

PLYMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

NEWSLETTER WINTER 2019

COLLECTIONS INVENTORY GRANT AWARDED

In December, the Plymouth Historical Society was awarded a Minnesota Legacy Grant for \$9960 to conduct a partial inventory of our artifacts and archives. Our plan is to identify, catalog, and photograph the 1600-plus objects currently housed in the Plymouth History Museum building. An additional 500 objects are housed in the Carriage House. These objects will be inventoried during a later phase of the project.

The overriding goal of this project is to create a single, comprehensive, and sustainable digital record of our collection. To begin, we will collect basic object information for each object, including accession number, object name, description, dimensions, current location, condition rating (excellent, good, fair, unstable, poor), condition notes, examiners' names, and date of examination. This information will be entered into a new collections software management system, Collective Access. This affordable, user-friendly software was recently developed by the Minnesota Association of Local History Museums to serve the needs of small collections like ours. It can be used in-house but, more importantly, it can be shared online.

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THE STORY OF PETER WINNEN



Front row, left to right: Annie Dickey, Peter Winnen, Lilly Keller, Anna Winnen, Paul Winnen, Mary Frick. Back row, left to right: Tena Dillman, Barbara Eddy, Carrie Crawshaw, Josephine Van Beck, Sadie Squires, Kate Reum, c. 1890.

Peter Winnen came to the United States from Germany in the early 1850s with his parents, Michael and Katherine, his sister, Katherina, and his uncle, Peter "Omar" Webber. According to Peter's daughter, Christine, Katherine bore sixteen children in Germany, but only Peter and Katherina survived.

Once in America, the family settled in Detroit in 1853. They moved to St. Paul in 1854 and then to Medina. By 1855, they had settled in Plymouth Township. The family built a log house similar to those in the neighborhood and cleared and farmed the land in the same manner as their neighbors. On October 16, 1860, Michael purchased the family's 160-acre farmstead

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in Plymouth. The deed was signed by Abraham Lincoln on July 1, 1861.

Peter was about five feet tall, very slim, and had dark hair and grey-blue eyes. He didn't like farming, preferring wood carving. He loved to roam in the woods studying the forms of wild animals, birds, and plant life to incorporate in his carvings.



Peter J. Winnen. Image courtesy of Western Hennepin County Pioneers Association.

As soon as he was able, Peter left home and found work as a cabinet maker in St. Anthony. In about 1859, Peter married Anna Mae Lacher, who had immigrated from Switzerland as a child. Michael persuaded Peter to move to the family farm with his bride, but Peter was unhappy there. After about a year, following the birth of their first child, Henry, they moved to St. Paul, where Peter again kept happily busy making furniture and woodcarving. He designed, built, and carved a beautiful, much-photographed footbridge that crossed the creek below Minnehaha Falls (since replaced). His family notes that he was helped in this endeavor by Native Americans, who cut the poles and brought them to the site.

At his father's urging, Peter returned to the farm in 1867. By this point, Peter and Anna had three children. Henry had died in 1863, but three girls followed: Mary, Katherine, and

Annie. Soon after the family moved in, Michael Winnen died, leaving Peter to care for his ailing mother, his young wife, their three young children, and the 160-acre farm.

After Michael's death, the 160 acres were divided between Peter and his sister, Katherine, and her husband, Christopher Swaggert. The farm was not divided equally north and south nor east and west, but according to what could be grown to advantage: a hay field here and a cultivated field there. Peter retained the old home and Katherine's land lay to the south. Katherine passed away in 1928 and Christopher in 1923. Both are buried in Parkers Lake Cemetery.

Peter's mother continued to live with Peter and Anna until her death in 1887. She was able to help with the housework and the care of the children. In addition to Mary, Katherine, and Annie, the couple bore Christina, Josephine, Lisetta, Caroline, Barbara, Lillian, and Paul – along with two additional children who died in infancy – in the years to come. All of the ten children who survived to adulthood married, and all but Christina had families.

