

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

Ripon's first salon was opened by Belle Pickard in 1912

Today in Ripon, people may visit one of more than 10 salons for a haircut and style, in addition to other beauty services.

The first beauty salon in Ripon was started in 1912 by Lestine "Belle" Pickard (1888-1972).

Pickard, originally from Neenah, Wis., had to find a way to support her mother and younger brother after her father died in 1907 at age 53. She apprenticed herself to a beautician in Oshkosh and then attended the Marinello Beauty School in Chicago. At age 24, she moved to Ripon to establish the first salon in the community at 508 Watson St. At first, she rented the building and in 1923 purchased it for \$3,000 (equal to \$55,227 today.)

The year that Pickard was born is the year that the first beauty salon opened in the United States. At the turn of the century, only around 5,000 beauty salons existed in America. Between 1910 and 1920, the idea of the beauty salon grew, and by 1930 around 40,000 salons were open across the United States. However, those numbers were much lower in Wisconsin, where the 1927 State Blue Book noted that the state had approximately 650 "beauty parlors." By the early 1960s, the state had approximately 2,000 beauty salons.

Pickard was on the leading edge of the beauty salon trend when she established her business, first known as "The Marinello Comfort Shop." It also sometimes was known as "The Comfort Shop." At that time, she offered hairdressing, hair shampooing, permanent waving, facials, scalp treatments, electrolysis, chiropody, manicures and other related services.

Pickard ran the only beauty salon in Ripon until another opened in the community approximately 15 years later in the 1920s. Advertisements show that in 1931, the name of the business was changed to the "Ripon Beauty Shop."

The Comfort Shop was located on the first floor of the circa 1870s' house just two blocks south of Ripon's main business district. Pickard, her mother Lilly "Lulu" Nelson Pickard (1861-1928) and her brother Samuel Nelson Pickard (1897-1973) lived on the second floor.

"A great many Ripon ladies had long, thick hair in those days," Pickard told the *Milwaukee Journal* for an Aug. 19, 1962 article. "Whatever the Lord gave them,



THIS UNDATED PHOTOGRAPH shows beauticians at work in Belle Pickard's beauty salon, which was located at 508 Watson St. from 1912 until 1965.

submitted photo

they had. There was very little hair styling as such."

Pickard noted in the *Journal* article that women in the early days came into the salon every three to four weeks to have their hair shampooed. When it was warm outside, customers would sit in the yard behind the salon to visit while Pickard brushed out their hair to dry.

"In the winter, the long, heavy tangled tresses were painstakingly dried with weak motored pedestal dryers, long and narrow snouts aimed at the hair a few inches at a time," the *Journal* article noted. "Later, big canvas hoods were attached to these blowers and tied around the face to make the operation more efficient."

The early days at the salon were harder as beauty products were just starting to be commercially produced. In order to make shampoo, Pickard ordered 4 pound slabs of castile soap, shaved and melted it to be stored in gallon jars. The hair was rinsed with vinegar. The first synthetic hair dye was not invented until 1907 and bobby pins were introduced to America in 1916.

Pickard noted that in the early years an emphasis was placed on electrical and steam treatments of the scalp and skin.

An advertisement in a 1914 *Ripon Commonwealth* noted that the Comfort Shop started selling Marinello "toilet articles," including "creams, powders, etc., to meet all demands of various kinds of skins."

Only those graduates of the Marinello Beauty School like Pickard could sell the exclusive Marinello brand of beauty items.

At first, Pickard ran her salon by herself.

The *Journal* article reported that "Miss Pickard was determined

to put her operation on a scientific basis."

Pickard stated in the article that "My program was for scientific facial and scalp treatment, manicuring, buffer, polishing, electrolysis and chiropody."

Pickard held a license in chiropody, which is the treatment of the foot. It included care of the nails, corns, calluses, ingrown toenails and more. One local beautician remembered Pickard cared for the feet of male laborers who came to her back porch.

In the 1920s, for the first time in history, women started cutting their hair short. Short, boyish bobs were all the rage and salons started popping up all over the nation. In order to accommodate the increased number of customers, Pickard built an addition to the building to enlarge the shop.

