

Fire on South Jackson Street (16th Avenue) in 1905

Until I read the article that I'll highlight today, I hadn't realized that I have never seen any early photographs of 16th Avenue across the street from Spring Square when there were wooden buildings on that block. If anyone can direct me to a photo that I may copy, I'd appreciate it. According to the 1900 city directory, these were the businesses in that block (from south to north): Wagner & Pfeiffer (now Amy's Corner Cafe), Fred Lanz hardware, Jac Steinmann's saloon, painter J. Fetterhoff, jeweler G. A. Wettstein, Swamp Angel newspaper, barber Nic Dowling, E. L. Adelman and Ed H Considine, John Gettings' meat market, C. H. Schneider cigar factory, Carroll Brothers (double width), A. Brunert & Co cigar factory, and P. F. Burke's saloon.



This photo, from the Alan Barman family, was taken about 1900 and is included in the Pictorial History of Monroe. It shows the building that now houses Amy's Corner Cafe. At that time, the bakery and lunch room was operated by John M. Wagner and George Pfeiffer. Out of the range of this photo were at least three wooden buildings just to the north of this building.

At 8:55 p.m. on October 5, 1905, there was a fire in the block described above. Three frame buildings were almost completely destroyed. Two buildings were destroyed beyond repair with the third one, which adjoined John Gettings' meat market, might be able to be repaired. The repair would not be permitted by the city unless it was found that the damage was not more than 50 per cent.

The fire appeared to have started in the rear of the middle of the three buildings and "burned furiously" from the start. That building was wholly enveloped when the fire was discovered by employees for

the Monroe Electric Light and Power company who gave the first alarm by blowing the whistle. The flames soon went through the building. The fire had spread to all three buildings by the time the firemen turned on the water. It gave them a good fight.

The firemen were engaged for nearly two hours with hose company No. 1 and the Hook and Ladder company in the front and the south side hose company in the rear. The firemen had a good stream of water and threw a great quantity of it on the burning buildings.

Only one of the buildings was occupied. Nick Dowling's barber shop was in the north part of the building and G. A. Wettstein's jewelry repair shop was in the south part. The fire had originated in the rear room of the barber shop, believing that it was caused by a defective flue. There was a fire in the stove late in the afternoon to burn up the paper and hair that filled it. It is thought that the burning soot was blown out through the opening in the other side of the chimney and into some old paper that was strewn about the room. This was the generally accepted theory and was supported by the appearance of the burned building and the fact that the chimney fell in at an early stage of the fire.

Dowling had the contents of his shop insured for \$200, which fully covered his damage, except that there was no building available for him to move into to continue his business. He did not return to his shop that evening as he was busy closing up a lease on his building on north 17th Avenue that was rented to John Lengacher to open a saloon. Dowling had gone home and retired just before the fire. Another incident, which turned out to be lucky, was the renewal of his insurance during the day when George G. Wright called upon him in that regard. Dowling's barber, Dan O'Meara, left the shop at 8:15; there was no fire in the stove nor any indication of any fire in the back room at that time.

Wettstein said the he lost a large part of his collection of Columbian relics that he had been gathering since the world's fair in Chicago. He also had a collection of pearls and watch curios, including a number of valuable pieces. These articles had been displayed in his front window and were scattered when the firemen smashed in the front. A couple baskets of old watches were saved. Wettstein was about the building early the next morning raking the ruins to recover his relics, but only found a few. He had been at the post office at the time the fire broke out. When he returned to the building, he was determined to remain there until he could remove all of his belongings. He had to be pulled out twice. One time he had locked the door behind him and was at work while the fire was coming through the ceiling!

The buildings were owned by Joshua Wells and were insured for \$400 with Etter & Treat. They had a frontage of 60 feet and were on valuable land for building sites. The fire burned rapidly until it was brought under control and was watched by hundreds of people who filled 16th Avenue.

The water works company accidentally discovered that there was a fire and gave the firemen direct pressure. The force was stronger than necessary so Chief Streiff notified superintendent Luchsinger that the tank pressure would be sufficient. The alarm was given at the firehouse across the street. When this is done instead of turning in an alarm, the water works station does not get the alarm. A push button at the firehouse would complete the system and the button could be pressed whenever the alarm did not come in through the regular alarm system.

I will share with you next week how long this property remained vacant and who finally decided to build the structure that presently occupies the space.