

Washburn During The Great Depression, the churches

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During the 1930s the transformation of Washburn's church community, which began during the Great War period, was essentially completed, the individual congregations assuming the character that would distinguish them for the next several decades. The Congregational Church gradually lost membership and was unable to support a pastor, so was served by outside pastors. In September 1931 the Washburn and Iron River Congregational Churches merged, the Iron River pastor serving both congregations.

The Methodist congregation was large and active, but their building on Fifth Street East was in poor condition. In November 1937, the Congregational and Methodist Churches merged as the Warren Methodist Church, the Methodists moving from their building to the Congregational Church building on the triangle formed by the intersection of First Avenue West and Washington Avenue. The Methodist Church building was torn down, with the corner stone installed in the wall of the Congregational Church building.

Why the Congregational Church and the Episcopal Church were disestablished is an interesting question. The membership of these churches was predominantly Yankee, or old American, the people who occupied the leadership positions in government, business, industry and society in the formative and boom years of Washburn. They were few in number, however, and many were probably absorbed into



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the larger population through marriage, while others left Washburn to seek opportunities elsewhere, as the great boom faded. While Washburn lost several Protestant congregations after the Great War—Swedish Mission, Scandinavian Methodist, Norwegian Trinity, Congregational, and Episcopal—it gained three new ones: the Seventh Day Adventist, Christian Science Society, and Washburn Gospel Assembly. These small faith groups held their meetings in private homes or in rented space in various buildings.

The Norwegian and Swedish Lutheran congregations began to adopt English for their services, reflecting the Americanization of the ethnic groups from which they drew their membership. There was apparently no talk of merger, the two congregations remaining active and relatively prosperous. The Swedish Lutherans extensively reconstructed their building, expanding and redecorating it and adding a full basement. In 1932 they celebrated their

forty-fifth anniversary, then five years later their fiftieth, each with "appropriate ceremonies," including a banquet, speeches, and special music.

For the Norwegian Lutherans, the decade opened with the resignation, in August 1930, of their beloved pastor, Reverend Christian Christianson. He was born in Norway in 1859 and went to sea as a cabin boy at an early age. In 1881 he immigrated to the United States. He went to Chicago where, with the help of a Norwegian businessman, he attended the Chicago Theological Seminary, graduating in 1887. After serving congregations in Illinois, he accepted a call from the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Washburn, in January 1907, serving his congregation and the community with tireless dedication for 23 years. He died on November 23 1947 in Gardner, Illinois.

The Americanization of the congregation continued with the change in the name from the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church to the Christ Lutheran Church, and the switch from Norwegian to English in the church council minutes, and translation of the church constitution from Norwegian to English. The big event of the decade was the observance of the 50th anniversary of the congregation in August 1937. In preparation for the event, the interior of their building on the northeast corner of Fifth Street and Third Avenue West was extensively remodeled and redecorated. The Times reported that hundreds of

people from Washburn and vicinity, as well as "scores from other communities near and far," attended the golden jubilee. At this half-century mark, the congregation included 600 members. Despite the pressures for Americanization, the Norwegian community in Washburn, increasingly composed of first and second generation native born Americans, continued to celebrate Norway's independence day on May 17th and to gather for the tribal ritual of lutefisk dinners.

The St. Louis Catholic Church, with its predominantly Polish and French-Canadian membership, continued to flourish. In November 1934 the congregation held a three day bazaar in the Legion building, the Times reporting that "Hundreds of people from all parts of the Chequamegon bay region packed the building to play bingo, patronize the various booths and games, and share in the many valuable prizes" The prizes, donated by local merchants, included \$1.00 in cash from Mertz's tavern, \$3.00 in "tonsorial work" from Elmer Bourgo's Barber Shop, "1 pair of candlesticks" from the Fox Drug Stores, a ton of briquette coal from the Gibson Coal Company, "25 cents in cash" from Joe's Tavern, and 10 pounds of coffee, 50 pounds of flour, and 10 pounds of sugar from Anderson and Sons grocery store. The Times noted that the bazaar was "One of the most successful events of its kind ever staged in Washburn."