

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

South Woods Park Association was founded by women

Conservation and a vision for natural resource preservation wasn't on the forefront of most Americans in the early 1900s.

But it was on the minds of the women who formed Ripon's South Woods Park Association, with a mission to preserve this natural habitat for future generations to learn about and enjoy what early settlers saw in the Ceresco Valley to the west of Ripon.

It's been written that the association's quest began when a young man from Green Lake purchased elm, maple and basswood trees taken from what was classified as "a primeval forest owned by Frank Schultz."

While driving home in a wagon with the trees, the young man began reflecting that these trees were irreplaceable and later told his wife, "If I were a rich man, I would buy this woods (South Woods) and donate it to the city of Ripon."

Other people were concerned about this same forest. It totaled approximately 20 acres and had been the playground of the children in the Ceresco village who, like most kids of their time, ran into the woods to play games and spend their time in this outdoor area. It held multiple flora and fauna that are native to the area and might someday be depleted, developed or devastated.

Women led the conservation

Two women's clubs, the Education Club and Science Club, held a joint-meeting in which they discussed how these woods could be saved and cared for by the city. They approached the City Council and asked if it could purchase the land, but were told that action would need a majority vote by the citizens of Ripon. To not lose time dealing with any bureaucracy, the women decided to purchase the

woods themselves.

To raise money each member who could afford to donated \$2 (\$73 in 2024) and signed a contract to purchase the 20 acres at a total cost of \$2,000.

Within six months after the purchase agreement was signed, the women formed the "South Woods Park Association."

Elected Officers were Elizabeth Hood as president, M.C. Pool as secretary and Carrie Stone as treasurer. Twenty-two additional women were assigned as "charter members" of the association. Afterward, the women adopted a constitution that stipulated members must belong to either the education or science clubs, and their draft constitution was signed and notarized, which enabled the secretary of state in Madison to incorporate the club, complete with new by-laws and formal meeting schedule.

Fundraising makes an impact

The members then began organizing fundraising to pay off their loan. Early funds were obtained from a rummage sale, followed by a citywide carnival.

For this large event, Ripon College provided music along with the Ripon High School band, store and shop owners donated goods, and booths were built to sell ice-cream, cake, coffee, candy, flowers and lemonade, with proceeds going to the South Woods Association.

A lunch counter was set up providing cheese, potato salad, coffee and doughnuts. School children formed a living flag drill team, and a parade with floats and carts marched through town.

At this time, there was a horse race track located in the area now known as Barlow Park that was operated by Dan Fenelon. Fenelon contributed midday race proceeds to the cause.

A year after the carnival, a citywide floral show was devised to continue to raise monies. Within five years, all of the women's activities enabled the South Woods' land purchase to be paid for via fundraising.



POSTCARDS OF A woman walking into beautiful South Woods were sold in 1923.

submitted photo

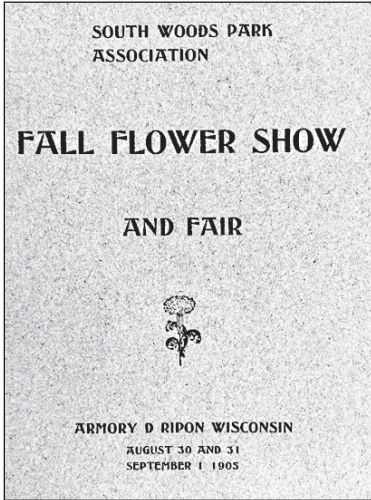
South Woods is preserved for all

Today, spring and fall tours of South Woods to view and learn about wild flowers and native Wisconsin plants take place almost every year weather permitting. Ripon College professors and students offer to help guide these tours. Volunteer clean-up days for the woods are also advertised for participation in the *Ripon Commonwealth Press* on an as-needed basis.

Thank you to the women whose vision and efforts conserved South Woods more than 120 years ago.

