

Building the White Block - 4

Citizens Bank moved into the newly built White Block on Friday, May 31, 1901 and was ready for business in its new home the next day. "Admiration and surprise were expressed on all sides and there was deep appreciation of the model banking house that has been given to the city through the enterprise and prosperity of the popular bankers who have made the Citizens Bank a flourishing success.

"The new quarters of the bank are by all odds the most elaborate to be seen in cities the size of Monroe and they are not equalled outside of the largest cities. In its liberal fittings of solid mahogany it presents a pleasing sight. The walls are done in deep olive green with light green ceiling which harmonizes well with the mahogany that is seen everywhere. The floor is of virtuous mosaic tiling and the mahogany counters and walls are on a base of marble. For the convenience of patrons there are two mahogany coupon rooms and in the rear there is a large directors room. The whole interior is commodious, comfortable, and pleasant. It is lighted by large windows on two sides and there is a suggestion of the welcome that the public will receive in the comfortable and inviting chairs that have been placed about the lobby.

"A beautiful souvenir that was gotten out for the occasion is presented to each one who calls and these will be mailed to all who have business with the bank. The outside cover of the souvenir is lithographed showing an excellent cut of the exterior of the building. The inside leaves give the names of the officers and stockholders together with a brief history of the bank."

On the day that the bank opened, the newspaper printed, "The building is about completed and settlement for all work has been made. The amount called for by the contract is a little less than \$21,000 and there is extras to the amount of \$1,000, which will bring the total cost of the block close to \$23,000 [sic], which includes the cement walk. For many years to come, it will be the most handsome, costliest and leading business block of the city. It will very creditably reflect the prosperity of the community and will ever be a support and comfort to the two little daughters who are the heirs to the F. F. White estate, which made the block possible."

Drs. Monroe and Monroe moved into the block in early June. Dr. F. L. Hodges, also moved into his new suite of rooms, the first office to the left at the head of the stairs. His office hours were from 10:00 to 12:00 a.m., 1:00 to 3:00 p.m., and 7:00 to 8:00 p.m. The Masonic lodges "have one of the finest and most convenient suite of rooms to be found in the state."

Peter Burke leased the south store room for his saloon. The Sentinel mentioned that F. F. White "was a pronounced man and would no more have rented a building for saloon purposes than forfeit his chance for Eternal life; a man who was religiously, and always bitterly opposed to the liquor traffic." Other parties wanted to lease the room, but couldn't afford the \$400 per year that Mr. Burke offered. "Mr. Burke considers himself fortunate in securing a section in one of the finest buildings in the city." Burke arrived home from Chicago on June 24 where he had purchased mahogany fixtures for his place. His old fixtures were sold to Thomas Thorpe. He took possession of the room and moved his new fixtures in on July 1.

It was announced on July 24 that Matti Oehmen had leased the basement room where he established the Palace barber shop. He was to fit up the room with "a new outfit and new furniture and says he will have the swellest barber shop in the city." One of the feature fixtures he obtained was a large mirror that he purchased from Shriner Brothers. Considine was to put in a compressed air outfit, which was a piece of up-to-date equipment that would be entirely new here. It did away with fanning as the face was dried with air from a tank. Oehmen, who had been in the barber business here for several years, planned to open on August 1. "He is prosperous and progressive and is determined to give his patrons the best known to the business."

O. J. Dietz sold his barber shop on the south side of the square in September and opened a restaurant in the basement of the White Memorial Block, the Buffet Cafe, on the evening of Friday, September 27. Indications from the first evening showed that it filled a popular want. The room was very pleasant and tidy neat; all orders were served in the best style. The cafe was for ladies and gentlemen and was open day and night. The menu at all times included everything seasonable and the prices were reasonable. Dietz promised that the place would be all that its patrons desired.

A memorial tablet bearing the inscription, "F. F. White, 1900," was placed in the panel under the tower and above the front window in October. The tablet was of white stone and was cut by D. C. Ryan and put in place by William Keister. While the scaffolding was up, E. H. Considine replaced the flag pole that had been struck by lightning. The new pole was of three-inch steel pipe and was 20 feet above the peak of the roof. The insurance company took care of replacing the pole.

In the 12 decades since the White Block was built, it has housed a countless number of businesses. Many structural changes have also been made to the inside and the outside of the building. Watch for more changes to be made by Scott Mosher and Kyle Keehn, who purchased the structure in November 2021.



This photograph of the White Block came from the collection of Marv Rufi, former owner of the building. One can see several changes that have been made to the building by comparing it to the previous photos that have appeared with these columns.