

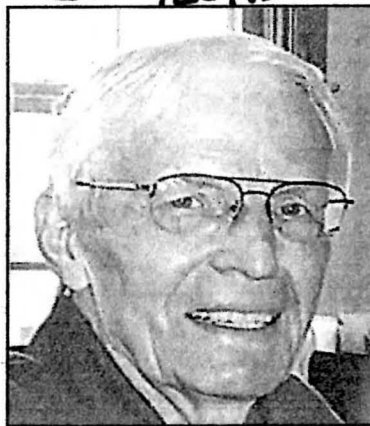
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A Window On The Past— Washburn's Historic Buildings - 1

Many of the more than 30 public buildings erected during Washburn's early years are still in use, notably the courthouse, library, and city hall. Numerous other early buildings, abandoned when they were no longer useful, were torn down. Through their purpose and location each of these buildings embodied and expressed a part of Washburn's history. This and subsequent articles will tell the stories of some of these buildings, providing a unique window on Washburn's past.

The depot of the Omaha Railroad was the first permanent public building on the new townsite of Washburn. It was originally located on the west side of what would become First Avenue East, but when the avenue was laid out the depot intruded into the right of way, so it was moved across the avenue where it stood for some 70 years. It was a conventional small town depot of the times, of wood frame construction. A freight dock with a small warehouse was located at the west end of the building, served by a spur off of the main track, while the station master's office and the Western Union telegraph station were located at the east end. In between there was a large women's waiting room and a smaller one for men. Between the depot and the track there was a wide brick platform, partly covered by an extension of the depot roof.

The Washburn Bee, one of the village's early newspapers, described the new depot as "one of the finest depots on the road." But this opinion soon gave way to complaints by businessmen and others that the depot was not only inadequate to serve the needs of the community, but that the shabby wooden structure reflected unfavorably on their prosperous and progressive community. Petitions were submitted to the rail-



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road company for a new brick depot, but they were unavailing, and the construction of a concrete foundation under the depot confirmed that it was not going to be replaced by a modern brick structure.

From 1883 to the early 1920s, when the passenger and freight business was taken over by automobiles, trucks, and buses, the depot played an important part in the community life of Washburn. Businessmen, settlers, con-men, and ordinary travelers arrived on daily trains from the large exchange depots in Ashland, some of whom took accommodations at the Washburn Hotel, one block north on Bayfield Street. Over the years the old depot was the scene of many happy arrivals and sad farewells. Particularly poignant was the departure of volunteer militia companies during the Spanish-American War and World War I. In melodramatic tone the Times described the departure of volunteer Company K for service in the Spanish-American War on June 28 1898. "Prior to departure an eagle was presented to the company . . . [that] the boys propose to carry . . . to the front and also a handsome silk

flag, while a hearty three cheers for the donors went up from the voices of the entire company. At 8:45PM the men, dressed in their blue shirts with Wing Guards emblazoned on them, marched to the old depot. There they were met by "4,000 people gathered . . . to bid them farewell" and were serenaded by the Washburn band, while everyone was entertained by fireworks. Loaded down with their personal belongings and refreshments provided by the ladies of the village, and with repeated enthusiastic cheers for the heroes of '98—for the Wing Guards of Washburn, ringing in their ears, the boys boarded the train for Camp Douglas. The Times declared, "Washburn never presented as solid a front in any previous undertaking. There was but one feeling, and that of patriotism and admiration for the boys who have gone to Camp, where they will be equipped to fight for their country's honor. As one of the boys mounted the platform he shouted back to the spectators: Goodbye, the Wing Guards will remember the Maine." The drama was repeated twenty years later, when volunteer Company D entrained for Camp Douglas on August 23 1917 for service in World War I. The Times described the scene at the depot as a "solemn and impressive one as mothers, sisters and sweethearts and fathers, brothers and admiring friends bid the boys goodbye and wished them good luck and an early return to the city." The men boarded the train in "military style" and as the train pulled away from the depot "the boys waved farewell to those who had gathered about and . . . cheers went up from the throats of thousands of people." "Cigars, candy, tobacco, lunch and fruits" had been provided to make "the first train journey of the home boys a pleasant one."