

'Finest resident property in southern Wisconsin' from 1800s still a gem in Monroe

Have you ever been at the First National Bank drive-thru and wondered who built the house that is kitty-corner across the street? It is one of the most interesting houses in Monroe and was built by Arabut Ludlow's nephew in 1888-89. Frank Chenoweth (1854 - 1938) was the son of Ben and Rosanna Ludlow Chenoweth. He lived his early life in the home his father built about 1857 on the north side of the 1900-block of 8th Street just two blocks north of the bank drive-thru. That house was razed in the 1920s after it fell into disrepair.

It is unknown where Frank and his new bride lived between the time they were married in November 1880 until they purchased the "Joe Barling home" the following April. It was announced in the April 27, 1887 Monroe Sentinel that he was talking of building a new house. He purchased two lots in December, which the newspaper said were a Christmas present for his wife. He built this house next door to his cousin, Henry Ludlow, who had built his beautiful home in 1881. On January 25, 1888 he had preliminary plans to build "a fine residence" on the lots that he had purchased from the J. S. Reynolds estate.



This photo of the Frank L. Chenoweth house, which was built in 1889 and still stands on the southeast corner of 20th Avenue and 10th Street, appeared in the City Directory of Monroe that was printed in 1891.

Nothing was mentioned in the newspapers about a delay of several months in construction, but the Sentinel said in December that the residence "was being pushed." Frank and Julietta took the train to Chicago to see about purchasing glass and more for the home in February 1889. The March 13 Sentinel said again that the residence was being pushed. It also said that it would be "the most elegant residence in this part of the State. It knocks 'em all out." By May 4 the brick work was "progressing finely." On July

17 it was reported that the “palatial dwelling house is nearly completed. It is one of the grandest houses in Southern Wisconsin.” A week later there were three painters from Milwaukee busy at the home. The following week it was reported that the incandescent electric lights had been installed. It was never mentioned when Frank and Julietta moved into this home with their only living child, Chester.

A blaze was discovered at the Chenoweth stable near the residence at 7:00 p.m. on Wednesday, February 26, 1891. The North Ward hose company was called, but the fire burned so rapidly that the family cow perished because it could not be released. The stable belonging to Henry Ludlow also caught fire and was so badly damaged that it had to be rebuilt. The buildings had been partially insured. By the beginning of April, Chenoweth had the plans for a new stable to be built on the site of the old one. He said that he was going to have the “most convenient barn in the city.”

Improvements were made to the home during the ensuing years. C. B. Churchill had reconstructed the drainage system in the home in December 1890. In April 1891 Frank had a large evergreen tree transferred from Henry Thorp’s yard and planted on his own lawn. The following month he had a handsome iron fence put around the large residence lawn. The fence with the fine new stable that had just been added, made it the “finest residence property in Southern Wisconsin.” In November 1895 they had a wood heater installed; that was in addition to the coal heater. They, along with a few other people in Monroe, had a telephone installed in March 1897.

An article in the April 16, 1900 newspaper described the house when Julietta entertained 21 people. It stated that the guests “were regaled with the elegance and beauty of the surroundings as well as the open-hearted hospitality that was a most charming counterpart to it all. The beauty of the home which does not stop with perfect elegance, but combines with it the elaborateness of artistic decoration, the hand work of Mrs. Chenoweth herself, makes it a most pleasing place in which to meet for pleasure, but when the guests were taken to the large attic, which Mrs. Chenoweth has fitted up for her art studio, and in displaying her large and varied art collection has made it a dream to the eye, the expectations of the guests were more than realized.”

It was announced in the Monroe Evening Times on January 16, 1904 that the residence was for sale. It was “the most handsome one in the city, is located in a very desirable resident portion of the city and will be offered at a reasonable figure.” It was reported on August 23 that it was traded for three sections [1,920 acres] of land in the great Moose Jaw wheat district 400 miles northwest of Winnipeg, Canada. Chenoweth traded his property at \$15,000 and planned to move into rooms in the Chenoweth Block on the north side of the square before a Mr. Harvey was to take possession on December 1.

It is unknown what happened to that deal, but it was reported on August 29, 1905 that the Chenoweths left for Dickinson, North Dakota to look up a land proposition involving the exchange of his residence property here. He made a deal and loaded two railroad cars of household goods to be taken there in early October with the family leaving on October 10.

Jno. C. Chadwick, Ray Crow, and Ed Bayerhoffer accompanied the Chenoweths there and returned on October 23. Bayerhoffer had invested in land and Chadwick was about to close a deal. All were “taken up” with the land. The Chenoweths were living in a sod house and had their goods in sheds until a large stone house could be built.

It is planned to share more about the Chenoweths in future columns — what happened to them after this move, Frank’s business dealings, and Julietta’s art work and traveling.