Chapter Thirteen

THE CENTENNIAL ERA AND THE PRESS

America's Centennial period, beginning in 1875, was a time when Monroe was experiencing the momentum of business, industrial and cultural activities set in motion by all the years which had gone before. That momentum was to continue through the turn of the century, receiving new impetus, from time to time, through changing circumstances and new enterprises.

Among the bright happenings in 1875 was the appearance January 23 of the Monroe "Sun," a modest biweekly. It was published by George R. South and a younger brother (whose name seems to have evaporated from written history). The "Sun" was printed on a small press owned by South's brother and its sprightly style and prose quickly became popular.

"The Sun" offered welcome relief from the constant sniping between the "Sentinel" and the "Green County Reformer," a Democratic sheet of sorts put out briefly by I.T. Carr. South's editorial opinions were subtle but often sharp essays which relegated petty politics to obscurity.

South's brother soon tired of the project and dropped out. George South had refused to carry advertising and his paper finally folded. He revived it in 1881 as a weekly, which continued until 1897 when it was merged with a group of other local papers.

The "Sun" publisher was a son of John South, wagon works owner. Civil War problems had caused the father to move here in 1864 from Allegheny, Pa., across the river from Pittsburgh. George stayed behind to operate the profitable family carriage storage business, finally coming to Monroe in 1870.
Another town highlight of the times was the opening of Adolph Sery's barbershop on the Square's south side. Sery's place soon became a morning gathering spot where men of the village exchanged news and gossip of the day, before or after their daily shaves or beard trims.

P. (Phares) Miller & Sons shop was gaining attention for its new line of fine, stylish carriages. Across the street, the Patterson & Billings firm was adding new wagonmaking machinery.

A "Sentinel" item on May 8, 1875, told of the wreck of the steamship "Shiller" off the Scilly Islands on England's south coast. The editor never got around to report that among the 300 or so victims was Joseph Schlitz, Milwaukee brewer whose firm was becoming one of Wisconsin's most prosperous industries. Schlitz was on his way home to Germany to bring relatives up to date on his achievements.

Green County Agricultural Society officers that month were reporting the 1875 County Fair should be the "best ever" and that $1,300 had been subscribed for a new exhibition building on the grounds.

Arabut Ludlow had started in mid-May to remodel the Green County House. He later was to rename it as the "Tremont House" and put his half brother, Calvin, in charge.

Bach's Band, a national touring group, gave a concert in May at Turner Hall, reported as the "grandest" ever heard here. It was such a sellout that more than 100, who could not get tickets, had to stand outside to hear the program. Unfortunately, the Turnverein lost $125 on the event.

In late May, Ludlow received a letter from J.W. Shuey, founder of Shueyville (Clarno), who wrote from Missouri that grasshoppers had destroyed all early plantings and farmers were in dire need of grain and bean seeds. Ludlow headed up a drive to prepare a shipment of supplies donated by Shuey's wide circle of oldtime friends.
Although the happening was not local, a stormy incident in July, 1875, at Janesville evoked considerable interest here since it involved Gen. James Bintliff, former "Sentinel" owner. A mob of angry supporters of an alderman, who had been chastized editorially by Bintliff's "Gazette" for his part in repeal of a saloon control law, invaded the newspaper plant, causing great damage. Bintliff confronted the hoodlums with a promise to trade shot for shot with anyone interested. His defiance cowed the crowd which left quickly.

It was a time of invention, S.E. Miner of the Planing Mill had developed a new type of window and door screen which was sold far and wide. Miner later invented several other popular building items for contractors. Monroe Mfg. Co.'s patented method for overcoming sidestream of wagons made heavier loads possible on all types of road surfaces--boomed sales.

In September, three Monroe Mfg. Co. wagons exhibited at the State Fair won top honors, while other prizes went to P. Miller & Sons, Patterson & Billings and John Scannell for wagons and carriages. Other local State Fair winners included Arabut Ludlow for Shorthorn cattle and William Lysaght for Cotswold sheep.

