

With the great boom ended, Washburn struggled to recreate its economic base and regain the familiar prosperity and "good times." Community leaders were confident that if everybody pulled together, if the city were cleaned up and beautified, if Washburn's "natural advantages" were widely publicized, new businesses and industries would soon be established and Washburn would be prosperous and growing once again. But this was wishful thinking, for Washburn, whatever its "natural advantages," could not compete with Ashland and Duluth-Superior as a commercial and industrial center and port at the head of the Great Lakes. A new economy did emerge, but it did not create the levels of prosperity of the boom years. Its main components were shipping, lumbering, wood products, and the Du Pont explosive plant.

Washburn continued to be a busy port after the boom ended with imports of coal, freight, and merchandise, and exports of grain and lumber. While coal imports remained large, the grain elevator closed in 1907, and lumber exports decreased from 95 million board feet in 1894, at the height of the boom, to a post-boom maximum of 34 million board feet in 1906. But lumbering played an important role in the post-boom reconstruction of Washburn's economy. While Hines and the other big companies had left Chequamegon Bay for more profitable timber regions, Washburn remained an attractive location for lumbering operations because of its ship and rail connections and its force of skilled mill workers. Timber was rafted

to Washburn from the Bayfield peninsula, the Apostle Islands, the Bad River area, northern Michigan, and even from the north shore of Lake Superior. The Thompson mill, the last of the large mills, continued to operate under various owners, while a small mill, erected by O.E. Lamoreaux, E.E. Kenfield, and Monroe H. Sprague, sawed rafted-in timber.

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In early 1896, Lamoreaux, who was a team driver in one of the large mills, and Kenfield, a foreman in the same mill, purchased a failed wood products business, converting it to the production of wire reels, boxes and crates from small logs. Their plant, the Washburn Box Factory, was located between Wisconsin Street and the Omaha tracks, just west of Eighth Avenue West. In 1909 a steam plant was installed so that the plant could operate during the winter. The office building burnt down in 1911, replaced by an office that the Washburn Times declared was "a beauty and a credit to the city." The business was so successful that both men purchased Cadillac automobiles in May 1912, bringing to five the total number of autos in the city.

The Du Pont plant, which had opened in 1905, also made a significant contribution to the reconstruction of Washburn's economy.

Employment at the plant fluctuated, reported to be from 100 to 400 men at different times. The plant continued to expand with many buildings constructed and new explosive products produced. The Omaha Railroad provided four coaches to transport workers from Washburn to the plant. But while the plant provided employment to many men and infused money into the local economy, it also extracted a terrible toll of injuries and deaths. In January 1907 an explosion seriously injured one man and the following October an explosion killed three men, seriously injuring five others. What little remained of the bodies of the men was buried in a common grave. Barely a year later, in September 1908, another explosion killed one man and seriously injured another. This time no remains of the victim were found. Thus, in a little over three years the toll from explosions at the plant stood at four dead and seven injured, some severely so. The Du Pont Company, perhaps concluding that it would cost less to try to prevent such catastrophes than to pay

for their consequences, established an elaborate safety program about 1912, hiring a safety manager, educating workers about safety and setting up a system of safety awards with "safety first" adopted as a motto. To turn the immense wilderness area occupied by the plant to a useful purpose, in 1911 about 200 acres were cleared and planted in lawn and farm crops, both beautifying the grounds and producing a profitable crop. A "scientific farmer" was hired to oversee the project, and a number of farm buildings were constructed, so that there was a regular farm operation along side the explosives plant. In 1909 the company organized a boarding club for single members of management, named the Haskell Club, after a company executive. The uppers two floors of the city hall building—the former Washburn Bank building—were leased and refurbished as club rooms.

Smaller enterprises, which also contributed, if somewhat erratically, to Washburn's economy, will be the subject of part 2.