Back on the farm after his father's death, Peter was again trapped in the drudgery of farm tasks. This time he managed a compromise. Beside their log house, he built a workshop where he could make the altars and pulpits for which he was becoming well-known. Peter made his own carving tools out of old files, knives, and railroad spikes. He had very good perception as to size and detail in his carvings. He was a great lover of nature. He left part of his farm in a wild state to preserve what he loved: hunting, fishing, and observing nature. Another Plymouth resident, Charles Clay remembered taking long walks in the woods only to meet up with an old man sitting motionless in observance of a bird or a tree or an animal. This old man was Peter finding material for his designs. Various descendants of Peter Winnen today cherish wood carvings that have been passed down to them through the years.

To allow himself more time in the workshop, he taught his daughters how to do most of the farm work. Every morning, he carefully mapped out his daughters' chores and personally saw to it that the work was done. The girls hoed, weeded, planted, and did everything to be done on the farm, while Peter took care of sales. The Winnens had a wonderful berry patch. One day at the market, a man remarked that the berry business was profitable, but it was so hard to find workers to pick the fruit. Peter waved his hand, laughed, and said, "Oh, I have nine and all made to order."

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Peter planted sorghum seed and the girls took care of the plants. Anna made sorghum molasses, which Peter delivered to regular customers who purchased it for up to \$1 per gallon. They also raised vegetables, melons, wheat, oats, and rye. It was reported that the Peter Winnen farm in 1879 produced 240 bushels of spring wheat, 100 bushels of Indian corn, and 85 bushels of oats.

The nine Winnen girls were busy, but happy. Anna owned one of the first sewing machines in the area and she made good use of it. She made pretty dresses for the girls and taught them to sew. The girls also learned to cook and bake and make prize-winning jelly. The girls did have some free time, and they loved to follow their father through the woods, sometimes picking wild berries, and gather around his work bench singing German songs while they learned to carve. Their carvings won them ribbons at the Minnesota State Fair.

