

Many Milliners in Monroe in 1872

A Glimpse Back in Time was a book of photographs made from a collection of glass negatives taken by Will E. Trukenbrod compiled by the Green County Historical Society. The 166 candid photographs show people going about their daily lives in the downtown area and near Center School and Monroe High School, probably between 1915 and 1920. How well-dressed the adults in this rural city of less than 3,500 people were actually surprised and impressed me as I looked at these images.

While reading the 1872 Monroe Sentinels a few weeks ago, I was struck by the number of articles /advertisements about milliners in Monroe more than 40 years prior to the photos in the book. These first ones were all from the April 17 issue. Spring would have been approaching and the milliners would expect the women to change their fashions for the new season. The wording, as always, is interesting.



This cropped photo was taken from the top of page 76 in *A Glimpse Back in Time*. Notice the hats and clothing the ladies are all wearing as they cross 11th Street on the west side of the square. The people of Monroe were typically well-dressed even back to the 1870s as this column points out.

“Last Saturday, we were present at the opening of Mrs. Meyer’s New Millinery Rooms on the South Side of the Square, one door east of J. Bolender’s Grocery Store. Had we been educated to believe in Fairies, we could readily have believed that, through some supernatural agency, we had been transported to ‘Fairy Land.’ The room had been fitted up in a beautiful and tasty manner by Mrs. Meyer, who is prepared to do millinery and dress-making in the latest style, and to guarantee satisfaction. Call and see her before making purchases as she can and will furnish goods at the lowest living rates.” This starts off as if it is just a newsworthy article, but turns into an advertisement for the lady. Even though it isn’t an advertisement like we would expect to see today, my guess is that Mrs. Meyer had to pay for the space in the newspaper.

This next article seems to be just an advertisement for another business in the eastern half on the same side of the square. “Mrs. High and Miss Weirich have just received their new stock of spring goods, embracing a full stock of Hats and Bonnets of the latest styles; also a large assortment of ladies’ collars, neck-ties, ribbons, and trimmings of all kinds. All persons wishing to purchase anything in this class of goods are requested to call. It is our intention to keep a full assortment of millinery goods constantly on

hand, so as to give their customers a variety to choose from. Remember this place; one door west of Harper and Stagers Bros., south side of the square.”

Miss E. McMannes had a short ad in the same paper for her North Side Millinery Store, which was THE place to purchase goods cheap. “Goods purchased of this establishment are warranted to suit in price, style and quality.” She also stated that she received new goods every few days.

An ad for Mrs. W H. Allen stated that she would be glad to see all her customers and everybody else who was in need of millinery and fancy goods before the snow “goes off.” She was located one door west of the Union Block on the north side of the square. [The photo on top of page 6 in the Monroe Area Pictorial History shows a store building for W. H. Allen with a millinery sign beside it.]

The Janesville Cash Store also had two small ads, which made it sound like the men had not been forgotten. One said, “Hats and Caps New and Cheap.” The other said, “For a new Hat or Cap, Buck gloves or Mits don’t fail to call.”

Another article made it sound like the editor might have given the Janesville Cash Store a free ad for the hat that he had received. “Our friend Cheney, of the Janesville Cash Store, will please accept our thanks for a very nice hat of the latest style, ‘velvet finish,’ out of his well selected stock. Either of two things: He was ashamed to see us wearing our every-day hat on Sunday, or his prices are so low that it did not cost him much to fix us out in cap-a-pie; — that is French for new hat. It is not probable that this Enterprising firm can give everybody a hat, who needs one, but we are assured that Cheney can make it to the advantage of all to look through his stock, just received, and make a selection. This in not designed as a puff, as there was nothing said to us about puffing by Cheney, who gave us the hat.”

Mrs. Sue High and Miss Allie Weirich had another ad in the following week (April 24) stating that they received new goods every week. They had the “Latest styles of Hats, odd, gay, and sober styles. The new styles of French and American flowers, with elegant ribbons for sashes, and bonnet trimmings. If you want a real stylish hat come and examine our assortment, and you cannot fail to suit yourself in style and price.” [Alvaretta Weirich married Henry Ball in September and the firm became known as High & Ball.]

As we saw earlier Mrs. Meyers wasn’t only selling hats but also advertised stylish dressmaking. The April 24 Sentinel also had an announcement from Miss G. M. Beebe to the ladies of the Monroe area that she had “recently received her Spring patterns - all the latest styles - and is now prepared to do dress-making and warrant perfect satisfaction, both in price and workmanship.” Anyone wanting work done was encouraged to call on her at the rooms “formerly occupied by Miss Robinson, as milliner, under the Sentinel office.”

There have been well-dressed people in Monroe for generations; Monroe had many clothing stores downtown supplying both men and women until a few decades ago.