

Washburn during The Great Depression—entertainment

CS 1/20/11

There were many and varied entertainment opportunities for Washburn residents during the depression years. The Du Pont Club and the Bodin-Finstad Post of the American Legion, with their spacious buildings centrally located on Bayfield Street, continued to be important participants in the social life of the community. As in the 1920s, they sponsored balls, dances, mixers, parties, banquets, and other social events. Popular events sponsored by the Du Pont Club included the annual Christmas party for children and a New Year's ball. The club building was also open every day during the winter months for bowling, pool playing, card parties, basketball games and other school activities, and even for "radio listening" in the lounge, for those who did not have radio at home. Popular Legion events included an Easter carnation ball, a fall carnival, and a winter dog derby.

Movies, now a staple of the Washburn entertainment scene, were shown in the city's only theater, the Rex, located in the old Rait Building. In 1934 a modern "sound-on-film" sound system was installed, then the following year the interior of the building was redecorated, an inclined floor built, with new seats installed. In the fall of 1939 the Rex was sold. The new owner renovated the theater, adding a large canopy on the front and renaming it the Lake



Lars Larson
Guest Columnist

Theater. By the mid-1930s the "star system" was well established in Hollywood and movies, featuring actors and actresses, who were destined for future stardom, were often shown—for example, at the Rex, "Love On The Run" with Joan Crawford, Spencer Tracy and Franchot Tone; "Adventures Of Robin Hood," in the new "Technicolor" medium with Errol Flynn, Olivia De Havilland, Basil Rathbone, and Claude Rains; and later at the Lake, "Rose Of Washington Square" with Tyrone Power, Alice Faye, and Al Jolson; "The Life Of Alexander Graham Bell," starring Don Ameche, Henry Fonda, and Loretta Young, with "Paramount News and Selected Shorts;" "Tarzan Finds A Son" with Johnny Weismuler and Maureen O'Sullivan; "In Name Only" with Carole Lombard and Cary Grant; and "Also Added Special Dionne Quintuplets in 'Five Times Five' and

Paramount News."

Golf, fostered by the Washburn Golf Club, continued to be popular, the opening of the golf course in early summer receiving prominent coverage by the Times. Men's and women's tournaments were held, with refreshments and occasionally a picnic at Memorial Park. In 1935 the city purchased the golf course property from the railroad company, and operation of the course was taken over by a city commission. This apparently proved unsuccessful so the golf club resumed responsibility. The lack of reports in the Times about the activities of the golf club after 1934, suggests that interest in the sport had declined. Even the city council appears to have lost interest in supporting the club, refusing in June 1939 to donate \$100 to the club for the purchase of a mower. The golf club membership, apparently the only supporters of the game, was never large—for example, only 25 in 1936—so a decline of interest in the game and a loss of membership would have doomed the golf course.

Tennis, introduced to Washburn in August 1936, was, like golf, primarily a game for those with extra money to pay the fees and buy the equipment, and the leisure time to play. Two tennis courts were constructed by WPA labor, across from the Du Pont club, using donated materi-

als. An area between the courts and the sidewalk was planted with grass, flowers, and shrubs, with an attractive entrance walk leading to the courts. Another court was constructed by NYA men in the 600 block of Third Street West, "for the use of west side residents." The courts were frequently utilized by the "tennis enthusiasts" in the city, and several tennis tournaments were held.

Log rolling at brownstone bowl, popular during the 1920s, apparently lost its entertainment attraction for Washburn fun seekers in the 1930s. Only a one day tournament was held at the bowl, on August 31 1930, sponsored by the American Legion and the American Birling Association. The major event was the contest for world championship birler, won for the fourth time by Wilbur Marx. Displays of fancy, trick, and stunt log rolling and a contest between a girl and a boy birler, completed the program. The Legion band and a band from Drummond provided music for the occasion. Despite wide publicity, advance ticket sales, and the one day program, attendance "was very disappointing, due partially to the ball game in Ashland and partially to the fact that log rolling seems to have worn itself out in this region after six consecutive annual tournaments," the Times noted.