

Washburn Community Affairs

1940-1948 — Highways and Autos

as 6/14/12

The last major highway construction in the county before the war was the paving with concrete of US Highway 2, between Ino and Iron River, in mid-October 1941, completing the first all-concrete highway across the state in northern Wisconsin.

The Times reported that when the final bucket of concrete was poured at Iron River, "workmen and residents . . . threw hats, coins, lipstick containers, overalls, pocketbooks, handkerchiefs and other small articles" into the wet concrete, while the county highway commissioner drove a "golden spike" into it. An "informal celebration" was held at the county garage, with the formal dedication of the highway on November 2nd. Although important maintenance work on the county highways continued during the war years, no additional miles were constructed. After the war construction resumed, with 60 miles added to state and county highways, within Bayfield County, between 1945 and 1949. There were two postwar proposals for scenic highways, one around Lake Superior and another along the south shore of Lake Superior, from Sault Ste. Marie, in the east, to Duluth, in the west. Both highways were eventually completed although not quite as envisioned in 1946.

The great flood in June 1946 washed out



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years. An army "Bailey Bridge," which allowed alternating one way traffic, was erected over the creek in August, remaining in use until a new truss bridge was completed in the summer of 1948. To prevent another washout, the new bridge was erected on four huge concrete pilings, driven 50 feet into the ground. A major post-war project was the application of "blacktop," or asphalt paving, to County Highway 13, between Washburn and Bayfield in August 1946. The "blacktopping" of the original brick pavement on upper Bayfield Street was part of this project but was not completed until the summer of 1947.

The number of automobiles registered remained almost the same during the war years but increased substantially from 1945 to 1946 as they once again became avail-

was the largest city in the county, probably a major proportion of the registered automobiles was located there. The two automobile dealers in Washburn (DeMars' Chevrolet Company and Haugen's Washburn Motor Company) carried on a friendly competition with Ford and Chevrolet enthusiasts, good naturedly berating each other's preferences. The advertisements in the fall of 1941 for the 1942 models were full of the usual puffery—"The Finest Chevrolet Of All Time" and "For 1942—A Beautiful New Ford." The Ford advertisement included an assurance to the potential buyer that although to meet defense requirements, "some new materials have replaced old ones . . . in every case the new is equal to or better than the old." But these promises to potential buyers of the automobile of their dreams could not be met because the government ordered an end to automobile production in early 1942. The last civilian automobile, a Ford, was produced on February 10 1942. Production was resumed almost immediately after the war ended, with a few 1946 models appearing in dealer showrooms early that year. These were really the 1942 models, perhaps dressed up with a few cosmetic changes and with material substitutions—for example, plastic for metal—due to continuing material shortages. Since the few

town dealers like those in Washburn were lucky to receive even one new car.

As far as known, despite gasoline and the rationing, the five service stations in Washburn—Phillips 66 on the northeast corner of Bayfield Street and Second Avenue West, Northwestern on the triangle formed by Bayfield Street, Washington Avenue and Second Avenue West, Standard on the triangle formed by old and new Bayfield Street and Washington Avenue, City Service on the northeast corner of Bayfield Street and Fifth Avenue West, and DX on the southeast corner of Bayfield Street and Eighth Avenue West—remained open during the war. Several of the owners worked at the Du Pont plant, while family members or high school boys took care of the daily business. There were not the self-service stations of today but what might be called personal service stations. When an automobile pulled up to the pumps the attendant rushed out to receive the driver's order. The driver remained in the car while the attendant dispensed the gasoline, collected the money, and returned any change to the driver. The attendant was also expected to check the oil level and clean the windshield. There were no canopies so the attendant worked in the rain or snow while the driver and passengers waited
IN THE CAR.