

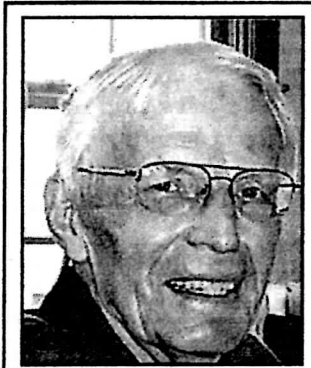
Washburn During The Great Depression—Health and Morals

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CS 5/26/11

The public health situation in the northern counties improved during the 1930s, with fewer deaths due to some of the traditional killer diseases. Tuberculosis remained a problem, however, the death rate in Bayfield, Ashland and Douglas Counties being higher than in the remainder of the state. The battle against the disease included skin tests, chest clinics, a traveling educational exhibit of the Wisconsin Anti-Tuberculosis Association, and treatment at Pure Air Sanitarium. Infantile paralysis struck Bayfield County in the fall of 1931, 1937, and 1938. There were many cases in the county, resulting in a few deaths, but only one reported case in Washburn in 1937, an adult who recovered. There were apparently other cases, however, for in the fall of 1938 the lower school grades were closed, with children under 12 years restricted from attending public events because of the danger of infection. There were only two brief disease epidemic scares in Washburn during the decade. In the spring of 1930, there were nearly 200 mild cases of measles reported in the city with homes quarantined, and in the spring of 1937 five families were quarantined with scarlet fever.

Intensive campaigns to vaccinate children against diphtheria and small pox were successful in dramatically reducing the toll of these ancient plagues. Other measures to guard the health of children included baby clinics, child health centers and courses in child health, conducted by local or state child welfare physicians and sponsored by the American Legion auxiliary and other women's organizations. Apparently, these efforts were to some extent unavailing, the county nurse



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stopping school health inspections because she found that many of the health problems she uncovered among children were not corrected by parents. Cancer education and prevention was conducted throughout the county by a unit of the Women's Field Army of the American Society For The Control Of Cancer, organized by local women in March 1938. In April 1935 Dr. Albert A. Axlely, who had established the Washburn hospital in early 1921, died from a stroke. His widow continued to operate the hospital, a physician who came to Washburn shortly after her husband's death assuming his duties.

While Washburn did not experience gangland crime during in the 1930s, there were more violent deaths in these ten years—eight murders and three suicides—than during the nearly 50 years since its founding. In October 1930, in their home on Sixth Street West, a father bludgeoned to death his wife and four children and then committed suicide by cutting his own throat. The father, for many years the assistant postmaster, was a devoted family man, well liked in the community, where he was active in lodge work and other organiza-

tions. He did suffer occasionally from mental problems, however, and it was thought that he had probably become insane. This tragedy was followed by another in September 1934 involving three Washburn men, living in a shack west of Washington Avenue, about two miles north of the city. They apparently quarreled, one of them killing the other two with a shotgun and axe, then committing suicide with the gun. As if two tragedies were not enough, a third occurred in May 1937 when a young high school teacher molested one of his students. He was arrested by the sheriff, but on the way to jail he was allowed to go to his room to leave some examination papers. While there he took poison, dying despite the efforts of two physicians to save him. He was a well qualified and respected teacher, highly recommended by the University of Wisconsin, where he had obtained his degrees. But it later came to light that he had served a term in the state reformatory for a morals offense, early in the decade. There was little other crime in Washburn during the 1930s, amounting

to a few store robberies, theft of an automobile, and some cottage looting.

In December 1933 the saloon problem returned to Washburn. For almost 20 years there had been no saloons in the city because of an ordinance approved in July 1914 and then national prohibition imposed in January 1920 by the 18th amendment to the Constitution. But in February 1933 Congress approved the 21st amendment to the Constitution, repealing the 18th amendment. The city council quickly approved a liquor ordinance, setting the license fee at \$100 and the number of taverns at five. During the remainder of the decade the old controversy over license fees, closing hours, and so on erupted once again, although in a milder form than in earlier times. Washburn was now a different place, where the saloons no longer played the important role in social and political life of the community that they once had occupied. Indeed, they were now comparatively sedate places.