

The Great Boom—Washburn City Of Churches 28

Churches were a major focus of the life of Washburn, attending to the public morals and the spiritual needs of the people as well as serving as centers of social and cultural activities. A Roman Catholic mission was established in early 1885, served by a priest from Bayfield. A small church was constructed on the northeast corner of Third Avenue East and Fifth Street in a neighborhood where several Catholic families resided. The first Protestant congregation to be organized was a Congregational Church, in February 1885. A building was erected on the northeast corner of Second Avenue East and Fourth Street, replaced by a larger building on the same location in late 1888.

By 1890 there were seven other congregations in Washburn. An Episcopal congregation was organized in the fall of 1886, erecting their church on the northwest corner of Washington Avenue and Fifth Street (still exists). A Swedish Lutheran congregation was established in February 1887, building their church on the southwest corner of Washington Avenue and Fourth Street, in the spring of 1888 (still exists). A Methodist congregation was organized in 1887 and a church built on the south side of Fifth Street, between Central Avenue and First Avenue East, in the summer of 1888, replaced by a larger building in the summer of 1895. The German Lutherans appeared to have organized their congregation in 1887, constructing a church on the north side of Fifth Street, between Central Avenue and First Avenue West, in the fall of 1890. The Norwegians organized their congregation in March 1887, constructing their church on

the northeast corner of Fifth Street and Third Avenue West (still exists). Famous for their firm differences of opin-

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ion about the finer points of theological doctrine, the Norwegians soon organized two other congregations, Scandinavian Congregational in the fall of 1890, whose church was located on the southwest corner of Fourth Street and Fifth Avenue West; and Norwegian Trinity with their building on the southeast corner of Third Street and Fourth Avenue West.

Meanwhile, the Catholics, their original church having proven to be too small, constructed a new one on the northwest corner of Washington Avenue and Eighth Street West, completed in the summer of 1891. The first church was then moved behind this new church, facing Eighth Street. A sisters' residence was constructed adjacent to the new church, facing Washington Avenue, in late 1891. A parochial school with classes held in the church was opened with 115 students. A priest's residence was also built on Seventh Street West. In 1903 the Catholics constructed a new building on the northwest corner of Washington Avenue and Seventh Street West (still exists). Built of native brownstone, the building was the first level of a larger edifice that was to be completed in the future, a

plan that was never carried out. The Congregationalists constructed a larger church on the triangle formed by Washington Avenue and First Avenue West, in the fall of 1900 (still exists—now Methodist but that will be explained later). The Norwegians installed a new foundation under their church, adding electric lights in 1897 and a pipe organ in 1907, while at the other end of Fifth Street the Episcopalians built a rectory next to their church. Two new congregations were also organized, a Swedish Mission Church, in September 1897, taking over the building of the Norwegian Trinity Church, which had disbanded; and a Norwegian-Danish Methodist Church, with their building on the northwest corner of Third Street and Third Avenue West.

The construction of the churches was financed in part by public subscriptions, the names of the subscribers published in the newspaper. Money was also raised from excursions, concerts, bazaars, fair and other events put on by the ladies societies or

guilds of the various congregations. The Catholics sponsored an annual church fair, and on one occasion held a "dime museum," where for ten cents people could view a donated collection of interesting "curiosities." The strongest congregations were the Catholics with a large French-Canadian membership, and the Norwegians, representing the two largest ethnic groups in the community. The Norwegians began the slow process of Americanization with the introduction of occasional services in English, and confirmation in both English and Norwegian. The Catholic parochial school continued in operation in the Pioneer School with as many as 300 pupils through the eighth grade.

In 1905, as the great boom was ending, there were nine churches in Washburn, or one for every 547 people, while there were sixteen saloons, or one for every 308 people. But the churches had the last word when Washburn went dry in 1914.