Jacob K. Eilert Continues his Drug Business on the East Side of the Square

After losing his frame drugstore to a fire on December 19, 1855, Jacob K. Eilert operated his store from two different locations on the Square before he and Hezekiah W. Whitney started building the Whitney-Eilert Block on the same location where his previous store had been located on the east side of the Square in 1859.

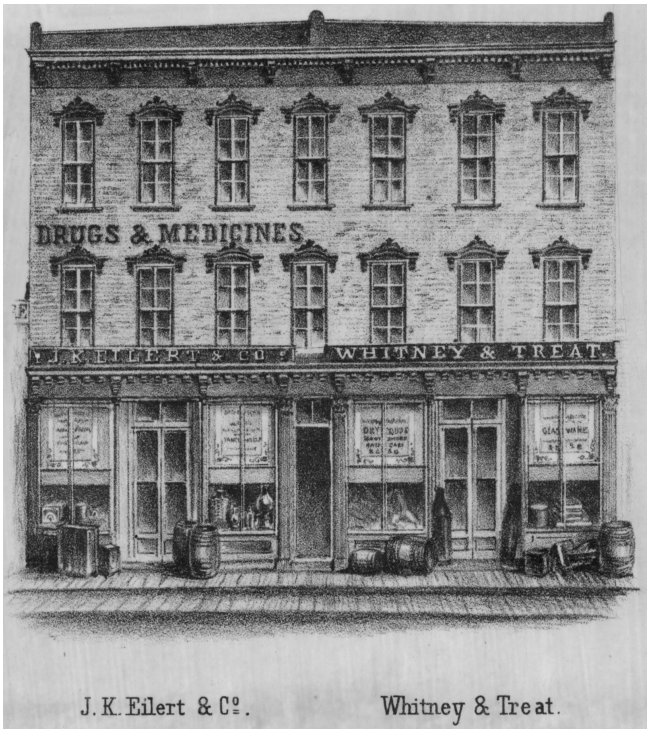
Eilert had engaged John Pool to do the carpentry work for his rooms. The first floor was nearly finished and was a model of its kind. The front was the same as in Whitney's room. Heavy gothic pillars divided the shelves in this room with arches supporting a very heavy and rich cornice of the same order of architecture. The counters were gothic and there was also a nice little gothic room at the rear of the store for an office. The ceiling was plain, with the exception of a few stucco ornaments. The upper stories would be divided by partitions, also having offices in the front and storerooms in the rear. The cellars were each high, dry, and capacious; easy ground access was in the rear of the building.

Whitney's cellar had an open well with pump. The architecture of the very elegant and substantial block was accredited to James Bradshaw. The carpentry work of Whitney's rooms was also done by Bradshaw. Mr. Brewer was given credit for the masonry. Mr. H. G. Austin did the painting. The cost of the lots and buildings was estimated to be $10,000.

Eilert & Co. was about to move into the new and handsome rooms in early November. The editor commented, "A better or more handsome drug room could not be found on the interior of Wisconsin." He was selling kerosene for 90 cents per gallon. Whitney & Treat opened in the south part of the building on April 11, 1860.

The 1860 census shows the Eilerts enumerated next door to the Whitney family. Eilert was listed as a druggist with $7,000 of real estate and $6,000 in personal property. A female servant born in Prussia, Christ Schaefer, 22, and a male drug clerk, William Fillebrown, 21, were also in the household.

J. K. Eilert & Co. was dissolved on June 25, 1861 when J. S. Emmert left the firm with Eilert being the only partner left. An advertisement in July 1863 stated that Eilert's Drug House was 'the oldest business house in Monroe," boasting "sixteen years in successful operations." Besides medicines, he also sold chemicals, paint, oils, glass, varnishes, kerosene oil, kerosene lamps, lanterns, as well as wall and window paper.



This early sketch of the Whitney Block might have been made shortly after the building was built in 1859. It was included on the plat map of Green County done by J. T. Dodge in 1861. That map, including this sketch, was reprinted into a plat book by the Green County Historical Society in 2012.

A lengthy article on February 21, 1866 gave more information about the business and what was going on within the building. Eilert had been manufacturing a tar and wild cherry remedy for coughs, colds, and consumption and more in the basement for about four years. The first lot consisted of only a half gallon; however, it grew "so rapidly in popularity that during the past year, Mr. E. has manufactured 2,100 gallons."

By this time he had added manufactured perfumery, flavoring extracts, hair dye, dentifrice of different kinds, teething syrup, and other articles for wholesale and retail trade to his "first class drug store." Eilert's Anti Billious Pills were being manufactured on the second story. Since September 1, 1865 he had "manufactured 48,000 boxes of

these pills." In another room on the second story he was manufacturing Dr. Jaques' Worm Cakes. Since January 1865, he had manufactured 4,000 pounds, or 32,000 boxes, of this remedy with another contract to have been filled at the time.

At this time he had been spending $3,000 a year for printing, $5,000 for paper boxes, $3,000 to internal revenue, $5,000 on circulars, labels, and fancy papers, and $3,000 on display cards of different kinds. He consistently employed from 12 to 14 people with two or three large wagons running all the time to supply the country druggists. At this time he was also manufacturing "Nerve and Bone Liniment, Sure Cure, Venetian Hair Dye, Horse Powders, Tonic Bitters, Tooth Ache Drops," and more.

Improvements were made to the property later in 1866. It was shared on July 4 that "the handsome new sign recently put up over Eilert's Drug Store was painted by William Wright." The editor added, "Young Wright displays more than ordinary talent in the art of painting, for one of his years; and, with the instructions of an experienced artist, we think he would do well as a landscape and portrait painter. His talent and genius in this respect should be encouraged." The following week he said, "Eilert can claim the premium on the best sidewalk on the Square, although very many new ones are first class."

By 1870 the Eilerts had accumulated $16,000 of real estate and $12,000 of personal property. Mary Keifer, a 16-year-old German immigrant, was the only person living with them.

Eilert was considering the building of an addition to the back end of his drugstore in November 1871, where he would do job work and publish a Democratic newspaper. The editor suggested that they would start a drug store in the rear end of their printing office and "keep concentrated 'lie' and oil of smoke." Two months later, Eilert was considering the removal of his patent medicine establishment to Chicago, which would eliminate the reason for him to start a printing office.

The final column will share whether Eilert moved the manufacturing to Chicago or whether he added a print shop to the back of his building.