

## First National Bank and Monroe in 1857

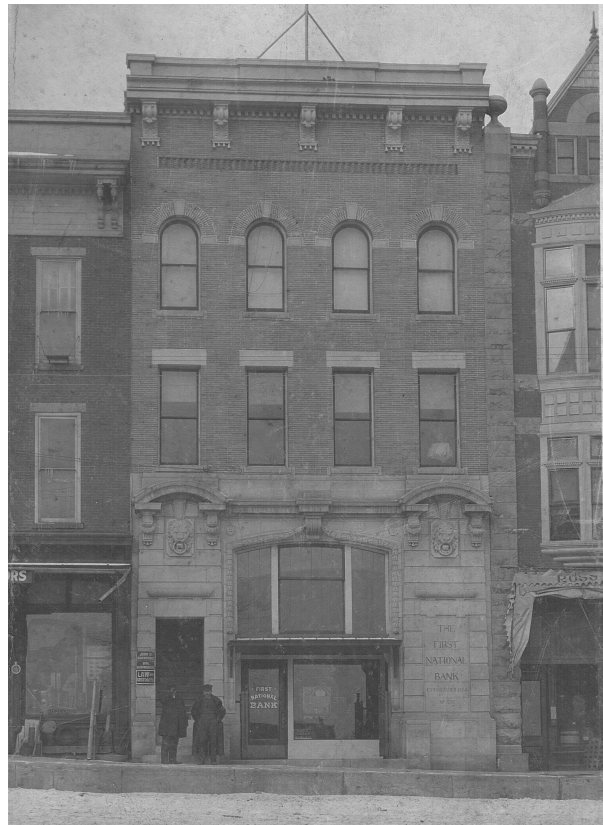
A new building on the north side of the square was opened early in 1857. It was located on some of the highest ground in the town and was the first four-story building in Monroe. It must have been something to see at that time, when most of the buildings around the square were made of wood. The following description was printed in the February 11, 1857 issue of the Monroe Sentinel.

The whole height of the Bank Building from basement to roof was 65 feet, 58.5 feet above the sidewalk. It was 70 feet deep and 26 1/3 feet wide. The basement, finished off into one room, was entered by steps in the front descending from the side walk. Three heavy stone pillars, 11 feet high, formed the support of the building in front. The first story proper was 13 feet high and had an iron front. That was occupied by the Bank of Monroe. The ceiling was ornamented with fine stucco, which was credited to the artist, Mr. Thoms of Janesville, who did the plastering.

The second floor was finished off into rooms for offices. No. 4 was occupied by Messrs. Dunwiddie & Dexter's law office. The third floor was finished the same as the second. No. 17 was occupied by Messrs. Gardner & Brundage's law office; No. 18 was about to be occupied as a counting room for the Sentinel. To the right was a stairway leading to the fourth floor. The rear half of this story was divided into two rooms and occupied by Preston & Richardson, daguerrean artists. No. 24 was the operating room and No. 25 was the reception room. The front half was occupied by the Monroe Sentinel Printing Office and was next to the banking office, the finest room in the building. The stairway was five feet clear in width with heavy handrails on either side. The stairs leading from the sidewalk into the building were made of iron. Taking everything into consideration, the building was not excelled in artistic beauty or excellence of finish by any other out of Milwaukee. It cost the proprietors, Messrs. Ludlow, Bingham & Co., \$12,000. Mr. Norman Churchill was the architect; he personally superintended the work from its inception. The building attested his ability better than any encomium that could be passed. Friends, from town and out, were invited to tour the premises. "One view from our front windows will repay anybody for the time occupied in the ascension."

On February 2nd of the following year, a group of between one hundred and one hundred fifty ladies and gentlemen from Milwaukee took the Excursion Train on the M. & M. R.R. to Monroe to attend the commemoration of the completion of the Southern Wisconsin Railroad. The following description of our area appeared in the Milwaukee Free Democrat, reprinted in the Sentinel, also mentions the new bank building.

The village of Monroe was built something after the fashion of Ancient Rome, if not exactly on seven hills, at least several. The one in the center of town was apparently the highest. It was skirted on the east, south, and west by belts of timber, the latter tended to give a varied effect to the beautiful landscape view, which could be had from the top of the highest building, the Bank Block. From that point there was an expanse of country visible to the eye, which for beauty and fertility could not be excelled, and seldom equaled. Nearly all of Green County, the eastern part of Lafayette, the northern portions of Stephenson and Jo Daviess, and the southern portion of Dane was visible and the whole presented the appearance of a



This photo, from the collection of the late Howard Schulz, shows the First National Bank on the north side of the square. The building, built in 1857 and razed in 1956, was probably the highest structure in Monroe for most of that time.

country capable of sustaining a far more dense population than was probable to test the capacities of its soil. The village had a business-like aspect, but the editor felt that it was situated in a spot less remarkable for its beauty than many other locations which abounded on every side, and which embodied the latter advantage to a greater extent than Monroe. But time, enterprise, and the railroad could put a smoother face on Monroe, extend its sidewalks, and beautify its location, even if they could not remove its "prairie mud." Visited in summertime, however, one could be much more favorably impressed with the advantages of Monroe than during the winter season. The business points of Monroe, however, especially as a station on the railroad where the whole country spoken of above will pour its golden wealth of produce, were apparent as they were expected to be in the future.

Lying in the midst of such a fertile region and being an eligible point on the Southern Wisconsin Railroad for the marketing of grain, it was expected that the village would soon feel the impetus given it by the extension of the railroad and spring into a new being afterward ranking as one of the chief business places in the interior of Wisconsin. The railroad company was expected to soon proceed to construct their depot buildings, which would vastly improve the appearance of that part of the village. They had secured the services of Wm. B. Strong, a courteous and obliging gentleman, formerly agent at Whitewater, as agent at Monroe, who was expected to prove himself acceptable to the citizens of Monroe.

All of this information came from *Becoming a Village: Monroe, Wisconsin in the 1850s*, which was published in 2009. There are several photos of this building in the two pictorial histories of Monroe. The building was razed in 1956 to build the new First National Bank building.