

## NEW HISTORICAL SOCIETY MANAGER



Rebekah Coffman has been hired as the new Historical Society Manager. She has a background in nonprofit and museum work, event planning, education, and historic preservation. She received a BA in Art History and Religion from Hamline University and an MA in Historical and Sustainable Architecture from NYU in London. She is passionate about engaging others with history so everyone can find their sense of place. Since beginning in February, she has been working with the Plymouth Historical Society board to take a strategic look at the Society's goals and has been overseeing an interior rehabilitation project of the museum (discussed further below). Please join us at an upcoming virtual open house where you can meet her and discuss her vision for the Plymouth History Museum (find more information on upcoming events on pg. 7).

## MUSEUM INTERIOR REHABILITATION PROJECT UNDERWAY



*Plymouth's original town hall, now home of the Plymouth History Museum.*

In recent months, the Plymouth History Museum has been undergoing an interior rehabilitation. The goal of this project was to address deferred maintenance issues within the museum and create a fresh and inviting space for staff, volunteers, and visitors.

### Building History

The museum is housed in the original town hall for the City of Plymouth. In 1885, local residents Clem Mengelkoch, a carpenter, and Tom Ditter, a plasterer, were charged with its construction. Its simple rectangular form originally sat atop a foundation of local fieldstone, and its timber frame boasts lumber purchased from

*(Continued on page 2)*



*Museum main floor interior, previous to rehabilitation.*



*Main floor interior plaster repair in progress.*



*Main floor interior following rehabilitation.*

bustling mills in Northeast Minneapolis. This humble structure served as the center of city government through the mid-twentieth century. Though used regularly for city meetings, throughout its history it would serve other needs of the town, including as a food pantry during the Great Depression and even as a setting for boxing matches. By 1961, the 1885 building ceased to be used for government meeting purposes, with its eventual functional replacement by the new Plymouth City Center (1978-1979), leaving the building redundant for over a decade.

### Preservation by the PHS

In the early 1970s, the City of Plymouth made plans to widen Fernbrook Lane, works that would have necessitated razing or moving the original town hall. Thanks to efforts by the Plymouth Historical Society's founding members, the building was instead preserved and repurposed in 1975. These initial efforts included relocating the building from its original location along Fernbrook Lane, though still in close proximity to its original site. Works included the addition of a second room to the west end of the town hall and a new foundation with a finished basement level. Building services such as plumbing and heating were introduced to make a space more conducive to twentieth-century needs. These volunteer-led efforts also included the beginnings of the collection that forms today's museum, which opened its doors to the public in 1981.

### Recent rehabilitation efforts

After four decades of use as a local history museum, the original town hall is receiving some much-needed interior works to aid in the long-term preservation of this local historic site and its collection. Works have included introducing new HVAC and cooling for better climate control, installing enhanced lighting, repair of plaster walls, refreshing paint and floor surfaces, and addressing plumbing needs in the basement level. To enable this process, the museum collection has been carefully packed and stored. As building works reach completion, collection storage and redisplay will begin to take place. The Society hopes to make the space more relevant and engaging for researchers, educators, and history-lovers alike. We look forward to when we can welcome you back for in-person visits. In the meantime, keep an eye out for updates on our blog: [www.plymouthmnhistoricalsociety.org/learn/blog](http://www.plymouthmnhistoricalsociety.org/learn/blog).



*(Above and above right)  
Classroom addition previous to rehabilitation.*



*Previous to rehabilitation, the upstairs classroom addition was housing numerous items both on display and as storage. Additionally, it was serving as the PHS office space. The project included adding in new lighting options, repairing drywall, refreshing wall and floor surfaces, and installation of a new stair rail. Removal of the case above the stairs also revealed a section of original, historic 1885 timber siding.*



*Classroom addition following rehabilitation.*



*New hand rail over staircase with revealed historic siding above.*



*The basement carpet was replaced with an epoxy floor covering for better hygiene and durability. Walls were refreshed with new paint, and fluorescent lighting was replaced with LED for better collection care.*



*Outdated and unsanitary restroom surfaces were replaced with sanitizable tile and accessibility features were added.*



