

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

## Livery business thrived in Ripon before invention of cars

The Ripon Historical Society has a number of photographs of “livery stables.” Over a span of about 70 years from the early 1850s until 1919, there were many livery businesses in Ripon.

When automobiles became available in the early 20th century, the livery business ended.

Livery stables, sometimes called a “livery yard” or “boarding stable,” provided a number of services that supported Ripon’s early community. They offered individual horses, teams of two or more horses, buggies, wagons and even sleighs for hire if anyone needed to hire transportation.

Some livery stables offered horse-drawn buggies for use as taxi services that could take passengers to and from train stations, hotels or other locations for a fee. Often, these types of liveries were located in buildings adjoining nearby hotels, where they could provide services for travelers and tourists alike.

The Hotel LeRoy (now known as the Historic Mapes House Hotel) at 300 Watson St., offered a horse-drawn taxi service to and from the train station to the hotel.

A receipt in Ripon Historical Society’s archives from “Richard Prout’s Livery and Sale Stable” located on Scott Street itemizes the use of a three-seater funeral hearse. This included two horses,

pall bearers and a single buggy or wagon for the family.

This was promoted as “Prout’s Funeral Rigs” livery service and cost \$12.50 in 1907 (which equals \$397 today). Added to the invoice was an additional \$4 to bring the family’s children to the funeral from Fond du Lac. The Prout livery stable was owned by Richard Prout (1868-1919), who ran the stable until his death.

### Livery Services

Private horse owners could pay weekly or monthly to keep their horses indoors at the livery stable as a boarding arrangement. Livery stables were essentially large open barn-like buildings with wooden stalls or “boxes” to contain horses, while providing them a safe and secure environment, space to graze on grasses or oats, drink water and rest or sleep.

Those who owned their own horse(s), the livery stable had options for the care of the animal(s).

► **Full livery** — The staff undertakes complete care of and often exercises the horse. This was typically the most expensive boarding option.

► **Part-livery** — The horse was fed, watered and its stall is mucked out (cleaned) on behalf of the owner, but would not be exercised or groomed.



**THE HOTEL LEROY**, a temporary owner’s name change for the Mapes Hotel, offered a horse-drawn taxi seen here on Watson Street, which was perhaps cared for at a local livery business, submitted photo

► **Do-it-yourself livery** — A stall was provided, but the horse owner undertakes all care including the provision of hay, feed and bedding. This was usually the least expensive boarding option.

► **Horses for sale** — Cards and advertisements would list horses for sale. One receipt in the historical society archives from the 1880s includes a 10 year-old grey mare among other horses sold for \$75-\$100 (which equals \$2,199-\$2,933 today) and a 5-year-old sorrel reddish-brown mare sold for \$200 (which equals \$5,866.00 today).

Many livery stables also often sold hay and grain for homeowners, who kept their animals in their own carriage houses or barns. In addition, sometimes coal and firewood was sold for heating homes.

One of the historical society photos shows a livery stable business was located where the historic Carnegie Library building stands at 401 Watson St.

Diagonally across the street from this (where Ripon Drug Store is located at 328 Watson St.) was an “open hay market” that sold straw and hay for people to take home via wagon or to have delivered.

### Times Changed

Sixty percent of families



**LYLE'S LIVERY** WAS started around 1893 at 112 E. Jackson St. The owner’s son then took over the business which relocated to Scott Street, and closed around 1918. submitted photo

owned their own car by 1929, ending the need for horses, carriages and livery business.

The last two livery stables listed in Ripon Telephone Directories were Prout’s and Lyle’s.

The Ripon Directory shows Lyle’s Livery on Scott Street. It was owned by Herbert Lyle (1876-1938) who took over the business from his father, Robert (1846-1918), who had retired in 1905. Lyle’s Livery was established around 1893, when the family moved to Ripon and was then located at 112 East Jackson St. Lyle closed the livery around 1918 and started farming.

