

'Rowdies' Cause Disturbance in 1800s Monroe

It seems that Monroe has not always been as quiet as it is today. It seems there was always a small element that did not show respect to others; some even made life miserable for many. Following are a few articles that were taken from the Monroe Sentinel.

The first article is from April 24, 1878. Three young men, somewhat under the influence of rotgut, by the names of Padden, Caton, and Keenan, got into a terrible rumpus with Constable Chambers last Saturday night. As a result two or three heads were made sore to say nothing of the other hearts that were made to ache. The newspaper printed a brief form of what was told to them. The lads were making a disturbance on Jackson street [now 16th Avenue] and Constable Chambers told them to go home and behave themselves. They then invited him to go to a place that H. W. Beecher [Congregationalist clergyman] didn't believe in. Chambers called out three young men who room in Bridge's block to help him; but the Paddies made a formidable resistance and finally succeeded in beating a retreat after beating the bush about Jackson and Racine [12th Street] streets.

Ed Welter came off scarred a little in his attempt to assist Patsy to Studley's hotel while Padden had a tremendous contusion on his cranium produced by a shelaly in the hand of someone unbeknown to the "loikes of 'em as was heard bate wid it." Warrants were sworn out against the belligerent colts who, it seems, have decamped for the time being after spending Easter more "in a straw stack fornist [sic] the town."

A similar incident was reported on January 17, 1880. The report simply stated, "A row occurred at a Jackson street saloon last night, and Chambers had three men in Jail before morning. It was the O'Harra pay day."

Two cases of downright devilry were reported in the paper on December 14, 1881. On the previous Thursday night several large boys attacked Pfeiffer's grocery windows. When Pfeiffer went out to drive them off, they attacked him, threw him down, and kicked him. Several arrests were made, but nothing was proven to the satisfaction of the Justice, and Mr. Pfeiffer was permitted to go home and nurse his injuries.

On Saturday evening, an old man and his wife were carrying home clothes they had been washing for other parties. They were attacked by a mob of scapegraces; the man was knocked down and beaten. The paper had been informed that two of the ruffians had been jogged. The editor added his own opinion that, "Such chaps should be chained together and made to clean crossings and work on the road during a whole year."

Four separate incidents were reported in the February 15, 1882 paper. The first is printed with even more editorial comments than the previous one - and in one long paragraph. "We have been informed that several obscene letters have passed through the Monroe Post Office, recently, evidently written by one or two miscreants, male or female, which they could be found out would subject the perpetrators to states prison punishment. These persons, whoever they may be, cannot expect to always keep up this diabolical plot to contaminate the young people of Monroe. The meanest part of the business is that the low lived cusses sign the names of respectable young ladies to these epistles, and they are directed to respectable young men. This matter can be stopped if anything like systemic vigilance on the part of the postmaster is taken. We are also informed that two persons, both females, are suspected of this vile use of the mails, but it is hard to believe that anybody but a low lived, miserable, devilish, depraved wretch would stoop to such a thing."

An article titled, "Same as Gratiot," appeared in the same paper. "It was remarked recently by an ex-saloon keeper, that the Public Square in Monroe was getting to be as unsafe for a lady in the evening, as boiler avenue in Chicago, unless she was accompanied by a full grown man. Now, there are a few places where these devils on two legs, miserable drunken loafers congregate, and take in benzine, and issue forth to insult decent people and pollute the air with their profanity and obscenity. These rowdies, who probably do not number more than a score or two, are permitted to have their own way. There is a law for the punishment of persons who use indecent or abusive language on the public highway or streets, and public places of resort. 'What are you going to do about it?' That's the question. As remarked by a close observer, 'Monroe will be as bad as Gratiot if the officers don't do something pretty soon.'"

Yet another from the same paper stated, "Five or six rowdies from the vicinity of Browntown, created a good deal of disturbance at the depot last Saturday night, and Constable Nicholson had to quiet

some of them with his shelalah. This sextette were well set up with benzine, and made an exhibition of themselves on the train going home.”

If newspapers printed today what was printed in some of these articles, they would probably have several lawsuits filed against them. In the column next week, I'll continue to share some more articles about rowdyism in Monroe in the 1880s.