

## The Building of the New Center School in 1871 - Part 2

This is the rest of the story about the building of Center School that replaced the one that burned on January 19, 1871.

A public election was held on Thursday, March 16 to decide what to do about replacing Center School. It was reported the following week that the electors of the district voted to allot \$15,000 for the purpose of building a schoolhouse on the center site, with more than a one hundred vote majority. The contract for building was let in May to J. M. Hinkley, who was one of the contractors who had built the Green County Jail. He was considered to be the lowest responsible bidder with a price of \$14,9777. The Sentinel said that, "he demonstrated that we are to have a well-built schoolhouse."

When the building process commenced in June, they expected that the building would be ready for occupancy by the winter. The newspaper was informed that, "On account of the crowded condition of the school rooms now at the command of the District Board, there will be no more school until the new house is completed." By late July the house was "being pushed ahead," and a good job was indicated.

R. Craven was furnishing the white brick for the school and the editor stated that, "We do not hesitate to say that it is equal to the Milwaukee brick, and superior in hardness and mould to the Edgerton brick that has hitherto been brought to Monroe. Mr. Craven has brought his brick-making to that degree of perfection which enables him to command the home trade." By mid-August the masons were working on the third story so that the citizens were then able to see what it would look like when finished. The editor thought that it would be a good building for the money paid.

Contrary to what was previously thought, the 12-week fall term commenced on September 11. The high school personnel were principal R. W. Burton, first assistant Miss Dwight, and second assistant Miss Rathbun. It is unknown where the high school students attended, but it was expected that the new building would be completed by December 1. "When it is completed, there will be a grand rejoicing among the scholars who are now obliged to put up with many inconveniences. The teachers are remarkably good natured, considering the crowded state of affairs and we congratulate them that their patience will not be taken much longer by reason of crowded rooms and other inconveniences." The term ended on Friday, November 30 and it was announced again that there would be no more school until the new building was ready for occupancy about three weeks later.

The dedication of the new brick schoolhouse took place on Friday, December 22 with an afternoon exercise and an evening exercise. The afternoon exercise began with an organ piece, followed by the class reciting the 121st Psalm and a chant of the Lord's Prayer. There were papers read, recitations, and songs given. The state superintendent and others gave addresses. The afternoon exercise closed with the song "Happy, Happy Christmas." The program for the evening exercise was much shorter with an address by the state superintendent being the main component. Professor Twombly, fourth president of the University of Wisconsin, was also to be present.

A second-hand bell for the new schoolhouse was received the first week in January 1872. It was large enough and good enough for the purpose intended. It was bought at a bargain by the committee instructed to procure it. New framework had to be made as the original had been destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire in October 1871. The bell would "send forth its melodious tones to call the young ideas forth to shoot." The bell was put in place by the middle of the month where its "sonorous tones will call our children to their daily lessons."

The Sentinel staff made a short visit to several departments in the new building in March and were convinced that the departments were admirably managed and the teachers were well qualified for their responsible tasks. There were about 90 students in the primary department with Miss Blair and Miss Van Wagenen. Nearly all of those students were quite small, yet the teachers seemed to exercise good control and "have not been obliged to wallop anybody." The teachers had only one complaint - that parents did not take time to visit the school.

Another column printed in June showed that Monroe High School had 76 students enrolled during May with an average membership of 69. Average daily attendance was 54, with 55

## Monroe Area Pictorial History



Green County Historical Society

An interesting photo of the former Center School was included on the cover of the Monroe Area Pictorial History, published by the Green County Historical Society in 2016.

tardies recorded for the month. There had also been 30 visitors. There was a list of 18 students who had not been absent or tardy, another nine who had not been absent, and another 27 who had not been tardy for the month.

This school served the Monroe community until it was razed in 1915 to make way for the more modern Lincoln School. Contractors Wagner & Bauman tore down the old building. Unfortunately the school bell was not salvaged for the new building; Ray A. Young rescued it from the scrap heap. Young, president of the Alumni Association, placed it in the high school building and planned to present it as a trophy to them at their next banquet. The article concluded, "There will be no bell on the new school building, nor any other school building in the city, another evidence that Monroe is rapidly becoming metropolitan."

A mystery was solved after the Center School was razed. One wall had been cracking for years for reasons that nobody could figure out. It was at this time that they discovered that one corner of the building was built on top of an old well. They had previously thought that the building was built on solid rock, but found out that there was no rock even ten feet below the surface.