

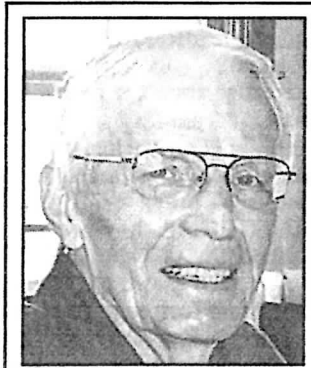
# Washburn Community Affairs 1940-1948—Education -1

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An important responsibility of Washburn's city government was the education of the children. Unfortunately, the poor financial condition of the city was reflected in the finances of the public schools, the largest part of the city budget. A 13% decline in enrollments between the 1939-40 and 1948-49 school years did not contribute to improving the situation since the underlying decline in the population reduced the tax base. At the beginning of the decade, children were still attending three schools—Lincoln, Garfield and Walker—which despite minor upgrades over the years were deteriorating, unsafe, and totally unsuited for teaching.

During the 1940s the dilemma that for so long had confounded the Washburn school system—woefully inadequate school buildings, but no money to replace them—was forcefully resolved. In the fall of 1940 the State Department of Education conducted a comprehensive survey of all aspects of the city's public education system. Washburn was rated against 25 comparable Wisconsin cities on a number of factors, scoring at or near the bottom on most of them. All three schools were found, not only to be completely inadequate for educational purposes, but menaces to the health and safety of teachers and pupils. The only good news was that they were not overcrowded.

In mid-February 1941 the



Lars Larson  
Guest Columnist

council took the first steps toward constructing an elementary school. A federal grant of \$60,000, plus \$35,000 from the Du Pont Company, and \$25,000 to be contributed by the city covered the estimated cost of \$120,000. Work began in March 1941 on the site, on the northwest corner of Fourth Street and Third Avenue West. The new school, named the Du Pont School, was formally dedicated on Sunday, March 19 1942. All classes, kindergarten through eighth grade, were then moved to the school from the Garfield and Lincoln Schools, which were finally closed.

The major proportion of the school budget was for teachers' salaries, and, just as the council cut expenses by reducing the wages of city workers, the Board of Education economized by holding the pay of administrators and teachers at the lowest possible levels. For example, in the spring of 1940 the board reduced the salary of the school superin-

tendent from \$2,400 to \$2,000. When he objected to the salary reduction, he was dismissed. The board did not even allow him the courtesy of submitting his resignation. Teacher's salaries were so low that in November 1946 several of them met with the council to appeal for a salary increase of \$200 each. The council eventually agreed to add \$1,000 to the school budget (raising it to \$25,500), to be distributed among the salaries of nine teachers. Fortunately for the city, many of the grade school teachers were natives of Washburn and were apparently willing to work for lower salaries than they could have obtained elsewhere, given the shortage of teachers during and after the war.

Washburn High School vocal and instrumental musicians continued to place well in the spring North Wisconsin Music Festivals. In 1940, when the festival was held in Superior, the Times reported that Washburn students had achieved a "splendid record," with the choir and glee clubs winning the highest ratings in their divisions. Beginning in 1941 the festival was held in Ashland, where the band, choir, glee club, ensembles and soloists continued to achieve many high ratings in their respective divisions for their performances. The band and chorale groups also gave frequent public concerts, a special event being the Christmas programs that they presented

almost every year. The Christmas program for 1945 included "Silent Night," "Away In A Manger," and other traditional carols, and a few pieces appropriate to the season but perhaps unfamiliar to the audience, performed by the band, choir, ensembles or soloists. High school students also continued to participate in oratorical and debate competitions. Apparently athletics were suspended during the war for the last reported football game before the war, which Washburn lost, was in November 1941, with the next one not until October 1945, when Washburn won its first football game since 1939. High school homecomings were held in 1940 and 1941, but there were no reports about such events during the war.

The public library, under its long-time librarian, Mrs. May Greenwood, continued to play an important role in the educational and cultural life of the community. Beginning with 9,500 volumes in January 1940, by February 1946 the collection had grown to 10,038, including 3,407 books for children. In the latter year 30 magazines and five newspapers were available in the reading room. This was an impressive accomplishment for a small public library, considering that its operating expenses actually decreased during this period, from \$2,776 in 1940 to \$1,790 for 1946, despite wartime inflation.