

Rowdyism Rampant in Monroe in 1880s

It was also reported in the February 15, 1882 paper that there was a most diabolical row the previous Saturday night in front of Vogt's saloon near the post office. Vogt had refused to sell any more liquor to an unnamed chap when he became ugly and was put out on the sidewalk. It was there that he "gave vent to his spleen" in the most disgustingly profane and obscene language. People passing, men, women, and children, were obliged to crowd through the rabble or take the muddy street, which some did prefer. Not an officer could be found within hailing distance. "What has become of the Village Marshall!" and "Where is the Constable!" and like inquiries were made.

An editorial titled "Rowdyism Rampant" was printed more than two years later on December 31, 1884 summing up what the editor thought of these situations. "It is said to be a maxim that the real strength of a chain is equal to its weakest link. This is particularly true when that link is in the middle of the chain. The tone of society is measured by the character of its individual members. The morals of a town or city is judged by the nuisances it tolerates; by the criminals it harbors; by the drunken loafers and hoodlums it permits to run at large to insult decent people, break into public assemblies to disturb meetings and social gatherings; insult ladies and gentlemen who are obliged to pass them on the streets. Monroe has her share of hoodlums! Whisky is making more of them, and making those who are already spoiled for any decent use, still worse.

"These young chaps, who go in on their muscle, in defiance of all rules of etiquette or common decency, have of late become bolder and more meddlesome than formerly; and their reeking breath and indecent persons are thrust into places that should know them no more. They are not even decent drunkards - who, seeing themselves as others see them, get into some dark corner and keep quiet or go to sleep and snore. These hoodlums, on the other hand, assume to take an active part in society affairs - uninvited, and if a mild protest is made against their brazen-faced impudence, insult, rowdyism and profanity of the worst sort is the answer returned. As a matter of fact we have no efficient policemen in Monroe - when policemen are most needed. We have about thirty saloons, though, and some of them sell to boys and drunken men, and otherwise violate the terms of their licenses; but there is no corresponding provision made for the protection of decent people, who in no wise sanction saloon business or rowdyism. It is easy to imagine what this rowdyism and lawlessness will lead to unless some legal protection against it is afforded; and that soon. Respectable people will quit attending places of public assessment, where a score of hoodlums can, with impunity, come and break up the assembly without any fear of interference by the police.

"Last Thursday was a red day for the hoodlums. One drunken son-of-a-gun, a stought young man, (not yet 21) knocked two peaceable citizens off the side-walk with his fist, and for fifteen minutes there was a crowd blockading the side-walk on the west side, greatly excited over the event; yet no officer appeared till the offender of the law and the peace of the community had been coaxed off by a boon companion. Then three officers appeared as if by magic, and made inquiries, and departed. No arrests. The south-west corner of the public square was a dangerous place to pass for nearly the entire afternoon and evening on Christmas Day.

"About eleven o'clock Christmas night a lot of drunken hoodlums invaded Turner Hall and began making a disturbance; some of them, however, were induced to leave; but they returned again and carried out their program; going to the remotest verge of indecency and, drinking from their newly filled bottles, and using the most abusive and indecent language, in the presence of the ladies.

"There were no officers about the city then; yet saloons, it is said, were kept open till midnight.

"The dance given by the Monroe Cornet Band after their fine concert was cut short by the interference of this batch of hoodlums. Of course, had the gentlemen present chose to enter into a free fight, or had the members of the band clubbed their music racks, - somebody would have been hurt; but there were ladies and young people present; and the better way was to stop the dance and go home.

"These chaps, emboldened by their success, threaten to clean out any dance that is held in Turner Hall. And for all that the police (!) will do to prevent it, they may succeed. We imagine we hear the apologist asking: 'What are you going to do about it?' That is the question that comes home to every decent man and woman, young or old, in this community. Here is one more we will put square and fair: How long do the people of Monroe propose to let a lot of rummies and hoodlums control the city of Monroe, and do as they please in public places and at public gatherings?"

This final clipping is from July 20, 1887. "Two disgraceful rows occurred outside the U. B. Church last Sunday night between thugs who congregate there, and who like bulls in the pasture are attracted by the drums. The fights were not occasioned by religious enthusiasm, although the Salvation Army's meeting was made the occasion for the disgraceful affairs. If you can't enjoy religion and behave yourself, stay away."