

Cheese Day 1923 Announced

One hundred years ago this month, almost every Monroe Evening Times had at least one article on the front page about the upcoming Cheese Day, which was held on October 2. This had to be a huge deal for the city since there had not been a Cheese Day since October 9, 1917. The successful celebrations had taken place for four consecutive years while the war was going on in Europe and even in 1917, after the United States was involved in the war.

It was decided on June 27, 1918 that there would not be a Cheese Day for the fifth consecutive year. Prior to that decision being made, the Monroe Evening Times mentioned that opinions were “quite divided.” Those opposed thought that there should not be a celebration while some of the “boys are fighting with the American forces abroad.” Others thought that it should be held so “Monroe and Green county will not lose the prestige established by the annual affair and the benefits of its advertising.” Some felt the event should have only local merchants to avoid having the square filled with “hucksters from hither and yon.”

County Food Administrator F. W. Wettengel inquired of the food administration to see if the celebration would be compatible with the national food interest. In previous years cheese sandwiches had been given away, which resulted with many of them being found on the street. They considered selling sandwiches instead to avoid the waste. About 50 committee members and boosters made an almost unanimous decision at the meeting because “of the war and the accompanying circumstances.” The report from 1917 indicated that they had a balance of only \$60 left.

Word must not have made it to Dixon, Illinois that there wasn't a Cheese Day in 1918 or 1919 since six men made the trip through the mud “only to have their hopes of fun and frolic blasted” in October 1919. They claimed there had been an item in their hometown paper announcing the festival. The event had been called off because of “the high cost of cheese and all other features connected with Cheese Day.”

Another interesting incident that happened during those five years without a Cheese Day is that an auto that had been stolen during Cheese Day 1917 was located by the Wisconsin Automobile Mutual Insurance Company in November two years later. The vehicle that belonged to Michael Sullivan of Adams township was located in Des Moines after having changed hands. G. W. Wilkinson brought the automobile back to Monroe, which the insurance company would keep because Sullivan had been paid for his loss by the insurance company shortly after it was stolen.

One of the promoters explained when the date was announced in March, “This is going to be the biggest day the county ever had. It's not going to be primarily a trade boom for Monroe merchants - that isn't the idea. It is promoted in the interests of the Green County dairymen and is intended to be a boost for every person who is making his living in the county.” The Farm Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis club, American Legion, and other organizations were taking an active interest in the event. The



This is the float that the Monroe Planing Mill entered into the Cheese Days parade in 1923. The Planing Mill building stood on the west side of the 1200-block of 16th Avenue until it was razed decades ago. The Middle School parking lot now occupies that space.

Holstein Breeders Association also planned to lend support with an exhibition of prize stock on that day and a Holstein sale the next day.

An order for thousands of buttons was placed on March 8 and were expected to be put up for sale in all parts of the county for \$1 each within three weeks. This was the first year that button sales were to be the chief finances for the event; previously Monroe businessmen had borne the larger part of the expense. At this time, they needed between \$3,000 and \$3,500 to be assured of the best Cheese Day possible and planned to raise that by the sale of the buttons. "The old-time parade, better than ever, free cheese sandwiches, and all the attractions of yesteryear will be present on Oct. 2 - with many new ones besides." Howard W. Chadwick had been named to appoint a committee on committees.

Workers also did canvass the businesses in the downtown area for donations. It was announced on June 22 that the east side of the square was the first to be completed where they had raised \$235. Workers were still working on the other sides of the square trying to reach their \$1,000 goal. They felt this was the amount needed for "the event to be assured." The enthusiasm of the east side left them "highly encouraged" that they would be successful.

The Cheese Day Committee took out a large ad on July 6 which announced that the sale of buttons was to start that day. They asked the people to "wear the booster button." It was expected that every business institution in Monroe would come forward with a 100 per cent "Booster showing." The button campaign was carried on throughout the county to farms, cheese factories, and business places. They shared that, "Wearing a button will help."

The Times reprinted an article on July 31 from the Wisconsin State Journal with headline "Is It Worth It?" about Cheese Day. "It is the red letter event of the year. It symbolizes dairying for which Green county is world-famous. And so it isn't just cheese, but the cow as a living food factory, that is celebrated."

That article went on to say that the people of the county "are workers and pushers, able to meet triumph over their own difficulties, the architects of a state of rural well-being which widely advertises its prosperity at a time when less businesslike farmers are in the dumps over conditions. Naturally, to an editor, the first evidence of competence . . . is the fact that the little city of Monroe has a newspaper plant unequalled in any city of three times its size in the entire country. "

We'll learn more next week about the planning for the first Cheese Day to be held in six years.