



RIPON  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
Since 1899

# Annual Report

## Year Ending 2023, Looking Ahead to 2024

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***In 2024, we will celebrate the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Ripon Historical Society, the oldest continually operating local historical society in Wisconsin. I'm happy to say that 2023 has been a good year for the Ripon Historical Society, and we enter our anniversary in good shape, strong, dynamic, financially sound, and forward-looking.***

### 2023 Year End Highlights

- More than 500 visitors; toured our museum buildings, attended our monthly programs, and joined our walking tours. Our Website saw 300 to 700 visitors monthly with many returning for more than one online visit. There were thousands of visits to our Facebook page and many “likes,” “shares,” and “comments.”
- We built stronger partnerships with Ripon Public Schools, the Ripon Public Library, the Chamber of Commerce, the Historic Preservation Commission, and the Little White School House Museum. We continue to look for new ways of collaborating with other community organizations and resources.
- Ripon College faculty have brought history, art, and museum study classes to the museum. Student interns and volunteers from the College are working within our artifacts, exhibits, and events.
- We are building stronger ties with other local historical societies, and we will host another regional “mini conference” of local historical societies in the spring of 2024.
- Our weekly column in the *Ripon Commonwealth* newspaper has raised the Society’s visibility, fostered renewed interest in Ripon’s history, and increased support for the Society and its mission.
- Our slide-lecture programs in Spring and Fall months remain popular, attended by up to 60 guests.
- Our walking tours of Ripon’s historic districts and Hillside Cemetery are extending our reach beyond the museum buildings and bringing more people into contact with Ripon’s history in more ways.
- Repair and restoration of our Pedrick-Lawson House Museum continue with completion expected in the Spring of 2024, and we continue open this facility more often to the public, and for private tours.
- The Society remains financially sound, despite some fiscal challenges in 2023. These included the need to replace aging and failing furnaces and computers, complete deferred maintenance, and meet increased insurance costs. We established a long-range capital plan for future maintenance and repairs, and we are planning new fundraising initiatives. Together, they will help to ensure the Society’s long-term financial stability.

**Our plans for 2024** include new exhibits, programs, and events to celebrate our 125<sup>th</sup> “birthday”, new board members and volunteers, and stronger community partnerships as we gather, preserve, and share the rich and vibrant history of Ripon, Wisconsin.

*The Ripon Historical Society is an independent 501(c)(3) charitable corporation supported entirely by membership fees and private donations. Gifts to the Society are tax deductible.*

### **Visitors to the Historical Society**

2023 saw more than 500 visitors to the museum and to programs outside the museum. Our slide-lecture programs have been well-attended. We hosted three tours of Hillside Cemetery and an architectural walking tour of historic homes, all well-attended.

Visits to our Facebook page are still in the thousands. Individual posts often reach over 6,000 individuals online through “shares”, “likes” and “comments.”

Visits to our Website average 300-500 each month with almost 700 individual website users during Spring & Fall months. Up to 14 percent of users are returning visitors who come back to the web site for additional reading.

### **Strategic Partnerships**

In the past year we have built stronger partnerships with the Ripon Public Library, the Chamber of Commerce, the Historic Preservation Commission, and the Little White School House.

Classes from Ripon public schools have also visited our museum to learn about local Ripon history, and we are working to strengthen our ties with the public schools.

-We continue to build ties with other local historical societies - in the spring of 2024 we will host a conference of officers and volunteers from historical societies and museums around the Fox Valley including a guest speaker from the State Historical Society.

### **Strategic Partnership — Ripon College**

Thanks to Ripon College Art History & Museum Studies Professor Travis Nygard and other professors -- Brian Bockelman & Becky Matzke, Sarah Frohart-Lane -- we have increased the number of student interns who volunteer at the Society this semester, and we have built stronger bonds with the College and its art and history faculties.

Through Ripon College we have established a college accredited curriculum for college student internships and coursework at the historical society.

We currently have three student interns from the College working under the supervision of Caron Sisko, Adjunct Scholar of Art and Museum Studies at the College. The interns are engaged in a variety of tasks including museum cataloging, research, writing articles, and working on new exhibits.

