

Ripon Knitting Works
328 Watson St.

Founded in 1884, the Ripon Knitting Works became one of the city’s most important industries and employers. The notable company specialized in the manufacture of heavy hosiery, gloves, undergarments, and leather baseball mitts. For decades, the factory helped establish Ripon as a regional manufacturing center before the building was demolished in the 1970s.

Look for: Historic photographs showing the scale of the former factory complex. Scan the QR code to see these photos and more!



Biegick Brothers Garage
333 Watson St.

Originally built in 1925, this building later became home to the famous Biegick Brothers automotive business. Edward and Walter Biegick operated gas stations, repair shops, tire stores, and car showrooms throughout Ripon and Berlin. Known for their creative promotions, the brothers hosted ballroom dancing events inside the service garage and screened racing films during “Free Film Nights” in the showroom. Walter Biegick even earned a ride in the Goodyear blimp after leading regional tire sales promotions.

Perhaps most famously, the business displayed a giant 12-foot Goodyear tire outside the shop, attracting curious visitors from throughout the area.

Today, the former garage building has been transformed into a restaurant.

Look for: Oversized windows that once served as garage doors.



Horicon Bank
400 Watson St.

When this striking black glass building was constructed for First National Bank of Ripon, many residents were surprised by its futuristic appearance. Designed by a Chicago architectural firm, the building’s steel-and-glass exterior looked unlike anything previously built downtown. The innovative structure featured flexible interior spaces, exposed ceilings, and community meeting rooms long before shared workspaces became common. The design later earned a “Distinguished Building Award” from the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Today, the building is home to Horicon Bank.

Look for: The dramatic black glass exterior contrasting with surrounding historic architecture.



Carnegie Building
401 Watson St.

Funded through a grant from the Carnegie Foundation, this elegant building originally served as Ripon’s public library for 68 years and remains listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

When the community library relocated in 1972, residents famously formed a human chain down Watson Street, passing books hand-to-hand to the new library building on Jefferson Street.

The building later became home to Pearl’s House of Fashion before continuing its role as part of Ripon College and the downtown district.

Look for: Classical columns and neoclassical architectural detailing.



Bartlett Hall
302 Seward St.

Built in 1888 as the first women’s dormitory, Bartlett Hall mostly had served as a residence hall for the first 100 years of its existence. Designed by James Douglas of Milwaukee, the building originally featured a large



(Bartlett Hall Cont’d) square tower rising from the entrance arch. Today, only the three-stage brick base of that tower remains. The building was completely renovated in 1987 and 1988. Bartlett Hall houses the offices of the Vice President and Dean of Students, the Registrar, and other essential campus departments. Bartlett is named in honor of Sumner Bartlett and constructed with funds from his widow, Lucy Bartlett. According to his obituary, published in The Oshkosh Northwestern Jan. 3, 1881, Bartlett’s “mother was a direct descendant of Peregrin White of Mayflower history, the first white child born in America.”

Pickard House Museum
508 Watson St.

This building, built in the 1870s, was once a private residence and is currently the headquarters of the Ripon Historical Society.



In addition to a library, archives, and storage space, there are rooms for events, meetings, and exhibit displays. The Pickard House gets its name from Belle Pickard. Pickard operated Ripon’s first beauty salon on the first floor from 1913 to 1965, and her family lived on the second floor. The house was donated to the Ripon Historical Society in 1968, and an addition was added in 1999.

Bumby House
526 Watson St.
(Owner of Rippin’ Good Cookies)



Bumby House was built in 1898 for the Burgess family, who ran the Ripon Knitting Works. For many years, it was the largest industry and employer in town. A notable resident of this home was Horace Bumby, the founder of Ripon Foods and maker of Rippin’ Good Cookies. Horace, along with 25 of his employees, founded Ripon Foods in 1930, which made cookies under the brand name Rippin’ Good for decades. As one of the major manufacturers of Ripon, his company provided jobs to countless individuals.

Provided by:
Ripon Historical Society
Ripon Historic Preservation Committee
Ripon Wisconsin
Ripon Public Library
2026

Ripon’s Historic Downtown

Welcome to Historic Ripon!

Ripon is a unique community that is rich in architectural beauty, entrepreneurial spirit, and fascinating stories that helped shape Wisconsin history. This self-guided walking tour invites visitors and local residents alike to explore the people, places, and events that transformed Ripon from a small frontier settlement into a thriving downtown district filled with character and charm.

As you stroll along Watson Street and nearby landmarks, you’ll discover a wealth of grand hotels, historic banks, theaters, factories, and storefronts that each tell a remarkable story of innovation, resilience, and community pride.

Approximate Walking Time: 60-90 minutes

Distance: Approximately 1 mile

Tour Type: Self-guided walking tour



Woods Hotel
100 Jackson St.

Built in 1872, the Woods Hotel—later known as the Englebright and Grandview Hotel—was once one of the largest and most elegant hotels in Fond du Lac County. Rising five stories high with balconies overlooking the square, the hotel welcomed travelers, politicians, writers, and entertainers from across the country, including Ralph Waldo Emerson and Frederick Douglass. In 1949, tragedy struck when a devastating fire destroyed the hotel, claiming six lives, including elementary school principal Alice Callan. The hotel’s historic guest register, containing the names of countless notable visitors, was also lost in the fire.

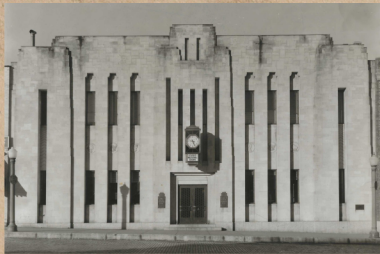
Look for: Historic photographs showing the massive five-story structure and balconies overlooking the downtown square.

