

Historical Clippings

Three Lakes Museum

October 2023

Monico Junction

If you travelled this summer on 45 South from Three Lakes you encountered the highway construction at the 8 and 45 intersection in Monico. If you were stopped in traffic you probably had time to look around more than usual and wonder, "What happened to Monico?" It's difficult to envision from the highway now, but when Monico was founded it was a busy, growing community.

As the Milwaukee Lake Shore and Western Railroad was making its way north to Three Lakes, trains were already in Monico, then referred to by some as Monico Junction. While in 1882 there were only railroad shanties, things change rapidly in 1883 as the Wisconsin Sulphite Fibre Company bought practically the whole town to build a factory.

During the height of the railroad boom, Monico Junction had 16 freight and eight passenger trains in and out per day.



railroad yards in Monico, early 1900's. Courtesy of Jeanette Pederson.



Scene on the west side of Monico. Courtesy of Kris Gilbertson.



Rich with the promise of becoming a center of rail commerce, the Wisconsin Sulphite and Fiber Company of Appleton had the village area platted and then built a large plant to debark pulpwood for shipment to the pulp mills in the Fox River Valley. In the fall of 1884 the company tore down the original plant and built a larger one with the intentions of adding a papermill, however when a disastrous fire swept through the operations in 1887 the dreams of the company and the citizens were wiped out. The company sold out their interests and moved away.

One of the largest employers to continue lending stability to the community was the Monico Excelsior Co. which started operations in 1908, continuing well into the 1920's, and then to the 1950's. The firm manufactured not only excelsior but cheese boxes, veneer and like products for the nation's packaging needs. Mostly birch, cedar, maple, spruce and balsam were used, plus of course, the ever-in-demand pine lumber! Gradually, with the end of the pine era and the decline in the agricultural potential during the drought and the depression years of the 1930s, this once thriving village gradually faded away with the final blow coming with the abandonment of the railroad in the 1980's.



Monico Junction in the late 1890s or early 1900s. Note the white sidewalks and the double tracks, incoming and outbound. Sidewalks are of white marble. Monico Junction at that time was slated to become the county seat of Forest County, but political gerrymandering gave it to Crandon. Photo courtesy of Gladys Flannery.



Hotel Northern, Monico. Courtesy of Kris Gilbertson.

Disaster plagued the community over the years, with fire heading the list. Early day fires wiped out several mills and sections of the village. Even as late as 1920 a fire roared through taking two stores, the post office, restaurant and seven or eight homes. Again, in 1923 the depot was leveled by fire.



Scene at Monico, Wis.



Monico's first school was one room built in 1885. A year later a two story frame school was built. In 1921 this school was lost to fire and replaced by 1923 with a four room plus gymnasium brick building.



Monico School burns — 1921. Courtesy of Grace Ort.

In 1949 the state was consolidating school districts and Monico became part of the School District of Three Lakes. Declining enrollment closed the school in 1968 sending all students to Three Lakes and the school was torn down in 1977.



Joe Kurtz store and other buildings, circa 1905. Courtesy of Jeanette Pederson.

In 1904 Joseph Kurtz built a flour and feed warehouse and added a mercantile in 1905. It is claimed that his store had the first plate glass windows in Oneida County. He also had the first telephone that ran on a single four mile line to his house and farm and if that wasn't enough he also had the first electric lights powered by his own Delco plant - early electrification which consisted of a power generator, a battery and lamps. His store closed in 1963.

All content and images are credited to books found in the Local History Room in the Demmer Library - a space shared with the Three Lakes Historical Society. These books include *The Pine the Plow and the Pioneer volumes 1 and 2*, and *Oneida County Centennial History Edition, 1887-1987*.

Those images not credited were a recent anonymous donation . Thank you!



Main Street, Highway 45, in Monico in the mid-30s. Picture courtesy of Jeanette Pederson.