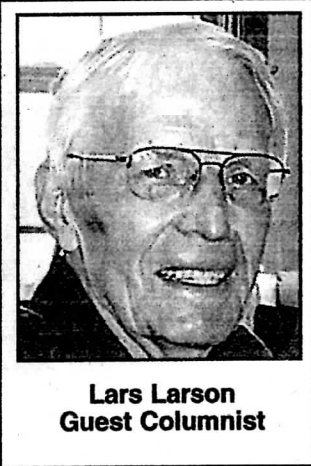


1929 The end of the Roaring Twenties

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During the boom years of the Great War the people of Washburn convinced themselves that having been the victims of one boom-to-bust cycle they surely would not once again be cheated out of a prosperous future. But it was not to be. During the 1920s, despite frantic boosterism and dreams about airports and seaways, Washburn was transformed into a maintenance community, with an economic base sufficient to maintain itself, but not substantial enough to bring back the prosperity of the boom years. A key marker of this transformation was the decline of the population from 3,707 in 1920, to 2,238 in 1930, or by 40%.

As it gradually became apparent that the past could not be retrieved, people in the Chequamegon Bay communities became interested in remembering that past, particularly those who had lived through the exciting lumbering boom years and now had reached an age when nostalgia for the "good old days" sets in. Historical pageants were held, the first in Ashland in 1920, followed by an "Indian pageant" at the Red Cliff Reservation in August 1924. In February 1929 the Ashland Daily Press published a "Chequamegon Bay Who's Who Edition" that contained biographical information about important people in the bay region, with historical articles about the three communities. And the following April the Bayfield County Historical Society was organized



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"to discover, collect and preserve and publish historical records and data of and relating to the county of Bayfield." The first stirrings of a collective historical consciousness in Washburn was a proposal in December 1926 "to decorate the walls of the City Hall with pictures of people and scenes from the time Washburn was first started and coming down to the present time."

A different manifestation of the nostalgia for the "good old days" was the homecoming held during eight days in early August 1929. Officially a joint event with Bayfield—the "First Annual Washburn-Bayfield Homecoming and Gala Week"—it was principally a Washburn affair. There were earlier Washburn homecomings—in August 1913 the Pioneer Association sponsored "Washburn's Home-Coming And Old Settlers Picnic" at Memorial Park; and in June 1919 there was a "soldier's homecoming" for Bayfield

County veterans held in Washburn. Because many people left Washburn when the great boom ended, there was a large population of "Washburnites" scattered around the country, many of whom retained a fondness for their "old hometown." A "homecoming editorial" in the Times revealed something of the sentiments that had inspired the event—"Love of country and home is one of the deepest-rooted of human emotions. Without a community we can call home, we are poor, indeed. To return periodically to the 'old home town' should be the high duty and the keen pleasure of every man and woman."

In May the Times began to publish advertisements with the theme, "Come Back to Chequamegon," showing buildings and houses from Washburn's early days. Over 1,300 invitations were mailed to former residents, with buttons and stickers sold to finance the event. Every week the Times listed the names of people who had responded to the invitations and in July it published an elaborate homecoming edition, containing historical articles on many aspects of Washburn's history and numerous biographical sketches of prominent and less-prominent people who had played a part in that history. And a big celebration it was with an "Indian Opera" in Bayfield, log-rolling competitions at brownstone bowl, a golf match, a baseball game, family reunions, and many

other events. The highlight of the week was a joint Washburn-Bayfield picnic held at Memorial Park, attended by hundreds of people from the two cities and the surrounding region. The day began with a parade headed by the Legion band, with "a number of beautiful floats" that "wended its way to Memorial park where the picnic dinner was served among the pines and where the people gathered around the festive boards to swap stories of former days and to renew acquaintances." In the afternoon there were speeches, games, a log-rolling exhibition, and other activities. "It was," the Times enthused, "one of the biggest days in the history of Washburn and a day to be long remembered by everyone." The people of Washburn would also long remember the catastrophe that was to strike the nation and their community within a few weeks after this happy celebration—the great depression.

The next homecoming was held in 1934, to mark Washburn's Golden Jubilee. This began what is now the tradition of a homecoming celebration every five years, except 1946 and 2000. The homecoming edition, published by the Times, is a rich source of historical and biographical information about Washburn. A reproduction of the edition is available in the Washburn Public Library and the Washburn Historical Museum.