

Monroe in 1851 - Part 2

The article from the June 14, 1871 Sentinel concludes below to describe Monroe in 1851.

“Among the ‘celebrated’ institutions of twenty years ago was the Seminary, described as a large and well-appointed edifice with some of the best talent in the country, &c. The old Seminary, which cost over \$3,000, where a theater, and occasionally a grand ball used to be held, because it was the only place in town large enough for a ‘grand affair’ - was conducted by H. C. Burchard, B. A., principal, and his good sister, Miss F. B. Burchard, as assistant.

“Charles Foster was Post Master in those days; he and Alf Goddard kept store in the same building. Jerry Chandler made furniture and kept on hand ‘ready-made coffins,’ and took country produce in exchange for the same when the cash was short. G. J. Adams, a painter, advertised extensively; in his notice we see that he had a pair of ‘jack-screws,’ which he let on reasonable terms. Joseph McCracken and Daniel Sutherland ran a saw mill 2.5 miles east of this village and most of the flour sold by the merchants in this village came from Warren’s mills at Albany. B. Dunwiddie kept a law office and Doctors Lombard, Sherman and Porter dispensed physic much in the same way as it is done nowadays.

“A local notice says: ‘Blackberries 4 cents a quart; market glutted.’ F. Emerson dealt extensively in ‘air-tight’ stoves and L. & P. D. Hurlbut told the public in a modest way that they ‘kept constantly on hand a large assortment of boots, shoes, leather &c.’ Perhaps if business had been good they would not have their goods ‘constantly on hand.’

“A local notice informs us that a bell - the same one which now rings in the Court House dome - had been purchased at a cost of \$100; arrangements were made to have it ‘wrung’ four times a day. In the same year we are informed that Hon. Daniel Webster had resigned his post as Secretary of State and would immediately sail for Europe. Cyrus Woodman offers all the town lots of Winslow for sale at auction on the 17th day of June 1851; ‘5 per cent off for purchase money down.’ Afterwards we learn that most of the lots were bought by one or two men and they are now used for farming lands. We are also told that the new license law brought the county about \$300 revenue and that grocers had stopped selling liquor.

“So Monroe pegged along for several years, paid light taxes, and amounted to about the same as Oneco. Two-thirds of the trade of the county was done in Janesville and Freeport where all the produce was marketed. Now and then a ‘new farmer’ would move in, pasture his stock in the door yard, and house his plow and horse in the woodshed; go to town and smoke. Some few speculators bought up the land joining them and waited for a rise. At length there came a time, within the memory of the resent generation, when a road was to be built. Farmers needed the road, merchants needed the road; and the rapid growth of the town after it was completed, proves that a road of iron rails was a good thing for them all.

“This road, known as the Mil. & St. P. Southern Branch, was built against the protestations of all who did not want to pay a cent to help build it; their arguments were the same then that have been used everywhere when local aid for railroads has been solicited; viz: ‘It would ruin the town.’ Behold, how it has ruined our town! The manner in which the road was built came near ruining the few who built it; we believe there are many today who were made rich, who did not invest a cent by mortgaging their farms.

“Twenty years ago, Oneco was larger than Monroe; Winslow nearly as large; Dayton larger than the County Seat. Now Monroe is greater than all these villages combined and a couple of thousands to spare. Instead of a little corner grocery we have grown to a city - lacking only the government to make it an expensive place to live in.



This photo, from the collection of the late Howard Schulz, shows the first courthouse in the center of the square that housed the bell mentioned in the 1871 article. In spite of the ink blotch, this photo is valuable as it has rarely been seen before. Photos of the courthouse with its two different bell towers can be seen on page 5 of the Pictorial History for Monroe.

“These and many other important facts are to be found in the musty and crumpled files of the Monroe Sentinel of 20 years ago, and one is led to believe that much progress has been made ‘in the course of time’ and that wherein the place has been willing to help itself, it has prospered. The place where our R. R. Depot now stands was then a huge goose pond, the only advantage of which was that feathers were very cheap. Yet we find intelligent men today preferring geese ponds and cheap feathers to pavements and unlimited commerce by rail with the great markets almost at our door.”

The “musty and crumpled files” have been available on microfilm for decades in our clean, modern library. They do give us great insight into the bygone days of Monroe.

The large Seminary building was sold for \$215 to Eli Edelman in 1884 so the city could build the North (Churchill) School on the northwest corner of 15th Avenue and 9th Street. Another smaller building, also known as the Seminary, is now a private home at 821 14th Avenue. It is unknown how the Seminary used the smaller building. *Becoming a Village: Monroe in the 1850s* includes several references to the Seminary, seminary property, and seminary building.

The former courthouse, which held the bell that is mentioned here, was razed to build the Court House that currently stands in the middle of the square. Evidently a bell was later purchased and hung in the Court House dome in September 1867. The paper stated then, “We hope it may be rung for more marriages than deaths, more joy than sorrow; but whatever may be the occasion, it will be always handy for the service of our citizens.”