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

The First Mills of Silver Creek: Ceresco

For the side-by-side settlements of Ripon and Ceresco in the 1840s, Silver Creek offered a valuable energy resource that would drive the mills, grind the grain, and provide the economic resources for these two mid-19th century towns.

- In 1845 a sawmill was quickly built to provide the lumber needed for housing the settlers of Ceresco who called themselves the Wisconsin Phalanx. The men situated their sawmill along the south shore of Silver Creek, a little east of their settlement. For power the rapid flowing creek was used to run a flutter wheel that drove the saw blade in the mill.

- The Wisconsin Phalanx's first crop of wheat was good, but a means of grinding their grain had to be found. In preparation for the grist mill, the hard-working group built a dam at the site of their sawmill in order to back up the creek's water into a pond. The pond stretched to present-day Washington Street. This pond would assure a steady flow of water for this mill.



Above: AI generated image of how the first grist mill may have looked based on historical descriptions.

- By 1846 the grist mill itself was erected. The Phalanx decided that the grist mill should be closer to their homes and other buildings than they had built the sawmill. Ceresco was built on the south side of the road paralleling Silver Creek. The task of putting the grist mill on the south side along with their village meant getting the water from one side of the road to the other and then headed westward to the proposed site of the grist mill.

- To accomplish this the pond water was piped in wooden pipes under the road. The piping ran to a ditch, or race as it is called, heading westward to present-day Union Street. Here the water was once again piped underground and came out into an overshot that turned the grist mill's wheel.

- The spillage from the overshot emptied into a small creek called Crystal Creek right by the grist mill. This small creek begins in South Woods, south of the Ceresco settlement, and joins Silver Creek across present-day Highway 23, about a hundred and twenty feet north of the site of the Ceresco grist mill.

BELOW: CERESCO, 1850
LAND PLAT AFTER PHALANX DISSOLVED

Circle incates location of Original Phalanx

KEY

1 Mill Race
2 Grist Mill
3 Mill Pond
4 Long House
5 Saw Mill

