

The First YMCA Building in Monroe

We saw last week that the YMCA had a sporadic beginning in Monroe in the later 1800s. We'll learn today how it wasn't much different in the early twentieth century. A meeting was finally held on May 4, 1904 to organize a YMCA here - more than four years after the editorial that ended last week's column. The meeting was held that evening in the rooms of the Monroe Business Institute. The organizers were confident, at that time, that they could get 200 members and have finely equipped quarters.

YMCA state secretary F. E. Anderson met with about 60 young men who had signed up for membership and explained the benefits and purposes and gave them an idea of the cost. Anderson thought they could start it here and run it for about \$2,000 a year. Of this sum he expected \$800 to go for a professional instructor of gymnastics with another \$600 for setting up the gymnasium. The rest would be spent on rent and incidentals.

It was proposed that the money be raised by charging each member an admission (membership) fee of \$5; they would have \$1,000 if they had enrolled 200 members. They intended to raise the balance by popular subscription. In addition to the gymnasium, there would be shower and tub baths and a reading room. The rooms would be open to members at all times.

C. A. Booth, Rev. J. C. Kauffman, Rev. E. C. Dixon, and Rev. G. W. Reichert gave it every possible encouragement. The Ministerial association contacted Andrew Carnegie to see if he would be willing to give the money that he had offered to the city for a library toward a YMCA building. Dr. J. G. Randall, C. L. Chambers, Andrew Schindler, John Kaufmann, and Eugene Ryan were appointed to a committee to secure suitable rooms for the organization.

The ladies of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the societies of the various churches teamed up in January 1907 to give a benefit supper for the YMCA. The treasurer received \$114 from that event. The local YMCA was finally incorporated on April 19, 1907 by Charles B. Bolender, Samuel Wenger, and E. H. Gloege. Active and associate members each had to be men who were 15 years of age and older. Active members also had to be a member of any Evangelical church, whereas associate members only had to be of good moral character. Their first meeting was scheduled for the first Monday in May in their rooms. I saw no mention of where their rooms were located at the time.

The YMCA obtained the former Presbyterian church on 16th Avenue between 8th and 9th Streets that September by assuming the mortgage of \$400, without \$216 in accrued interest. A committee was appointed to look over the building to decide what had to be done to convert it into suitable quarters.

The building was dedicated on Thursday evening, January 23, 1908. That program consisted of short talks by Rev. J. H. Berkey, John Luchsinger, C. A. Booth, and Frank Gapen, followed by refreshments being served. The seats had all been removed from the sanctuary and were to be used in the gymnasium. It was equipped with basketball goals and backstops and the windows were screened. Basketball, tennis, and indoor baseball teams were to be formed. The gallery was used for a reading room and the lower hall was used for a reception room.

At that time there were more than 40 members with expectations that there would be many more joining. The dues were set at \$5 a year with a special rate for out-of-town students who were only located here temporarily. The building was to be open every afternoon and evening. There was also an effort to organize a glee club.

In the October 2 paper, the YMCA announced that they were going to try to raise \$1,500 within two weeks to make necessary repairs to their building and to pay off their



This photo, from page 68 in the Monroe Area Pictorial History, shows the former Congregational church which was later sold to the Presbyterians. It was located on the west side of 16th Avenue north of 9th Street and was purchased in 1907 to serve as the YMCA in Monroe.

\$500 debt. The finance committee, Herman Schindler, R. B. Gifford, and Samuel Wenger, was in charge of the canvass. It was felt that there would be an increase in membership if they put the building in better shape.

The society held annual opening events. In 1910 it was held on Monday evening, October 3 with 135 men and boys in attendance. Paul Dietz won the first event, a name contest, which helped people get acquainted with each other. Superintendent George B. Haverson then made some brief remarks followed by tenor solos by a Mr. Brown. President W. W. Moore gave plans for the association before Professor Hiram Dahms presented a buzz saw act. Professor Charles Dietz then closed the first part of the program.

The second part of the program consisted of athletics, starting with a game of volleyball between the businessmen and the high school and college men. Then the high school Crescents played a game of basketball against a team from the Monroe Business Institute.

The smaller boys took the principal part in the final event of the program. Coffee and "dog" sandwiches were served with every boy getting his share. R. B. Gifford, H. H. Shank, and J. A. Huffman did the serving. From this point forward, the building was open six days a week from 3:00 to 10:00 p.m.

We will learn more next week about how long the YMCA was able to operate from this building and what happened to the building.