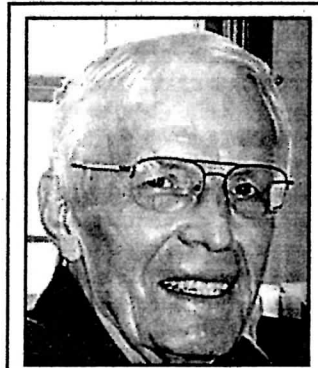


Washburn during the roaring 20s: entertainment

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The entertainment fare for Washburn residents during the roaring twenties was varied, ranging from fine arts and music to children's dog derbies. The former categories included an exhibition of "more than 150 fine reproductions of the world's famous masterpieces of art," concerts of vocal music, including the Lawrence College Men's Glee Club, and the LaSalle Bell Ringers. There were also "lecture courses," for example, in the winter of 1928-1929, the University of Wisconsin "Lyceum Department" provided a "fine lecture course" of four numbers, for which season tickets could be purchased for \$1. Many operettas and plays were also performed by local talent. The "Womanless Wedding," a play sponsored by the Welfare Association to raise money, was a great success. The Times reported that the play, with parts played by 80 local men, was "a scream," which "proved to be the 'big hit' of the season and will go down as one of the funniest ever staged by local talent in the city." Other events featuring local talent included "Love Pirates of Hawaii," played by high school students; and "The Marriage of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Thumb," played by "children between the ages of three and six years, dressed in costumes befitting the attendance at a marriage ceremony, the girls being dressed in dainty dresses while the boys wore dress suits and long pants."



Lars Larson
Guest Columnist

The Du Pont club served as Washburn's community center, with the events and activities held there an important part of Washburn's social and entertainment scene for many years. There were dances, charity balls, mixers, banquets, bowling, gymnasium classes, and a lending library. Men could even bathe there. Each Christmas the club sponsored a party for Washburn's children, with the year's activities climaxed by a "grand ball" on New Year's Eve. The club gymnasium was provided with bleachers and high school basketball games were moved there from the opera house. The gymnasium also served as a movie house with regularly scheduled offerings such as "The Master Mind," with Lionel Barrymore; "While The City Sleeps," with Lon Chaney, "a gripping story of the underworld;" Charlie Chaplin in "The Gold Rush;" "The Bandit's Baby," "a thrilling story of train robbers and cow punchers;" "Truth About

Wives" posed the question, "Can the holy state of matrimony become a living hell?"; Marion Davis in "Little Old New York," in which "The brave old days live gloriously again on the screen;" "The Love Master," with Lillian Rich and the "Wonder Dog Strongheart," who battles "famished wolves to save his mistress." Anyone could attend the showing for a small admission price. Two other movie houses, the Rex and the Temple, also screened the latest creations. They also occasionally offered plays and other forms of live entertainment on stage. Washburn people also patronized the Royal Theater in Ashland, advertisements for which appeared occasionally in the Times, including for Cecil B. De Mille's "The Ten Commandments," another of the early "great epics."

In 1929 "talkies," the technology that made the motion picture a complete entertainment medium, arrived in Washburn. In mid-March an article in the Times reported that "Talking and singing pictures, the latest and most notable product of our inventive, 20th century civilization, will make their initial appearance in Washburn at the Du Pont Club." The "notable product" shown was "6 Big Singing and Talking Vaudville Acts Contained in a Two Reel 'Talkie' Feature."

The advent of the movies as a form of mass was accompanied by strenuous efforts on the

part of the authorities and religious groups to censor them. The assumption was, as it had been for a century or more with respect to stage plays, pulp novels and other forms of cheap, mass entertainment, that what was depicted by word or action in these media would inflame the passions and prejudices of readers and audiences, threatening individual morality and public order. Movies, it was believed, were even more "dangerous" because they blurred the distinction between "reality and representation," capturing the attention and emotions of viewers more than the traditional forms of mass entertainment. Washburn established a "Mayor's Local Board of Censors," the membership of which included representatives of the Norwegian Lutheran, Congregational, Methodist, and Catholic Churches. The only mention of the board in the Times was a report, in March 1921, regarding its review of the German film "Passion," a historical drama about decadent court life in the pre-revolutionary France. Apparently the board could not make up its collective mind about the film, some of its members "believing that it was truly representative of the time preceding the French revolution, while others thought otherwise." There were no further reports about the activities of this local board, so what happened to it is unknown.