

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF RIPON

Ripon was built on the northern edge of one of the largest stretches of open prairie in Wisconsin. The first white settlement within the present city limits was a small utopian community known as *Ceresco*, founded in 1844.

One-half mile east of Ceresco, other settlers formed Ripon, named after the English cathedral city located in Yorkshire. It drew most of its settlers from New England, New York and Pennsylvania. Ceresco disbanded in 1851 and in the two villages combined two years later and incorporated as the City of Ripon in 1858.

Like many cities in Wisconsin, Ripon grew quickly attracting a large German and Polish population in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### OTHER THINGS TO DO while in Ripon

**Visit** the Little White Schoolhouse, *Birthplace of the Republican Party*

**Shop** our many distinctive establishments on the east & west sides and in Ripon's Historic Downtown district.

**Tour** the Ripon College campus

**Hike or Bike** one of Ripon's many trails

**Enjoy Downtown Ripon** at Friday Night Concerts June through August & the Farmers Market on Tuesday evenings & Saturday mornings June through October, both on the Village Green

**Have fun** at Larson's Famous Clydesdales Show, and the historic Campus Cinema

**Contact the Ripon Area Chamber of Commerce for more information about all Ripon has to offer!**

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## Self-Guided Historic Walking Tour

### Ceresco

Approximate Walking Time  
60 Minutes



Prepared by the  
Ripon Area Chamber of Commerce

## WELCOME TO HISTORIC RIPON!

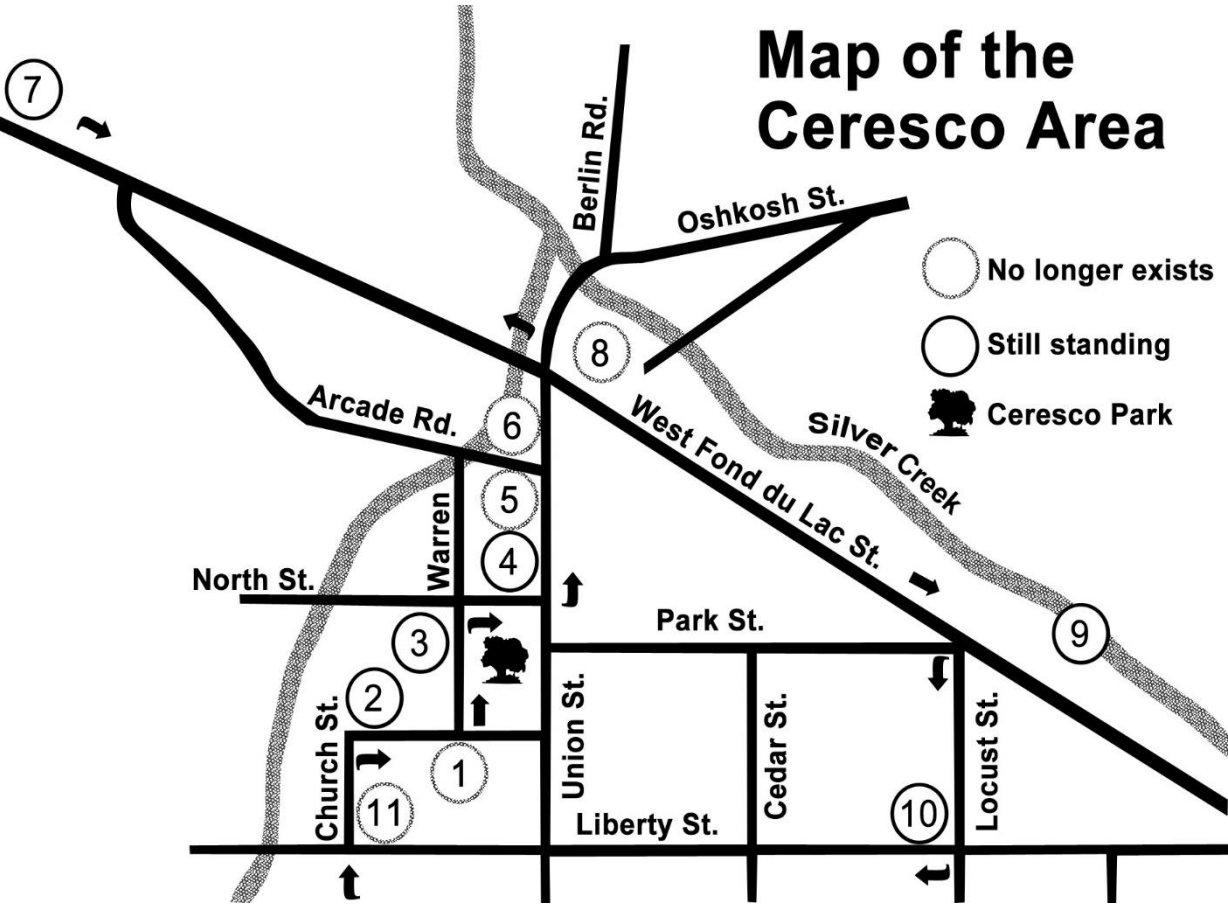
Ceresco was an experiment in the Wisconsin wilderness. Nearly 150 years ago the settlers formed a utopian community free from outside pressures in what is now Ripon. While their efforts to build a perfect society failed, their experiment had a dramatic impact on the city, the state and the nation.

