

# Beautifying the City of Washburn CS 8/12/10

As a new and booming village hacked out of the pine forest, Washburn was a crude, wide open place, dirty and unhealthy. Raw sewage from outhouses polluted the soil and ground water; people dumped ashes, garbage, and trash in the streets and alleys; roaming cattle, horse and pigs littered the streets with their waste; dust, dried animal waste, and other filth were blown throughout the village; while discarded furniture and junk from abandoned buildings were strewn around empty lots. The first step in cleaning up the city was the installation of sewer and water systems, but that more needed to be done is suggested by an editorial in the Times in 1903 urging that the village be cleaned up to make it more attractive to prospective businesses.

Responding to such expressions of public opinion, in May 1904 the city council approved an ordinance forbidding people to "place, scatter, deposit or leave any dirt, filth, manure, straw, ashes, sweeping or refuse of any kind upon any street, alley, gutter, sidewalk, road or other public ground," also "to keep and maintain all privy vaults, water-closets, cesspools, sinks, drains and like receptacles at all times in a cleanly and inoffensive condition." The acts that this ordinance prohibited reflected the dirty condition of the city at the time it was approved. Appar-



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ently people did not pay much attention to the ordinance because four years later the street commissioner published a notice ordering people to clean up streets and alleys or the city would do it and charge the expense to property owners.

In 1911 the Commercial Club launched the idea of not only cleaning up the city, but beautifying it. Residents were urged to plant trees and beautify their yards, businessmen were asked "to keep their places in neat condition," and vacant buildings were to be cleaned and old posters and lithographs removed from windows. Apparently the idea of not only cleaning up but also beautifying their property was not enthusiastically received for the Commercial Club's beautification campaign seems to have faded away.

With the slogan, "A City Beautiful," the campaign to clean-up and beautify Washburn was again taken up with enthusi-

asm again in 1915. In mid-April the mayor issued a proclamation, designating one week in early May as "clean up and paint up week for the City of Washburn," urging "every citizen . . . to clean up his house and property so as to avoid fire risk; to clean up his front and back yard; to paint his premises if necessary; to abolish all places that might breed flies and mosquitoes; to eliminate dandelions, quack grass and all noxious weeds, and to help clean up vacant lots." Even school children were mobilized for the campaign, the high school civics class taking it on as a special project. The Times was an enthusiastic supporter, declaring that "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." The clean-up campaigns were held in early May, when melting snow uncovered the great mass of garbage, trash, ashes, and other debris accumulated during the winter.

The May campaigns to clean-up and beautify the city by removing rubbish, ashes, junk, and old buildings, and beautify it by painting and repairing homes, planting flowers, shrubs and trees, and tending lawns continued almost every year. A list of "rules and suggestions" for the May clean-up in 1921 included some interesting items-for example, "Don't throw waste paper . . . on any public street, nor in your back yard," "Don't let milk bottles stand unwashed after

use," "Don't expectorate on any sidewalk or floor," and "Keep the loose manure in covered boxes and have it carried away at least once every week." That expectoration or spitting was now against the law was in a way a measure of how far Washburn had come since the days when men chewed tobacco and expectorated wherever they pleased, including in spittoons in the public library.

In May 1925 high school students, who had "taken over" the city government for a day, were put in charge of the clean-up campaign, and "about fifty tons of rubbish" were collected and hauled "up the hill" to the city landfill off of what is now County Trunk C. The purposes of the May 1926 campaign, part of a "national clean up and paint campaign," were to promote health, prevent theft and fire, and stimulate civic pride; there was no mention of attracting business and industry to the city, a major purpose of earlier campaigns.

Through all these years the women of the Wednesday Evening Club, organized in 1907, were energizers and leaders of the campaigns to beautify Washburn. Their work is continued today by the Washburn Beautification Foundation, which provides funds for beautification projects and maintains Wikdahl Park and the Veterans Park.