

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

Origins of Ripon's Soldiers' Memorial and its evolution

In honor of Memorial Day, the Ripon Historical Society takes a look at a soldiers memorial that today is located at the corners of Seward and Ransom streets.

Many people may notice this while attending events at the Village Green, wondering about its significance.

This memorial actually looked very different when it was originally erected in approximately 1913 on a small triangular shaped street corner of Blackburn Street south of Fond du Lac Street. This is where the Central Park Offices now is located at 201 Fond du Lac St., across the street of the present day American Legion building at 113 E. Fond du Lac St.

The *Ripon Weekly Press* newspaper dated Aug. 18, 1910 stated that the monument was erected jointly by the local post and camps of the Grand Army



RIPON'S GRAND Army of the Republic (GAR) post was known as the H.S. Eggleston Post No 199. It was named after Major Henry S. Eggleston (1820-1862), who came to Ripon in 1856.

submitted photo

pyramid of 40 cannon balls on the top.

The cannon balls (also called "mortar balls" in the *Ripon Weekly Press* article) were obtained from the U.S. government from a congressman.

This 1910 article noted, "upon examination the balls were found to have seen actual service in the Civil War. They weighed just 89 pounds each when empty, and when filled with powder would come up somewhere around an even hundred." It was surrounded by a triangular cement wall with an iron fence with three cannon balls topping three corner posts, and flowers were planted between the monument and the fence. After the cannon balls were obtained, the article reported that "The business men and citizen of Ripon gave their money very promptly, and about \$250 (which totals approximately \$8,000 today) was raised" to build the memorial.

Information from Ripon historian Sam Pedrick (1868-1963) noted that it was the idea of John Ganes (1845-1929) to erect the monument. Ganes was very involved in the GAR on a local, state and national level.

After attending school until age 15, Ganes enlisted as a private in Ripon's Co. D, 1st Wisconsin Cavalry during the Civil War. Following the war, he lived in other communities, moving to a farm west of Ripon in 1907 and then to the city of Ripon in 1909.

However, the August 1910 article from the *Ripon Weekly*

Press stated that "During the early part of the winter, Dr. J. S. Foat, together with some others, conceived the idea of building the monument."

Dr. John S. Foat (1872-1929) graduated from Ripon College and was a member of Ripon's Co. D going into the Spanish War. Later he received his medical degree in Chicago and returned to Ripon to practice medicine. During World War I, he also was commissioned as a captain in the Medical Corps.

The Jan. 19, 1961 *Ripon Commonwealth Press* reported that the memorial was moved at the expense of the city and given to The Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Schultz-Kemp-Wentland Post 5278. This was done "in order to eliminate a traffic hazard at this point."

The June 6, 1961 *Commonwealth* noted that "The city council authorized payment of \$263 (equal to \$2,619 today) for reconstruction of the cannonball monument to veterans on the Ripon VFW clubhouse property."

The Ripon VFW was founded in 1946. It was named after four service members who gave their lives during World War II: Lt. Victor Schultz (1919-1944), two brothers Sgt. Arthur Klemp (1918-1943) and Sgt. George Klemp (1906-1945) and Capt. Roy Wentland (1913-1942).

After passing away, Daisy Fenelon (1881-1957) donated her home at 404 Ransom St. to the post as a "living memorial to old Company D of the Wisconsin National Guard."

The VFW, which had been meeting at various locations, then moved into the house. The organization razed the house in the late summer of 1969 and built a new, smaller clubhouse on the same location.

The post sold its building in 2018 and currently meets at the American Legion building.

Magnolia Hair and Nail Salon now occupies the former VFW post building. The memorial now stands in front of the beauty salon just north of the Ripon Veterans Walk of Honor which was erected in 2001.

Memorial plaques tell stories

When the memorial was moved, it also was reconfigured from a triangular to a rectangular monument. Only five cannon balls remain from the many that decorated the original memorial.

It is not known what happened to the 47 other cannon balls from the original memorial. The new monument has four bronze plaques: three on the front and one on the eastern side.

