

Washburn Community Affairs

1940-1948 Improvements for civic betterment

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History was repeated once again as Washburn set about "securing industries" to strengthen its economic base. In a meeting in March 1946, the city council discussed ways to attract industry, authorizing an elaborate advertisement, describing the advantages of Washburn, to be placed in the Mississippi Lumberman. Another contribution to the effort "to stimulate local business and promote civic betterment" was the organization of a Commercial Club, in March 1947. Among the decisions made at the club's first meeting was to offer free movies on Friday nights "for residents of Washburn and the tributary territory" who made a 25 cents purchase at a local store that day. The idea was apparently successful, with merchants reporting increases in business "ranging up to 100 per cent," while a count of traffic at the west end of Bayfield Street on one Friday, between 6:00PM and 8:20PM, revealed "12 cars entering town to every one leaving town, in contrast to the usual Friday night traffic." Another imaginative proposal was to place signs with the message "Trade in Washburn," "in strategic northern areas where traffic is heavy." It was also decided to sponsor an annual festival during the first week of August, but only two were held, "Pioneer Day," in August 1949, and "Days of Progress," in August 1950. The only issue that seems to have ruptured the amicable

the Municipality during this



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ings was a "heated discussion" about parking along Bayfield Street, some members favoring angle parking because "Tourists cannot find parking space, and drive right through," while others supported parallel parking to expedite the flow of traffic. The club also discussed the question of whether the "water frontage, lying unused for 50 years, should be made purchasable." In April 1948 the club sponsored a public meeting at the courthouse to discuss the "Ways and means of encouraging and expanding new industries to locate in Washburn." Possibly in response to these efforts, a Minneapolis firm established the Washburn Wood Products Company in the Garfield School, while a former resident returned to the city to erect the Washburn Foundry Company in the Lemke Building. There were the "usual prospects" for new businesses and industries, none of which became reality: in 1940 a hotel, in 1944 a toy factory,

in 1945 a post office building, and in 1950 a factory for manufacturing Christmas wreaths and a plant for making cement blocks.

The return of relative prosperity to Washburn in 1940 resulted in a substantial reconstruction of the private and public components of Washburn's dilapidated material base after years of neglect. Although new houses were occasionally constructed—the Times reported, in August 1940, that four were being built—most of Washburn's stock of houses dated from before 1920, with some remaining from the early days of the settlement. Many of the houses that had already been improved one or more times and now they underwent another round of repair, remodeling, and restoration: new roofs, painting, rooms and porches added, modern kitchens installed, new heating plants, redecoration, basements constructed, and other types of home improvements.

While there were a few improvements in business buildings during the war, after the war there was a boom of construction and improvements along the Bayfield Street business district, apparently with the expectation that the prosperity of the war years would continue. The one story shell of the Opera Block was reconstructed for a grocery store, and the Hanson Block was renovated in 1945 for a theater and shops. Other smaller business remodeling and

rebuilding projects included the Yates Building, for a restaurant; the Olson Building, for a tavern; the Arcade Block, on the southwest corner of Bayfield Street and Central Avenue; and the Washburn State Bank building. Two new business buildings were constructed, the first since the World War I other than service stations: a law office (Hawkes), on the southwest corner of Bayfield Street and First Avenue West, and a barber shop (Holman), adjacent to the east side of the Ungrodt Block.

A major city infrastructure improvement project was the installation of storm sewers along Washington Avenue along with the surfacing of the avenue with asphalt paving, during the summer of 1940. With a gravel surface, open drain ditches lined with cobblestones, and a steep slope, Washington Avenue had always posed serious problems of erosion and flooding. Other infrastructure projects included the "blacktopping" of the brick paving of Bayfield Street, from First Avenue East to Washington Avenue; grading and ditching of streets and alleys; the installation of curbs and gutters; and surfacing of many streets with asphalt paving. Deconstruction of the remnants of Washburn's old material base also continued: the old brewery building was razed to make room for the new elementary school, and the Lincoln and Pioneer Schools were demolished.