

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

RC: Alumni who took Ripon to the national stage

By Pat Grahn

Editor's note: This is the second of a two-part series on Ripon College's long history of placing the city of Ripon in the national spotlight. This installment highlights the alumni whose accomplishments — from Hollywood and science to law and public service — carried the college's influence far beyond Wisconsin.

Ripon College, founded in 1851, has produced graduates and faculty whose achievements have reached national and international prominence.

While the college itself has often appeared in the public eye, many of its people have carried its name even further.

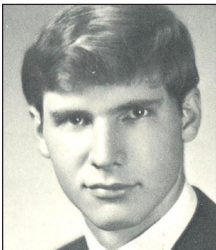
Famous performers

Al Jarreau (1940-2017), class of 1962, started his singing career with a local group called 'The Indigos.' He became a jazz legend and seven-time Grammy Award Winner, also singing in the 1985 charity single "We Are the World."

Two years after Jarreau graduated "Star Wars" and "Indiana Jones" actor Harrison Ford (1943-present), along with "Gremlins" and "Back to the Future" movie actress Frances Lee McCain (1944-present), class of 1966, spent time at the Ripon College Red Barn Theater before they hit the big screen.



Al Jarreau



Harrison Ford



Frances Lee McCain

America's Next Top Model

Brittany "McKey" Sullivan (1988-present), class of 2013, majored in government and chemistry-biology at Ripon College. She won the 11th cycle of America's Next Top Model in 2008. In 2009, she was named one of *People* magazine's most beautiful people.



Brittany "McKey" Sullivan

American botanist

Clarissa Tucker Tracy (1818-1905) came to Ripon in 1859 to become a teacher and superintendent of the ladies' department of Ripon College.

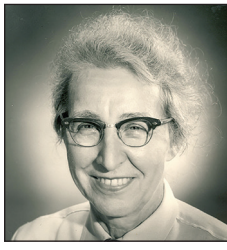
She became a well-known American botanist after studying local flora for almost 30 years, publishing a book on the subject in 1889. After being at Ripon College for 34 years, she retired in 1893, but retained her association with the college until her death. She is referred to as "the mother of Ripon College."



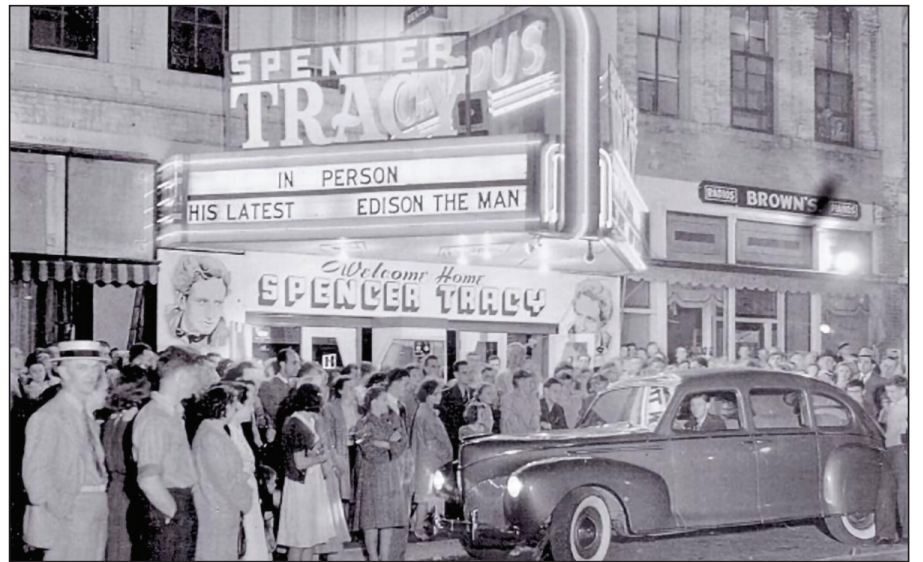
Clarissa Tucker Tracy

The Manhattan Project and a Ripon physicist

Elda Emma Anderson (1899-1961) was born in Green Lake and earned her bachelor of arts degree in physics and mathematics from Ripon College in 1922. She then obtained a master's degree in physics from the University of Wisconsin-



Elda Emma Anderson



SPENCER TRACY RETURNED to Ripon in 1940 for "Spencer Tracy Day." The Campus Theatre shown in this photo, featured Tracy's new movie with Tracy attending. Ripon College students who became famous like Tracy helped to keep the community in the national limelight.

Madison in 1924.

During World War II, Anderson worked on the Manhattan Project at Princeton University and Los Alamos National Laboratory. She was the first person to create a pure sample of Uranium-235. Without it, the atomic bomb would not have been created.

After returning from the Manhattan Project, Anderson spoke out about the dangers of nuclear arms and educated people about the devastating effect of radiation on human health. She died in 1961 of breast cancer and leukemia, most likely due to her work on the project.

A major star of Hollywood's Golden Age

Spencer Tracy (1900-1967) became a student at Ripon College in 1921 and quickly developed a passion for acting.

While on a Ripon College debate team trip to New York, Tracy took a chance audition,



Spencer Tracy

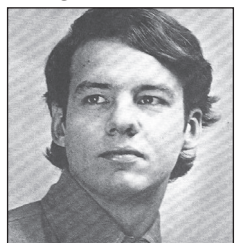
causing him to leave Ripon College in April 1922. Tracy became a Broadway performer and then a famous Hollywood film actor, but never forgot Ripon.

In 1940, he returned to Ripon for a special "Spencer Tracy Day." The Campus Theatre showed the newest of Tracy's movies which Tracy attended. He also was awarded an honorary degree in dramatic arts from Ripon College.

Nation's second-youngest mayor was RC student

Mark Conrad, who graduated from Ripon High School and then Ripon College in 1973, made the national news in 1972 after being elected as the mayor of Ripon.

The second-youngest mayor in America, Conrad lived in the dorms at Ripon College during his time in office. His graduation from Ripon College was covered by a five-person crew from ABC News.



Mark Conrad

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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