

## **Former cheese company building now used as rest stop for bicyclists.**

By Susan Wetherington *Times Correspondent*

**MONTICELLO** —At the turn of the century, Monticello was a thriving village. Served by two rail lines, the Illinois Central and the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul, the village was a busy exporter and importer. Businesses in the village were successful. One example was the Rolph Brothers.

Established in 1894 by Charles and William Rolph, the company built many fine homes in the area. As public demand increased, the brothers started a lumberyard on the east side of Monticello, near the C.M&SP rail line spur. By 1920, the Rolph Bros. had no less than five buildings standing on either side of Pratt Road, just north of County EE. They sold anything needed, from silos to bee food.

Today, the only structure of that period still standing is an old cheese warehouse building. And thanks to the Monticello Community Club's efforts, the building is restored.

Charles Rolph, grandson of found-Charles, said the buildings bring back memories of life in what was known as Jimtown, the far eastern side of the village.

"Things have changed a lot in 60 years," Rolph said. He spent many hours as a child in his grandfather and father's place of business.

"In those days, you didn't have to worry about things, and I could go all over town," he said.

The cheese warehouse handled wholesale cheeses, made in Green County and shipped out to the cities served by the lines. Two cheese warehouses stood near the tracks, Bontly Bros, owned the one near the Illinois Central track and Rolph Bros. the one near the CM&SP.

The stone buildings are actually two built together, with a connecting door. One is brick-faced, the other limestone. The walls in the building are 12 inches thick.

The Rolph's warehouse also served as an icehouse. The buildings had a two-story basement with an elevator. The ice came from Lake Staedtler, the millpond which covered 38 acres between Main Street and Wisconsin 69.

Workers brought the ice to the warehouse in the winter and packed it carefully in the basement. Layered with sawdust and air insulation spaces, the ice remained in the lower section serving two purposes.

First, the people in the village contracted for ice for their homes during the summer to cool food.

But until the ice was used up, it also provided the cool temperatures the cheeses needed for storage, Rolph said.

The plank flooring used in the building was spaced to allow air circulation from the basement to cool the stone building. This was a time before electricity and cooling/ heating systems. •

Rolph Bros. wholesaled round and block Swiss cheese, brick, and Limburger. Rolph still has letterheads from the Rolph Cheese Company.

Rolph remembers when he was 7; he and his father were at the warehouse while cheese was being loaded onto rail cars. Rolph noticed an exhaust pipe on the car. His father told him not to touch it, but "I still went ahead and grabbed hold of it, he said. The hot exhaust pipe burned his left hand and "I still carry the scar today," he said.

In the office across the street from the warehouse, Rolph's sister Laura learned to roller state around the pot bellied stove that stood in the middle of the room.

The Rolph horses, used in deliver and for transportation, were housed in a barn behind the Rolph home on South Monroe Street. Rolph remembers the horses were so familiar with the route they could travel from the business to the barn without a human guide. "They'd go home by themselves," he said.

The Great Depression brought an end to many businesses, and the Rolph Bros, closed in 1933. Bontly Bros, used the warehouse. Rolph remembers that as World War II started he was 15 and making wooden tubs for Swiss cheese wheels in the stone buildings.

"I made them in three sizes, and hated the job," he said.

When the Karlen-Steimann Lumberyard started using the stone buildings, it filled in the basement first. Rolph said. The business stored cement and shingles in the warehouse.

When the Community Club began restoring the CM&SP depot in 1997 the cheese warehouse, the only other standing building, was added to the project. The walls were in good shape, but the roof and some of the doors and windows had rotted.

The buildings now have repaired windows, doors and a new roof. The floors are now concrete.

Through grant money, the club was able to restore the building as a primitive hostel for biking groups to use. The Sugar River Trail runs by the buildings.

Groups can reserve the building. The village requests \$100 for the reservation, \$50 to be used as a deposit and returned after clean up.

The Cheese and Ice Warehouse will be open, along with the restored CM&SP Depot, during Depot Days April 26-27.

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