## OBJECT SPOTLIGHT: MISSION FARMS POSTCARDS SERIES

### Postcards Captured Early History of the Mission Farms

By Ted Hoshal

This year 2020 marks the 125th anniversary of Missions, Inc., currently a rehabilitative and long term care business tucked away along the north shore of Medicine Lake. If you've lived in Plymouth for a long time, you'll remember the property as the old Mission Farms—a place where church camps and religious retreats brought music, spiritual awakenings and even baptisms to the waters and shores of Medicine Lake. What you may not realize is that the property, which today includes portions of French Regional Park, Hazelden Betty Ford Clinic, Missions, Inc. and parts of their residential surroundings, has an extraordinary photographic and narrative history. Surprisingly, it measures just 3 1/2" x 5 1/2", and it can be found on many, many postcards.

Common among postcard collectors, real photo postcards captured the Mission Farms people, places, animals and buildings so extensively that it may be the greatest of all Minnesota single-location series postcards. From the earliest known cards in 1931 to as late as 1962, camp goers sent postcards home by the thousands. Many of the postcards tell the stories and simple details of life at church that help shed light on the buildings, surroundings and daily life at camp. In this photo series, we'll pick out a few favorites that reveal some surprising findings.

#### The Bath House Pavilion

If you've traveled to Lake Harriet, Bde Maka Ska, Lake Como, Minnetonka, or White Bear Lake, chances are you have either visited or seen photos of many postcard-pictured lakeside pavilions. Absent from the record for a long time was one at Medicine Lake. This postcard shows the Mission



*Postcard of the Bath House Pavilion. Image courtesy of Ted Hoshal.*

Farms rustic Bath House Pavilion as it first appeared in the early 1930s. It was located along the base of the small hill, between the beach and the boat landing at French Regional Park. Later postcards show the open air top of the structure enclosed to form one of the seven lodges of the Mission Farms—appropriately titled the Lakeview Lodge. Can you imagine sitting in a cane chair with a cold beverage enjoying a warm southerly breeze off of Medicine Lake? If only it were still here today.

#### The Wigwam

The Mission Farms once held over seventy buildings on its property. Many were constructed from recycled brick from downtown Minneapolis buildings and mixed with natural fieldstone gathered locally. Most spectacular among these was the Wigwam—a three-story, stone, brick, and shingle-sided structure—an appropriation of a traditional Ojibwe architectural form. Its tapered sides, sloped windows, and rounded ends made it look more like a close cousin of the Merrimack, the Civil War ironclad warship. The Wigwam was just a stone's throw north of the Bath House Pavilion. If standing today, it would likely retain a national historic designation.



*Postcard of the Wigwam. Image courtesy of Ted Hoshal.*

#### The Tabernacle

Of all the Mission Farms buildings, the Tabernacle could hold the most congregants—2000—at one seating. Utilitarian in nature, the postcard records shows the original building with a low slung gabled roof built right at water's edge. Later postcards show the same building with a gambrel roof. Actual trees were incorporated into the original structure. One postcard account described the trees sprouting leaves the following spring. Now, that's fresh wood!

#### Have you got a Mission Farms postcard?

Look at our website link to download a list of known Mission Farms postcards. The postcards are identified by title, series type, and additional details. The list includes collections of the Plymouth Historical Society and some prominent area collectors. Some postcards are more rare than others. Some remain lost to time. Maybe you have a card that can help fill in the blanks

of our list? Eight photographic series and twenty-three sub-series identifications have been noted so far. It is estimated that there may be more than 150 different real photo postcards out there—close to 120 of which have been identified to date.