Earlier, on August 2, 1875, Monroe Mfg. Co. stockholders had named H.W. Whitney, Arabut Ludlow, John Bolender, J.B. Treat and A.C. Dodge as directors. Ludlow became president, with Whitney as business manager. The firm reported 500 wagons on hand or in the process of finishing, most of them already on order from dealers and customers.

Ben Chenoweth announced plans for a new business block on the Square's northwest corner (Monroe Clinic site). Plans called for a brick structure with a unique rounded corner and a third floor if a tenant for a hotel operation appeared. That building was erected but the hotel idea was never realized.

An iron mine, north of Monroe on the former Levi Starr farm owned by Arabut Ludlow, had been sunk to the 35-foot level by Gideon Gillett and his
crew in mid-August. The ore lode still was running strong and Ludlow planned further prospecting. Apparently, the mine later failed to yield the indicated profits.

On November 5, 1875, J. B. Treat was elected state senator and John Luchsinger of New Glarus, Assembly representative. Republicans swept all local races.

The Young Ladies High School Literary Society presented Elizabeth Cady Stanton, national suffragist movement co-founder, in a lecture at Turner Hall November 9. The crowd was fair but the society lost money on the program.

Monroe's merchants on the Square announced plans to close stores at 7 p.m. daily (except Saturdays) during the winter months. The idea, it seems, didn't work and the 9 or 10 p.m. closings were resumed.

On December 27, 1875, fire destroyed portions of the Jacob Hefty brewery's main building with a loss of $8,000. Firemen, battling flames in the frigid weather, saved 400 barrels of beer. Hefty started work the next day on rebuilding.

In an omen of things to come, a spectacular chimney blaze at the Empire Block brought out firemen on a January night in 1876. It was in that same structure that fire started May 22, 1879, spreading north up the Square's east side and destroying seven buildings.

Various cheese producers were complaining in January, 1876, that they suspected dealers in New York, handling their cheese exports to Europe, were falsely claiming shipping damage or spoilage to drive down agreed prices. From lack of further items, it would seem nothing came of that.

Evidence of Monroe and Green County influence in state Republican ranks, after election of J. B. Treat as state senator and John Luchsinger to the Assembly, was obvious when E.T. Gardner was named State Senate sergeant-at-arms and Edmund M. Bartlett, another Monroe attorney, Assembly clerk.
At a January 31 meeting in A.S. Douglas's law office, Joseph T. Dodge, Douglas, H. W. Whitney, Helen Bingham and Mrs. Charles A. Booth were named to a committee on forming a new public library association. Dodge was named chairman and Miss Emma Van Wagenen, secretary. Articles of association were filed in March with the register of deeds. This Centennial Year project, however, languished somewhat until its revival in October.

Gen. Judson Kilpatrick, nationally-prominent military speaker, appeared at a fairly well-attended Turner Hall lecture on "Sherman's March to the Sea" February 1, 1876. Again, however, the Young Ladies High School Literary Society, the sponsor, found proceeds barely covering the costs.

After that second disappointment for the girls group, 42 village leaders published an appeal in the "Sentinel" for Helen Bingham, founder of the society, to prepare a lecture on any subject she wished as a benefit program. Miss Bingham chose early history of Monroe as her topic and the March 21 lecture in the Universalist Church drew a fine crowd, replenishing the society's treasury.

Miss Bingham then was urged to publish her talk in a booklet but decided to expand on the subject with her "History of Green County" printed in 1877. That book furnishes researchers with invaluable leads today in their studies of Monroe and Green County pioneer happenings. Its prose is delightful and its facts highly accurate. This narration's author leaned heavily upon Helen Bingham's book.

A crippling ice storm ravaged the Monroe area in mid-March, 1876, damaging shade and fruit trees. Its impact was almost as severe as that suffered here March 4-5, 1976, but, of course, there were no power and phone wires to be downed in that Centennial Year disaster.