The commune attracted a group of bold, intelligent, idealistic settlers. They were not only influential in founding the city of Ripon and many of its institutions; they helped found Ripon College and the Republican Party.

As you take this tour imagine the pristine valley where the settlers built their "Long house," the outward symbol of communal life.

Take your time with the walk and notice the historic buildings and architecture. While many of the original buildings have not survived the years, there are still many sights to see along your walk.

Have an enjoyable tour and thank you for visiting historic Ripon!



In 1844, a group of dedicated idealists met in Southport, WI (now Kenosha) and formed the Wisconsin Phalanx. Inspired by the writings of Albert Brisbane, members of the Phalanx intended to form a Utopian Socialism settlement advocated by the French philosopher Charles Fourier; leaving behind a hopelessly corrupt civilization and make a fresh start. Cooperation rather than competition was to be the essence of this new life.

In the spring of 1844, the Fourierites settled in a fertile valley a few miles to the east of Green Lake. They called it Ceresco (Ceres’ Company) after the Roman goddess of agriculture. Here, under the leadership of Warren Chase, a charismatic if somewhat eccentric New Englander, they established their “domain.”

### 1. First Long House – Church St

According to Fourier’s rules, all resident members of the Phalanx were to live and work together under a system of democratic management. To this end they built their first “Long House” in 1845, using rough lumber from their own sawmill. The building was located on the south side of Church Street and ran approximately east and west across the end of Warren Street. It was some 200 feet long and contained two-story apartments for twenty families.

### 2. Ceresco Commons – 800 Church St.

North/west of the first Long House the Fourierites built their “Unitary” or commons, including the dining hall, kitchen, bakery, reading room, meeting hall and guest rooms for the little commune. The house at 800 Church Street on the west side of Warren is built on the site of the “Bakery”.

### 3. Second Long House

By 1848 the Phalanx had built a second, more comfortable Long House. This building still stands, considerably remodeled, along the west side of the park. Built in Greek Revival Style, it had apartments for another 20 families. By 1847 the population of Ceresco was 175. The second Long House stood empty for many years after dissolution of the Phalanx. In the 1930s it was rebuilt and converted into five apartments.

### 4. Lester Rounds House – 116 Union Street

When communal living proved to be unpopular with some of the families, individual family dwellings were authorized. The Lester Rounds House may have been the first Ceresco Post Office, since Rounds was the first postmaster. It also served as a grocery and supply store.

### 5. Central House – Arcade Rd & Union

As the Fourierites, converted from common to private ownership at the end of the 1840s, a number of businesses grew up at the corner of Union and Arcade Road. A small hotel called the Central House was built on the southwest corner. Across Union Street was cooperative store known as the Ceresco Union. The later was organized by former members of the Phalanx in the hope of retaining some of Fourier’s principles. Neither of these buildings remains.

