

## The Demolition of the Old YMCA Building in Monroe

We left off last week with a description of the annual opening of the YMCA in October 1910. I didn't see any more of those openings described in the newspapers.

The high school, at that time, did not have a gymnasium so the board of education in December 1912 rented the YMCA building on school day afternoons. The lease was for one month with the possibility of renting for three months. This move was an experiment to test out the interest of the high school boys and girls in athletics. If this experiment were to prove a success, the board might decide to build a gym at the high school that had been built in 1906.

At their meeting on January 20, 1913, the YMCA had extensive plans for remodeling their building and ultimately secure a new structure to be built as an addition to the original structure. Estimates were being made on the cost of turning the building half way around on the lot and also moving it back on the lot on 16th Avenue. Constructing a swimming pool as part of the basement was their first priority. They felt that enough lumber could be salvaged from the tower of the current building to erect two rooms in front of the building after it was moved to the back of the lot.

It was hoped that, after the building was moved and remodeled, they would then be able to raise funds to build an addition to be used as club rooms and a dormitory that would be joined onto the gymnasium. It was thought that a 15-day campaign to raise the money would probably be executed as had been done in many other cities.



The steeple of the Presbyterian Church is shown in this photo to the east of the recently built Ludlow Memorial Library. The YMCA owned this building, located on 16th Avenue between 8th and 9th Streets, from 1907 until 1915.

It was decided later that year to sell the property on Saturday afternoon, October 18. The association was somewhat in debt and planned to use any equity to earn interest. The plan was to use this money at some future date to purchase or erect another building. In the mean time, they planned to rent some rooms. At the auction there were about a dozen bids made starting at \$800. Samuel Jackson made the final bid and purchased the property for \$1,800.

The deal with Mr. Jackson must have fallen through since the YMCA trustees were again offering the property at auction on Tuesday afternoon, March 3, 1914. This time they offered the building and the 78-foot lot together or the lot and building separately. The Monroe Evening Times reported, "A bid of \$1,500 was this afternoon received on the YMCA property, but the sale was not confirmed by the board of directors. Action will probably be taken in the matter tomorrow."

Evidently this deal was not completed either as the paper reported on the \$100,000 fire on January 14 that the YMCA building, believed to have been built about 1860, caught fire early. "The firemen made their big fight here for the reason that the destruction of the large frame structure would be certain to have disastrous result in spreading the fire to adjacent homes. In case it burned the Leehy house would have to go and other dwellings in the block would face new danger. The work of the firemen at this particular point, although laboring at great disadvantage, was highly creditable."

Apparently, the building was then dismantled. The next reference to this property was an auction of wood on the YMCA lot on March 21. Besides the pine lumber, the auction included oak joints [sic], pine sills, flooring, siding, sheeting, windows, doors, and more. They apparently received about \$200 for the lumber after having collected \$500 from insurance.

More than a year later, Edwin Ludlow purchased the lot in August 1915 for \$1,800. The 78 by 120-foot lot had been sitting idle all of this time, so the YMCA board of directors decided it would be better to have the money than an empty lot. The YMCA, with C. L. Chambers now serving as president, had cleared about \$2,100 on their original \$400 investment.

An article from January 1918 stated that the YMCA building fund was still growing. The board had received a communication signed "Several Citizens" offering to add \$60 to the fund. They were hoping to receive other donations and bequests from time to time so they would be able to erect another building. At the same time, there were many meetings being held across the county to establish a county YMCA.

Unfortunately, the YMCA in Monroe was dissolved at a special meeting on September 10, 1926. The YMCA had only eight members at the time and all voted in favor of the dissolution. C. L. Chambers still served as president and E. H. Gloege as secretary.

The county YMCA still existed many years later, which might become a column sometime in the distant future.