

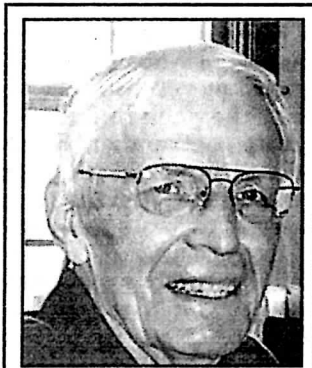
Washburn During The Great Depression: The Economic Base, part II 2

CS 2/3/11

In 1940 there were 62 business buildings along Washburn's Bayfield Street between First Avenue East and Sixth Avenue West, compared to 88 in 1926. This loss of 26 businesses reflected the smaller population and depressed economic conditions of the community during these years.

While the Times rarely noted business failures, it regularly reported on new business and changes in established businesses. Depressed economic conditions did not deter ambitious people from risking their small capital stock on new business ventures. In October, 1931 the "Goody Shoppe," a "confectionary, soda foundation and lunch shop," opened in the Hering Building at 26 Bayfield Street East. In May, 1935 a grocery store, "Harold's Food Store," was opened in a building next to the "Goody Shoppe;" in the following November and December two millinery stores opened; in June, 1936 the "Chequamegon Bakery" opened on the corner of Bayfield Street and Second Avenue West; in October, 1937 a clothing store opened; and in March, 1938 a "Gamble Store" opened. This store apparently had a short life, for in December, 1939 a "Serv-U" grocery store opened in the same building.

In December, 1938 the Pratt Ice Company entered the coal business. Providing ice to Washburn was apparently still profitable for this company, its annual ice har-



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vest from the bay being a notable event. For example, the Times reported in February, 1938 that "About 18 men and four trucks are engaged in harvesting the ice crop" near the commercial dock. That many homes still used old-fashioned ice boxes is perhaps an indication that modernization had not progressed too far among the people of Washburn.

Possibly the most notable event in Washburn's business district during the decade was the opening, on Saturday, September 9, 1937, of the Ungrodt Shopping Center in the Meehan Block. The hardware store, established by Ben Ungrodt in 1886, was moved from 122 Bayfield Street West into the east two-thirds of the building, while a new Ben Franklin "variety store" occupied the west one-third, the two stores being connected through an archway.

Many businesses along Bayfield Street improved their premises by remodeling, redecorating, installing

new fixtures, or rebuilding store fronts, but no new business buildings were constructed. The loss of 26 businesses between 1926 and 1940 added more links to the chain of vacant lots fronting on Bayfield Street. The Times urged that these vacant lot "eyesores" be cleaned up and grass or gardens planted or board fences erected to hide them. A few gardens were planted but did not survive long, but several board fences were erected that stood for many years.

A much more radical proposal by the Times was "to consolidate our business section within three blocks and relieve ourselves of the dubious distinction of having the most-scattered and best-ventilated Main Street in twenty states." This new business section would be located around Washington Avenue, the city "to build modern store structures in the empty spaces." Another proposal of the Times was that "the city council take action to renumber or rename our avenues." The real center avenue of the city was Washington Avenue, rather than Central Avenue, the Times maintained, and should be so named. Houses would then be renumbered east and west from this new central avenue. All other avenues should be given names to avoid the confusion created by both streets and avenues being numbered. These were good ideas but unfortunately they were not seriously considered by the city council,

businessmen, or anyone else.

With the improved economic conditions during the second half of the 1930s, many families were able to improve their homes, quite a few of which were old and probably badly in need of repair or at least "sprucing up." The Times, an enthusiastic supporter of improvements, published occasional articles listing the names of people along with the types of improvements that they had made. For example, a report in August, 1938 listed 50 homeowners who had made improvements, including interior and exterior painting, new roofs, additions such as a garage or porch, remodeling or general repairs.

In October, 1935 a physician named Roth constructed a new house, which resulted in a "short news dispatch" by the Associated Press to the effect that this was the first house constructed in Washburn since 1919. Why the construction of a house in a small, remote Wisconsin city would have been of interest to a nationwide news organization like the Associated Press is unknown. In any case, in January the Times, updated about house construction around the city, reported that while the Roth house was the first new house built of new materials, four new houses, constructed of old materials — lumber salvaged from the demolition of old buildings — had recently been completed.