

White Lake Area Had Its Own Ripley – Believe It or Not

By Barbara Bedau Brow

White Lake Area Historical Society

L. G. Ripley was loyal to his hometown and never lost faith in its people or institutions. He contributed liberally, and often beyond his means, to every movement for the betterment of his town and its citizens. No one was ever turned away empty handed who came to him with a worthy cause. And for this spirit of loyalty to country and home his deeds will endure in the hearts of those who knew him and his cherished memory will be passed on to succeeding generations as one of Montague's greatest benefactors. (Taken from a portion of his obituary that appeared in May 1919.)



Lafayette Gilbert Ripley was born on 16 January 1844 in Barre, Vermont. He was the only child of Joseph A. and Philona French Ripley. He and his parents moved to Vassar, Mi. when he was very young. His father died when L.G. was about 6 years old. His mother died when he was about 11 year old. An orphan, his mother's brother, Ephraim French, brought L.G. back to his Vermont home where he and his wife Angela raised L.G. until he was 18 years old.

When the Civil War started, L. G. Ripley enlisted on 28 Jul 1862. He mustered in on 1 September 1862 to Company B, 10th Infantry Vermont Volunteers. He was wounded at the battle of "Mine Run" in Orange Grove, Virginia, on 27 November 1863 and saw no further active service at the front after that time. He was discharged on 21 February 1865.

After the close of the war, Ripley moved to Saginaw where he worked for a couple of years in a drug store. Being young and ambitious, he entered the University of Michigan in 1867 and graduated from the Pharmacy School.

He then enlisted in the regular army in 1867 as a Hospital Steward and was assigned to duty at Cheyenne and Fort Bridger, Wyoming. It was there that he met his future wife, Miss May E. Brackney whom he married on Christmas Day 1871 in Towanda, Kansas. They had a son in 1872 who died as an infant while Ripley was serving in the military and is buried in the Little Rock National Cemetery in Little Rock, Arkansas.

L.G. Ripley and his wife came to Montague in 1874. While living here they had seven additional children, five of whom lived to adulthood.

Edward Lafayette (1876-1944) – Attended Montague HS but transferred to a Grand Rapid high school from which he graduated in 1894. He then attended and graduated from a Grand Rapids business school as an Accountant. At the request of his uncle E. P. Ferry, President of the Santa Fe Railroad, he went to work for the line in Kansas City. For many years, he was associated with the railroad and in business in Decatur, Illinois. Eventually, he moved to Boston and became the Treasurer of the First Church of Christ Scientists of Boston. He married twice but had no children.

Montague Woolsey (1878-1943) – Attended Montague HS, graduated in 1895; attended Albion College, and graduated in 1899. Following his graduation he entered the publishing business and became the Editor of the Whitehall Forum from 1900 to 1901, when he joined his father in the pharmacy business. He married in 1903 and had five children. He was named Post Master in 1904, a position he held until 1916. In 1919 he joined his brother Howard in the operation of drug stores located in both Montague and Whitehall until 1931, when he became a member of the Michigan House of Representatives from January 1931 to December 1932. He eventually sold his Whitehall drug store to Robert Dowker in 1936.

May (1880-1885) – Was born on December 30, 1880. She died from Scarlet Fever at the age of four year and six months.

Katherine “Kate” (1882-1958) - Attended Montague HS, graduating in 1899. She took musical and literary courses at Albion College and worked in her father’s drug store prior to marrying Whitehall native Dr. Charles W. Littlefield in 1909. They had four children.

Howard Brackney (1885-1955) – Attended Montague HS and was one of six to graduate in 1903. Following in his father’s footsteps, he went on to study Pharmacy at the University of Michigan and graduated in 1907. After his graduation, he assisted his father in the operation of the drugstore and took over the business in 1939. He continued operating it until he sold it to Glenn Lipka in 1952. Howard married in 1913. They had no children.

Helen (1887-1971) – Attended Montague HS, she graduated in 1905. She then attended the Michigan State Normal College of Ypsilanti School of Music in 1910 and taught music in Montague Schools from 1910-1915. Helen married local banker Adolph Anderson in June 1914 and they had three children.

Baby Girl (1888-1888) – Died at the age of two months and eleven days. Cause of death listed as a fever.

Ripley purchased the drug store of A. Hood in 1874. In 1875 he moved his business to a store-front located in the Franklin House block.

L.G. Ripley built the Ripley Block in 1878, and enlarged it in 1882.

In October 1884, Ripley and several other businesses in the block were burned out when a fire of a suspicious nature swept through the block. The fire was suspicious because it was the third attempt to burn the town with the second one being just a few days previous.

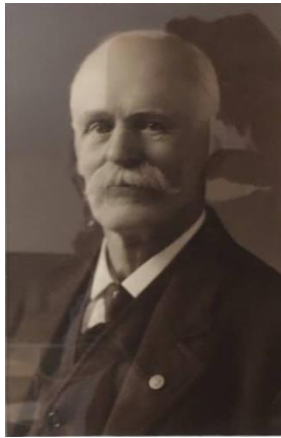
Businesses effected by the fire included: Burrows & Jones Grocery; The Opera House which was located above the store; J. F. Kelly General Store; W. J. Ricaby Jewelry; J. R. Conley Ladies Furnishings; Thos. Phelan Clothing; W. E. Marshall Photography; the Masonic Lodge; Geo. M. Duram Musical Instruments; Frank Bracelin, Editor of the Lumberman and his Law office; Morse & Bell Hardware; the Township Library; and several other individuals who had rooms over some of the shops.

When the fire reached the Morse & Bell Hardware stock, a number of dynamite cartridges exploded with such force that the windows of all the neighboring building were broken. The only wall left remaining was the west wall of the Ripley block. Shortly after the fire, Ripley had a crew of workmen cleaning up the area and beginning reconstruction, as did several of the others.

Ripley sold his drug store business to Charles F. Hoffman in 1899 but gained it back in 1901. The building still stands in town today on the corner of Ferry and Dowling streets is now known as Lipka's.

Ripley started building his Italianate style house in 1883, at a reported cost of \$6,000. He used bricks made by E. M. Ruggles & Company of Whitehall. The Ripley family moved into their house in April 1884. The house was added to the List of Michigan State Historic Sites in January 1983.

Ripley's wife May died in June 1915. He then married Mrs. Kate N. Bacon-Young in March 1916 in Los Angeles, California. Shortly after returning home to Montague, Kate became ill and died on 10 July 1916. L. G. Ripley died on 25 April 1919. He, his wives and several other members of his immediate family are buried in the Ripley family plot in Oak Grove Cemetery in Montague, Michigan.



L. G. Ripley (1844-1919)



Ripley House – Built in 1883



Ripley Block – Built in 1878, enlarged in 1882, burned in 1884 & rebuilt.