If people are in need of transportation today, there are 4,318 rental car businesses in America

offering more than 1.8 million cars, trucks and vans for hire and use. This is a 5.3% increase since 2022, and the rental car industry expects to continue growth going forward. In addition there are taxis and rideshare services that may be ordered online for individual or “rideshare” services.

Interestingly, businesses sometimes refer to themselves as “livery car” and “livery-taxi” services.

*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.*

## Livery and Sale Stables

**RICHARD PROUT, Proprietor**

### Carriages for All Occasions

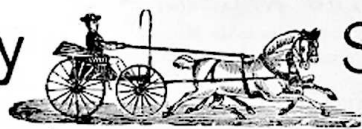
Dealer in **DRIVING AND DRAFT HORSES**

PHONE 158

**Scott Street**  
Opposite the Postoffice

**PROUT'S LIVERY AND Sale Stables** was located at 126 Scott St. submitted photo

## ROOT & VINE, Livery Stable.



Stylish Rigs on short notice. Gentle Horses and Easy Phaetons for Ladies' use.

**Corner Main and East Fond du Lac Streets,**  
**RIPON, WISCONSIN.**

**THIS IS A Root & Vine Livery Stable advertisement from the Ripon Commonwealth Press.** submitted photo

## LANDMARK/Schoolhouse moved location April 17 continued from page 1

ing additional information and answering any questions to the Department of the Interior as the landmark designation is reviewed,” Ripon Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Mandy Kimes said. “It will continue to advocate for all the ways of nationally recognizing the Birthplace of the Republican Party and are providing details of the situation as they become clear.

“The history of the Little White Schoolhouse is of national importance and pride, and the chamber and the Little White Schoolhouse board of directors are committed to the preservation and protection of this history into perpetuity.”

Ripon’s Little White Schoolhouse moved from its location on Blackburn Street to 1074 W. Fond du Lac St. Monday, April 17 and

the chamber said at the time that the schoolhouse expects to be open in May.

While the move was the sixth for the schoolhouse, according to the chamber, its location on Blackburn Street had been its home since 1951. Its Blackburn Street location “was determined to retain integrity,” in support of the building’s inclusion on the National Register in 1973, according to the letter written by Frear.

Frear also noted in the letter that just because the building has been moved in the past, that doesn’t mean it is OK to move it again.

“... The proposed new location lacks the qualities needed to offset the loss of historic integrity caused by a move,” she wrote. “The fact that this property has been

relocated in the past ... makes it even more critical that its current location be maintained.”

The chamber maintained that the move was necessary to ensure the integrity of the building after property behind the schoolhouse was purchased in preparation for the Boys & Girls Club.

“We realized that we would soon be surrounded by a new building with no parking,” Kimes said. “Looking to protect and preserve the integrity of the building, as well as offer visibility, parking and bathrooms to visitors, the chamber felt the property being donated ... would be beneficial to the future of the Little White Schoolhouse.

“The property offers 2.95 acres of land for various outdoor activities and events, great visibility,

easy and safe access for tour buses and the ability to have a visitor center. This way we can keep the interior of the museum as unaltered as possible and offer a prairie-like background that is set back from the road.”

That argument, though, didn’t convince Frear at the National Parks Service.

“While both Blackburn and Fond du Lac streets serve as State Highway 23 in Ripon, the current and proposed locations are extremely different because the roadway is different,” she wrote. “The current Blackburn Street location is less than one acre on a two-lane road, and the proposed Fond du Lac Street location is just under 2.5 acres on a five-lane artery with a faster speed limit and greater density of traffic. The new

location is not part of the historic street grid that defined the core of Ripon as it grew, but it is along a higher-speed artery that curves as it guides traffic out of town.

“The owners indicate concern regarding excessive hardscaping and traffic noise and pollution at the current location; however, the proposed location surrounded by asphalt parking lots on a busier thoroughfare would not alleviate those concerns.”

The National Park Service wasn’t the only organization to speak out in opposition to the move. Among the detractors is the Republican Party of Fond du Lac County, which said in a statement it was “deeply disappointed” by the move.

*Chad Richardson did the initial reporting on the story.*