

Fire on South Side of Square Claims Buildings in 1870

The information in this column comes from the Monroe Sentinel that was published on Wednesday morning, January 5, 1870. With a few exceptions, the buildings on the square at that time were small wooden structures unlike those of today. If you look at the photo on the top of page 36 in the Pictorial History of Monroe, Wisconsin (gray book) you will see the buildings that are being talked about in this article, which means the photo had to be taken before 1870. A photo of the north part of the west side of the square from about the same time can be seen on the bottom of page 40 in the same book. These have to be some of the earliest photos taken in Monroe.

I debated whether to reword the newspaper article or to share it as it was written. Many people have commented to me that they find the old wording to be interesting, so this is exactly the way it was written.

“A conflagration in this village is something strange; still, fires are liable to occur in the best regulated communities. Were it not for the fact that our Village Board has ordered a fire engine, we might “slop over,” as did those buckets of water Sunday night, as they were passed along the line. The losses as near as we can learn are as follows:

“Locality of the fire, southwest corner of Public Square — three wooden stores occupied by Bloom & Son, hardware; James A. Banks, boots and shoes; Edward Morris, clothing; B. C. Reynolds, tobacco and cigars; D. F. Corson & Son, harnesses, saddles, leather, &c.

“Bloom & Son, loss of building and part of stock; about \$4,000; insured in the Hartford for \$2,000, Phoenix, \$1,500. By the exertion of a few brave men, among them Donk [sic] Glascott and John K. Parks, the safe and books in this building were saved.

“D. F. Corson & Son, insured on building in the Hartford, \$500; on the stock in Phoenix, \$1,000. As nearly the whole of Corson & Son’s stock of goods were saved, they are probably insured to the full amount of their loss. The tools of their workmen, however, were all destroyed, which to them is a great loss.

“James A. Banks, loss about \$5,000; insured in the Home company for only \$1,000. Nothing was saved, of either stock or accounts, except a day book; and, as Mr. Banks is quite an old man [64 years old], his loss is deeply painful to him and his many friends.

“Ed Morris, in the same building with Mr. Banks, loss estimated at about \$5,000; insured in the Hartford for \$1,000; Republic, \$2,000. There was no insurance upon the building, which was owned by Ared White, and was valued at about \$1,000.

“B. C. Reynolds, who occupied the upper portion of White’s building, lost his entire stock of cigars and tobacco, valued at about \$500. No insurance.

“The fire was discovered in the rear part of the building owned by Mr. White, at about 8:30 P. M., and spread rapidly to the buildings on either side — Bloom’s and Corson’s. There was a small wooden building directly in the rear of Stewart’s Block, which was in imminent danger, and had it taken fire, no possible effort could have saved from total destruction the entire South Side; but, through the exertions of our citizens, passing water along in lines, and the service rendered by the little engine belonging to Anton Miller, which kept up a continual stream of water on the fire and the buildings adjacent, the fine block of stores occupied by Weber & Wettengel, S. C. Chandler, Fillebrown Brothers, Cross’ Art Gallery, and other smaller concerns upstairs, were saved, as also the wooden buildings beyond. The wind blowing from the southwest contributed greatly in stopping the progress of the flames.



This sketch of the eight blocks surrounding the square was taken from the plat map of Green County printed in 1861. It shows the buildings that were destroyed nine years later on the southwest corner of the square. Many of the buildings were frame buildings with space between some of them, unlike today’s brick buildings.

“Sam Boynton had his entire stock out in the street. Blackman, grocer, was also partly moved out, as also Porter & Allen, fancy dry goods, Everett, boots and shoes, Dye, restaurateur, and Cross, photographer. At 10 o’clock, all danger from a spread of the fire being over, goods taken out were returned to their original places.

“The Hook and Ladder Company did some good work, and their ladders and hooks came in just right to save from and subdue the devouring element.

“After the fire had become manageable, the [wooden] sidewalk was torn up to put out the fire which had crept under it, and other precautions taken to prevent any further spread of the flames. People now began to wend their way homeward, while the firemen and those particularly interested remained to watch through the night.

“Our citizens, generally, worked with a will (among whom were several ladies, to the shame and disgrace of many lazy male bipeds who looked on and saw it) to stay the progress of the fire and save their neighbors’ goods. No serious accidents occurred, although some narrow escapes are mentioned. The cause of the fire is unknown.”

This corner was totally destroyed. J. H. Bridge purchased the property and built the large brick block that later housed Ruf Confectionery in the same location where Rainbow Confections is now located.