The *Milwaukee Journal* article noted that as women started cutting their hair in bobbed style, "Miss Pickard and her assistants were knee deep in shorn locks as first the young women and gradually older customers presented themselves to her shears."

Pickard added that "No one knew a thing about thinning and tapering, so here were all those blunt ends, cut straight across, like brushes."

In the late 1920s and into the 1930s, permanent wave machines utilized a combination of chemicals and electrically heated clamps for long term curl or wave of hair. It wasn't until 1943, when aerosol hairspray was created. Also, in the 1940s, "cold waves," which relied only chemicals and not heat for perms, gained popularity. By the 1940s, Pickard employed as many as six beauticians.

Wisconsin did not license beauty shops or beauticians until sometime around 1919.

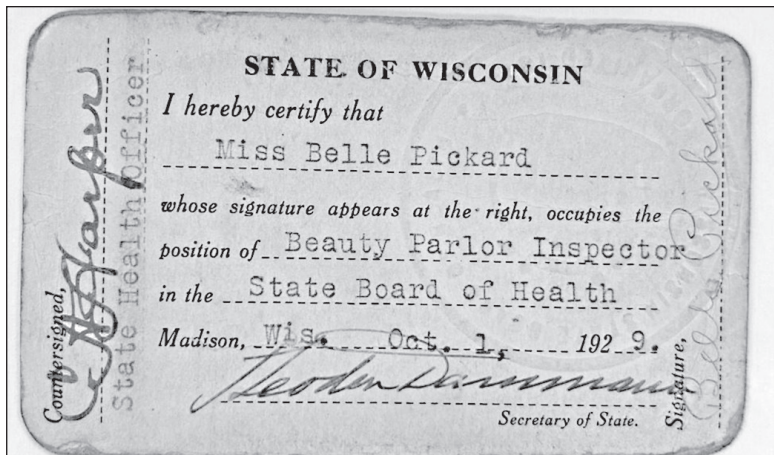
From 1925 until 1940, Pickard was on the "Committee of Examiners" for the Beauty Parlor Division of the State Board of Health. Between 1929 and 1950, Pickard was a state inspector of the cosmetology division of the State Board of Health. She traveled during the week to inspect and rate salons while her staff kept her salon in Ripon open.

By 1962, her 50th year in business, Pickard still worked part time and had two beauticians working with her. These people were Olive Kitchen Sullivan Graf (1912-1984) and Elaine Briese (1917-2011). Graf worked for Pickard for 36 years, while Briese was employed for 28 years and lived on site as she rented a room from Pickard. Briese also had a yarn store on the premises.



THIS PHOTOGRAPH OF Belle Pickard and one of her clients was featured in a 1962 article in the *Milwaukee Journal*. The apparatus on the left is an electrical permanent wave machine. A standing hood hair drier also may be seen behind Pickard. These two beauty salon items are now found in the artifact collection of the Ripon Historical Society.

submitted photo



THIS IS THE first identification card of Belle Pickard (1888-1972) who was a state inspector for the cosmetology division of the State Board of Health between 1929 and 1950.

submitted photo



A SMALL DISPLAY of Belle Pickard's hair salon items is being showcased at the Ripon Historical Society museum.

submitted photo

The *Journal* reported that "The 72-year-old spry, slim Miss Pickard is still at the head of the operation, doing a facial now and then, lending a hand when necessary, presiding over the books and managing the 12-room house on Watson Street which is half business, half home."

In 1965, 53 years from when she founded the salon, Pickard closed the doors. She entered a nursing home in 1967 and in 1968 donated her building to the Ripon Historical Society, which has occupied the building ever since.

The historical society uses it as its headquarters and museum.

The historical society has many of the items and instruments that were used by Pickard over the years in its artifacts collection.

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 follow us at Facebook/riponhistory or www.riponhistory.org.



THIS CIRCA 1960 photograph was taken in the backyard of the Ripon Beauty Shop, which was located for 53 years at 508 Watson Street. Pictured are, from left, beautician Olive Kitchen Sullivan Graf (1912-1984), salon owner Belle Pickard (1888-1972) and beautician Elaine Briese (1917-2011).