

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

1858 journal sheds light on pioneer life in Ripon

By Caron Sisko and Ian Stepleton

A recently discovered 1858 journal of Hazen R. Hill gives insight into what life was like for the earliest pioneers and residents of the city of Ripon.

How the journal found its way back to Ripon from across the state may be nearly as interesting as the story it tells.

It's never boring at the Ripon Historical Society. New

and interesting artifacts are brought in at a steady stream, offering glimpses into Ripon's past and enriching the understanding of the city's unique history.

Recently, a journal dating to 1858 that belonged to Hazen R. Hill was donated to the society.

The donor came across the journal in a used bookstore in Madison.

The journal covers a date range from April 13, 1858 to June 24, 1858. In it, a 21-year-old Hazen Hill recounts the daily events of his life while attending Ripon College, at the time known as "Brockway College." Hazen writes about helping his father, Asa, on the family farm, working hard as a student, going swimming in the mill pond on hot days, working as a clerk and selling grain. He was one of the first students at the school and it was there that he completed his education.

Hazen was born Feb. 13, 1836 in Huron County, Ohio and was the son of Asa (1810-1895) and Philena (Lattin) Hill (1816-1866). Hazen was the oldest of seven children.

In 1838, the Hills started by boat for Wisconsin, but on Lake Michigan, the vessel was wrecked and all the family's goods were lost. A year later, the family started west again but this time from New York.

In 1849, the Hills came across the country by covered wagon, passing through Chicago and then continuing their journey to Dartford (now known as Green Lake). When nearing Dartford, the family stopped for a short rest. In one of those chance meetings, the

Hill family met up with David Mapes, founder of the new city of Ripon. He persuaded them to settle in Ripon rather than Green Lake as they had originally planned. The Hills traded their horses for 80 acres of prairie land nearby and a team of oxen. Initially, the family situated itself on a parcel in town given to them by Mapes.

The Hills built the second house and first frame house in Ripon. The home was con-

structed at what now is 217 Blackburn St. Hazen's father came to Ripon a poor man, but by good business habits, perseverance and industry, accumulated a handsome amount of wealth as a farmer. He sold mostly wheat and corn.

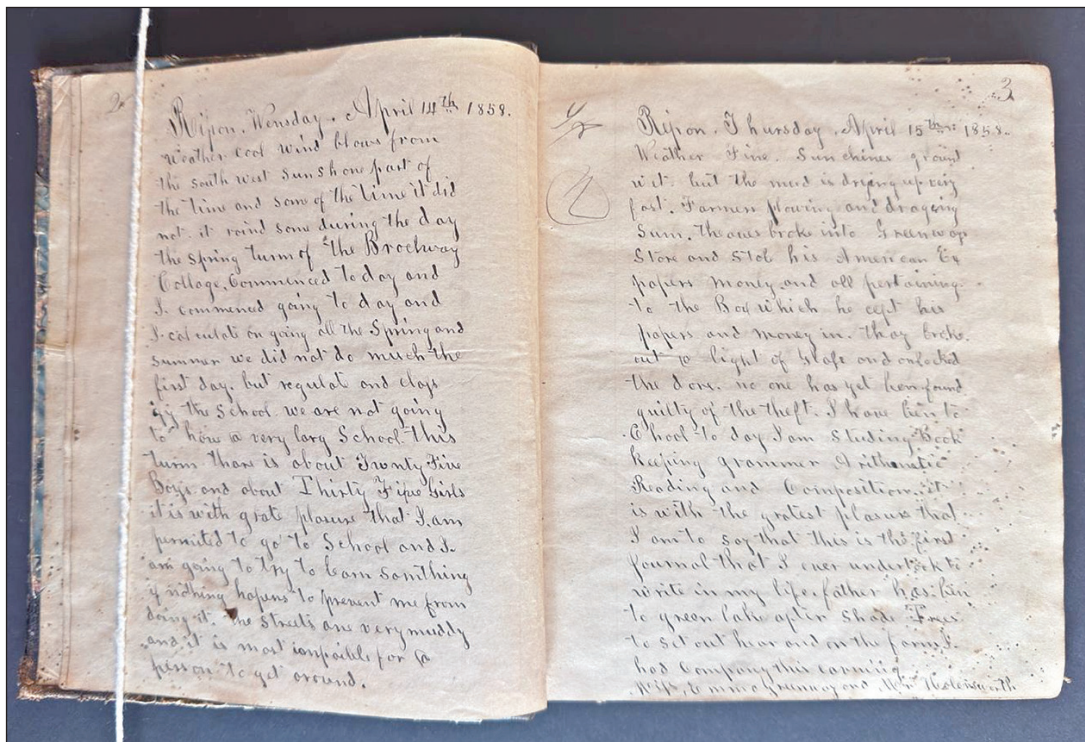
In 1859, Asa moved his family to the 80-acre plot, southeast of Ripon. He returned to Ripon in 1866 after Philena's death at the age of 50. Asa lived the rest of his life with his daughter, Rhoda, on Scott Street.

