

Educating Washburn's Children—part two 2

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When school opened in the fall of 1902, Washburn had four schools available, the new Lincoln, Garfield and Walker Schools, and the old, but refurbished Pioneer School. Although the boom population was declining, the population of school age children did not, so overcrowding continued. Enrollments were less than the school census, however, because some parents did not send their children to school, believing that education was not necessary. The loss of tax revenue because of the decline in the population and closing of the mills resulted in a reduction in school budgets, while the school expenses remained the same due to high enrollments. Various steps were taken to meet the "shortfall," including increasing class size, lowering teacher salaries, and textbook rental. Proposals to eliminate domestic science, manual training, and agricultural science courses, and even to discontinue the high school program were not carried out because of strong opposition.

The number of high school graduates increased more or less steadily from one in 1889 to 26 in 1914 (there were no graduates in 1890 and 1891). Of the 309 graduates during these 26 years, 226, or 73%, were women. Spring graduation became a six-part rite of passage for the happy students: the senior class play; the prom (from promenade) and the junior-senior ban-



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quet, both sponsored by the juniors to honor the seniors; class day exercises; baccalaureate services; and the climax, commencement, the ceremony at which graduates received their diplomas. In 1913 the class play was entitled, "Engaged By Wednesday," the Times noting that it was a "four act farce comedy, one of the best plays that has been put on for some time." The commencement program was especially elaborate with an opening prayer, music, salutatory by Andrew Johnson, an address by a professor from St. Olaf College entitled, "The School of Life," valedictory by Harriet Finley (who would serve the community for many years as a high school teacher), responses from underclassmen, more music, presentation of diplomas, even more music, and finally the benediction.

Each spring exhibits were held at the Walker School, displaying examples of the

work of pupils from the lower grades through high school. In 1913 the exhibits took place two days in mid-May with "at least one piece of work from every child in the city" on display, with the "manual training and domestic science department in operation" during the day and evenings, so that parents could see their children at work on various projects. The exhibition ended with a program including the "Auction of 10 sacks of Gold Medal Flour contributed to the Victrola Fund by the Washburn Crosby Co.," music by the high school girls' glee club and an address by a "social center worker" from Superior. The Times reported that the exhibit "was one of the best that has ever been held in the city. . . . The work exhibited was of a very high grade and showed the excellent work being done in the Washburn Public Schools."

Another way that high school pupils could display their talents was through participation in oratory and declamation competitions in the Chequamegon Oratorical League. The competitions were followed closely by the community and, when held in Washburn, were important social events. In 1911, the preliminary contest was held at the Congregational Church and was "largely attended," the News reporting that "The music for the evening was a selection by the pupils of the fifth and sixth grades of the Pioneer School and was one of the

best ever heard in Washburn by the children, and the other selection was by the Ladies Cecilian Double Quartet, a new organization in our city. Their song was exceptionally well rendered and made a hit." A rendition of "A Daughter's Sacrifice" won first place in the declamation contest, while second place was tied by interpretations of "Her First Appearance" and "The Man in the Shadow."

Over the years the Catholic parochial school with usual enrollments as high as 300 pupils, contributed to reducing the enrollment burden of the public schools. The school was opened in the fall of 1891 by Catholic teaching sisters in the wooden church on the southwest corner of Washington Avenue and Eighth Street, which the parish had erected during the preceding summer. In February 1901 the parish purchased the Pioneer School from the city for \$300, refurbished it, and moved the parochial school there. In May 1902 the city bought back the school for \$3,000 to accommodate pupils who were attending classes in different locations throughout the village. The Catholic pupils were moved back to the church building, which became the school building when the present brownstone church was constructed in 1903 on the northwest corner of Washington Avenue and Seventh Street.