

## Howe Comic History - Part 1

During the 14 years that I actively volunteered with the Green County Historical Society, I accepted many accessions and recorded them in the computer. I probably handled copies of Howe's Comic History of Green County many times, but didn't take time to peruse it then. Fortunately, Barb Ruff recently shared a copy with me and I finally took time to read it. That was time well spent for its entertainment value. It was printed R. Elsmere Howe in 1927 using a bit of information from Helen Bingham's 1877 Green County History. He also included some fun history that he wrote as well as some comical sketches, some of which I shall share here. The advertisements that are contained in it are also interesting. There were also comical sketches drawn by Howe.

I'm first including excerpts from the "Foolish History of Green County" written by Ray R. Snyder, which is exactly what it is titled. "When the early settlers thought about giving their county a name they called it Green, because of the pretty green grass all around, not because of green cheese or the Irish, the Irish never made cheese, they made confetti and raised cane. These settlers found the verdant county so fertile that they could throw a handful of tooth picks out at night and in the morning they had telephone poles, that's how rich it was.

"So for twenty years or so they raised wheat and drove all the way to Milwaukee to sell it, 'cause the people there had to eat and they couldn't raise wheat in the lake. Of course there were fish to eat but there is only one Friday in a week. However, the wheat sort of got tired of growing and as fast as it would grow the cinch bugs would eat it, so what was the use of raising it. Well, sir, they quit raising wheat as a traveling man from Ohio came thru with some good bargains in cows at \$12 a piece, and some of the settlers bought them as they knew darned well that the bugs that eat the wheat couldn't eat the cows. This was the start of the dairy business in Green county and also the Swiss cheese industry."

That two-page article concludes with the following paragraph. "Now, down to all seriousness, the original settlers have passed on but they have left a hardy, sturdy business, behind them which knows no slack seasons because people will eat, and Swiss cheese and Limburger makes good eating, especially when served with — — oh well, why mention beverages, because that too has passed like the early settlers but still the memory lingers. They tell me that this year the people of Monroe are going to build a capitol building made of Swiss cheese with a dome of Limburger and a flag on top which will read "Green County's Gold" - so all hail the Swiss cheese Capitol of the United States."

A full-page advertisement for the Monroe Auto Co. showed that they sold Willys-Knight (sixes) and Whippet (fours and sixes) automobiles as well as Fisk tires. Everett Keel was the proprietor. A photo from 1925 shows this new building on page 61 of the Monroe Area Pictorial History.

A short article entitled, "Boys' and Girls' 4-H Club Work" gave a brief history three years after 4-H had been formed in the county. It said, "This club work was first founded in 1924 by Veva M. Divan. The club, beginning with a membership of fifty-five, carrying [sic] on four projects, calves, pigs, sewing and canning. To a membership in 1927 of over 200 enrolled in eleven projects, is considered one of the best county clubs in the state. Many members each year are finishing with honors and winning state championships.

"This club work is a nation-wide movement, called the 'American Born System' of practical education, known to rural boys and girls as 4-H Club Work, which gives them an opportunity to develop themselves educationally, economically and socially.

"The 4 H's stand for the four-fold development of head, heart, hands and health."

Another tongue in cheek article said, "One outstanding feature of our county schools is the fact that they take the child in the rough, as it were, and turns [sic] him out to be a polished business man in one line or another. Some of them take readily to farming while a great many of them move to town and go into the insurance business. But laying all jokes aside the people of Green county do, and I believe they have a perfect right to boast of their healthy offspring, for it is no uncommon sight to see a youngster three or four years of age who is starting out on his worldly career, his eyes riveted on a little star called fame, holding in one hand a well filled bottle of milk, and in the other hand he tenderly clasps one of those large, well cured, healthful 'cheese sandwiches,' the kind that made Green county famous."

Having mentioned insurance agents in the schools article, Howe wrote more about them in another article. "Speaking of insurance agents, I believe Green county has more of these pests to the square foot than any other county in the middle west. I am positive that if some of our agents had the opportunity they could convince a brass monkey that he was actually alive, and could prove to him

beyond the question of a doubt that he was greatly in need of a life insurance policy. We have been informed through a very reliable source that some of our county officials are actually alarmed over the situation, and rumor has it that they have even gone so far as to advocate spraying the county with Paris green in order to eradicate it of the insurance men and potato bugs.”

More will be shared next week from this small comic history.



This sketch was copied from Howe's Comic History of Green County, which was printed by R. Elsmere Howe in 1927. It shows E. B. Rosa near his green houses at what is now 5th Street and 19th Avenue. The cabbage is crying that he doesn't "want to be sauer kraut!" The beet asks him to "take me away from this garlic bulb or I'll beat it!"