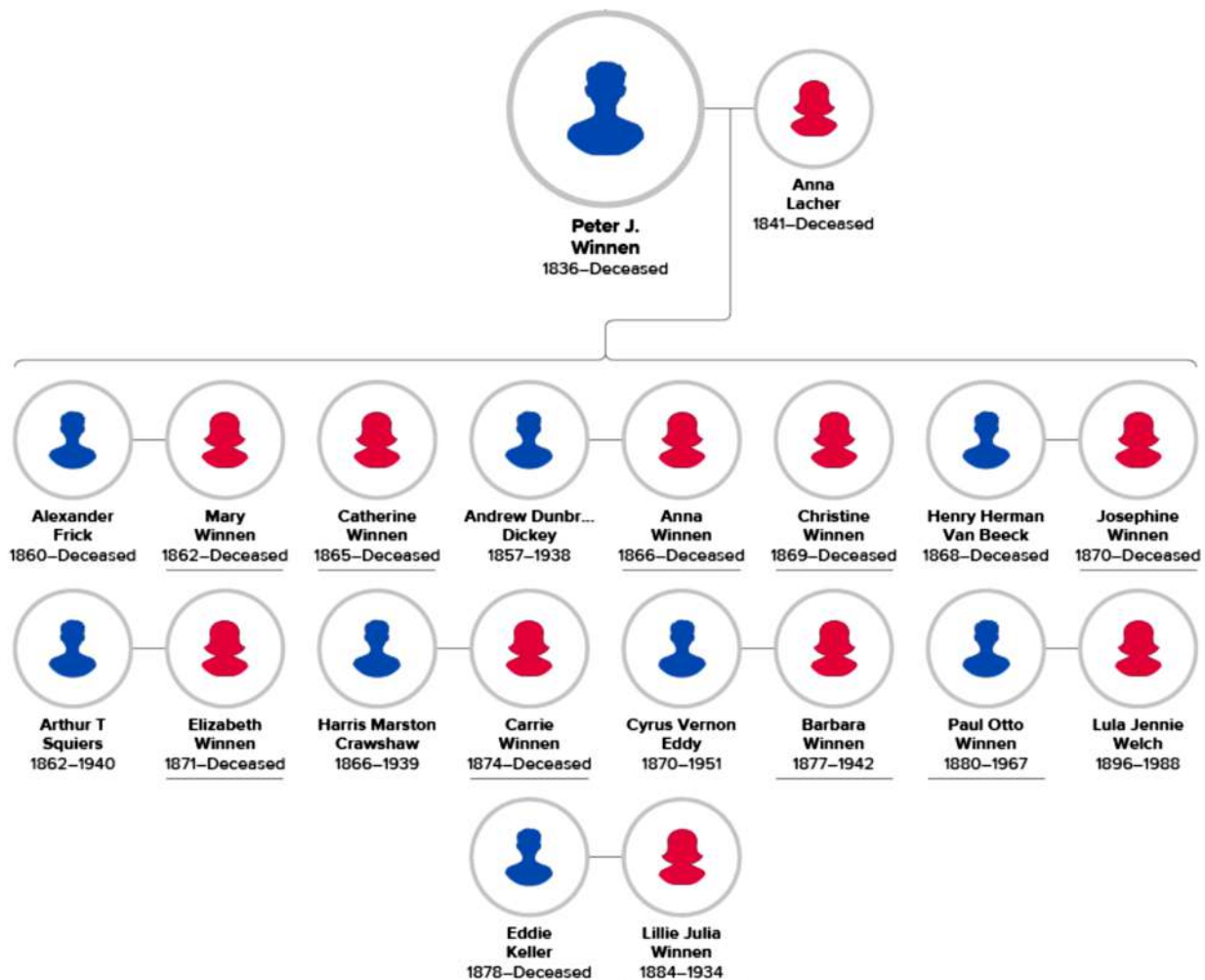
Whenever the girls wanted a new ribbon, trinket, or dress, they took to the woods to pick blackcaps and other wild berries or ginseng. The money from the sales of the berries and ginseng was their own.

The original farm house burned down in 1890. In 1891, a frame house was built in its place by Edward Keller, Sr., Eben Dillman, Archie Eastman, and Archie's father.

In 1908, Peter moved off the farm for good. He built himself a slab cabin on Kimball Lake near Minong, Wisconsin. He carved designs in the woodwork and made all of the furniture. He also made himself a rowboat.

Peter's son Paul moved in with him in 1910. Paul was married in 1914, at the age of thirty-three to eighteen-year-old Lula Welch from Minong. Paul and Lula took care of the ailing Peter until his death on June 15, 1915.

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Meanwhile, Anna had remained in Minnesota. Paul and Lula brought their infant son, Victor, down to Minneapolis so Anna could meet him before she died. On July 4, 1915, Paul and Lula moved in with Paul's sister, Barbara, and her husband, Vernon Eddy. They lived together in the Eddys' summer cabin on what is now Broadway Avenue in Wayzata. They fixed up an 8' by 16' chicken coop to live in until November. They spent the winter in a rooming house in Wayzata, where Lula cleaned the rooms to pay the rent.

In March 1916, they moved onto the Winnen Homestead, which had been leased while the family was away. Paul and Lula's second son, Harold, was born in the farm house in 1916 and their daughter, Violet, followed in 1920. Their youngest son, David, was the last baby to be born in the house in 1934.

Paul, the last of Peter's ten children, died in 1967. Lula lived alone in the house until she moved to a health care center near David.

This history was based on the following sources:

- "[Peter Winnen,](#)" *Plymouth Historical Society Newsletter*, September 1995, 2-3.
- "Peter J. Winnen, Wood Carver (and the Winnen Homestead)," *Western Hennepin County Pioneers Association Newsletter*, Winter 1995, 1, 4-6.
- Ellen Wilson Meyer, "The Man Who Hated Farming," *Wayzata News*, May 10, 1982, 8.