College interns and student volunteers also serve as docent guides at our Pedrick-Lawson House Museum on Ransom Street and walking tours of Hillside Cemetery.

We are grateful to Professor Nygard for his efforts to bring student interns to the Society and to encourage other faculty to bring students here for learning.

### **Outreach**

Our weekly column in the Ripon Commonwealth newspaper has raised the visibility of the Society and fostered renewed community interest in Ripon's history. These articles are mostly written by Pat Grahn, Steve Arbaugh and a few other contributors, including our college interns.

We will publish a book of those articles in 2024 titled "Ripon Remembers." It will be sold in Ripon and through Amazon.

We host public programs on the third Thursday in the Fall and Spring months. In October, 63 people came to the museum for Pat Grahn's program on Ripon ghosts and graveyards.

Part of our mission is to share Ripon's history. Through cemetery tours, walking tours, and slide programs at other locations, as well as our newspaper column and social media, we are extending that mission beyond the museum and reaching a much wider audience.

#### **Pedrick-Lawson House Restoration**

Work continues on the Pedrick-Lawson House. We hope to complete the work in the coming spring. The projected total cost of the repairs and restoration is \$34,000. Our goal is to raise \$15,000 from the community and draw the balance from our endowment. We have so far raised about \$9,500 toward that \$15,000 goal.

#### **Unexpected Challenges**

After one furnace died and another needed major repairs, the board chose to replace all three aging furnaces, one in the Pedrick-Lawson House and two in the museum. and we completed long-overdue measures to prevent water seeping into the basement archives.

When our primary computer died, the board chose to replace both computers. The new systems and software will, among other things, allow us to digitize much of our collection and make it available online. Recent donations of a new color printer/copier/scanner and a large flat screen TV enhance our computer systems and allow us to better serve visitors and researcher in many ways.

We also completed a long-deferred project to eliminate water leakage into the basement archives.

#### **Strategic Planning**

Despite a rather expensive "expenditure year," the Society remains financially sound, thanks to the generosity of our members and donors, growing support from the community, and efforts of our board.

We are preparing new fundraising initiatives to ensure ongoing financial stability.

And we are developing written policies and guidelines to help volunteers carry out tasks and projects that are consistent with accepted best practices.

Officers elected for 2024 include:

- David Sakrison, continuing as President
- Caron Sisko, newly elected Vice-President
- Dani Moore, newly elected treasurer

Until we can recruit a Secretary, board members will rotate the duty of recording our meetings. Our paid administrator will continue to maintain the records of the board's actions and of the Society.

#### **Looking ahead to 2024, our plans include:**

- offering new programs, including new architectural walking tours of Ripon

- recruiting new board members
- recruiting new volunteers
- strengthening connections with Ripon Public Schools and other local historical societies

Finally, 2024 brings the 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Charter and Constitution of our Ripon Historical Society, approved by the State Historical Society in 1899. New exhibits are in place for viewing, and we are planning additional public activities to celebrate the anniversary.

### **Recognition**

I want to recognize several people who have helped to guide the Society in 2023:

- Our board of directors, Caron Sisko, Travis Nygard, Steve Riemer, Chris Wiegand, Joe Walker, Roberta Walker, Lara Grant, and Matt Koski.

The board faced some tough challenges this year and I'm grateful for their ideas, commitment, and support.

- Our newest board members are Ms. Dani Moore, and Mr. Lee Prellwitz. Dani brings a strong financial background to the post of treasurer. Lee has extensive experience in business management and working with non-profit organizations.
- Our tireless administrator Steve Arbaugh has been instrumental in expanding our social media audience and helping to develop short and long-range strategic plans, processes, and tactics.
- Special recognition is given to long-time board member Roberta Walker, who served as our treasurer for 25+ years. Roberta held the role long after she had hoped to retire while we searched for her replacement.

*The board of directors extends our deepest gratitude to our many volunteers, donors, and other supporters. members, This Society, the oldest continually operating local historical society in Wisconsin, could not carry on without you.*

*Respectfully submitted,*

*David Sakrison, President  
Ripon Historical Society Board of Directors*