

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

## Christmas spirit always has shined brightly in Ripon

It has never been difficult to catch the holiday spirit in the community of Ripon.

Watson Street always has been the hub of beautiful decorations, holiday shopping, traditional food, parades, festivals and activities shared by all ages.

Since Ripon was founded in the 1840s, people have given joy to each other at the holidays by providing food, gifts and other items for those in need, and doing holiday activities such as caroling to shut-ins. Ripon also has heard old familiar holiday songs at children's programs in the schools and Christmas services in the city's churches.

Starting in 1902, Santa Claus has arrived in town, whether it be a jolly old elf who looked like Arthur Steinbring, Earl Bucholz, Jack Frank or "Tuba Dan" Jerabeck. For years, Ripon's children have wondered how Santa found a minute to make toys or visit other towns, as he seemed to spend so much time at the Ripon Business Association Christmas Open Houses, Christmas in the Village, and the modern day Dickens of a Christmas celebration.

Over the years, people have decorated their homes and put up Christmas trees that peek out of their windows, adding a festive flair to the city streets.

As they bustle about, the residents of Ripon yell out holiday greetings to their neighbors, friends and strangers.

Whether you have lived in Ripon for years, moved to the community recently or grew up in Ripon but haven't visited in years, the Ripon Historical Society hopes that you remember and hold in your heart the magic of the holiday season in Ripon.

*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 1953** *Ripon Commonwealth Press* photograph shows Arthur Peters (1891-1962) looking at Eugene Sommerfeldt (1927-1961) decorating the top of a community tree in the town square found in the 100 block of Watson Street. *submitted photo*



**THE HUGO SCHULTZ** (1846-1921) store on Watson Street is decorated for the holidays circa 1900. *submitted photo*



**RIPON'S BROWNIE TROOP** 84 sings carols to the eight women who lived in the Dorthy Jantz (1920-2009) nursing home in this photograph from the Dec. 24, 1964 *Ripon Commonwealth Press*. Residents in the photo are Louise Krenz Shilf (1881-1974), left, and Hattie Mulder Brink (1874-1966), right. Troop leaders were Pauline Handsby Hammerling, left background, and Mrs. Tom Jones, center background. Also shown in the front is the troop "mascot," Ian Jones, then age 4. *RCP file photo*



**JAMES BAUERNFEIND'S HOUSE** at 955 Ranson Street was judged the best in Ripon and won \$20 (equal to \$150 today) in the 1972 Jaycees outdoor lighting contest.



**IN 1939, SANTA** Claus, portrayed by Arthur Steinbring (1879-1950), brought Christmas joy to Roosevelt School, 742 Woodside Ave. Steinbring visited every school in the greater Ripon area over his almost 50 years of playing Santa Claus. Most schools had a holiday pageant or concert and the lower grades a classroom party.



**BARBARA LUECK** (1938-2008) displays her international holiday collection of ornaments and advent calendars at the Ripon Historical Society open house during Ripon's first Dickens of a Christmas celebration in 1990. *submitted photo*



**THE COMMUNITY OF** Ripon comes out to greet Santa Claus in this *Ripon Commonwealth Press* photograph from December 1949. A crowd of about 3,500 people gathered in the 100 block of Watson Street to see Santa arrive for the season on top of a fire engine. More than 1,000 bags of candy and cookies were given out to attending children. Santa Claus was played by local shoe store owner Arthur Steinbring (1879-1950) from 1902 to 1949. That year, starting on Dec. 16, Santa's workshop was open every day from 3 to 5 p.m. It was located "on the square" just across from Steinbring's corner store, which sat on the southwest corner of Watson and West Fond du Lac streets. *RCP file photo*



**THIS FESTIVE PHOTO**, looking south along the 200 block of Watson Street, was taken from a second-story window around 1930. It shows downtown buildings during the Christmas season. The street lamps are decorated with live greenery wreaths, ice is found on the brick-covered street and a post office box for mailing cards and letters is on the right street corner. Three Christmas trees may be seen in front of the inset windows on the second floor of the hardware store, currently Farrell's Fine Furnishings. Today, Patina Vie's building is located on the left-hand side of the photo, which shows curved windows and a barber pole. The majority of buildings found in the 100-400 blocks of Watson Street are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The street still holds its charm for modern-day businesses. *submitted photo*