

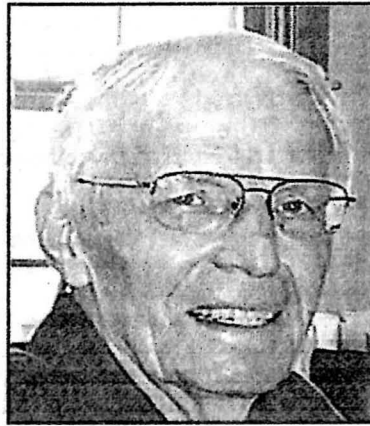
# Washburn Community Affairs

## 1940-1948—Disease and Hospitals

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While the general health of Bayfield County residents improved somewhat during the decade, there were occasionally serious outbreaks of chicken pox, measles, and mumps. In 1940 there were 131 cases of chicken pox and 102 cases of measles in the county; in 1944 there were 611 cases of measles, and in 1945, 175 cases of the mumps. No doubt many cases were unreported because people were afraid they might be quarantined or did not trust doctors and nurses. Two epidemics struck Washburn in 1943, a measles epidemic in early November and an epidemic of influenza in late December. While measles reduced school attendance by one-third and influenza resulted in a large number of worker absences at the Du Pont plant, there apparently were no deaths in the city attributable to these diseases. An aggressive program of vaccination of children for smallpox, diphtheria, whooping cough was carried out by local health officials. There were no reports of widespread outbreaks of these diseases in Washburn, however.

In the fall of 1941 the widow of Dr. Albert A. Axley, who had established the Washburn Hospital, in the former Haskell Club building in 1921, indicated that she wished to sell the property. A hospital association was organized that purchased and renovated the hospital with money raised by public subscription. While the plan to operate the hospital as a community facility was successful, it had to close in early 1945 because a medical director could not be obtained due to the wartime shortage of doctors. In the spring of 1946 a director was obtained, but financial problems along with the difficulty of obtaining nurses raised doubts as to whether it could continue to operate. A public campaign to raise \$8,000 to pay debts was successful, allowing the hospital to remain open. With the completion of the Bayfield County Memorial



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Hospital in February 1971, the old building was vacated and sold to private parties for conversion to apartments.

Poliomyelitis struck Wisconsin in the fall of 1946, with 957 cases and 66 fatalities state-wide by the time the epidemic faded. There were nine cases in Bayfield County with one death. The March of Dimes campaign of the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis, highlighted by President Franklin D Roosevelt, himself a victim of poliomyelitis as a young man, raised money to combat the crippling disease. The campaign began on January 30th, President Roosevelt's birthday, and was celebrated with "birthday balls," card parties, old-time dances, and other events. Collections in the county in 1944 amounted to \$675, including \$132 from Washburn, while in 1947 county collections totaled \$2,475 with \$447 from Washburn.

Despite an elaborate program of skin tests and x-ray clinics to control the disease, tuberculosis remained the most serious public health problem, with a county death rate almost twice as high as the state average in 1945. People apparently did not understand how highly communicable and dangerous the disease was,

neglecting or even refusing to have the skin tests or x-ray examinations. The annual Christmas Seal drive collected money to combat this insidious disease. Among the campaigns in cities of its size in the state, Washburn ranked second in 1942 with per capita contributions of 15 cents, first in 1943 with per capita contributions of 20 cents, and third in 1944 with per capita contributions of 22 cents.

Those who were diagnosed with "TB" were sent to the Tri-County Pureair Sanatorium. The sanatorium, jointly financed by Ashland, Bayfield, and Iron Counties, was constructed in 1919 on the bay shore just south of Bayfield. The complex included the main hospital building, a physician's residence, nurses' quarters, and supporting facilities. The Washburn Times described the hospital as follows: "The building is being built of cream brick and tile with brown stone facings and is a beautiful structure. It has three stories, the ground floor being devoted to nurses' quarters, rooms for help, dining room, kitchen, laundry, etc. The second floor will contain the [laboratory], receiving room, reception room, doctor's office, etc., and the third story will be used for patients' quarters. The building is laid out in an L shape and is so arranged that an [additional] wing may be added at any time without spoiling the appearance of the building. There is a power house and pumping station in connection with the building and it is the intention to erect a number of cottages about the grounds where incipient cases of tuberculosis may be treated. This will give the institution a capacity of more than one hundred and more can be added from time to time." In 1975 the sanatorium ceased operations and was vacated. Bayfield County purchased the shares of Ashland and Iron Counties, and after a long and acrimonious bidding process, the property was sold to developers.