

Karlen Block - The Final Chapter

The Karlen Block, on the east end of the north side of the square, saw many tenants throughout the decades that it existed after being built in 1891. The 1900 city directory listed Emanuel Knoeri in the saloon on the corner. It was announced on January 2, 1901 that the GAR Post would move from the Syndicate Block to the Karlen Block. The Mystic Workers were to do the same as were the WRC and the Woman's Club after April 1.

Two articles in the Sentinel on August 13, 1902 mentioned that men were busy laying a new cement walk in front of the Karlen Block, with a new walk to be placed soon at the First National Bank next door. "They will be the best that money can buy." While one of the masons was busily working on the new walk, "Fritzie Karlen's hound walked up to him and, advancing his snout close to the gentleman's auditory apparatus, let out a howl that raised the startled man several feet, more or less, off the earth. The bunch on the corner had a good laugh."



This photo of the northeast corner of the square was taken by A. R. Steele on June 3, 1956 before the second stories of the First National Bank and the Karlen Block were razed. Notice that the Bank had already taken over the west store of the Karlen Block.

From what I can't decide if it was an advertisement or a news article, it was learned that Richard Maurer had been busy putting fire escapes up on different buildings in the city in May 1904, including the one he had just completed on the Karlen Block. The editor added, "Parties wishing fire escapes should call on him before ordering elsewhere."

The Green County Herold office planned to vacate the Karlen Block in June 1907 and it was announced that the space had been leased by the Standard Amusement Company. The plan was to conduct a permanent moving picture theater in that space. The company planned to take possession during the week of June 23 and planned to have its first performance by July 4 or before. They planned to change the

moving pictures and views twice a week. "There being no day current here Wednesday and Saturday matinees cannot be given for some weeks." Nothing more was learned from the newspapers about a theater in this building.

The building underwent many physical changes as well as many tenants during the subsequent years. The 1915-1916 city directory listed Sidney Wells, grocer, in the west section of the ground level and Adolph Schmid's saloon on the east side. By 1917-1918 Oscar Denney had taken over the grocery while Adolph Schmid was still running the saloon. By 1922 the G. W. Wilkinson Insurance Agency and Wisconsin Automobile Insurance Co. had taken over the corner store front with the First National Bank having taken over the other side. The same was seen in the 1927-1928 directory. In 1930 some of the city offices occupied the corner store.

By 1933 the corner saloon was occupied by the Headquarters Tavern; it remained there until 1952 or later with several different owners. Adolph Schmid, whose name appears on the window in the photo on page 43 in *A Glimpse Back in Time* and on page 14 in the *Monroe Area Pictorial History*, was listed as the proprietor in 1933 and again, with Thomas Cunningham, in 1936. Louis Pfund was the proprietor in the 1940s before Joe and Alois Milz took over. The last time that this corner storefront was listed in the directories as occupied was 1952. By 1954 it was vacant and the Headquarters Tavern had moved to 1012 17th Avenue. The First National Bank had probably already given them notification that the building would be razed in the near future.

Notice in the attached photo that the facade of the west part of the Karlen Block had been changed to match the facade on the First National Bank and another lion's head had been placed to match the two that had existed on the bank for decades prior. One can look at the photos in the pictorial histories to see the changes made to the outside of the building. But one can only imagine all of the changes that were made to all three stories as the tenants came and left during the decades.

Plans with an architect and builder were probably underway for the new bank building, shown on page 22 of the *Pictorial History of Monroe*, that was built on this location starting about August 1, 1956. This involved the removal of the two upper floors of the old bank building and the former Karlen Block. The razing of the Karlen Block in 1956 can be seen in a photo on page 15 of the *Monroe Area Pictorial History*. Jacob Karlen had passed away in 1920, so he never knew that his building was razed too soon. The new bank, free of all pillars and supports, was open by February 1, 1957.

The building that immediately replaced the Karlen Block did not last long as it was then replaced by the current, much larger building in 1982. The Karlen Block, possibly one of the most beautiful privately-owned buildings to exist in Monroe, is now only a memory.