

More about the 1870 Fire on the South Side of the Square

The newspapers at the time of the fire on the south side of the square (column of last week) were able to give their opinion without ending up in court about defamation of character. The following three paragraphs were printed the week after the fire on January 12, 1870 with the title, "SELFISHNESS." The village was small enough that most people probably knew the person being talked about.

"A smart(?) young man was overhead to say, during the progress of the recent fire, that he did not propose to work much — that his "dad's" building was insured for more than it was worth. We will not mention his name on account of the respect we have for his parents. Contrast this conduct with that of Mr. Sam Mack, the whole-souled man, of the firm of Mack & McCracken, hardware merchants, who at the peril of his life helped to save some of the most valuable portions of Bloom & Son's stock of goods from destruction. For the one we have a contempt that beggars expression; for the other, a respect never ending. The whole community, also, will judge of these things in the same measures as ourselves. We believe that at a time like that of the recent fire our worst enemy would receive some help — at least, sympathy — from us, provided we were permitted to give such an experience.



This photo, copied from page 27 of the Monroe Area Pictorial History and then cropped, shows the large block (and more) that Mr. Bridge built in 1870 after a fire destroyed the wooden buildings that had previously been located here. Notice the wooden buildings that still stood on the south side of the square.

"Another little incident to the point, came to our knowledge a few days ago, which is a fair illustration of the different natures of some men and women in times of danger and loss of property: A young man was busily engaged in chatting with a bevy of young ladies, near the burning buildings, when he was asked by one of them to go and help carry water. He replied that it would spoil his clothes, and didn't

want to help. She answered with much spirit, and told him he had better go home and have his mother put him to bed. He mizzled [vanished].

“During the confusion which prevailed in getting out goods from the burning buildings, there were several pairs of boots and shoes stolen from the two or three cases of those goods which had been saved from Mr. Banks’ store. Other depredations, similar to the foregoing, are also repaired. The souls of the beings who could act thus might be put, by the thousand, into the skin of the smallest flea, and then they would rattle like corn in a beef’s bladder. Our “devil” says that the thing who would be guilty of such meanness would rob a dying infant of its last morsel of nourishment, and, after death, steal the body and burial clothes.”

It was reported on March 16 that Ared White had sold his lot in the “burnt corner” to J. H. Bridge. He purchased the next two lots to the east later that month in connection with D. F. Corson & Son. Bridge intended to put up as fine a brick block as there was in Monroe. The Sentinel reported, “That would be a great improvement to the corner, a good thing for the town, and we believe a profitable investment for Messrs. Bridge and Corson & Son.”

The Sentinel of April 27 reported, “R. Craven, ‘brickist,’ is to furnish the brick for Bridge’s new block of stores.” Not much was reported about the progress of the building until August 24. “Mr. Bridge’s handsome new block, on the southwest corner of the Square, has received its beautiful iron cornice, which puts a crown of finish to the general fine appearance of the block.”

It was announced the following week that C. E. Adams, the druggist on the west side of the square, had rented the corner store of the new block and planned to move in as soon as the rooms were completed. His intention was to put in a large stock of goods, and in “all respects make his establishment first-class.” Another week later it was stated that Messrs. McNamara & Kinsley, of Freeport, were planning to open a first-class boot and shoe store in the new block. That meant that three of the stores were already rented. Adams moved into his new store the first week of October.

Dr. Bradshaw moved into his new office above Corson’s Harness Shop in December while Dr. Monroe remained in his old office above Adam’s Drug Store.

As it happens now in Monroe, businesses changed locations around the square back then. In February 1872 Edmund Bartlett, Justice of the Peace, moved his office above McNamara’s in the Bridge Block. S. C. Chandler moved his dry goods store to a room in the Bridge Block, which faced Jackson Street [now 16th Avenue].

That building later became known as the Ruf Block after Paul A. Ruf purchased it. That might be another column or two in the future about Mr. Ruf and his Block! Photos of this block may be seen in both pictorial histories of Monroe.