

A Window On The Past— Washburn's Historic Buildings—4

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In the summer of 1886 an Opera Block was constructed on the southwest corner of Bayfield Street and First Avenue East, 50 by 80 feet in size, for \$8,000. The street floor was divided into two spaces for stores or saloons, and the second floor was an opera hall with a stage and a seating capacity of 500. The front façade of the building was capped by a brownstone circle in which the words, "Opera Block 1886" were inscribed in large gilt letters on a black background. This decorative circle was surmounted by a 20 foot flag staff, capped by a guilt ball. This building was gutted in a great fire of September 1888. It was immediately replaced by a brick fireproof structure. While it was the same size and layout as the original opera block, the facilities on the second floor opera hall for accommodating patrons and staging performances were more elaborate. The opening of the new building was celebrated by a "grand opening ball" on Christmas Eve. In addition to entertainment and dances, the opera hall served many other purposes over the years, including town meetings, high school graduation exercises, plays, and other events; emergency sleeping quarters for men during the World War I boom; and as a basketball court and roller skating rink. With the opening of



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the DuPont club building with its modern facilities, and the closure of the saloon and store, the opera block was eventually abandoned and began to deteriorate. In 1947 the upper levels of the building were removed, and the street floor was refurbished for a grocery store and machine shop.

The Union Block on the southeast corner of Bayfield Street and Central Avenue was also constructed immediately after the great fire in September 1888. Built of brick with a brownstone front, the building is 25 by 80 feet. The first floor was divided into spaces for two stores, originally occupied by a men's clothing store and a hardware store. Later it was occupied for many years by the Washburn Times and is now a book store with apartments on

the second floor. There are three other historic buildings between the Opera Block and the Union Block along Bayfield Street. From east to west the first building at 26 Bayfield Street East was constructed by Gustav A. Hering in 1915 as a confectionary. Later it was unoccupied for several years until it reopened in 1931, again as a confectionary, named the "Goody Shoppe;" the building is now occupied by an auto parts store. The next building at 16 Bayfield Street was erected sometime in 1887 or before by Frederick T. Yates. Constructed of brick with a brownstone front, it was originally a jewelry store, and is now a dental clinic. The last of the three buildings is the Bayfield County Bank at 14 Bayfield Street East, erected by D. M. Maxcy in 1889, also of brick with a brownstone front. After the bank was absorbed by the Washburn Bank, it was occupied for many years by the Railway Express Agency, then in the post-war years by the American legion, and now by a counseling service.

The Lemke Building, on the corner across First Avenue East from the Opera Block, was erected by W. H. Lemke in 1889. Constructed of brick with a brownstone front, it was originally a general merchandise store with lodging rooms on the second floor. In 1896 Lemke's business failed

and he moved to Ashland. The building was abandoned until 1946 when it was taken over by the Washburn Foundry Company.

The large warehouse on the southeast corner of Omaha Street and to First Avenue East was erected in 1912 by the Bayfield County Farmers and Fruit Growers Association. It is constructed of concrete blocks, 36 by 60 feet in size, two stories high with a full basement, and an elevator to move freight between floors. The building was the shipping point for the produce of the association members, with a railroad spur on the south side. It was also the business and social center for the association, with numerous dinner and other events held there over the years.

The Haskell Club building at 12 Third Street East was constructed by the Du Pont Company in 1917 for \$20,000 to provide accommodations for unmarried management employees at the Barksdale Works. The building was originally 30 by 72 feet, frame construction, two stories with a full basement and included 13 bedrooms, and a dining room, living room and reading room. In 1921 the building was converted to a hospital, serving in that capacity (with additions in 1955 and 1959) until the Bayfield County Memorial Hospital opened in 1971. The building is now occupied by offices