In April, 1875, the Harper & Staver hardware firm announced it was the dealer and distributor for a new corn cultivator invented by George Staver
and built at the Monroe Mfg. Co. works.

Henry Hoehn and P.H. Weber were enjoying a fine spring business with their growing men's clothing store and tailoring shop on the Square's northeast corner (former Ludlow and Hoffman store site).

On June 6, 1876, Zadok H. Howe, postmaster and prominent citizen, died at 57 in his home. Two weeks later, Janet Jennings, during a visit here, declared she was cheerfully yielding any claim to the Postoffice appointment to Howe's widow. Some time later, David W. Ball, who had been postmaster twice before, was named to the post.

Monroe's first announced architect, W.M. Wright, was offering his services in June, 1876, to owners and contractors. Previously, the only local building plans had been sketched by James Bradshaw, artist and stationer, and Norman Churchill, builder and engineer. A Chicago firm also was advertising architectural drawings for homes and public buildings in the "Sentinel" each week.

On July 4, 1876, between 6,000 and 10,000 joined in Monroe's Centennial celebration, touched off with a two-mile parade to the Fairgrounds. Rev. T.P. Sawin, popular Janesville orator, spoke on the Republic's birth and its destiny. Local events were climaxed at night with a Grand Ball at Turner Hall, featured by supper and other refreshments. A late evening storm spoiled the event for many visitors caught in a drenching downpour of rain and thunderstorm on their way home. Farm families along roads leading out of Monroe gave shelter for the night to scores of soaked travelers.

First news of the June 25, 1876, massacre of Gen. George Custer and his cavalry troops at Little Big Horn, Mont., was carried in the July 12 "Sentinel" edition. It consisted of a series of telegraph bulletins relayed by military correspondents on the Indian War frontier. Another brief item that day reported that Theodore Golden, a young Brodhead man, was believed to be among the victims, as was a young Decatur man, identified only by the name "Hansen."
Those casualties never were confirmed in later "Sentinel" editions—unless the items were so well hidden they couldn't be found.

Many Monroe people were traveling to Philadelphia for the Centennial Exhibition on excursions arranged by the Chicago, St. Paul railroad agent here. Others were combining business trips to eastern cities with side jaunts to the Centennial site. Among the Philadelphia visitors was photographer H. G. White who came home with many pictures he took or purchased. White told the "Sentinel" he would display the pictures at the County Fair.

Not one of the Centennial visitors seems to have mentioned Alexander Graham Bell's telephone, which had been invented only a few months earlier.

C.D. Hulburt, whose sawmill was buzzing away at a prosperous pitch, was finishing his new house at the southwest corner of Clinton and Racine Streets (13th Avenue and 12th Street) in mid-November. The tidy brick Second Empire French style residence, with mansard roof and "handsome" bay window, was being praised as charming and unique by fellow Monroeiotes, as it still is today.

As the Centennial year ended, the community was the scene of other residential and business-building activity. Job opportunities were increasing, particularly in the cheese industry as dealers built storage and curing structures, many of them along the railroad across from "Smoky Row." One of these projects was Jacob Karlen's cheese cellar, the town's first, at 15th Avenue and the railroad where it still exists as a landmark.

On March 3, 1877, Monroe Republicans greeted news of Rutherford B. Hayes's narrow victory over Samuel Tilden for president with a public celebration at Turner Hall. The Courthouse bell clanged mightily when the telegraph bulletin came through and a large bonfire, which had been made ready days earlier, was lighted. The 185 to 184 final electoral vote ratified by Congress was assailed angrily by local Democrats who charged the decision was a "steal."

A milestone of sorts for the Swiss community was marked September 15,
1877, when Rudolph Loewenbach, formerly of Freeport, published the first edition of his "Green County Herold." This German language paper flourished in varying degree, under Loewenbach's operation and subsequent changing editorships, until the Monroe Turners prevailed upon Robert Kohli to take over the paper. The Kohli family successfully continued the "Herold" well into the 1900s until declining readership made it less and less profitable. On August 22, 1939, the "Herold" was absorbed by a German-American publishing firm at Winona, Minn.

