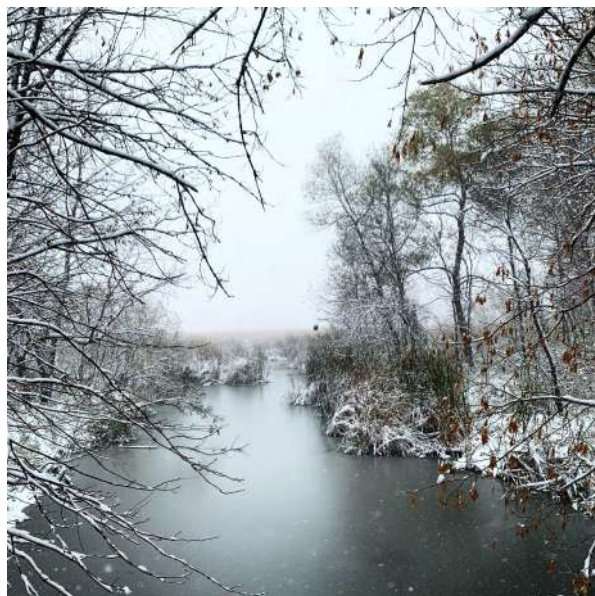


ON FROZEN WATER, WE FIND COMMUNITY

We, dear Minnesotans, have reached that time of year. The time of year in which we stand in awe of winter's beauty while cursing its frigidity, hoping for a glimmer of sun and warmth in the long, cold days. With many unable to travel to warmer climes for their annual reprieve this year, it seems to have become our duty to embrace the wonders of winter around us and dive anew into what our majestic snowy tundra may bring.

Historically, Minnesotans are no stranger to finding imaginative and inventive means for getting through the winter months. Some activities and industries in fact thrive in these times, and friends and neighbors connect through ways otherwise impossible in warmer months. A simple, if not obvious, example is our deep affinity for frozen water. As temperatures drop,

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A Frosted Plymouth Creek. Winter 2021.

PHS PROCEEDS WITH NEXT STEPS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH CITY

VIRTUAL MEMBERS MEETING

02.08.21

7PM

PLYMOUTH
HISTORICAL
SOCIETY

The Plymouth Historical Society held an important members meeting on February 8, 2021 during which members voted to move forward with the process of transferring operations of the Society fully to the City of Plymouth. This decision has come as part of a multi-year process initiated by the PHS Board in 2017 to secure long-term sustainability for the Plymouth History Museum and its collections. At that time, leadership felt their current board would not be able to sustain operations through their limited volunteer base. The City of Plymouth agreed to a partnership that would allow for a funded staff position to help with daily operations, collection management, strategic initiatives, and community outreach.

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community members make their way to the lake, and life seems to take on a new sense of meaning.

What makes us so drawn to lakes in the winter? In warm months, the appeal of swimming, boating, fishing, and playing in the summer sun seems clear, but why in sub-zero temperatures do we subject ourselves to outdoor pastimes? Perhaps it's the subtle underscore of temporality. We know the opportunity is fleeting. The very surface on which we can firmly stand, skate, walk, and fish will, within a matter of weeks, be once again fluid, making every activity an of-the-moment experience. Perhaps, even more, it's a place we find community. It's a place we hold in common with each other, a space bounded by land with no one person holding ownership over the water itself.

The notion of the "commons" is an ancient one, and in fact, the very word itself means "body of the people." Community gathering in public spaces is something that has ancient roots in both planned and spontaneous ways. The roots of spaces like town squares, places left intentionally open for the purposes of gathering, could take us back to the times of the ancient Greeks, where city planning by Hippodamus created a grid-like system of blocks with spaces left purposefully blank. Most notably, he created the idea of the *agora*, a prominent space within city structure that contained businesses, gymnasiums, stadiums, and other community amenities, not unlike our own City Center today. Other forms of squares or gathering places are less planned. They make use of leftover space, our human drive to find connection



Bertrands Ice skating on Medicine Lake. 1917.



