

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

Ripon’s first rural mail carrier walked 145k miles

In the early days of both Ceresco and Ripon, as in other pioneering and rural communities, mail was carried and delivered in a pillow sack via horseback to a local postmaster’s house by a “mail messenger” for distribution to the community.

In a prior *Ripon Commonwealth* Now&Then article, the Ripon Historical Society noted that people would stop by the postmaster’s house to inquire whether any mail had been left for them. And sometimes, the postmaster would list mail that wasn’t yet picked up or retrieved in the local newspaper as a reminder to individuals to stop in for their mail.

The historical society has receipts for mail that was both sent and to-be-delivered, which before the U.S. Government Post Office and its mail carriers was organized was extremely costly — with receipts sometimes reaching costs upward of \$35 per mailing (the equivalent of \$661.67 today). This was extremely out of reach for most individuals who earned as little as \$6 per week or \$300 per year (the equivalent of \$5,671.49 per year today).

On Jan. 31, 1939, Ripon’s first-ever rural mail carrier, Frank Earle Tinkham (1874-1963), retired from the government postal service after serving both the rural and city mail delivery for 34 years. He was honored by employees of Ripon’s local

office at a dinner held in the then post office “recreation rooms” on a weekend evening.

Tinkham, who lived at 231 Blossom St. with his wife, Anna “Viola” McLean Tinkham (1871-1966), was one of 26 applicants to take a mail carrier examination when the free city of Ripon mail delivery service was first introduced by the U.S. Government in 1905.

Free rural Ripon farm and home delivery service had been introduced by the post office in 1904. Tinkham was the highest-scoring applicant of the civil service test given by the post office, awarding him the job.

He assumed his duties as mail carrier under then Postmaster Thomas Sayles Chittenden (1848-1911) on March 15, 1905. Tinkham served continuously, except when on paid vacations or personal sick days. Upon his retirement, it was noted that Tinkham had a number of untaken sick days to his credit, which spoke well of his loyal duties.

When he retired, the city of Ripon noted that Tinkham served under 10 different postmasters during his lengthy tenure. It was estimated that during this time, Tinkham had covered at least 145,000 miles walking to deliver mail, while wearing a uniform and carrying his government-issue mail pouch or sack.

During a *Ripon Commonwealth Press* interview Tinkham

said “his favorite mail delivery season was winter — noting the ground was frozen hard and during the spring months he has to walk around too many mud puddles and muddy streets, which added time and slowed his delivery system.”

Previous to entering his job as a government service mail carrier, Tinkham graduated from Ripon High School and then learned telegraphy at the local office of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railroad Station in Ripon (located where Condon Total Comfort is today). He was a telegram operator. Whether sending and receiving telegrams from the train station or delivering the U.S. Mail, Tinkham always was involved in delivering personal communications.

Upon Tinkham’s retirement, the *Ripon Commonwealth Press* asked him “what do you intend to do?” Tinkham answered that “he and his wife Viola planned to visit their relatives on both the east and west coast(s) of the United States.”

Today, the average U.S. mail postal carrier may walk up to 10 miles a day depending upon location, according to the U.S. Postal Service Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays



FRANK E. TINKHAM, seen here in 1894 at age 20, is credited with being Ripon’s first U.S. Postal Service mail carrier. He walked 145,000 miles during his 34 years delivering mail.

submitted photo

and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. us at Facebook/riponhistory or
For more information follow www.riponhistory.org

Baird receives scholarship



DAYTON BAIRD RECEIVES a \$500 scholarship from Ripon VFW President Sandy Soda during a meeting earlier this month after a successful first semester at Ripon College. submitted photo

BAV
BLAZER AUDIO VIDEO

FREE
Estimates

803 W. FOND DU LAC ST.,
RIPON • 920-745-2255

Home • Auto • Boat • Sales • Service
Always featuring Custom Installation

dishSpectrum

AUTHORIZED
RETAILER

DIRECTV DEALER

HughesNet.

ALARM.COM Security in the Palm of your Hand!

SELLING SAMSUNG, LG & SONY TVs
Electronics • Home Theater • Home Control • Security
CCTV • Voice/Data • Antenna Sales & Much More!

Monday - Friday 10:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

www.blazeraudiovideo.com

CHOOSE TO MOVE
Without Hip Pain

ORTHOPEDIC & SPORTS
INSTITUTE OF THE FOX VALLEY™

Hip

Dr. Eggert and Mako
Robotic Surgery will help.

Call 920-731-3111 or visit osifv.com