The first front panel on the memorial reads, "H.S. Eggleston



ABOVE, THIS photo postcard shows the Soldiers' Memorial in its original form and location at the corners of East Fond du Lac, Blackburn and East Thorne streets. It was later reconfigured, right, when it was moved to the corner of Seward and Ransom streets, the former location of the Veterans of Foreign Wars.

submitted photos



Post No 199 G.A.R." This was the H.S. Eggleston Post Number 199 of the GAR. The GAR was a fraternal organization made up of veterans of the Union Army and Navy of the United States during the Civil War, which ran from April 1861 until April 1865. Founded in 1866, GAR grew to a peak membership of 410,000 by 1890, but by 1956 it was dissolved at the death of its last member. The DAR also had a woman's auxiliary chartered in 1883 called the "National Women's Relief Corps (WRC)."

The Ripon GAR originally was founded in 1870, but it was short lived, and a new GAR organization was formed in 1885.

At one time, it had a membership of 139 men. However, by 1938, 73 years after the end of the Civil War, Ripon historian Sam Pedrick (1868-1963) wrote, "The sun is setting low in the west, and the day is drawing to a close for the Grand Army of the Republic. Other comrades of later wars must take command and continue the work so nobly begun and carried on by the GAR."

In 1868, General John A. Logan, the first GAR commander-in-chief, declared May 30 to be Memorial Day (this was also referred to as "Decoration Day"). Logan requested that all GAR members make May 30 an annual occurrence to pay tribute to all war casualties, missing-in-action and deceased veterans.

In Ripon, the Memorial Day activities were first organized by the GAR. After the soldier's memorial was erected, people attending the ceremonies would stop at the memorial before moving onto the wreath laying ceremony held in Hillside Cemetery.

One hundred and fifty-five years later, Ripon still celebrates Memorial Day as a way to re-

member those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our country.

These ceremonies are now organized by the Ripon American Legion and the VFW.

The GAR was organized into "departments" at the state level, and "posts" at the local community level. Ripon's GAR post was named after Major Henry S. Eggleston (1820-1862). Eggleston came to Ripon in 1856.

"He was associated with A.M. Skeels in mercantile pursuits, but in the summer of 1861 he enlisted in the First Wisconsin Volunteer Cavalry (also known as the Ripon Guards, Co. B), receiving a commission as captain," Pedricks wrote.

The Wisconsin Veterans Museum noted that Eggleston was a "prominent citizen of Ripon" before he established the Eggleston's Real Estate, Insurance, Loan and Collection Agency and served as post master of Appleton, Wis. prior to the war.

During the summer and early fall of 1861, there was an encampment on the Ripon College campus. Eggleston and the Ripon guards trained at Camp Harvey in Kenosha, Wis. In July 1862, Co. B participated in skirmishes in Missouri and Arkansas and Eggleston was promoted to major.

While stationed in Missouri in 1862, Eggleston contracted an illness and relinquished field duty to become a recruiter in Milwaukee. He died of diphtheria that year and is buried at Hillside Cemetery.

The middle panel on the front of the memorial reads "Curtis J. Dillon Camp No. 18 S.W.V."

Curtis J. Dillon (1879-1898) was born in Ripon and was a bugler in Co. D, 2nd Regiment Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry during the Spanish-American War, which ran from April to December 1898. He contracted

typhoid while serving in the Army and in October was the first death in his company after they returned to Ripon that September.

The S.W.V. on the memorial stands for "Spanish War Veteran" and the Ripon Spanish-American War organization was named after him.

The third panel on the front of the memorial reads "Company D 2nd Regiment W.N.G."

This was in honor of the Wisconsin National Guard, Co. D, 2nd Regiment, which served in the Spanish-American War, Georgia, Puerto Rico and at the Mexican border. The regiment was reorganized in World War I as Co. B, 128th Infantry and saw service in France.

A new panel was added onto the east side of the memorial. It reads, "Dedicated to the memory of all Veterans who served their county and to commemorate the 100th Anniversary 1899-1999. Presented by Schultz-Klemp-Wentland Post No. 5278, Ripon, WI 1999."

This honored the 100th anniversary of the national VFW organization, which was founded in 1899 as the American Veterans of Foreign Service and started by 13 veterans of the Spanish-American War. The organization has been known as the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States since 1914.

Individuals with any more information about the memorial may email the Ripon Historical Society at riponhistsoc@gmail.com or call 920-748-5354.

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.