The Sault’s “Homecoming” Week in 1923

By Bernie Arbic

In 1923, the week of July 4th was declared “Homecoming Week” in the Sault--- an event which grew out of an idea by City Commissioner John N. Adams. Almost a year earlier, Mr. Adams asked the commission to set aside a week so that all Sooites who had strayed away from the old town to many parts of the world “could re-gather on Main Street in a reunion of great proportion.” The proposal was adopted enthusiastically, and the Homecoming Week was thoroughly planned and widely promoted. (John Adams was a prominent Sault businessman. His father, R. N. Adams had come to the area in 1879, and purchased a farm of 148 acres--- the farm occupied land roughly bounded today by Ashmun, Ann, and Superior Streets, and the Cody Hill heights on the south---just south of 8th Avenue. R. N. Adams was the man who built the “Adams Building,” still standing on the northwest corner of Ashmun and Spruce.)

A huge parade was held on July 4th, and as the headline on the July 3rd newspaper below indicates, 46 floats took part.

Fourth of July Parade, 1923. Special note: The space with the two billboards and the house is now occupied by the Soo Theatre / STARS complex. The Soo Theatre building was built in 1930. This A.E. Young photo shows Parade Marshall George Blank and his assistants Jay Young and James Troyer on horseback, followed by the Homecoming Queen Lena Ladd and her two attendants Ruby Moore and Lois Osborn in a car lavishly covered (even the wheels!) with chrysanthemums.
According to a news article after the event, 1,300 out-of-towners registered for the week, and, since many only registered as the head of households “and family,” the paper figured that at least 2,000 people came from “away” for the event. A picnic was the featured event for one of the days, and the newspaper said “Old Timer’s Picnic to be a Real Dinger. Plans have been made to accommodate thousands at the Shallows. Bring your own lunch is the injunction.”

Friday, July 6th, was billed as “Canadian Day.” The ferry made several special trips to bring hundreds of folks from Sault Ontario over for many events, capped by street dances, as mentioned in the other headline earlier. Ashmun between Portage and Maple was one venue, while Ashmun from Spruce to Dawson was the other. People were encouraged to wear masks “to give the affair a real carnival appearance.”

A brand of work pants called “Sweet-Orr” advertised that if three men on each leg of a pair of Sweet-Orr pants could rip the seams, they would each be given a pair of the pants. There were apparently many friendly contests between Canadians and Americans as part of the day’s festivities, and the next photo shows stalwarts from the fire departments of the two cities engaging in a tug-of-war using Sweet-Orr pants at Brady Park. (They didn’t succeed in ripping the pants). Overall, the Homecoming must have been deemed a success, since another Homecoming Week was held five years later, in 1928.