

A Brief Look at the Early History of Plymouth

By Niel O. Nielsen

Plymouth, rich in history, can be traced back to the pre-Columbian period, 1400 to 1500 A.D. Its original inhabitants were the Wahpeton Sioux whose encampment was at the north end of Medicine Lake. The lush woodlands, still partially unchanged, hold much history such as the still visible Indian mounds. Medicine Lake, its name derived from the Indian word MDE-WAKAN (meaning lake of the spirit), was named by the Wahpeton Sioux after a warrior overturned in his canoe and his body never recovered. The Indians believed the lake held a great spirit. The first settlers shortened the name to Medicine Lake.

The first settler to this area was Antoine LeCounte who arrived in 1848; however, he did not settle at this time. Antoine LeCounte was known as an adventurer, guide and explorer; he carried mail from the Red River country to points south, along the way trading trinkets and other goods to the Indians for horses. LeCounte returned in 1852 and built the first cabin on East Medicine Lake Blvd. At approximately 29th Avenue North.

Others followed LeCounte to Plymouth, claiming land and clearing and settling it, which was all that was required then. Plymouth had its first beginning as a town on the northwest shores of what is now known as Parkers Lake in 1855 with a grist mill and other structures springing up. In the spring of 1857, the waters of Parkers Lake rose, flooding and forcing the mill to be taken down and moved to Freeport, Minnesota, which is now called Wayzata.

With many new settlers coming into the area, they decided they should organize. Plymouth was the name given by the Hennepin County board of commissioners to the new settlers who had organized a group. On April 19, 1858, the group met at the home of Francis Day to open elections for town officers. On June 1, 1858, among other items voted on was changing the town's name to Medicine Lake. This was used once at the next town meeting, but for reasons unrecorded, it was never used again.

In 1862 during the Sioux uprising at Fort Ridgely near New Ulm, the settlers of Plymouth formed a militia to protect themselves against raiding Indians. At the start of the Civil War, Plymouth paid its volunteers a \$25.00 bounty for their patriotism.

Plymouth's growth took on a new look. Now schools and churches were being built, and a series of post offices located throughout Plymouth. By 1863 hotels began springing up. More changes and progress arrived after the Civil War, and by 1880 Plymouth boasted a population of 1,074 and reaped taxes of \$667.00 for the year.

After 1880 railroads began crossing Plymouth, and the Indians had moved on due to the growing progress in Plymouth. From this time on, it was like most other towns. Farming had become the trade of most of the settlers. Roads were petitioned for and built across Plymouth, and access to other towns was possible. Medicine Lake had become a major tourist attraction, and resorts and wayside spots sprang up around the shores.

Plymouth, its heritage and history rich, should and will be preserved before it is completely lost to progress. Many landmarks still stand, and much of its lush woodlands and its hills still there can be imagined if one concentrates. Your help is needed to help us preserve it. Our past is present, help us keep it...

Plymouth Historical Society
Plymouth, Minnesota 55447