

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

## Ripon couple patented 'Dish-Cleaning Machine'

Riponites who applied for patents weren't just inventors.

Most owned and operated businesses for their everyday income. Many were farmers seeking to improve their equipment and related parts. They were similar to the Wright Brothers, who invented the airplane, while their day job was operating a bicycle shop.

This is the sixth in a series of articles about early Riponites applying for Patents.

Jeremiah Scott Letts (1828-1910) married Elizabeth Winters Bates (1834-1904) in 1857 and they resided in Will County, Ill.

Letts served in the American Civil War from 1861-1863. Following his time in the service, he enrolled at Hillside College in Michigan, where he studied to become a minister. He and Elizabeth, and their daughters Stella and Maud, arrived in Ripon in 1866 where the children attended Ripon schools, and they resided at West and Arcade streets.

From 1868-1873, Letts is listed as the reverend and minister to the Freewill Baptist Church (this building now is the American Legion Hall) located on Blackburn Street. In addition to his calling at the church the Letts couple aspired to be inventors. Jeremiah's eventual obituary credits him with holding patents for a hay press, fire extinguisher, dishwasher and aviation machine.

What follows are details for the Letts' "Dish-Cleaning Machine" enhancement patent, which was applied for in April, 1877 and granted in November of that same year.

JEREMIAH S. LETTS and

ELIZABETH W. LETTS, his wife, of the city of Ripon, in the county of Fond du Lac and state of Wisconsin, have invented a new and useful machine for washing dishes; and we hereby declare the following to be a clear and exact description thereof, reference being had to the accompanying drawing, which correspond with, and form a part of this specification.

The drums and the pan are connected with a force-pump with piston having a closed or solid head plunger. The pump-barrel is of sufficient capacity to fill the pipes with water. The bottom of the pan is fed on the "fountain principle." When the plunger is pressed downward and the water is forced into them the drums, having tubes, divide the water into numerous upward and downward streams upon the dishes, and also then acts as a faucet to draw-off the water. The dishes are placed in a rack made of coiled wires, attached to bands that pass around the inside of the pan. What we claim as new, and useful, and desire to receive a patent for is 1. The combination and arrangement of the pump connected with the pan and drums by the pipes, and 2. The drums and plus the rack for holding the dishes, all suitably arranged and operating.

Signed: (Inventors) Jeremiah S. Letts & E.W. Letts

Witnesses: W.R. LYLE, STELLA LETTS

William R. Lyle (1845-1918), witness to this patent application, worked in land-holdings and real estate sales. He and his family lived at the corner of Woodside

Avenue and Oak Street in the large home that would become "Lyle Hall" to Ripon College sorority girls and now is a private family residence.

The second witness, Stella Letts (1858-1960), was the daughter of Jeremiah and Elizabeth Letts, who were the inventors.

Jeremiah and Elizabeth Letts eventually left Ripon in 1882 and moved to North Dakota. Their daughters married later; one living in Washington and the other in North Dakota. Wife and mother, Elizabeth died in 1904 after a lingering illness. Jeremiah then lived with his daughter and her husband in Washington until his eventual passing in 1910 at age 85. Their youngest daughter, born in 1866, lived to be 101 years old, dying in 1967.

### Did you know?

► The U.S. Government and Congress grants four different types of patents to secure inventor rights to design, use and sell products, enhance processes or register new species of plants.

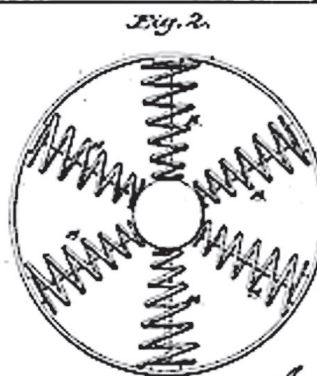
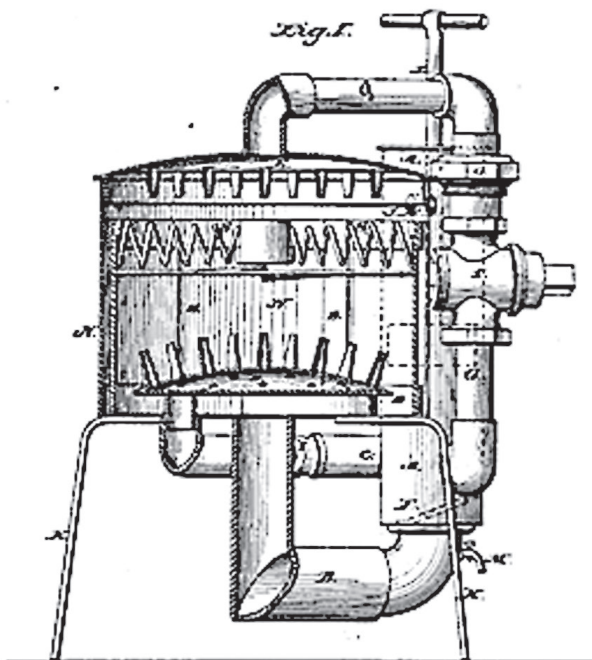
► There were 110 U.S. patent applications filed from individuals in Ripon in the 1800s.

► There were 66 U.S. patent applications filed from individuals in Ripon in the 1960s.

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.

J. S. & E. W. LETTS.  
Dish-Cleaning Machine.  
No. 197,480. Patented Nov. 27, 1877.



Attest:

W.R. Lyle  
Stella Letts.

Inventor:

Jeremiah S. Letts  
Elizabeth W. Letts.

THIS IS A picture of the "Dish-Cleaning Machine" patented by Jeremiah Scott Letts and Elizabeth Winters Letts. submitted photo

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