

## The Building of the New Center School in 1871 - Part 1

I mentioned a Center School that burned in 1871 in the previous column. It is unknown when the school was built or what it looked like, but it had a second story according to the article about the fire. It was located on the southwest corner of 16th Avenue and 14th Street where the newer Center School, and then Lincoln School, were later located. There is no longer a 14th Street at this location since the Middle School property has taken over both blocks.

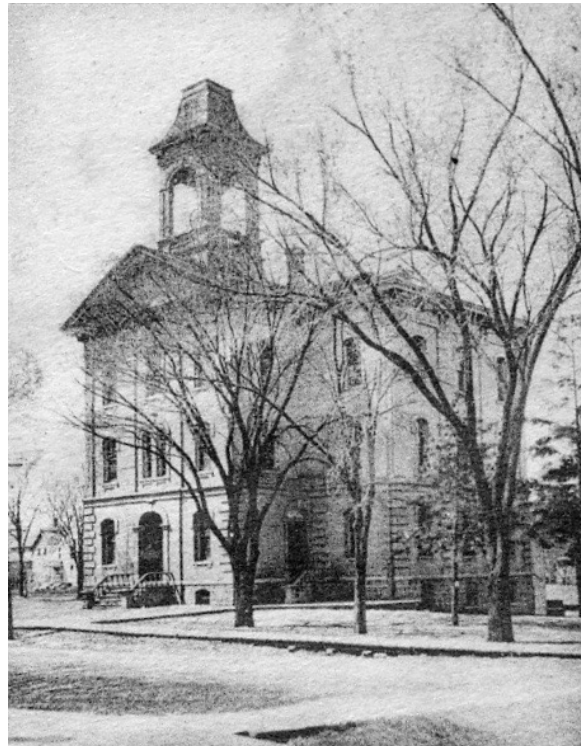
According to the Monroe Sentinel, Center School burned to the ground on Thursday, January 19, 1871 between 11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. School was in session when the fire was discovered, so it was dismissed immediately by the teachers. The paper stated, "the teachers are deserving of much praise for their timely action, which prevented a loss of life or limb." The article seemed to have mixed reviews when it said the building might have been saved had there been no dependence on the engine. The Engine Company could have put out the fire if there had been water near as they were on the ground in time and they showed good will.

The community lost its school, which they estimated to be worth \$5,000, for several months. There was also a near-fatal accident when the fire was nearly put out. A woman was drawing a child past the east end of the ruins and within reach of one of the chimneys, which was still standing. She had just arrived near the chimney when it began to fall outward toward her. Someone shouted and she jumped forward leaving the child to "receive the mass of bricks." There was a crash with dust and debris followed by a clearing up. The child was safe within a few feet of the pile of brick. The bricks barely missed the woman's head while grazing her dress and one of her heels as they fell.

The school board met with the public at 7:30 the following evening in the old Court House, with J. S. Bloom serving as the chairman. The clerk was requested to show the facts and figures concerning the capacity of the schools in proportion to the number of scholars. He said, "The recent fire had changed the nature of the questions somewhat, from that of building a high school to that of building a schoolhouse or schoolhouses." The immediate need of the district was to make room for 350 scholars, including those thrown out by the fire, those occupying the basement of the Universalist Church, and the surplus who were attending school away from home.

Many prominent men spoke at the meeting; all but one of them were in favor of erecting a commodious high school building yet that year. Minor differences were voiced between building a large enough structure on the site of the former Center school to house all of the students or erecting a high school building worth \$25,000 or more in some conspicuous site. After much discussion L. Davenport made a resolution that they build a structure to house 500 scholars. C. S. Foster offered a resolution to lease suitable rooms to accommodate the scholars of Center School. The clerk was instructed to call a legal meeting to decide how many schools to build and where to build.

Arabut Ludlow suggested a plan where they would build both Center School and a larger, better high school in some other part of the village during the summer. He suggested taking out bonds at 7% for three to five years. He felt there was enough money available to do that. Many



An 1871 fire that resulted in the loss of the Center School in Monroe caused a commotion throughout the community, with members working to find a solution that would benefit all.

thought this was a better plan, so a motion was made to adjourn until one week later at the same time.

The editor printed on February 1, "Nothing would have a greater tendency to bring wealth, refinement, and business to our healthful and beautiful town. Nothing would be of more lasting and potent benefit to the generations to follow us." He suggested that, "the responsibility is with us to do now what should have been done years ago." He went on to say that erecting two houses in the village was best because the village already had two buildings that could be used for primary and intermediate schools. To bring them together in smaller amounts, he felt was better. He also thought that removing the older scholars from the noise and confusion of the primary schools would be advantageous.

About 300 electors attended the meeting in the Court House on February 3 at which J. S. Bloom, member of the board of directors, called to order. They voted \$30,000 for the erection of a new high school at a site to be determined. H. W. Whitney, who had just returned from Madison, related that a bill authorizing this district to borrow \$25,000 for 20 years had passed the senate and was believed that it would become law. It was to be determined at a meeting the following week whether to build a school for the small scholars on the former Center School site.

A notice appeared that there would be another meeting at 10 a.m. on February 23 to rescind "all actions heretofore made in regard to building schoolhouses, and, if rescinded, to take no action on the subject." The Thursday morning gathering was largely attended by 300 or 400 men and was noisy and turbulent at times. After several others spoke, Arabut Ludlow suggested that a schoolhouse worth \$15,000 be built on the site of the one burned down and rescind the previous resolution. This was put to a voice vote twice and the motion was lost. At that time, it stood that a new school was to be built on the center site for not less than \$30,000. At this time, "we are sorry to say that men behaved in a way very unbecoming, as it was no occasion for hard words or dangerous gestures."

Read more next week about the building of Center School.