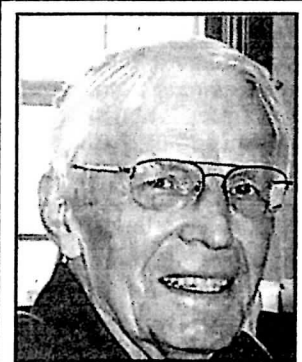


Washburn During The Great Depression— Highways and Vehicles

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Despite the severely depressed conditions during the 1930s the network of roads and highways connecting Washburn to other communities in the region was improved and extended to serve the increasingly heavy automobile and truck traffic. In 1939 there were 1,875 miles of public highways, roads, and streets in Bayfield County, consisting of 149 miles of state trunk highways, 131 miles of county trunk highways, and 1,595 miles of roads and streets in cities, towns, and villages. This represented an increase of 367 miles from 1930. The state and county, with federal financial assistance, carried out extensive rebuilding of the trunk highways radiating from Washburn: State Highway 13 to Ashland and Bayfield and County Highway C across the barrens to Cornucopia. In the summer of 1931, the Washburn terminus of the Washburn-Ashland section of Highway 13 was relocated from Bigelow Street to Bayfield Street, with a bridge constructed over Thompson's Creek. The dangerous grade crossing of the Omaha Railroad tracks at Bonus Creek was eliminated by the construction of an overhead railroad trestle with the road passing underneath in a sharp "S" curve. Finally, in 1936 the entire highway from Washburn to Ashland was paved with concrete, the 20 foot wide roadway being extended into Washburn to Washington Avenue, as noted in



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an earlier article. A "pavement warming" was planned for the end of October with a torchlight procession of automobiles from Ashland to Bayfield and back to Washburn, where a dedication ceremony was to be held, but a sudden snowstorm forced the cancellation of the celebration.

The process of rebuilding Highway 13, from Washburn to Bayfield, also began in the early 1930s. From Bayfield the highway ran southwest, along the west side of the Omaha railroad tracks, but immediately north of Onion River crossed the tracks and ran on the east side, to a point about midway between Onion River and Sioux River where it recrossed to the west side. These two dangerous railroad grade crossings were eliminated by moving this eastern section of the road to the west side of the railroad line. In 1934 the road was surfaced with asphalt

paving as a federal public works project. With the completion of these reconstruction projects on Highway 13 in 1936, the three bay communities were at last linked by a highway adequate to meet the demands of the increasingly heavy traffic among them. The major work on County Highway C, between Washburn and Cornucopia, was the straightening of the road across the Sioux River Valley. Here the road turned to follow the sides of the valley for about 700 feet south, down to a bridge across the river, creating steep grades with a series of dangerous sharp curves. Relocating the road to straighten it was a large undertaking that involved the construction of a concrete box culvert 8 feet high, 17 feet wide and 214 feet long, with 81,000 cubic yards of fill around it, to create a roadbed 55 feet above the valley floor. The project, completed in 1936, was financed in part by WPA funds in order to provide employment. The heavy traffic loads on Highways 13 and C were due not only to the number of vehicles using the highways, but also to increased use during the winter months since automobiles were now enclosed and equipped with heaters.

From 1930 to 1939 total vehicle registrations in Bayfield County increased from 3,138 to 3,553. Registrations of automobiles declined somewhat while truck registrations increased substan-

tially. Trucks, which had demonstrated their value as freight haulers during the Great War, were beginning to take over freight business from the railroads. In fact, Washburn and Bayfield were becoming increasingly dependent on trucks for freight as the Omaha Railroad reduced its service to the two cities. There is no census of automobiles in Washburn during the 1930s, but as the largest city in Bayfield County, a substantial number of the automobiles registered in the county must have been located there. By the end of 1931 there was a well-established automobile support industry in Washburn, including Ford and Chevrolet dealers and six other repair garages and service stations, with two more stations opening during the decade. As the economy improved the Ford and Chevrolet dealers engaged in a lively competition for a share of the Washburn market, with large advertisements in the Times—a Chevrolet advertisement in 1938 declaring, "Again More Quality At Substantially Reduced Prices," and a Ford advertisement, the same year announcing, "Still More Car At the Low Ford Price." The Ford dealer did not publicize information about sales, but the Chevrolet dealer announced that in 1935 he had sold 61 new cars and 192 used cars, for which he received a letter of commendation from the company.