

## Green County Was the Wealthiest County in the United States

Since I've moved back to Monroe, I've been impressed with the generosity of the residents of our community whenever an organization asks for funds to renovate, build an addition to an existing building, erect a new structure, or just help out others in the community. The generous residents and businesses of the county always seem to come forward and help each organization meet its goal; fortunately, there are enough in the community who have the financial means to help.

Monroe currently supports five Edward Jones offices as well as several other financial advisors, so I was not shocked when I came across an article in the May 2, 1916 issue of the Monroe Evening Times whose large headline said, "Green County Wealthiest in United States." It reported that the total wealth of the county was given as \$52,219,962.78, with the per capita average being \$2,425.83. Real estate and personal property totaled \$50,248,169 and the most recent bank statement at the time showed \$7,961,793.78 on deposit.

Frank E. Corson, Register of Deeds, had written to all of the state and national banks in Green County asking for a statement of their resources and liabilities at the last bank call during March. He also requested the same statement of banks in adjoining counties as to which part of their deposits properly belonged to Green County. The object of Corson's request was to determine the surplus wealth of the county at the busiest time of the year - the season when farmers were buying and selling properly most actively. There were more specific numbers compiled by Corson included in this article.

The population of the county at that time was about 24,000, which is how they determined the average wealth for each resident. The article concluded, "Without doubt Green County is the wealthiest county in the state of Wisconsin per capita and it is stated, authoritatively, that a recent government publication declared Green County to be the wealthiest county in the United States in proportion to population."



Green County became the wealthiest county in the country partially because of the many cows who provided the milk to make the cheese produced here. This photo, taken from the Monroe Area Pictorial History, shows the cows on the Maple Grove Dairy Farm located at N2220 County Highway S just south of Juda in 1920.

More than a dozen years earlier, the newspaper had reported on April 3, 1903, "The healthy financial condition of Green County is denoted by the statements of deposits and resources of the banks of the county as published recently in their financial statements called for by the state bank examiner. There are ten banks in the county carrying total deposits of \$1,796,254.85 and \$2,470,108.89 in resources." The article compared that to their numbers from April 2, 1897 - six years earlier. The increase of deposits in those six years was 1,204 per cent, compared to only 135% for the banks of Wisconsin. The First National Bank had more money in 1903 than all ten banks had in 1897.

A headline on July 28, 1915 stated, "Monroe Wealth Shows Big Gain During the Year," but this time it was referring to Monroe township. Assessor O. H. Atherton stated that the valuation of the township property had increased \$38,142 in the previous year. This happened in spite of the fact that horses and cattle had been given a lower valuation than the previous year and two stock of goods and one large manufacturing firm had been sold or moved away.

An indication of the increase of wealth, and the fact that the residents were enjoying it more, was indicated by the fact that the number of automobiles had increased from 137 to 213. The value of the automobiles increased from \$51,150 to \$69,985. The larger number of automobiles in 1915 meant that there were less horse-drawn vehicles around. This number went from 260 down to 232, with valuations dropping from \$7,485 to \$6,285.

The article concluded, "The tabulations of Assessor Atherton also show there were 35 new houses either completed in the city during the past year or under process of completion while he was making his rounds."

People in other parts of the country must have known how successful the people of Green County were. In an article titled, "Green County's Golden Opportunity," it was announced that a delegation of from 100 to 150 southern Illinois bankers were to visit here on Wednesday, September 26, 1917. The purpose of their visit was to get first-hand information from "the greatest dairy county in the United States." They came by a special train over the Illinois Central, arriving at 6:30 in the morning, and were guests here all day.

Many of those bankers had already advanced money with which to purchase Holstein cattle here; others were prospective purchasers. Since the previous November, the members of the Southern Illinois Bankers Association had purchased 2,714 head of Holstein calves and cows through their field representative here, George B. Brown. The trip was planned so they could "verify to their own satisfaction the great tales of prosperity that have gone forth from Green County concerning the dairy business. They want to know how it all came about and how it is done. And it is up to every person here, farmers as well as townspeople, to give these men a hearty welcome and a cordial entertainment while they are in Green County." These bankers were on a serious mission - to take notice of the practical example that their farmers may profit from.

In spite of the way farming has changed in the last century, Green County continues to be an industrious, hardworking community which still prospers. May it continue to do so and take care of each other for generations to come.