Civil War years, with their battlefield coverage, and the development of telegraphed news services had built high interest in newspapers of every community in the nation. A few years after the appearance of the "Herold" and South's "Sun," the "Sentinel" began to experience some competition for readers.

The arrival of John W. Odell in 1881, founder of the "Weekly Gazette," however, confronted Charles A. Booth with solid evidence that his "Sentinel" had a battle on its hands. In years previous, Booth had been able to shake off an annoying progression of small papers, most of them lasting only long enough to have their names and expirations noted briefly in official history.

As it turned out, Booth was able to continue, even during the years when there were seven Monroe papers struggling at the same time for readers, until November 2, 1912, when his ill health and declining revenues caused suspension of the "Sentinel."

Odell, however, had come to Monroe to stay and South's "Sun" was proving popular, later being acquired by Miles T. Gettings. In 1886, Odell was joined by George E. Tanberg in publishing the "Daily Gazette," the city's first daily in 1889 and Odell took it over as the first "Monroe Evening Times." Giles continued the "Weekly Gazette."

Odell split with Giles in 1895 and moved his daily, using a press owned
by the "Monroe Journal," which seems to have died aborning. Soon afterward, Gettings of the "Sun" and Alfred C. Clarke, who had purchased the "Weekly Gazette" from Giles, merged their operations into the "Sun-Gazette," printed upstairs in the present Bauman Ace Hardware building.

Clarke and Gettings in 1897 then joined Odell of the "Monroe Evening Times" and Edward S. Hanson in a new enterprise, the Union Printing Co., located in the Syndicate Block, 1500-block on 11th Street. This firm was broken up less than a year later. L.A. Woodle, son of pioneer Allen Woodle and owner of the "Green County Journal," which served mostly as a paper for county legal and real estate news, bought the Gettings and Clarke interests. Odell and Hanson withdrew from the Union plant setup, the former establishing the "Monroe Weekly Times."

Woodle shifted his operations to the Union plant in the Syndicate Block and began publishing the "Journal-Gazette" as a weekly. At the same time, he started the "Monroe Daily Journal" with his son, Roy.

Dissolution of the Union firm and Woodle's takeover had ended the "Monroe Evening Times" but John Odell retained rights to that name. Emery A. Odell, his son, who had edited the "Evening Times" since 1893, had shifted to Woodle's "Monroe Daily Journal" but quit over the $5 weekly salary. He then founded the present "Monroe Evening Times" October 13, 1898, with meager capital borrowed from town leaders.

The "Daily Journal" and "Evening Times" embarked on a rugged fight for readers and advertising. Emery A. Odell took over his father's "Monroe Weekly Times" in 1903 and began to build a commanding lead over the Woodle daily and weekly. This "war" continued unabated until July, 1927, when Odell purchased the "Daily Journal" and the "Journal-Gazette," dropping the latter weekly and absorbing the daily into his "Evening Times."

Since that time, the "Monroe Evening Times" has been alone in the local

In May, 1951, a new figure emerged in the communications picture here with launching of radio station WEKZ, owned and operated by the Green County Broadcasting Co. Founding partners were the late W.R. Schuetze, Doran R. Zwygart and Kenneth W. Stuart. Later, Joseph Urban, Stanley Neuberger and Kenneth R. Schneider became stockholders.

Returning to the period following the Centennial era, the record shows Monroe was moving into the 1880s as a full-fledged business and industrial community which had enjoyed strong surges through new leadership and enterprises indicating high promise for a fine future.

The town's position as a center for banking, retail and wholesale merchandising, wagon building, construction supply and other businesses was firmly established. And, the village's happy situation as the storage, curing and shipping point for most of Wisconsin's foreign type cheese production also was beginning to auger well for even greater prosperity.