**Do you or a relative have a story about attending church camp at the Mission Farms? We would love to hear from you!**

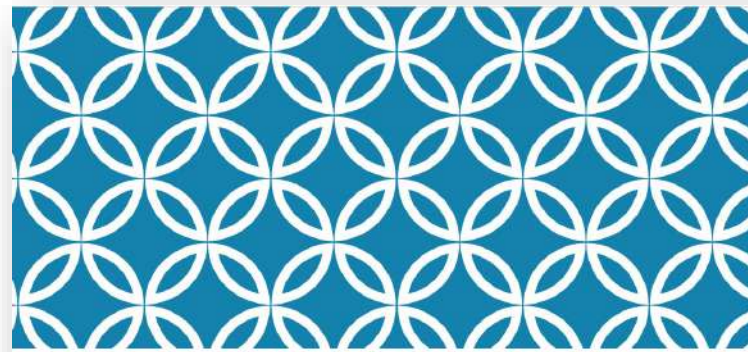


*Postcard of the Tabernacle. Image courtesy of Ted Hoshal.*

### VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE SERIES

The Plymouth Historical Society is continuing to imagine new ways to engage members and visitors during the unprecedented times surrounding Covid-19 and its effect on our communities. Historically, the museum would be open seasonally to welcome our community to visit and learn with us. While the museum is currently closed for onsite gathering, we will be hosting a series of virtual open houses.

More information and registration link can be found at:  
[www.plymouthmnhistoricalociety.org/visit/upcomingevents](http://www.plymouthmnhistoricalociety.org/visit/upcomingevents)



**PHS VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE** | **WEDNESDAYS 4-5PM**  
 JULY 15 | OCT. 21  
 AUG. 19 | NOV. 18  
 SEPT. 16 | DEC. 16

### CEMETERY TOUR AT PARKERS LAKE



PHS is partnering with the Plymouth Parks and Recreation Department to offer a cemetery tour this October.

On this historical walk through Parker's Lake Cemetery, learn the history of the cemetery, Plymouth's founding families, and the Parker's Lake area. The group will meet at Parker's Lake Pavilion and walk to the cemetery.

**October 10, 2020, 3-5pm.**

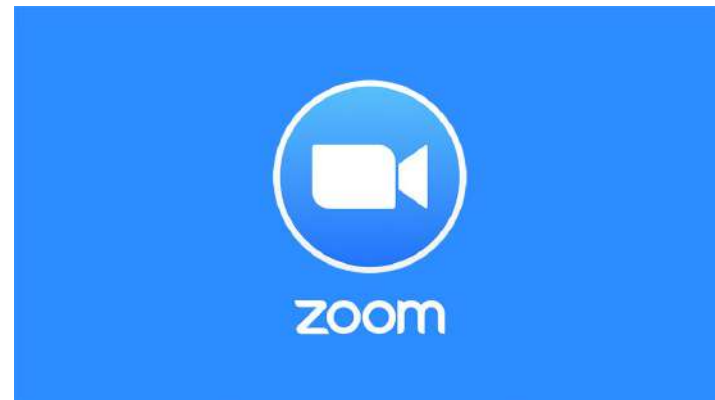
Registration is taking place through the Plymouth Parks and Recreation Fall Activity Guide:

35345-02; \$14 Res, \$17 Non Res

All participants must be comfortable walking two miles.

### FINDING PLACE IN PLYMOUTH PROJECT

We are in the beginning stages of an oral history project, which we are calling "Finding Place in Plymouth." We are looking for a diverse range of stories of those who consider Plymouth home. Interviews will be conducted over Zoom with the ability to capture video and voice recording in a digital archive-ready format. If you or someone you know may be interested in volunteering as part of the project, as either an interviewer or an interviewee, please contact us at [info@plymouthmn.gov](mailto:info@plymouthmn.gov) to get involved!



### VOLUNTEER WITH US!

Do you love history? Do you love Plymouth? Then we would love to have you volunteer!

We are looking for help with a number of upcoming opportunities, virtual and in person, including blog post writing, collections research, collections cataloguing, storytelling, and more!

To get connected, please fill out a volunteer application form on the City of Plymouth's website: <https://www.plymouthmn.gov/departments/parks-recreation-/volunteer-opportunities/apply-now>

#### Plymouth Historical Society Board of Directors

- Ben G. Broman, At-Large
- Vern Doseh, *ex-officio*
- Paul Ellefson, Treasurer
- Bob Gasch, Secretary
- Ted Hoshal, President
- David Preves, At-Large
- David Schiebe, Vice President

#### City of Plymouth Historic Site Manager

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#### Plymouth Historical Society

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Discover Plymouth's history on our website!

[www.plymouthmnhistoricalociety.org](http://www.plymouthmnhistoricalociety.org)