Minnehaha Falls and Rustic Bridge

Postcard of Minnehaha Falls featuring the "rustic bridge," c. 1895. <http://www.cityhistory.us/minneapolis/metropolis.htm>

OBJECT SPOTLIGHT: WINNEN MAGAZINE RACK

“Have you heard of Peter Winnen? He was my grandfather and a very famous woodcarver.” So asked David Winnen during a visit to the Plymouth History Museum on August 21, 2018. Armed with digital photos of Peter’s carvings, David described the themes and motifs commonly found in his grandfather’s work, including forest creatures, flowers and leaves, and Minnehaha Falls.

Minnehaha Falls held a special place in Peter Winnen’s heart. Minnehaha State Park became one of the country’s first state parks in 1889, but has been managed by the City of Minneapolis since its inception. In 1892, the City commissioned a pavilion, seating, and lavatories, and, in 1893, approved the construction of two bridges, one above the falls and one below. Peter carved the “rustic bridge” below the falls. Immortalized in countless turn of the century postcards, the bridge consisted of a rough plank deck and railings carved to resemble woven tree branches.

Minnehaha Falls, made famous by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s epic poem of 1855, was represented in over 100 turn-of-the-century postcards. Tourists seeking a souvenir could visit certain local photographers and pose atop



“Rustic bridge” prop in use at Kregel Photo Parlors, Minneapolis or St Paul, c. 1900. <http://postcardy.blogspot.com/2012/11/minnehaha-falls-bridges.html>



Peter Winnen, magazine rack, c. 1900, wood.

a painted version of Peter’s bridge, in front of a backdrop of the falls.

As David and his family continued on through the Plymouth History Museum, something caught his niece’s eye. It was a carved magazine rack, stained a rich walnut color except for a golden rectangle at the center. That rectangle, it turned out, was Minnehaha Falls. In front, Peter’s famous rustic bridge was carved, inscribed as on the original bridge, “Minnehaha.” This was indeed one of Peter’s carvings, misidentified as his son Paul’s. David Winnen, Paul’s son, was quick to point out that his father was not the artist. Peter taught his children to carve, but Paul never took to the craft.

The Plymouth History Museum is not the only local history museum with an example of Peter Winnen’s carvings. The

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Western Hennepin Pioneer Museum in Long Lake has an impressive carved wardrobe door, a child's desk, and the pulpit from the old Crystal Bay Presbyterian Church. These items were featured in an exhibition at the Hennepin History Center in 2015.



Installation view of "Our Hennepin County" at the Hennepin History Museum, 2015, featuring Peter Winnen's carvings. <http://twincitiesblather.blogspot.com/2016/01/hhm-resident-kitty.html>

Like the PHS magazine rack, the wardrobe door also features an image of Minnehaha Falls behind Peter's rustic bridge. A panel below features a carved teepee set amongst the trees. The carving is rich in detail and depth, especially when compared to the relative flatness of the magazine rack.

With its shallow relief carvings, the Crystal Bay pulpit is stylistically more similar to the magazine rack. Peter used color instead of shadow to create contrast. The left panel features a sheaf of wheat crossed by a banner inscribed "My flesh is meat indeed." The right panel features carved fruit and leaves, with a banner that reads "My blood is drink indeed."



Installation view of "Our Hennepin County" at the Hennepin History Museum, 2015, featuring Peter Winnen's carvings. <http://twincitiesblather.blogspot.com/2016/01/hhm-resident-kitty.html>

The pulpit features a recessed area at front that represents a stage. This area might have held a carved wooden Bible, similar to Peter's pulpit for Parker's Lake Methodist Church, now Messiah United Methodist Church.

The Crystal Bay pulpit was commissioned in 1889 by Milton and Elizabeth Stubbs. In 1900, a new minister found the pulpit too low for his 6'5" frame, so it was sold to the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Maple Plain. When that church moved to Hutchinson, the pulpit was left behind. In 1939, it was found in a barn and returned to the Crystal Bay church. Members raised it eight inches and used it until the church dissolved in 1957. The pulpit was then stored at Calvin Presbyterian Church in Orono until 1970, when it was donated to the Pioneer Museum.