Hazen received his primary education in district schools. When he desired to continue his studies, he did not have the money necessary to pay his tuition. For two years, he engaged in clerking for Mapes. At the end of his two years, having saved his earnings, Hazen entered Brockway College in the spring of 1858.

While attending college, Hazen wrote about his experiences. In the first journal entry on April 13, he promises to write in the journal until it is full, "To write in a journal is new to me but I have made up my mind to keep one and I shall do it until I get this book all wrote ful."

At the time he wrote those words, he surely had the best of intentions, but Hazen's entries stop at the end of the summer term, which only takes up about one quarter of the journal book. He used the rest of the book for bookkeeping entries around the year 1860.

Frequent spelling errors are found throughout the journal. However, his penmanship and spelling do show some



HAZEN HILL'S JOURNAL, which he wrote in from April 13, 1858 to June 24, 1858, recently was discovered at a used bookstore in Madison. *submitted photo*

improvement over time. Many of the college's first students needed basic arithmetic and grammar.

Hazen studied bookkeeping, grammar, arithmetic, reading and composition. In his journal, he expresses gratitude for the opportunity to get an education.

"It is with grate pleasure that I am permitted to go to School and I am going to try and learn something if nothing happens to prevent me from doing it," he wrote on April 14, 1858.

Hazen also wrote about how it was difficult to get around Ripon because of the often muddy and irregular surfaced roads. However, during this time, progress was made to remedy the problem.

On May 28, 1858, Hazen wrote: "I have ben to school to today there has been a good deal of work dun in building sidewalk in Ripon for the last week it is getting so that a person can get around without getting his neck broke."

Hazen also journaled about how his father made multiple trips to Oshkosh to get wood planks for the sidewalks.

Hazen then obtained a salesman position with entrepreneur David Greenway and was subsequently engaged in buying grain at Ripon on salary for about five years.

In April 1860, Hazen married Caroline A Windecker (1840-1919), who was born in Lewis County, N.Y. She was the daughter of John and Caroline Windecker. The Win-

deckers came to Fond du Lac County as farmers in 1851.

Hazen mentions writing letters to "Carrie Windecker" or "C.A.W." in Ruggles, Ashland, Ohio, Hazen's birthplace.

He also mentions Caroline's brother, Simeon, accompanying her. It is not known why Caroline and Simeon Windecker traveled to Hazen's birthplace that spring, while Hazen stayed behind to attend Brockway. However, the 1860 census indicates that Simeon was living in Lorain, Ohio by then. One could surmise that in 1858, Caroline's brother had plans to relocate to Ohio and that is why his sister accompanied him. One also could assume that Hazen and Caroline were courting during this period between 1858 and 1860.

In 1861, Hazen became a partner with Greenway, owning a restaurant and saloon.

Within six months, he owned half the interest, and it was not long before he became sole proprietor. He continued alone until 1876, when he sold to his brother. From 1866 to 1876, he served as deputy sheriff of Fond du Lac County, and for two years subsequent, the position of sheriff. Hazen also was Ripon's first fire chief when the hook and ladder company was established in 1874.

Shortly after his time as sheriff, Hazen purchased the Spring Grove House and grounds, a 60-acre summer resort that bordered Green Lake on the southern shore. Hazen and Caroline were reportedly the most congenial hosts, and

their guests enjoyed lavish meals, a bowling alley and steamboat rides on the lake.

Because of ill health around the age of 60, Hazen turned the business over to his son, Frank. Then, a few years later, in 1901, Hazen and Caroline moved to Ripon on Scott Street shortly before his death in 1903. He is buried in Hillside Cemetery. Hazen was known to most everyone in Green Lake and Fond du Lac counties, having been engaged in business in the two counties for more than half a century.

It is a mystery as to how the journal ended up in a used bookstore in Madison. However, Hazen's daughter May married William Petrie of Green Lake in 1895 and then moved to Madison in 1900. This may explain how the journal could have been passed on to her and then made its way to Madison.

While the last entry is dated June 24, 1858, there was nothing written by Hazen that day. Instead, his younger brother, John, made an entry, teasing Hazen about the unfinished journal: "What made you lie. What made you lie in the beginning of this book. There is no use of lying about small things."

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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