

Thanksgiving in Monroe in 1910 was Much Different than Now

Thanksgiving may be quite different for many families this year. Since I moved back to Monroe in 2004, I've been celebrating the holiday with my cousins at a gathering of about 50 people. Obviously, we will not be doing that this year. As I was reading the old Monroe Evening Times, I was surprised to see what Thanksgiving was like for the residents of Monroe in 1910. The following few years were celebrated similarly.

The first thing I noticed in the paper was the menu for the supper at the firemen's ball at the armory on Thursday evening. The Women's Relief Corps was in charge and they were serving panned chicken, rolls, pickles, olives, cranberry jelly, cabbage salad, cake, ice cream, salted nuts, mints, and coffee. This was the only time each year that the firemen asked the public for their patronage.

At 2:30 p.m. the high school football team was to play a team made up of players from the previous year and a few other well-known local stars. This was hyped because the team from last year had beaten Sterling with a score of 61 to 0; Sterling was the Illinois state championship team. The paper suggested that people come out to the game for two reasons: first, to see the old stars on the field again and second, to help the boys in their earnest endeavor to clear themselves of debt. The cost of the game was 25 cents.



Monroe's Turnverein performed on Thanksgiving in Monroe in 1910.

Ads in the paper told what the families might have to eat if they were celebrating at home. Becker & Share advertised cranberries, fruits, nuts, celery, fresh oysters to stuff the bird, and other specialties.

The day ended up being a great success all around. The fans of the football game "were out in good numbers and were enthusiastic and bubbling over with good feeling for the boys and the game." The high school team had not been playing that fall due to the outstanding debt, but "the crowd understood

this and were well satisfied with what the players gave them. They also saw that there was still good football stuff in Monroe.”

Features of the game were Kundert’s long run which led to the only touchdown by Lantz, Gibbon’s manipulation of the forward pass, the use of the old rules, Prof. E. J. Shives at the game, and W. W. Chadwick at the window. “Too much time was taken out, but this could not have been avoided because of the softness of the players.” The game netted at least \$90 from the attendees who were “grade students, high school students, young grads, old grads, fathers, mothers, and friends.”

The firemen were pleased that they sold 257 dance tickets for the annual Thanksgiving party at the armory. Dancing followed an hour concert performed by the seven-piece Bach orchestra of Milwaukee. The dancers filled the floor, “which was a maze of life and color until the close of the ball.” The spectators filled the balcony gallery and many were obliged to take seats on the lower floor.

The decorations consisted of “an artistic arrangement of flags, bunting, and colored electric lights, with a large revolving wheel with the rim and spokes showing various combinations of electric lights for the feature.” The orchestra platform was suspended from the ceiling in the center of the hall. The music was “fully up to the expectations of the dancers and altogether the ball was a great credit to the firemen.” The W. R. C. also served a splendid supper in the dining hall.

One other event that evening that I saw no pre-advertisement for was a gymnastics program by the Monroe Turnverein in the Turner opera house. Spectators filled the hall to capacity for the event that also included the lady turners of Milwaukee. The juniors began the program with a fine exhibition of turning on bars, horses, and more. This was followed by the lady turners of Milwaukee and the older class of Turnverin. “The work of the feminine group was especially pleasing and they were generally applauded after each act.”

Jake Steffin was one of the star performers of the evening. He very cleverly executed the giant swing, one of the most, if not the most difficult, act that was given on the program. The club swinging of the ladies was worthy of particular mention, this part of the program “showing with what ease and grace this task could be accomplished.” More than 100 couples then participated in the dance that followed the program with the local orchestra, Bast & Booth, furnishing “the inspiration.”

I wish each of you a safe and healthy Thanksgiving celebration, however you choose to celebrate. Hopefully, we will be back to a more normal situation before Thanksgiving next year where we can again gather together in larger groups, visit, feast, and give each other hugs! I am truly thankful for so many blessings, including all of the favorable comments that I have received on my columns. Remember to take care of your mental health as it can also affect your physical health.