

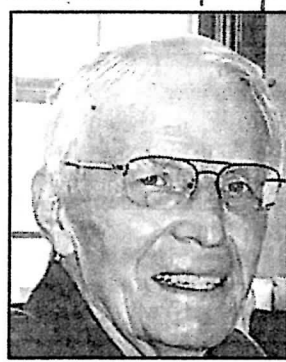
Educating Washburn's children, part five

97

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With the support of the people and the dedication of teachers and administrators, the schools continued to serve the children of Washburn throughout the 1930s. Total enrollment declined by 7% from 1930 to 1940. In the fall of 1937 a kindergarten opened for the first time, adding to the grade school enrollments, while in the fall of 1938 children from the Town of Bayview began to attend Washburn schools, adding to both grade school and high school enrollments (there were "about 50" Bayview students that year). There were few reports about the financial problems of the schools, perhaps because there was little controversy about the matter. The education budget was at "rock bottom," so to speak, with any further reduction resulting in the schools being closed.

Children continued to attend the Lincoln, Garfield, Pioneer, and Walker Schools, which ranged in age from the Pioneer School built in 1885, to the "newest," the Garfield School, built in 1900. Hope that a new school could be built continued to flicker, occasionally bursting into flame. In May 1938 the state condemned the auditorium of the Walker School for public gatherings. Spurred to action again, the council approved a resolution providing for the construction of a new school, which was followed by an announcement by the mayor that "Construction of a new school is practically assured," with "tentative



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plans" made. Unfortunately, as in so many times in the past, the "tentative plans" never became reality.

The aging schools required continuous repair and remodeling. A 1932 report by the school board detailing steps taken to correct the "deplorable conditions" of the four schools included repairing the heating plants, insulating the buildings, installing a ventilation system in the Lincoln School, painting the exterior of Lincoln and Pioneer Schools, redecorating the Lincoln and Walker Schools, replacing the electrical wiring of the Lincoln, Pioneer and Walker Schools, furnishing the superintendent's office with a fire proof safe "For the protection of school records" (fortunately, as events were to prove) and so on through a lengthy list. It was an uphill struggle to keep the four buildings safe and in use and avoid the displeasure of state authorities.

Despite the inadequate

facilities and financial stringency, steps were taken to strengthen and expand the high school and grade school curricula. A kindergarten was opened and a class for handicapped students was added, both at the Lincoln School. A report of the board of education, noted above, listed many curricular improvements: a music department was established, the high school curriculum was revised to meet state standards, the commercial department was expanded, a two-year chemistry course added, "Public speaking, dramatics, debate, athletics, brass band and orchestra" were supported, while "The most modern teaching devices—radio, and visual education [movies]"—were adapted "with success."

A total of 385 pupils graduated during the decade, compared to 401 in the 1920s. The usual gender imbalance of graduates in favor of women was reversed, with 208 men and 177 women graduating. The large increase in men graduates may have occurred because boys, who traditionally dropped out of school after the eighth grade to work, went on the high school because there were no jobs for them.

High school graduation continued to be a major celebratory event of the year, a time when the parents of the graduates came to realize that their children were no longer children, when the graduates were convinced that at long last they were "free," and former graduates

suffered bouts of nostalgia. The depressed economic conditions did not appear to have affected the usual graduation rituals of class play, prom, class day, and commencement, although the condemnation of the Walker High School auditorium resulted in moving the class play and commencement to the Du Pont club gymnasium in 1939 (where they were held for many years thereafter). The events in 1935 were typical of those held during other years of the decade. The junior-senior banquet took place at the Emanuel Lutheran Church in late April, followed by the prom at the Legion Hall. The class play, entitled, "Nora Nobody," "a highly-entertaining three-act comedy," was presented in two performances in mid-May. Graduation week began on Sunday, May 19th with baccalaureate services, followed by class day on Thursday, with commencement on Friday, when 36 graduates received diplomas. Whatever the deficiencies of the education received by graduates of the Washburn school system might have been, a remarkable number of them went on to further education. For example, in 1935, Times reported that 16 Washburn students were enrolled at the University of Wisconsin, 15 at state teachers colleges, 7 at Northland College, 13 at other colleges and universities, 4 in business schools, and 4 in nursing programs for a total of 59.