

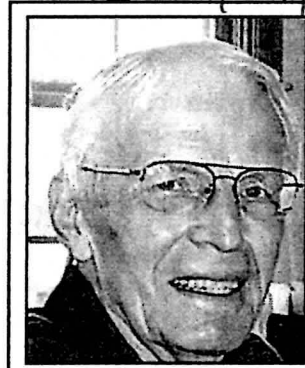
Educating Washburn's children -1

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The early immigrant ethnic groups—Norwegians, Germans, Swedes, Poles, French-Canadians, and smaller groups—hoped to pass on their languages and ethnic traditions to their children, but also realized that their children had to be educated to be good citizens of their new national home, so supported public schools.

The first school was held in a private residence, but this soon proved to be impractical. A school building, appropriately named the Pioneer School, was constructed on the site of the courthouse, opening in the fall of 1885 (razed in 1944). It was an elegant looking building, crowned by a cupola. Each of its two floors was divided into two classrooms, one on each side of a central hallway, with cloak rooms. A winding stairway connected the two floors. A school report for December 1886 showed an enrollment of 136 pupils, and a year later enrollment had risen to 237 pupils, divided into primary, intermediate, and grammar levels.

Washburn was growing rapidly and the Pioneer School soon proved to be inadequate. Much of the growth was in the western district, from Washington



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Avenue to Eighth Avenue West. To serve children from this region, a so-called new school was constructed on the northwest corner of Fourth Street and Fifth Avenue West, opening in October 1888. Enrollments increased rapidly as the great boom era began, although the opening of the Catholic school in the fall of 1891 provided some relief from the enrollment pressure. Disaster struck on March 2 1891 when the new school burnt down. Classes from the school were held in various halls around the village until a larger school was constructed on the same location, opening in the fall of 1891, named the Lincoln School (razed in 1944).

Meanwhile, in the election in April 1888 the voters unanimously approved a high school, the state to pay one half of the cost of the school. It opened in the fall of 1888 in the Pioneer School, the first student graduating in the spring of 1889 (Fern Leonard). In the fall of 1891 a four year high school program was approved, five pupils graduating from the program in May 1892. The graduates included four girls and one boy, a disproportion in favor of girls that would continue for many years because boys dropped out of school after the eighth grade to go to work.

The continuing growth of Washburn's population during the great boom once again created a shortage of classroom space. In April 1893 construction of a high school building was authorized to be located on the northwest corner of Washington Avenue and Ninth Street (present site of the fire department). The school, constructed of native brownstone, was designed in the then popular Romanesque Revival style characterized by thick masonry walls, deep entry ways, and windows surmounted by rounded arches, and round towers with conical

roofs (the school was destroyed by fire in February 1947). It was named Walker School in honor of Peter Walker, the widely respected manager of the Bigelow Company sawmill. The school's remote location on Washington Avenue, intended to be the grand north-south boulevard of the community, was chosen because it was expected that the village would soon expand northward, surrounding the school with streets, avenues, and houses. Unfortunately this did not happen. Generations of Washburn children trudging up to what they called the "castle on the hill" in the teeth of winter blizzards, had reason to wonder why it could not have been built in a more convenient location. The school was dedicated in a week long "education week" held in late May 1895, culminating in a commencement with one graduate, Mary Waegerle. The 250 students, who attended the Pioneer School from primary grades to high school, moved to the Walker School, their sadness about leaving the old school they knew so well mixed with anticipation about the new, modern school that would be their new home.