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

### Ripon's Dawes family tied to Revere's famous warning

This Fourth of July, the United States of America will celebrate the 248th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. During this holiday, Ripon Historical Society remembers the Dawes family of Ripon and its ancestors' contribution to this important time in America's history.

Those visiting Ripon's Hillside Cemetery, located at the southwest corner of the Ripon College campus on Congress Street, may find the Dawes family monument just to right (west) of the cemetery gates.

The red marble monument was erected in the early 1940s and replaced marble slabs that had previously marked original Dawes family members graves.

The inscription on the larger monument reads like a family tree, listing 10 family members starting with William Mears Dawes (1771-1855). At the bottom of the marker is an inscription which reads: "William Mears Dawes was the son of William Dawes, Jr., (1745-1799) who with Paul Revere, rode out of Boston on the night of April 18, 1775, to carry warning of an impending British Army attack."

When the American Revolution started, William Dawes Jr. was a resident of Middlesex County, Massachusetts Bay Colony. Dawes traveled a different route than Revere, but they arrived about the same time to warn John Hancock and Samuel Adams that the British troops were on their way.

The two men then rode onto Concord, Mass. to alarm the Minutemen soldiers; however, Revere was captured. Dawes has all but been forgotten for his contribution on that evening, while Revere became famous with the 1863 writing of the poem, "Paul Revere's Ride," by Henry Wad-



**THE DAWES FAMILY** monument can be found to the right of the Hillside Cemetery gate off of Congress Street. *Jonathan Bailey photo* sworth Longfellow. (1771-1855), and William Mear

Dawes had seven children and died in Boston the same year (1799) that former President George Washington died at his home in Mt. Vernon, Va.

Dawes' grandson, George Dawes (1801-1869), and George's wife, Elizabeth Ames Dawes (1800-1877), moved to a farm Ripon in 1854.

George and Elizabeth's son, Hector Dawes (1830-1922), had come to the Ripon area in 1851. George sent Hector to Wisconsin in 1851 to look for new land, traveling by coach, rail and then boat to Sheboygan.

From there, Hector walked cross country and found that the land surrounding Ripon appealed to him. His mother and father, George and Elizabeth, moved to Ripon later on their own, traveling by covered wagon. The family settled on a farm southwest of Ripon.

Trains arrived in Ripon in 1855 and William Dawes Jr.'s son, William Mears Dawes (1771-1855), and William Mear Dawes' wife, Abby Kendall Holden Dawes (1781-1856), came to Ripon to visit their son and grandson. Both died shortly after arriving.

George served as a trustee of Ripon College from 1858 until 1861 and had four children with Elizabeth, all of whom are buried in Hillside Cemetery. Hector left Ripon around 1892 and moved to Iowa and then Chicago.

Another of William Mears Dawes' sons, also named William (1799-1888), moved to Ripon in 1859 and lived at the southwest corner of Watson and Watertown streets. This now is the location of the Selfridge Apartment building.

This William left Ripon around 1875 and moved to Milwaukee. He donated a house to Ripon College, which became known as the "Dawes Cottage" located on Elm Street. The building was razed some years ago, but photos still exist in the archives at the Ripon Historical Society and also Ripon College.



**WILLIAM DAWES JR.** is featured in this oil painting by John Johnston, circa 1785-95. William Dawes, Jr. rode with Paul Revere on the night of April 18, 1775 to signal warning of an impending British attack. His son, William Mears Dawes, and other family members are buried in Ripon's Hillside Cemetery. *John Johnston painting* 

Hector's brother, Edmund Dawes (1839-1862), was killed in action during the Civil War.

Hector's son, Frederick Ames Dawes (1857-1944), was born in Ripon and graduated from Ripon College in 1878. He became a lawyer and was in the lumber and coal business. Another of Hector's sons, William Ruggles Dawes (1862-1951), also was born in Ripon and graduated from Ripon College in 1884. He went onto become a banker in various places, including Chicago, and starting in 1907, became a Ripon College trustee. He was chairman of the board of trustees from 1937 until 1948 and then was made honorary chairman.

Other Dawes family descendants include a vice president of

the United States, a Nobel Prize winner, politicians and congressmen, TV personalities, bankers and businesspersons.

There is a "Descendants of William Dawes Who Rode Association" (recognizing patriotism by riding along with Paul Revere), which was established in 1971. For more about this, visit www.wmdawes.org.

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.

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