

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

# Unsung Heroes: Charlotte Melvina Helmer

Charlotte Melvina Helmer (1842 - 1903), nicknamed "Lottie," was born at the State School for Dependent Children in Sparta, Wis., and later was recruited by Ripon College to become the overseer of the dining hall.

She and her two siblings, along with their parents, relocated to Ixonia, Wis., in 1845, where her father died only two months later. It left Helmer's mother a pioneer settler's widow in a town of approximately 120 people.

Helmer spent the balance of her childhood into young adulthood in Ixonia.

Unmarried, Helmer resided for some time with a stepsister, Mrs. R. J. Hill in Independence, Kan. Helmer then accepted a position as a matron at the School for Feeble Minded in Fairbault, Minn.

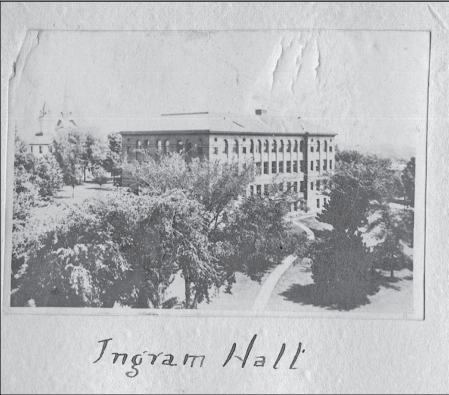
Following this as a career path, she



THE ONLY KNOWN photograph of Charlotte Helmer was taken at Eunice Lockwood's Ground Floor Gallery downtown Ripon. submitted photo

Helmer was called away to assist with her ill sister, but was recruited back in 1893 by Ripon College President Edward H. Merrell (1835-1910) and his wife Ada Clark Merrell (1856-1934). She became the superintendent of the Student Co-op & Dining Association, serving a 10-year tenure at the college until her passing in 1903.

In her role as superintendent, Helmer oversaw table set up, the preparation of meals, the bussing of tables and kitchen organization. She was known for her dedication and work ethic.

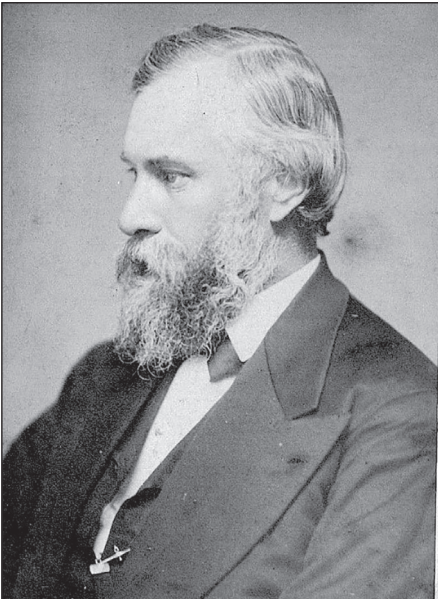


TWO SMALL PHOTOS that were hung from ribbons in Miss Helmer's collection of personal belongings. submitted photo

While in Ripon, Helmer became a member of the Ripon First Congregational Church and is buried at Hillside Cemetery next to the Merrells.

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](http://www.riponhistory.org), [facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety](https://facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety) or [instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/](https://instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/).



A LOCKWOOD STUDIO Cabinet Card Photograph of Ripon College President Edward Huntington Merrell is in Charlotte Helmer's collection of personal belongings. submitted photo

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