing dishes, clothing or other items.

Years ago, many people made their own soap, which took time and effort. They didn't want to waste any part of the bar of soap. The soap recycler helped to utilize the full bar of soap.

Many types of soap recyclers still are available today on Amazon.

*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.*