

Monroe in 1851 - Part 1

When I came across the following article in the June 14, 1871 issue of the Monroe Sentinel, I thought that it would be a very interesting article about what Monroe was like 20 years earlier. It is a little bit of that, but it is also a large advertisement for how successful the newspaper advertisers became because of the ads they placed! To those who have studied Monroe history, many of the names will be familiar. For others, take away what you can about their descriptions and their language.

“A mere speck on the beautiful green on which nature seems to have lavished all the necessities of a thrifty inland city. With great belts of timber reaching out from and around the little birds-nest of a hamlet with no railroad, no sidewalks, nor graded streets; a place where four-legged wolves and sly foxes used to come to the ‘Tavern’ door and whine for bitters.

“A stage now and then would roll into town drawn by jaded horses, carrying a load of men, women, children, leather, and findings of some family, who, tired of civilization had sought a home in the howling wilderness, away from cares and everything else. A few years before, the mail used to be carried on the back of a man to Mineral Point and Janesville, then remote parts of the earth.

“In glancing over the files of the Sentinel (an institution which the town, even in the early day, could not very easily be without), we curiously note the change in its aspect, style and size, and compare the advertisements and advertisers of those primeval days with the present splendid display of ‘business.’ One thing struck us more forcibly than any other, i.e. the businessmen who slung printer’s ink most freely then are the richest citizens now. Some may say it is all in luck that one businessman is better to-do than his neighbor, but the history of commerce and trade proves the fact that those who would prosper must have a regard for the general welfare of all about them.



This photo of the Monroe House in its dilapidated condition was scanned from page 64 of the Monroe Area Pictorial History. The hotel was operated by Joseph Kelly on the north side of the square until it was moved to the opposite side of the block along 9th Street.

“Let us see: Here is A. Ludlow & Co.’s double column advertisement, telling the people that they had “dry goods, groceries, boots and shoes, clothing, paints, oils, dye stuffs, crockery, books, stationery, (and we presume a little stock of medicine in a barrel which was as necessary in those times as now to

keep the fever and ague off and treat customers with) all of which was to be sold for 'cash or good pay.' The latter meant butter, eggs, hides, tallow, wool, etc.

"Among the many businessmen who had their names conspicuously in the paper, but few are among us: fewer still are in the same business. The old Monroe House by Jo. Kelly, has long since given place to the 'Union Block' - a perfect hive of business these days. J. K. Eilert then kept the only drug store in town and commenced the manufacture of remedies which have come to be as widely known as Dr. Jayne's Vermifuge and Ayer's Pills and Pectoral were. F. F. West kept 'Lumber for Sale' and told everybody of the fact. He was not ashamed to be in the lumber trade. 'Swaze' Cole kept a first-class livery stable, but he marked his ads with 'tf.' which means transient. We are sorry to say he did not stay at the business long enough to get rich. We believe the excitement gotten up about building a plank road from Monroe to Freeport had much to do with making our town 'remarkable' at that time. A meeting was called on the 23rd day of August 1851 to take matters into consideration. John Walworth was president and Francis Emerson secretary of the meeting. A committee was appointed to meet the citizens of Oneco - then as large as Monroe - and other important points along the route, to carry out the project of uniting those towns with the Northwestern Railroad which was to be built immediately.

"There were several resolutions passed in favor of building the plank road; we are not made aware that the plank-road was ever constructed. Had those men waited until now, they might have as easily resolved to build a railroad bed to the same place, and thereby had more complete connection with the Northwestern Railroad or some other."

The Monroe House is not the same Monroe Hotel that many remember being on 16th Avenue north of the square. Rather it was located on the north side of the square before it was moved to 9th Street. An article from May 9, 1866 stated the Monroe House was no longer on the square. "The cellar for the new building to be erected upon its site is being dug at a rapid rate; the dirt being used for street grading."

It is unknown where Mr. Eilert operated his drug store before he built his 3-story block on the east side of the square in 1859. That block now houses Bartels & Co. Tap and will be the new home of Sunrise Donut Cafe. Earlier photos of that building can be seen on page 23 of the Pictorial History of Monroe.

The names of 23 men who were appointed to the road committee, which was composed of 35 men, were left out of this column. The talk of bringing the railroad to Monroe was very early as the railroad from the south didn't arrive until the late 1880s. The first railroad that came to Monroe actually came from the east in the 1850s. There is much information about that arrival of the railroad in *Becoming A Village*. That book also shares more ads for the businesses as well as tidbits from the newspapers about businesses, churches, schools, and more. There is also a list of manufacturing firms with statistics about what was manufactured by each, how many employees and how much they were paid, and the value of the final products.

The rest of the 1871 article will appear in this column next week.