**Pettibone's
Dry Goods
103 Watson St.**

Constructed in 1872, this building originally housed A.W. Pettibone's dry goods store before later becoming one of Ripon's largest department stores. In 1935, entrepreneur Ben Marcus transformed the building into the Campus Cinema—the very first theater in what would eventually become the nationally recognized Marcus Theatres chain.



The building also shares connections to Hollywood history through Ripon College alumni including Spencer Tracy and Harrison Ford. Today, the Marcus Corporation continues to operate theaters through the United States. **Look for: Original upper-story architectural detailing from the building's department store era.**



**First National
Bank
114 Watson St.**

Designed by Auler, Jensen, and Brown, this striking limestone building reflects the confidence and security banks hoped to project during the era of famous bank robbers such as Al Capone and John Dillinger. Constructed from Texas limestone, the building features beautiful Art Deco-inspired stonework and decorative lines throughout the facade. The original bank vault remains inside, along with former executive offices and meeting rooms on the second floor.

Inside the lobby area, hidden gun ports were built behind the marble teller counter where armed guards once stood watch to protect customers during a time when bank robberies were a real concern. The building's interior suffered severe fire damage during the 1940s but was quickly rebuilt. Before this structure was constructed, the site was home to Ripon's Grand Opera Hall, later known as Stone's Opera House, until it was destroyed by fire in 1880. **Look for: Decorative coins embedded within the facade stonework.**

**Greenway Block
125 Watson St.**

This triangular corner site reflects the many architectural and economic changes Ripon has experienced over the years. After the original Greenway building burned in 1885, a new city hall was constructed on the property. That building later was demolished in 1965 to make way for the modern-style Ripon Federal Savings and Loan building, which opened in 1969.

Look for: The unusual triangular layout of the building site.



**Rimpler & Tetzlaff
Meat Market
109 W. Fond du Lac St.**

Originally built in 1875, this historic building became the subject of local legend for decades due to rumors of underground caves beneath the property. In 2001, Ripon Main Street and members of the Wisconsin Speleological Society investigated the site and discovered a man-made shaft hidden below the building. In 1920, William Rimpler and Henry Tetzlaff took ownership of the meat market, continuing a longstanding downtown business tradition that remained active for generations. **Scan the QR code to see the downtown cave exploration story!**



**Pratt's Block
200 Watson St.**

After several destructive fires between 1871 and 1885 destroyed earlier buildings on the site, Pratt's Block was constructed in 1885 and became home to a wide variety of businesses over the next century. Among its best-known tenants was Steinbring's Busy Corner shoe store, operated by Arthur Steinbring, who was rather affectionately known throughout the community as "Ripon's Santa Claus" for more than 45 years. The building was purchased and restored in 1995 through downtown preservation efforts. **Look for: Historic storefront details preserved during restoration work.**



**Yerk's Barber &
F.W. Gruetzmacher
Cigar Shop
205-207 Watson St.**

William Yerk spent nearly 60 years serving the community as a barber in downtown Ripon. Next door, F. W. Gruetzmacher operated a cigar business for half a century while also serving in the Wisconsin National Guard and later the Spanish-American War. Together, these neighboring storefronts reflect the importance of small businesses and local entrepreneurship in Ripon's history. **Look for: Narrow storefront proportions typical of late 19th-century downtown commercial buildings.**



**Barlow & Seelig
Hardware
214 Watson St.**

This site played an important role in the development of one of Wisconsin's most recognized manufacturing companies. Founded in 1896 by John Seelig and Joseph Barlow, the business originally operated as a hardware store before expanding into washing machine manufacturing. In 1908, Joseph Barlow purchased the rights to a hand-operated washing machine and began producing the machines behind the hardware store. Demand quickly grew, eventually leading to larger factory operations and the development of the famous "Speed Queen" brand. Today, the company continues as Alliance Laundry Systems, a global leader in commercial laundry equipment. **Look for: Historic commercial storefront proportions from the original hardware era.**



Scan this QR code for additional photos, images, and videos of historic downtown buildings!

**Strauss Bros.
Department Store
230 Watson St.**

Few downtown buildings better represent Ripon's changing commercial history. For more than 150 years, this property housed an opera house, grocery store, department stores, retail businesses, and restaurants before sitting vacant for many years. Today, the building has been revitalized as Knuth Brewing Company, continuing downtown Ripon's tradition of reinvention and preservation. **Look for: Historic upper-floor windows that once illuminated the opera house above.**



**Mapes House
300 Watson St.**

The Mapes House is one of the oldest surviving buildings in downtown Ripon. Built in the 1850s from limestone quarried locally in Ripon, the building originally featured an elegant third-floor ballroom and French mansard roofline. During the devastating Opera House fire of 1904, flames spread across the street and ignited the building's upper floors, destroying the ornate rooftop structure and cupola. The roofline was never rebuilt, leaving the flat roof seen today. After narrowly escaping demolition years later, the building has since been beautifully restored as a boutique hotel. **Look for: The flat roofline that replaced the original mansard roof after the 1904 fire.**



**Ripon State Bank
301 Watson St.**

Built from honed limestone in 1913, Ripon State Bank became the scene of one of downtown's most dramatic crimes when armed robbers stormed the bank in 1936. During the robbery, 13 customers and employees were forced into the vault while the robbers escaped with \$4,641. The crime was never solved. Fortunately, an employee returning from lunch discovered the trapped individuals and freed them. **Look for: The building's impressive limestone exterior and classical detailing.**