

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

The Elms was home to prominent family, fraternity

Ripon has many Queen Anne-style homes. Popular in America between 1880 and 1910, Queen Anne-style houses are known for their eclectic and ornate design. They were inspired by Medieval and Jacobean styles and feature a mix of materials, textures and colors.

The Queen Anne-style house at 206 Hall St. was built in approximately 1890 and is located in the Tygert Street Historic District and on the National Register of Historic Places.

It was built for Thomas Stone (1848-1911) and Carrie Allen Stone (1854-1930). The Stones had three children: Inez (1876-1902), Laila Stone Kingland (1879-1904) and Litta Stone Matt (1889-1972).

The house was named "The Elms" for all of the trees found in the yard. Litta wrote about The Elms in 1964 stating, "A few weeks after my arrival the ultra-modern, lovely three-story home on the corner of Hall Street and Tygert became one of the 'show' places in town. Lovely stained glass windows, two large bathrooms and two separate lavatories, three fireplaces, two were gas, a separate sunny sewing room over the front porch, a den on the third floor for my father and his many books, a speaking tube down to the dining room."

Thomas Stone purchased the *Ripon Free Press* in the 1870s. Ripon's historian Sam Pedrick (1868-1963) noted "as editor he 'wielded a vigorous and trenchant pen;' he built



THIS PHOTOGRAPH WAS taken around the time 206 Hall St. was built in approximately 1890. Shown in the photo are, from left, Carrie Allen Stone, Litta Stone Matt, Inez Stone and Thomas Stone. The house was called "The Elms" for the trees found in the yard.

submitted photo

Stone's Opera House, assisted in getting the German National Bank organized and managed the Ripon L&W Co., was on the School Board that helped unite the districts. ... His last enterprise was the Oakwood at Green Lake."

The Oakwood House and Resort was a large property on Green Lake that Stone purchased in 1903. The resort went into bankruptcy in 1910.

Litta wrote about her father noting, "T.D. Stone was a very progressive, forward thinking man. It was HE who brought the telephone into Ripon. My mother was the first 'switchboard operator' and often told it with pride. Another 'first' inaugurated in Ripon by my father was the Power and Light Company. The Heinz Pickle factory

in the northeast part of town was another project of his."

She added that "He rode in the first automobile that was shipped into Ripon, it came from the St. Paul depot, past the high school where I was, classes were dismissed. It was a big event."

Litta reported that purchasing the Oakwood in Green Lake was her father's "downfall financial and physical. The home on Hall Street was sold to Mr. Fred Soper (1854-1930) for about \$3,500 (approximately \$114,420 today). It had been rented to a fraternity and had seen much abuse. Everything went, it was the downfall and he died in September 1911."

For about seven years, The Elms was the furthest student housing from the Ripon College campus and served as the home to the Theta Sigma Tau fraternity. A 1911 photograph of the home features male Ripon College students looking out the windows and standing on the house.

The first mention of the property regarding Ripon College housing may be found in the October 26, 1911 issue of the *Ripon Weekly Press*.

The paper stated that "'The Elms' made its debut into the life of Ripon College. The 16 fellows who make their home at 'The Elms' together with their friends spent the evening showing the 'co-eds' how much their house surpassed Bartlett." It went

on to note that "Various rooms were arrayed with the various trophies and propaganda peculiar to the college boy."

Sometimes called 'The Elms Club,' the students staying in the house were a part of the Theta Sigma Tau fraternity. Information found online regarding the history of Ripon College's Theta Sigma Tau posted by Peter W. Lenz states that the fraternity was founded on May 2, 1910.

Lenz's history reported that "The entrance of the United States into World War I left The Elms/Theta Sigma Tau with only two active members and so a temporary disbandment was the only course open to the fraternity. With the end of the Great War many members of The Elms Club/Theta Sigma Tau returned the fall of 1919. They restarted the organization, this time housed in a college-owned building known as Sanford House located on Congress Street across from the cemetery, just west of the Commons." Stanford house was razed in 1939.

From this, it is known that Theta Sigma Tau occupied 206 Hall St. from approximately 1910 until 1917. Theta Sigma Tau was the oldest Greek organization found on the campus of Ripon College until 2021, when the college shut it down.

The house at 206 Hall St. was sold to Arthur Blumenshine (1891-1979), who in 1921 married his wife, Clara Ebert Blumenshine (1896-1990). The Oct. 2, 1919 issue of the *Ripon Weekly Press* mentioned that Blumenshine had just moved to Ripon to set up a dental practice after he was discharged from the Army after World War I ended.

The house has had several owners since that time, but is well taken care of and still has a large presence on the corner of Hall and Tygert Streets.

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/.



THIS PHOTO WAS taken in 1911 of 206 Hall St. At that time, the house was home to what was called "The Elm Club," also known as the Theta Sigma Tau fraternity from Ripon College. Featured on the home are Ripon College students.

Photo courtesy of Joe Walker

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