

1869 – AUBURN – 1969

100 Years a City

A Study in Community Growth

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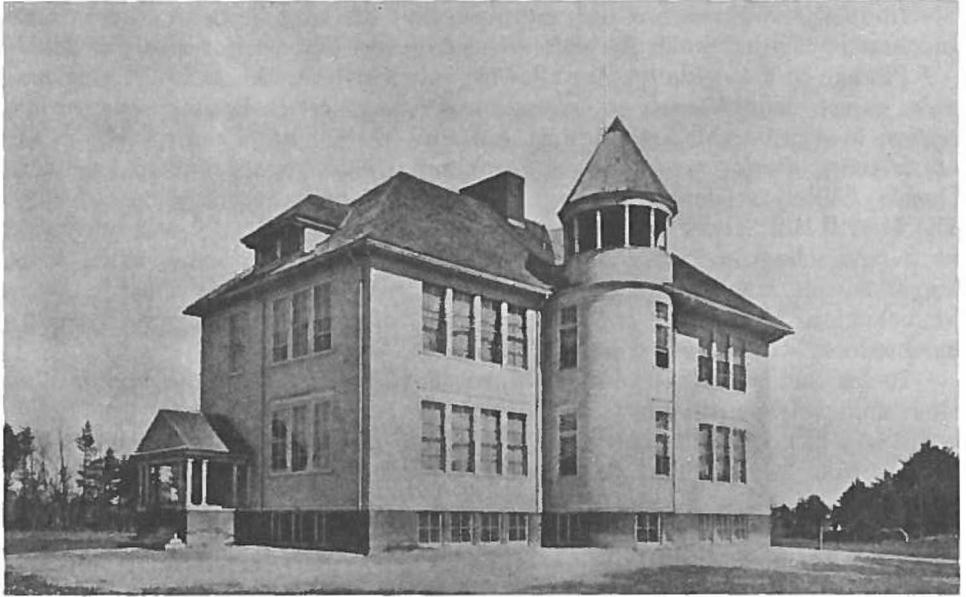
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Washburn School, as it looked when first built on new lot at Whitney Street and Lake Auburn Avenue in 1892. An annex was added in 1951.

WILLIAM W. BOLSTER, 1893

1893 was the one year that W. W. Bolster wanted to be Mayor of Auburn, and he got his wish. The well-known lawyer was elected by a rousing vote, augmented by appreciation from the citizens for a job well done.

Several times in years past, as City Solicitor, Bolster had engaged in legal jousts with the Auburn Aqueduct Company, owner and operator of the city water supply system. Sometimes he sued in behalf of the city, and other times defended it against suits brought by the company. Out of it he became somewhat a champion of Auburn's cause in the legal fight to take over the water system from the private owners.

Required to act according to the 1891 legislative action, the Commission held hearing and fixed the price at \$250,000. The Aqueduct Company took exception to that decision, and a long court hearing resulted during the summer of 1892. The decision was awaited when W. W. Bolster was elected Mayor, but it was practically known that it would uphold the price appraised by the Commission. Meanwhile, Auburn was seeking a legislative act that would allow

it to start a water supply system of its own if the Aqueduct Company would not sell at the appraised price.

The legislative action was still pending when, in the March, 1893, city election, Auburn voters made known where they stood on the subject by voting "yes" on the question of Auburn's taking over the water system, and by putting Bolster and his Aqueduct-opposed administration into office by a big vote.

Finally, on May 26, 1893, after it had exhausted every legal means to avoid sale of its rights and property to the city, the Auburn Aqueduct Company acceded to the transfer and accepted the first installment of \$100,000 in payment. On June 6, a balance of \$91,700 was paid and the city received a deed to the property. The city also assumed the bonded indebtedness of the company in the amount of \$56,700, fulfilling the total price of \$250,000. A Water Commission was appointed and Auburn was in the water business for itself. W. W. Bolster had realized his ambition, and a mass meeting of citizens was held in Auburn Hall to celebrate the event. His high pride in the city had been expressed in his inaugural address in this way: "If our present growth is now fostered, the anticipation of the future will be realized. We are now the fifth city in population, and seventh in wealth in the State, and it behooves us to take a broad and liberal view of the future if we would continue this increase."

HILLMAN SMITH, 1894-95

Hillman Smith reached the Mayor's chair at an unfortunate time. The whole country was hit by a financial depression in 1893; and in 1894, when Smith was elected Mayor, Auburn was feeling the full effect of it. The Ara Cushman Shoe Company, Auburn's largest industrial employer was affected; welfare costs rose; and on top of this, 1893 was the year when Auburn stretched its purse strings to purchase the city water works and put them in improved condition.

The city debt alone had been \$228,000, and notes and bonds totalling \$215,000 had been floated to cover the water works undertaking. There had been an overdraft of \$23,933 to finance the city administration. As Mayor Smith said in his inaugural address, "the depression has cast a gloom over our fair city, and today we are suffering from hard times." He pleaded for care in expenditure of the people's money so that "100 cents of value would be received for every dollar spent."

In spite of this situation, the city was under Court order to extend Summer Street "through the valley" to connect with the West Auburn road at Bird Flat, near Lake Auburn; "a piece of work", Mayor Smith stated, that "some of our citizens believed uncalled for and unnecessary." The cost was \$6,040. This meant much in that year, with 250 miles of roadway to maintain and streets and sewers to be extended.