

Rows in Monroe in the 1870s

Last month I shared information about some of the Monroe residents who left Monroe for other places in 1870, some who had previously left and were returning for a visit, and a couple who returned here permanently. There have been a few other columns that gave us a glimpse of what Monroe was like at that time. None of them included the side of Monroe that I'm going to share today, a few rough characters. I'm going to share most or all of the wording of these articles so you can see how creative the editor was. The money amounts, for that time surprised me.

On March 16, 1870, the Monroe Sentinel reported, "Oliver S. Tuttle who, we believe lives in the town of Clarno, came to town last Wednesday, and having imbibed too freely of that which 'biteth like an adder and stingeth like strychnine,' i.e. '40 rods around the corner,' appropriated a basket of goods without due process of law, from J. Bolender's grocery, and was arrested by Constable Pinney, near the depot, lodged in jail, and the next day was fined nineteen dollars and some cents for this little freak of good humor. Nobody thinks that Oliver would have done such a bold, bad act, had he been sober."

Six months later, on September 7, the Sentinel stated, "We understand that the seat of war has been transferred to the west side of the Square, and that last Saturday afternoon there were several pitched battles in that locality, the result of which was, that tho' no lives were lost, the contending forces were badly demoralized by the number of wounded. One prisoner of note (General Conley) was taken and had quarters assigned him at Carr's classical boarding house, until Monday morning, when his captor, General Strawser, assisted by the Minister of Public Justice, made a levy upon him for funds to the amount of \$9 to defray the expenses of the war, which, being paid, the captive was allowed his liberty."

From March of the following year, "Edmund Bartlett, Esq. did a good thing for this community last Friday, when he fined John McPhillips the sum of *fifty dollars* for riotous conduct. Esquire Bartlett went to the full extent of the law, and the *gentleman* made the donation to the village for the privilege of raising the devil in several of the saloons about town. The next time, McPhillips will get about three months in the new jail."

The next article appeared two months later. "Not 'That Little Church around the Corner,' but 'A Little Saloon on the Corner,' in this village was the scene of a row on Monday last. Three men 'half-sea-over' took advantage of the condition each other was in to have a little unpleasantness. They were not so quiet about the matter as their safety required, and consequently they were taken to the lodgings of Sheriff Wood, for such cases made and provided. We are informed that the Board are considering the propriety of taking away the licenses of two or three of those whisky holes in this corporation. It would be a good idea."

This last incident was first reported in the Sentinel on May 26, 1875 and ended up going to court the following month. "A disgraceful row occurred in Peck & Lytle's saloon" on the west side of the square late on the previous Saturday night (or early Sunday morning). Mr. Prime, a carriage trimmer for P. Miller & Son, was "knocked down and stamped upon by Charley Lytle in a most shocking manner." Prime, who was intoxicated, had been drinking at Lytle's and other places was "rather noisy and abusive. Some hot words passed between him and Lytle, when Lytle sprang upon the trimmer and knocked him down and kicked his face and ribs with his boot heels, much in the style that a boss canvas man in a second class circus would do it."



This photograph of the Thorpe and Whitehead saloon is borrowed from the Pictorial History of Monroe. This undated photo may have previously been the location of the Peck & Lytle saloon, which was where Charles Lytle was involved in a row in 1875 that cost him \$50.00 in fines and costs.

Corporal Nicholson, who was the night watchman and constable, happened to come along just in time to take the injured carriage trimmer, not Lytle, to jail, "thinking perhaps to turn an honest penny by turning over a drunken man to Sheriff Ball. It takes a brave man to jump into a man's face when he is down, and it takes a still braver (?) man to take a drunken man off to jail, especially if he has had his head kicked and pounded till totally insensible. What man, woman or child will not applaud Lytle and extol Nicholson for the gallant part they took in the interests of humanity and good order? Who will not commend the half dozen or more men, who stood by and saw the performance without interfering. . . . But common humanity would dictate that a fallen man should not to be kicked in the face, back and sides and carted off to jail while his chastiser is allowed to go Scott free. Of course Lytle was not at all to blame in this matter! Of course all the witnesses to the affair will swear that Lytle acted in self-defense purely - although he bears not a scratch from the fracas - and of course it would be impossible to get testimony from the watchman, or anybody else there, because there is never anybody around when such a row occurs."

Charles Lytle and John Peck were both arrested on June 1 for assault and battery and held in bonds to appear before Justice Rote two weeks later. The case was then adjourned until June 24. Mr. Douglas and Edmund Bartlett represented the prosecution while H. Medberry and B. Dunwiddie represented the defendant.

The trial began on Thursday and ended on Monday and "was attended by a good many of our citizens who manifested considerable interest." Peck was discharged because he did nothing; Lytle was fined \$10.00 plus costs, about \$50 in all.

As I read the papers from this era, it made me think of the old-time westerns I used to watch. I never would have thought it was like that here prior to reading the papers.