### 6. Cresco Gristmill – Arcade Rd.

In the park area north of Arcade Road the Phalanx built a three-story gristmill. The mill remained in operation (under private management after 1850) until the beginning of this century. A portion of the mill run can be seen protruding from the ground near the culvert under Arcade Road.

### 7. Little White Schoolhouse – 1074 W Fond du Lac St., Birthplace of the Republican Party.

Built in 1853 and originally located at Blackburn & Thorne St. in the Village of Ripon, the Little White Schoolhouse served as Ripon first schoolhouse. On March 20, 1854, a group of Ripon and Ceresco citizens met in the schoolhouse to form a new anti- slavery party and give it the name Republican. The schoolhouse has moved approximately 6 times over the years; most recently to its current location on W. Fond du Lac in 2023. In recognition of the building’s importance to the nation’s heritage, it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. A year later it was granted the additional status as a National Landmark. The markers in front of the building provide more information.

### 8. Blacksmith Shop – W. Fond du Lac St.

Across West Fond du Lac Street, the Fourierites located their blacksmith shop.

### 9. Ceresco Saw Mill – W. Fond du Lac St.

The Ceresco Mill was operated by waterpower from Silver Creek, a small stream running parallel to West Fond du Lac on the north side of the road. In their first year on the domain, the Fourierites dammed the creek at a point approximately 100 yards east of the corner of Fond du Lac and Locust, and here they built their sawmill. Both dam and saw mill are long gone, but the limits of the Ceresco millpond are still visible behind the houses on the north side of the road.

By 1849 the commune had lost some of its original zeal. The joint-stock form of organization had worked well at first; and their early industrial efforts had been crowned with success due to the effective leadership of Warren Chase and a general willingness to work. But their prosperity became something of a handicap for their social experiment. The advantages of cooperative living became less obvious to the established families. Furthermore, new Indian lands a short distance to the north were opened to white settlement in 1848; several of the more enterprising of the Fourierites chose to pioneer new settlements at Strong’s Landing (Berlin), Omro and Eureka. And finally, Warren Chase was spending more and more time away from Ceresco, first as a delegate to the Wisconsin State Constitutional Conventions of 1846 and 1848, then as a member of the first State Senate, and then as a Free Soil candidate for governor in 1850. His leadership was sorely missed.

### 10. Woodruff House – Locust & Liberty

In 1851 the Phalanx decided to disband. They platted a village of Ceresco in the area between West Fond du Lac and Congress streets and distributed their land, both as town lots and as farms, to their remaining members. One of these members was Jacob Woodruff. Given a town lot on the northwest corner of Locust and Liberty, he built a house on it of unusual design. The type of construction is “gravel-wall” or “grout” (a form of concrete); the shape is octagonal. It was the

building material more than the shape that was unusual, but the combination seemed to offer a solution to the need for inexpensive housing. Apparently invented in Milton, Wisconsin, the multi-sided gravel-wall house enjoyed a brief vogue nationally because of its low cost and efficient use of space. As one of the few remaining examples of this architecture, the Jacob Woodruff House has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

### 11. Ceresco Schoolhouse – Liberty & Church

The Phalanx built no church and had no official minister. The members were not irreligious, but some of them (especially Chase) were suspicious of organized religion. Nevertheless, itinerant ministers were made welcome and invited to preach in the small one-room schoolhouse that stood on the northeast corner of Liberty and Church. Ceresco became a regular stop on all the central Wisconsin Protestant circuits.

The Wisconsin Phalanx was both a failure and a success. Ultimately the rules of Charles Fourier were too confining for the relatively self-sufficient pioneer families of the American West. These rules were first modified, then abandoned. But the cooperative, joint stock company proved to be a workable organization for a new community in a remote area, at least for the first three or four years. Under this system the colony was well established, and it succeeded in attracting an industrious and vital population. The City of Ripon was heir to both its industry and its vitality. The Village of Ripon (founded in 1849) and the Village of Ceresco (platted in 1850) were combined into one community in 1853. Former members of the Wisconsin Phalanx participated in the founding of Ripon College and in the birth of the Republican Party.

**The Ceresco area** has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.