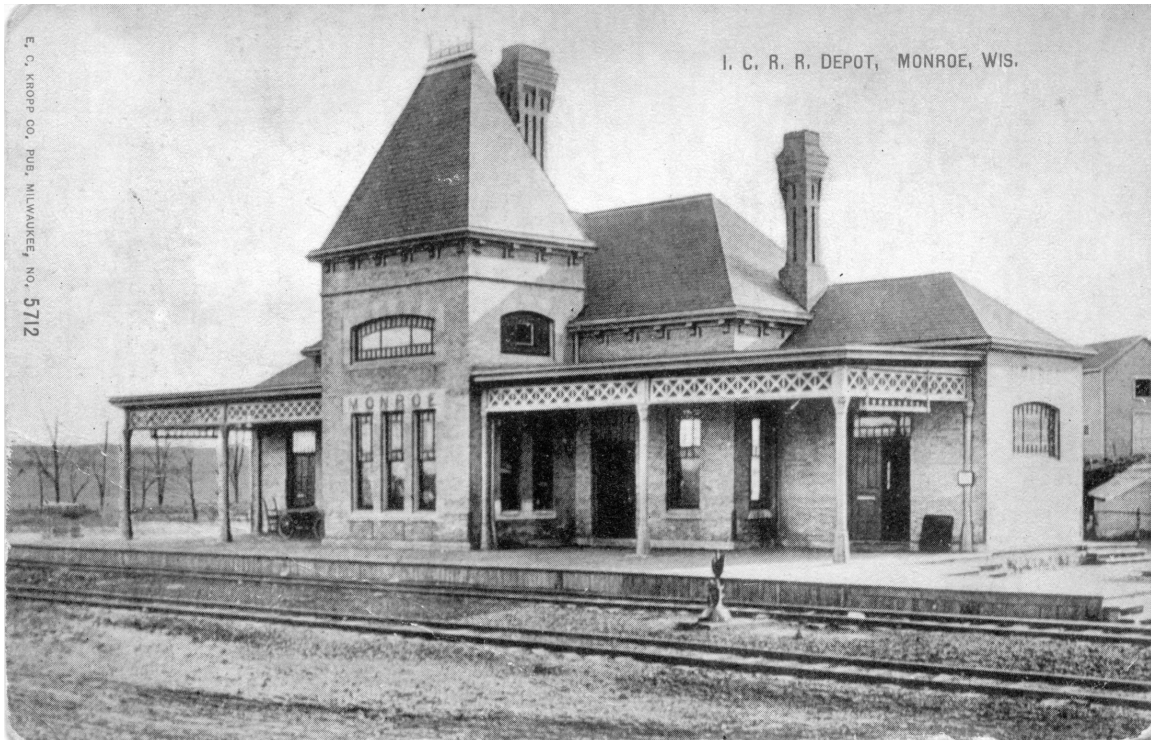


Trouble Abounds When “Boys Will Be Boys”

The old saying, “Boys will be boys” has been around for decades and trivializes male behavior at any stage of life. People may have used that phrase when they heard or read about the incidents that I am going to share today. It does not excuse their behavior, but might explain why it happened.

An 11- or 12-year-old son of Patrick Deveny had his leg crushed by a freight car at the depot on Saturday, November 22, 1879. When this was published on Wednesday, it was feared that he might lose his leg - if not his life. He had been in the company of other boys fooling around on the train while the switching was going on. While getting off one car and onto another, he fell between in such a way that threw one leg partly across the rail. The wheel of the advancing car partly pushed it off. It then ran over the calf breaking a piece out of the bone and badly cutting



This image, copied from a postcard in the collection of Marv Ruff, shows the Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul railroad tracks along 17th Street in Monroe. In days gone by it was a place where boys would hang out and sometimes get injured or vandalize. Sometimes the results could be dreadful as mentioned in this column.

the muscles and cords.

A party of about ten professional hoodlums procured a keg of beer at one of the breweries on Sunday afternoon, May 30, 1880. They then congregated in the rear of the Center School (shown on the cover of the Monroe Area Pictorial History) and “began on orgie in which they made the air hideous with indecency and profanity.” Their names were in the hands of Sheriff Morse by the time of publication and officers were laying low for them. When they found out that their location had been discovered by a competent witness, they moved to the railway bridge east of the depot and continued drinking. Nearly all of the group were former offenders and quite hard cases. It was presumed that the person who sold them the keg of beer also knew that he clearly violated the terms of his license and the laws of Wisconsin. The editor went on to say, “What this city needs is a police court, and stricter police officers; more arbitrary and summary dealing with the unruly and dangerous element, resident, and transient. The ordinary courts of Justice do not

reach the root in cases of misdemeanor and positive violation of law. The character should be amended so as to give more plenary power to the city officials.”

Jump ahead to January 1894 and we find that two young lads were arrested and sent to the county jail to be locked away for a week for disobeying the law regarding climbing upon the cars at the St. Paul depot. The editor added, “Something must be done to break up this dangerous practice, although the punishment may seem severe. Anything milder does not seem to count with the boys.”

On Saturday morning, November 16, 1901, two boys stood on the overhead bridge of the Milwaukee road. As the passenger train going east passed from under it, one of the boys tossed a stone through a window of the rear passenger coach. Gus Abendroth, the company mechanic, happened to be in Monroe and soon rounded up the boys who probably never did this again.

The names of the boys, Harry Witte and Otto Gutzmer, were released in the Monroe Evening Times two days later. They were scheduled to be in front of the Police Justice on a charge of disorderly conduct on the 23rd. It was thought that a charge of malicious destruction of property of railway trains might be made against them. That statute provided for severe punishment which meant that the sentence would be reform school for the boys if they were found guilty.

The boys did appear before Police Justice J. D. Dunwiddie at 2 o'clock on Saturday afternoon. At that time they found out that Harry Witte was only 11 years old. Otto Gutzmer (whose name was given as Gempler this time) was only nine. The boys also faced Robert Watson, the company's big detective, to whom the matter was referred and who came out here to give attention to the incident. When Mr. Watson learned of the stoning of the train and the capture of the offenders, there was joy in his heart as he saw the opportunity to administer a severe lesson that would be of benefit to others. He was determined that someone must suffer since complaints had been coming into the detective department about the Monroe depot for three or four months. The offense was punishable by a heavy fine or a sentence in a state prison

The detective was disappointed to find out that the boys were so young. While the boys were saved from the severe penalty because of their age, the reform school was still an option. Detective Watson was not anxious to prosecute the lads, but gave them an experience they would not soon forget. The boys were terribly frightened until the police justice announced that he would let them off by requiring them to pay the cost and damages (\$4.70) and their promise to maintain good behavior. He allowed the matter to remain open. All of this was satisfactory to the parents, who had also been in court with their sons.

Detective Watson was also making an investigation into the opening of a car the previous Sunday at which someone stole some candy. There were other cases of car breaking, pilfering, and petit larceny. The company intended “to ferret out the guilty ones, if possible, and see that they are justly punished.”