

Thanksgiving 1882

In my column on November 21, 2020 I described how Thanksgiving was celebrated in Monroe in 1910. As I searched for something to write about how the Thanksgiving holiday was celebrated in our area in years gone by, I chose to use what I found in the November 1882 newspapers to share. It seems that people here were busy 140 years ago this month.

The last exhibition of the Monroe Broom Brigade was held at Turner Hall on Friday, November 17, less than a week before Thanksgiving. The advertisement in the newspaper on that Wednesday stated that they would be presenting some fancy movements including “Driving the Cat out of the Backyard,” “Shooing the Chickens,” and more. There was also to be a supper and dance that evening to benefit the Monroe City Guards. It was to be the “finest party of the season” with Kneeland’s celebrated band to “discourse some new music for the merry dancers.” Admission to the hall was 15 cents with dancing tickets for 50 cents. An oyster supper was also available for an additional cost. Unfortunately, the newspaper did not give any summary of how many people attended or how much profit was realized.



The Broom Brigade was formed in June 1882 and performed at a celebration to raise money for the Monroe City Guards which was held in Turner Hall in November 1882. This photograph, taken in November 1882, appeared on page 117 of the Pictorial History of Monroe, Wisconsin.

The December 6 Monroe Sentinel gave a description of Thanksgiving in Monroe. “This festival of Thanksgiving was duly observed in Monroe, and generally everywhere. Many strangers came among us and those who used to be of our number in the census taking, returned to their old places, to devour the good things and feel thankful for the opportunities and blessings of life. The fame of Monroe hospitality has often been tested and approved, but never more thoroughly than at Thanksgiving 1882. There was religious services in several of the churches, including a union service at the Christian Chapel. The Universalists gave a festival at Turner Hall, which included a musical entertainment, suppers, and a social dance at which several hundred people gathered to enjoy themselves, renew acquaintances, and partake of the bounties there served up in the customary elegant style of this society of ladies. The weather was pleasant and quite cool enough to make the home and fireside the dearest spot on earth to most of us, and to cause us to feel truly thankful for the privileges and comforts there enjoyed. Our local market was well supplied with the traditional turkeys, and other fowls, that seemed to be too young and tender for the wicked world.”

In the same Sentinel, an ad for Witter & Co. in Monroe stated that they wanted poultry. They said they would pay the “highest market price in cash” for 20,000 turkeys, 10,000 chickens, 7,000 ducks, and

any number of geese. It appears that it had been a very busy Thanksgiving season and they needed to restock before Christmas. From what I've read during the years, I am guessing that many of these fowl were also to be shipped to Chicago.

I want to take this opportunity to wish each of you a rewarding Thanksgiving weekend with many happy times with family and friends and a fabulous upcoming holiday season. Making memories that will last a lifetime is what we want to do for our family, just like our parents and grandparents did for us.