The Building of the Whitney-Eilert Building in 1859

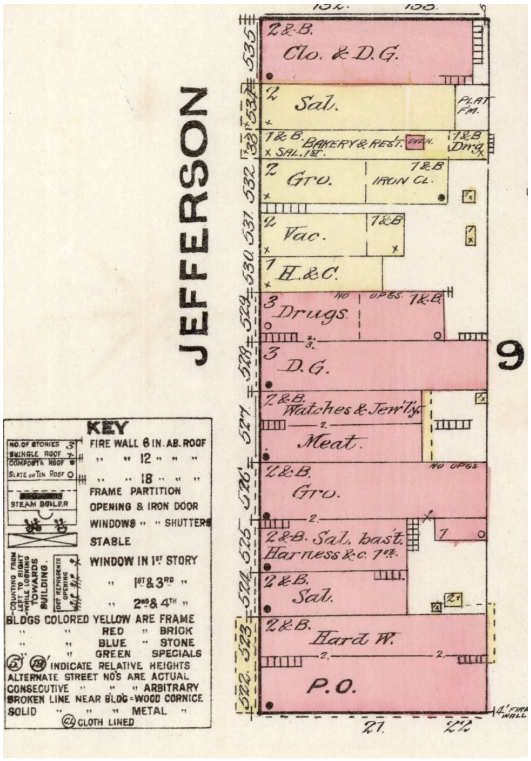
I was sitting on the south side of the Square one day in June and looked at the Whitney-Eilert Block, built by Hezekiah W. Whitney and Jacob K. Eilert for their businesses, on the east side of the Square. This building has most recently been the home of Bartels & Co. Tap and Sunrise Donut Cafe. As most of you know, this is where the devastating fire occurred on May 14. Ironically, you may recall from a previous column, that this was the building that stopped the fire that destroyed the south half of the east side of the Square in May 1879. Since Whitney was married to Harriet Treat, whose family will probably be topics of future columns, this column and the next two will focus on Eilert and the northern part of the building, which he occupied.

Eilert was born in Central County, Pennsylvania on July 4, 1824 and moved to Stephenson County, Illinois in 1842, where he was married to Margaret Badger; she was also a native of Pennsylvania. They moved to Monroe in May 1847, where they would spend the rest of their lives. The 1850 census showed them here with their one-year-old daughter, Mary. Unfortunately, their two daughters "died in early life." Eilert was a druggist at that time and continued in that occupation for the rest of his life.

An advertisement in the Monroe Sentinel on August 4, 1852 showed that Eilert "operated the Western Medical Depot east of the Court House. He was a dealer in drugs, medicines, chemicals, paints, oils, dye stuffs, glass, snuffs, tobacco, cigars, perfumery, confectionaries, fine liquors for medical purposes, etc." It was reported in May 1854 that Eilert was filling up the store so full that one could not go amiss of something that he wants for health, convenience, or ornament.

It was then reported on April 18, 1855 that Eilert had soap for mouthwash, of his own manufacture, that was very valuable. The editor had used it and pronounced it good. "It may be proper to state here, that soap is the desideratum for cleaning the teeth and gums. It is the only remedy which effectually destroys the animacule, which breeds in the catar of the teeth, and which, little animal, bores through the enamel, destroying the teeth. Use, then, soap if you would preserve your teeth" Eilert also had a liquid for washing clothes, "which is invaluable." He had been in the drug business for a long time at that time.

A fire on December 19, 1855 destroyed the building as well as his stock of drugs and medicines. He reported a week later that he had received prompt payment of $1,000 for the full amount of his policy. By mid-February 1856 he had opened the Western Medical Depot in the basement of Emerson & Condee's Empire Block on the south side of the Square. An advertisement on November 17, 1856 stated that he had again moved the drug store to the west end of the new block on the north side of the square. By the following June, he had a soda fountain in full play, which "throws a most excellent soda."



This 1884 Sanborn map shows what buildings were on the east side of the Square after Eilert and Whitney built their building in 1859 and also after all of the buildings on the south end of the block were replaced in 1879. The buildings between Eilert's drugstore and the clothing store on the north end were still all frame buildings.

The Sentinel shared on August 27, 1856 that Eilert was one of those indomitable fellows who all the elements combined could not subdue or dishearten. He had met with an undue proportion of bad luck at various times. Instead of giving up after he was "burned clear out," he obtained a new stock and located in a new place. He also united himself with other gentlemen. His nine years experience in Green County allowed him to learn the wants and needs of everybody.

Whitney and Eilert were ready to commence a brick block of two stores on the east side of the square in February 1859. The three-story building was to be 40 feet on front and 80 feet deep. It was to

be built on the old site of Eilert's Drug Store. There was to be an iron front, heavy iron window caps, and a hall in the center with stairs leading to the top of the building. The first story was to be 11 feet in height and the other two would be nine feet tall.

It was shared on October 19 that the building was three stories in height, quite tall for Monroe at that time. It was built of brick upon a very heavy stone foundation. The front was of Milwaukee brick with iron window caps, sills, and cornice, supported on the first story by Corinthian columns with capitals of the same order. Whitney's rooms were nearly finished at that time; the first floor entirely so and occupied by Allen Woodle. Gothic columns divided the shelves, with arches supporting a beautiful Corinthian entablature. The counters were gothic, as were the skylight and paneled ceiling. Even behind the counters, the drawers were divided by mouldings of the same order. A scuttle through the floor at the rear end of the room, as in all the floors above, permitted the convenient elevating of goods from the cellar. The room was to measure twelve feet clear and was lighted by windows (four panes 31 by 54 inches) and doors in front, a skylight in the center, and windows in the rear. A pair of stairs from the rear of the store led to the second story, which was to be finished with the third. Both floors would have offices in the front and storerooms in the rear.

More about Jacob Eilert's short life, his accomplishments, and his building will be shared in the next two columns.