

Washburn Community Affairs

1940-1948 — Entertainment

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The entertainment calendar of the decade began with a five day Midsummer Festival from Thursday, July 18 to Sunday, July 21 1940, sponsored by the American Legion. In addition to the standard fare for such events—including sports and games, an old-time barn dance, a parade, a water fight between the Washburn and Ashland fire departments—a carnival came to town and “The Great Virgil, noted magician and illusionist,” fascinated his audience in the Legion Hall.



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The obligatory address on such occasions, delivered by a former Washburn resident, was on the subject “Americanism and National Defense,” reflecting the temper of the times. The festival ended with roller skating Sunday night at the Legion Hall. A talent show, sponsored by the Legion, for the benefit of the hospital, was held in the high school auditorium. It was a “three-act home talent musical comedy, entitled ‘Funzappopin,’ with twenty ‘chorines’—high school students—appearing in ‘different costumes for five singing routines.’”

While the Du Pont club continued to serve as a community center, only one of the community balls, so popular in previous years, was held there, the President’s Birthday Ball, in January 1940. No reports of large banquets or other public events appeared in the Times. For Du Pont Club members there were

dances, including a resurrected New Year Ball in 1942, parties, card games and lyceum programs. Bowling was an important activity with men’s and ladies’ leagues and competitive tournaments with small prizes for winners. In the summer of 1940 two more bowling alleys were added to the west side of the building, making a total of four. The bowling alleys did not have automatic pin setters, and this writer was a long-time pin boy, manually setting pins, while trying to avoid flying pins and the fast balls rolled by the men. In September 1961 the Du Pont Company gave the building and land to the city. Various plans to find a use for the building were tried, but none were successful. In October 1967 the council decided to sell the building, the Times noting that “the city fathers will lend an attentive ear to anyone

who comes forward with a plan or proposal that will be mutually profitable and turn a white elephant back into a community asset,” but apparently the council listened in vain.

While Armistice Day, Labor Day, and July Fourth received occasional mention in the Times, the only Fourth of July celebration planned—an “Old-Time Fourth” in 1942—was cancelled. Memorial Day observances were held every year, sponsored as before, by the Legion. There was the usual parade with veterans of several wars and men on active service, who happened to be home on leave, and ceremonies at the cemetery or Legion Park, including a speech by a local notable. Public interest even for this event apparently waned over the years, the 1945 observance being held in the gymnasium of the Du Pont club, which, the Times noted, was poorly attended. Poppy Day was observed in conjunction with Memorial Day, sponsored by the Legion, members of the women’s auxiliary canvassing the city. A list of contributors published by the Times in 1946 included only 24 names, so participation appears to have been limited. Christmas 1940 was celebrated with a visit by Santa Claus to the Lake Theater to distribute bags of candy and nuts to the children, strings of colored light across Bayfield Street, and the illuminated star on top of the courthouse dome. There

were apparently no city decorations during the war years, but for Christmas 1945 the colored light strings and Christmas trees were again put up along Bayfield Street. The Times noted that the front of the Du Pont club “looks like it did in pre-war holidays, with a Christmas tree on each porch wing and a curved arch over the entrance steps, all decorated with colored lights.”

A special event in 1941 was the observance of the 75th anniversary of the creation of Bayfield County, on May 1 1886 (from territory annexed from Ashland County). A half-hour historical program was broadcast over the Ashland radio station on May 1st, with a birthday party on June 22nd at Memorial Park. While it was expected that “several thousand people” from around the county would come to the picnic, only “hundreds” actually attended, according to the Times. The program began with the audience singing “America,” followed by several addresses on the history of the county, the ritual burning of paid-off bonds, and special recognition of “early pioneers” who were present, concluding with the singing of “God Bless America.” The Times reported that “Scores of families brought picnic dinners and suppers and enjoyed them at tables under the pines,” while five wash boilers full of free coffee were served.