This object spotlight was partially based on the following article: Ellen Wilson Meyer, "The Man Who Hated Farming," *Wayzata News*, May 10, 1982, 8.

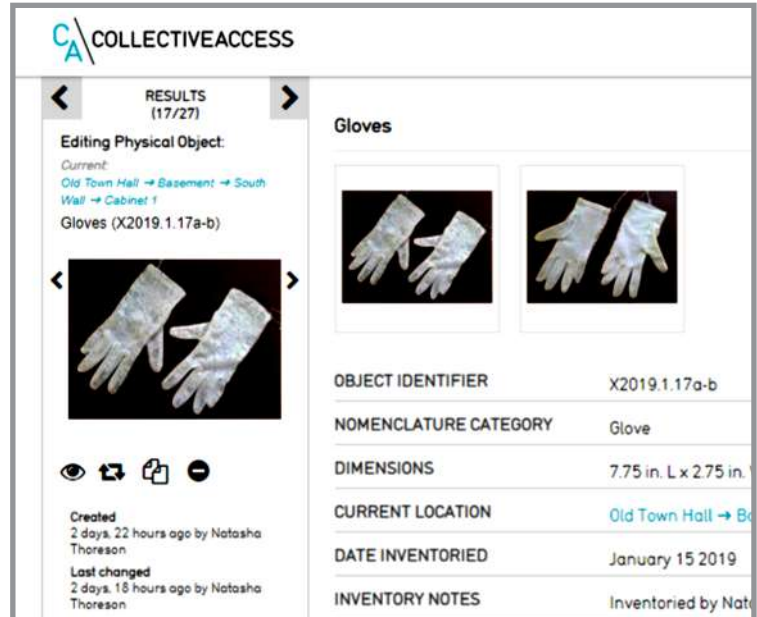
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This will be the first time we have been able to share our collections online! For this reason, we will also take photographs of each object. As cataloging progresses, more information can be added to each digital record; however, for the present, photographs and basic inventory data will provide a great deal of information about the Society's collections.

We are still looking for volunteers to assist us with the collections inventory project. Volunteers will learn museum best practices for handling objects of various materials and will assist with inspections, measurements, and labeling. This is a great project for anyone interested in a hands-on experience with Plymouth's history.

If you are interested in volunteering, 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>



The screenshot shows the 'COLLECTIVEACCESS' interface. On the left, it displays 'Editing Physical Object' with a breadcrumb trail: 'Current: Old Town Hall → Basement → South Wall → Cabinet 1' and the object name 'Gloves (X2019.1.17a-b)'. Below this is a large photo of a pair of white gloves. On the right, under the heading 'Gloves', there are two smaller photos of the gloves. Below the photos is a table of metadata:

OBJECT IDENTIFIER	X2019.1.17a-b
NOMENCLATURE CATEGORY	Glove
DIMENSIONS	7.75 in. L x 2.75 in.
CURRENT LOCATION	Old Town Hall → B
DATE INVENTORIED	January 15 2019
INVENTORY NOTES	Inventoried by Nat

At the bottom left of the screenshot, there is a 'Created' section: 'Created 2 days, 22 hours ago by Natasha Thoreson' and a 'Last changed' section: 'Last changed 2 days, 18 hours ago by Natasha Thoreson'.

Screen view of Collective Access inventory summary page showing the type of information collected for each object. Eventually this information will be made available online through the Minnesota Alliance of Local History Museums' MN Collections website: <https://mncollections.org/>

OLD FASHIONED CHRISTMAS 2018

The Plymouth Historical Society hosted the 32nd Annual Old Fashioned Christmas on December 8. Over 320 families attended this year. We want to thank you – our members, volunteers, and donors – for your continued support of this joyful celebration!



OLD FASHIONED CHRISTMAS



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