

The 200th Back in the Day Column

It is difficult for me to believe that it has been 57 months since the first of the Back in the Day columns was published. This is the 200th column that I have researched and written. I could not have kept doing them without the positive comments that I receive. Researching and writing are becoming more arduous as I get older; the deadlines seem to come more quickly, which is why I take a week off on occasion. Some people ask if the reason I take weeks off is because I am running out of ideas for topics; I assure you that is not the case. In this column I shall first include some additional information about some earlier columns and then share some of the feedback that I've received since the hundredth column was printed.

After the columns about the United States House and Karlen Block had been printed, I came across some notes that I had made several years ago while reading *The County Journal* (a weekly paper that covered much of the county). They give a bit more detail about the moving of the old building. It was printed on May 20, 1890 that "Eli Edelman has struck the first blow toward moving the old United States House to his lots on west Russell Street [now 10th Street] where tenement houses will be made from it." The following week it said, "The United States House is taking its first and probably last ride. Eli Edelman, conductor." Yet another week later it said, "The dining room part of the U. S. House is about ready to be moved." A follow up on June 10 stated, "Owing to weather last week the U. S. House did not commence its travel til Tuesday."



This photo, taken about 1950 and from the collection of the late Dr. John Irvin, shows the narrow Karlen Block on the east end of the north side of the square. The sign on the second floor, west window says Doctors Ruehlman, Baumle, and Leister. Immediately to the west of this building is the First National Bank (with the three lion's heads) and then Greiner's Hardware. A portion of Grossen's Tavern can be seen immediately to the north of the Karlen Block.

The Karlen Block rose quite quickly. The joists of the first story were being put into place on October 21. They shared on December 2, "The new Karlen block is now entirely enclosed with the exception of the windows and some of the doors. Stoves are set up to permit the rooms to be plastered. The bay windows, with the elegant galvanized iron cornice and trimmings, add much to the beauty of the building." They shared the following week that there were 10 stoves going every night to enable the plasterers to finish their work.

I shared in two columns earlier this year that the Monroe Sentinel described many eligible bachelors from Monroe in leap year 1892. After that column was printed I discovered that the Monroe Evening Times shared a few descriptions of "the 1920 crop of bachelors and widowers," Paul A. Ruf, Marcus Elmer, Leon Schmidt, Harold Johnson, Freddie Kohli, Glenn Preston, Martin Husinga, J. M. Heath, Ralph Wenger, Bert Galusha, Nick Durst, and Pete Solomon. They additionally listed the names of more than 40 others. They advised the ladies to put on the "war paint, get busy with the puffs and curls, marcelle your bangs, roll a roguish eye, and vamp 'em."

I appreciate all of the feedback that I receive while out in public. One day while I was volunteering at the clinic, I was sitting by the entrance during some down time. I said goodbye to a young lady who was leaving through the revolving door. Within seconds she came back in to tell me how much she enjoys the columns. She wasn't sure it was me so she checked with my coworkers to be sure, and went out of her way to let me know that she enjoys my columns. That was greatly appreciated.

I received two email messages earlier this year from men who grew up in Monroe, but who live in Madison now. The first arrived in January. "I cannot begin to tell you how appreciative and thankful I am of you and all of your hard and tireless work over the many years sharing the history of Monroe in your newspaper articles and books. I absolutely love being from Monroe and proud to call Monroe my hometown. Your articles are fascinating to me, as I piece together in my mind how things were 'Back in the Day.'"

An excerpt from the one I received in February said, "As I'm writing this, in a sense, the articles you have built with your talents are actually more enduring than these buildings on the square. The educational context you put together in your articles will outlast in years the Karlen block and others. I'm sure you have thought about that in your years of writing 'Back in the Day' but it is worth reminding you that your imprint on Monroe history will be useful for HUNDREDS of years."

Sometimes the feedback is just about the memories that are triggered. One of our local readers shared the following personal anecdote after reading the columns about the Karlen Block, where some of the new doctors (Baumle, Irvin, Murray) had their practice on the second floor in the early 1950s. As mentioned in the column, the entrance was on the east side of the building. The reader's mother had an appointment with Dr. Baumle one day and had to take her son along since he was only 3 years old. She told him to sit in the chair in the waiting room. He thinks he did - for about 5 minutes. The office girl must not have seen him get up and leave. He went down the stairs, out the door, and into Grossen's Tavern next door to the north. Coming out of the exam room, his mother immediately noticed he was gone and everybody, including the doctors, freaked out. The hunt was on. Eventually Dr. Baumle found him, sitting on a bar stool drinking a 7-Up.

People encourage me to keep writing about the past of Green County. That is what I hope to do, but I may have to take weeks off more frequently as time goes on. I will try to continue to cover a number of topics from various time periods. Keep the feedback coming.