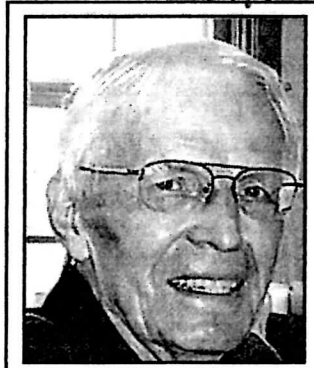


Washburn During The Great Depression—Part 8

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In the late 1930s farm families and city residents enjoyed the annual Farm Festival, first held in early September 1935, sponsored by the American Legion. That year there were exhibits of agriculture products, domestic arts and 4H Club work, and a flower show at the Du Pont club. A Ferris wheel, carnival games, dances at the Legion Hall, a water carnival at Memorial Park, band concerts, a parade led by the Legion band with "many attractive and novel floats," and many other events and activities provided amusement. According to the Times, the festival "was an outstanding success in every way and has been firmly established as an annual event." And so it was, being held the following three years in early September with the same program of exhibits, games, and entertainment. The outstanding event of the 1936 Farm-Forestry Festival (its name having been expanded to reflect the new importance of forestry to the region) was "an historical parade, showing various phases in the development of the Chequamegon region from the days of the voyageurs and the missionaries down to the present time." The 1938 festival appears to have been larger and more elaborate with "thousands of people" from the surrounding region attending. The festival program began with "a cavalcade of 47 Ashland cars" that "paraded the length of Bayfield street" with lighted



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flares, "making an attractive and colorful spectacle." Despite its success for three years, interest in the festival appears to have waned for the 1939 festival was a small event, with attendance reduced by rainy weather. The festival was not held during the war years and was not revived after the war.

But the people who lived on the isolated farms that dotted the marginal agricultural lands of the cutover probably did not have the means or opportunity to participate in these festivals. They were victims of the misguided campaign to colonize the cutover, the fraudulent schemes of land speculators and lumber companies, and the utopian "back to the land" movement. The living conditions of the people residing on these farms ranged from poor to appalling. Because neighbors and community services and institutions were far away over roads, some of which were barely passable during the best of

weather, people living in these isolated locations, particularly the women and children, often had no contact with others for months at a time. The roads and schools that had to be maintained to serve these isolated farms, along with the social problems and relief requirements that they created, imposed heavy financial burdens on town and counties at the same time that their tax revenues, to which these farms did not contribute, were declining.

In 1929 the legislature approved a rural zoning law that provided counties with the authority to control the use of land for agriculture, and thereby prevent the proliferation of these isolated marginal farms. Nothing could be done under the zoning authority about the existing isolated farmsteads, however. The obvious solution to the problem was to resettle these people on suitable agricultural land. Under the northern Wisconsin Settler Relocation Project of the Federal Resettlement Administration, a New Deal agency, 416 families in Bayfield and 19 other northern counties, who were isolated on marginal land, were "bought out" and moved to better farms or to locations where they could pursue other occupations. The Drummond Forest Community was another relocation project established by the Resettlement Administration and the Forest Service in 1935. Located adjacent to the Chequamegon National Forest, about

seven miles southwest of Drummond, the community consisted of 32 houses, built largely with WPA and CCC labor, located on 20 acre tracts. The underlying assumption was that families relocated to the community from marginal homesteads would be rehabilitated—which meant essentially to become self-sufficient—by combining part-time farming on their land with work in the national forest or other employment. The project was greeted with enthusiasm and the houses were quickly occupied by selected families. The community was not a long-term success and was terminated when economic conditions improved after 1940, and families moved away. Another federal resettlement project was the agriculture colony established in the Matanuska River Valley, northeast of Anchorage, Alaska. In May 1935 two hundred families from northern Wisconsin, Michigan, and Minnesota (67 families from Wisconsin, including two from Bayfield County) traveled four thousand miles to the colony to start a new life as farmers. But even farmers from the northern counties of the three states, accustomed to farming in difficult circumstances, could not succeed in the even harsher conditions in Alaska. Within five years over half the colonist had abandoned the colony, and the remaining population of colonists and their descendants gradually dwindled away.