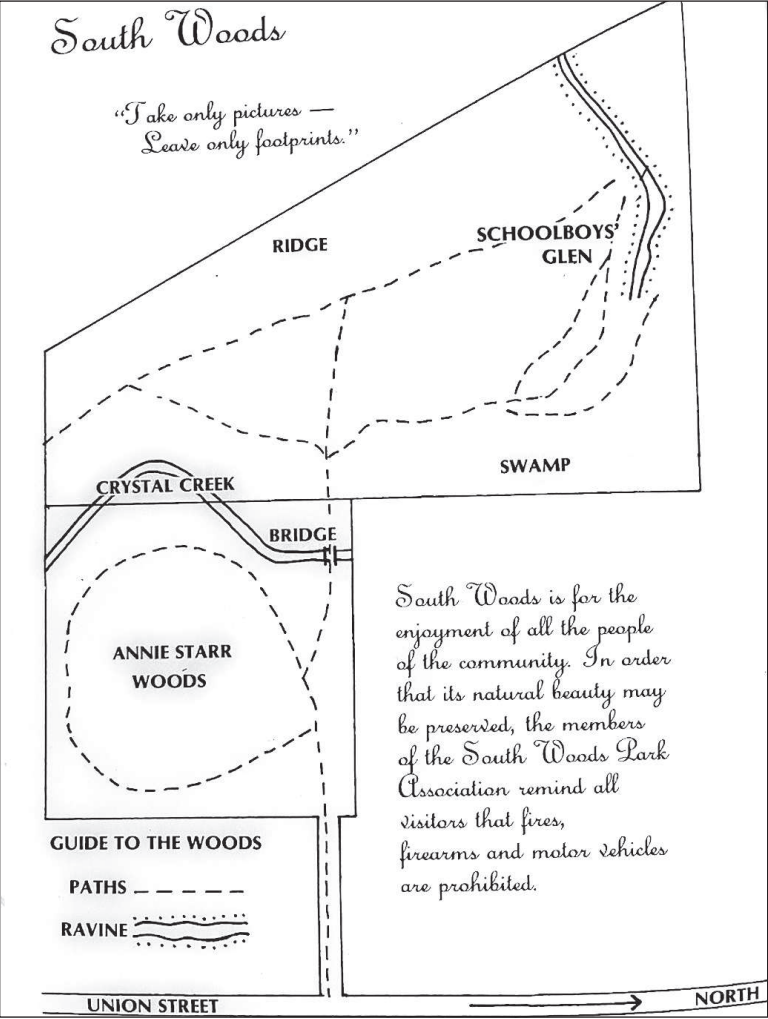
The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more information follow us at [Facebook/riponhistory](#) or [www.riponhistory.org](#).



A RIPON CITYWIDE flower show and fair took place at the Armory Building (currently Déjà vu Boutique and Home) with proceeds going to help pay down the loan taken out to purchase South Woods. An entry admission was charged and products were sold in addition to exhibits for viewing.

submitted photo



A MAP FROM the mid-1900s show the layout of South Woods Park.

submitted photo

Answers to the Crossword Puzzle from the October 2nd issue of The Commonwealth Express

BAFTA	TOBAGO	TSA	ELKS
AMIRI	IRAQIS	AERONAUT	
ATFIRSTBLUSH	EVENTIDE		
TACT	SKATES	ENE	LOA
ASHLARS	SATINDAMASK		
REG	NUCLEI	RATTLE	
CARNATION	FAMILY	MIMI	
AMAID	COINOP	SOONER	
DIDLAPS	CORALS	SPRINGS	
ILES	EARWAX	WAILER	
AER	CANAAN	PANDAS	ABC
MORTAR	PAYEES	KNEE	
PEACHCOBBLER	SHTETLS		
URBANE	OILIER	REIMS	
BEEF	PANSEARED	SALMON	
EAMONN	HALOED	INA	
ROSEKENNEDY	BREASTS		
ANI	RAT	TIARAS	BOSS
ZIRCONIA	SHADES	OFFPINK	
OCEANIAN	COGENT	FOLIO	
RENT	ECO	SOUNDS	STEAD

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