

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

War propaganda posters took off during World War I

Memorial Day originally was known as "Decoration Day." This day was set aside after the Civil War to decorate the graves of soldiers who had died in the war. In 1967, Congress formally changed the commemoration's name from "Decoration Day" to "Memorial Day." In 1971, Memorial Day became a federal holiday honoring all those who have died while serving in the United States military. It always is celebrated the last Monday of May.

The Ripon Historical Society honors those who have served in military by preserving Ripon's military history. Its archives contain uniforms, flags, awards, letters, photos and oral histories from Ripon-area residents who served in the military. It also houses items used in Ripon to support of the military in times of war. The archives have items dating back to the Civil War up to the Vietnam era.

Last year, Ken and Lindabeth Angle of Ripon, both veterans, helped catalog military items at the historical society. Uniforms were professionally cleaned and moved to a new storage area.

Donations of military or related items belonging to people who lived in Ripon are welcomed.

Recently the society's collection of World War I and II propaganda posters was added to the online catalog.

"The use of posters as propaganda took off during World War I and some of the most iconic images from this era are still in use today," Ripon Historical Society Director Caron Sisko said.

Sisko photographed and cataloged the 58 posters found on the society's website. To view the collection, visit the website at www.riponhistory.org, click on "Explore Our Collection" and then click on "Propaganda Posters: WW I and 2."

One of the best-known historical posters is that of Uncle Sam. Uncle Sam was an image drawn by James Montgomery Flagg (1877-1960) and dates from 1916 when it first appeared on the cover of *Leslie's Weekly* magazine. The U.S. Army adapted this image and used it on a recruitment poster with the caption, "I Want You for the U.S. Army." This image was subsequently used throughout the rest of World War I and then repurposed for World War II. It still is identifiable to many people today.

Propaganda posters were visual tools used by various organizations to influ-



HORACE BUMBY AND Lex Royce point to a poster used at Speed Queen (now Alliance Laundry Systems) utilized to promote the sale of war bonds during World War II. War bond posters were found throughout Ripon and the community became a leader in war bond sales, winning the National Bond Selling title in 1945.

submitted photo

ence public opinion, rally support for the war effort, encourage recruitment, promote conservation of resources and generally instill a strong sense of patriotism and national unity among citizens.

The posters were critical in mobilizing the home front and maintaining morale throughout the conflicts.

The large-format, full-color posters could be found just about everywhere during wartime, including store windows, schools, post offices, train stations, factories, offices and city streets. Many were torn down and thrown away after the war, and some, like the ones at the historical society, survived.

Sisko noted that her favorite poster of the collection is Chandler Christy's "I Wish I Were a Man," World War I poster with a smiling young woman with rosy cheek and red lipstick dressed in a man's Navy uniform. The strategy behind the flirtatious image was to coerce military service by questioning the masculinity of the view rather than patriotic duty. The text at the bottom of the image states "BE A MAN AND DO IT," reinforcing the message that to not enlist would be emasculating.



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THIS 1917 POSTER from World War I is one of the many propaganda posters that now may be viewed on the Ripon Historical Society's Catalogit HUB at riponhistory.org.

During World War I and II, talented illustrators and graphic artists created posters for government agencies. There are stylistic differences between the propaganda posters of World War I and II. World War I posters generally have a more traditional, realistic or illustrative style. While World War II posters have bolder colors and more stylized designs.

Also found on the society's Catalogit HUB are the photograph collection, the library collection, photos of some of the society's quilt collection, "Now & Then in Ripon" articles from 2023 to 2025, and photographs of objects from the society's four most recent exhibits.

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/.

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