Carl Eckstrom ice fishing on Medicine Lake. 1915.

bringing us to otherwise abandoned locales for a breath of fresh air. Think of a vacant lot in a neighborhood and the spontaneous games that may have erupted for you as a child in that space, or the mostly empty parking lot that becomes a bustling farmer's market on a Saturday morning and then returns to its quiet hum. In many ways, frozen lakes serve for us the same purpose, amorphous spaces that lend themselves to spontaneous use.

Within Plymouth's own history, we see numerous examples for how our community has interacted within the open space of frozen water meeting sky. From our collection, we see historic examples from the early twentieth-century, such as this charming view of the Bertrands ice skating in 1917 (left). In another, Carl Eckstrom is pictured showing off an impressive ice fishing catch, though instead of the ice fishing houses we may usually view, we see his 1915 Ford Model T.

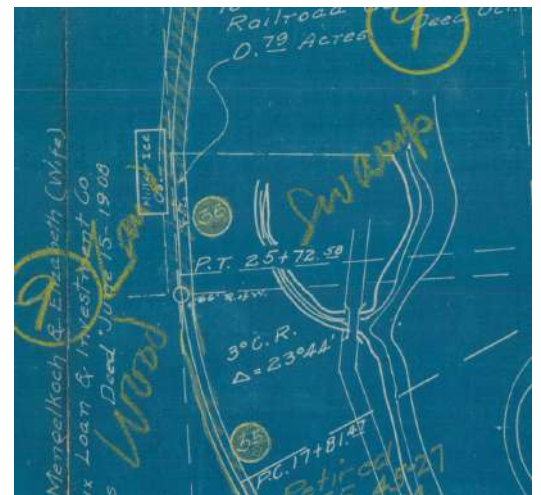
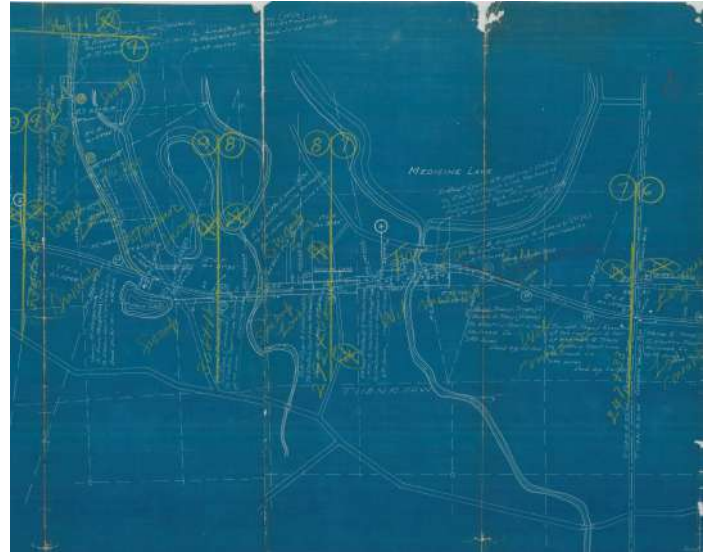
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Beyond recreation, common spaces have also found themselves the home to industry. In this way, discussions of the commons can also center on the idea of natural resources, such as air or water. The ice trade is a fascinating example of the seasonal opportunism of frozen water and one whose historic footprint can be seen throughout the city of Plymouth.

The ice trade holds an incredibly significant role in our industrial history. The ability to harvest, store, and transport frozen water revolutionized how we as a global society consume food, yet the true impact of this winter "crop" is not discussed as often as its other industrial counterparts, such as oil or coal. Though harvesting snow and ice has occurred for centuries across the globe, the modern industry of trading frozen water is credited to Frederic Tudor (1783-1864), an American businessman based in Boston. Until his efforts, ice was often something reserved for the cultural elite. It was expensive and difficult to harvest and distribute, leaving it to the ruling classes who had the means to build ice houses for storage on their elaborate estate properties. Where there is demand for a coveted product, there lies the opportunity for profit, and Tudor saw the opportunity before him in the frozen lakes and ponds near his family home in Rockwood, Maine. He began realizing the potential of exporting ice harvested in the chilly Maine winters to the wealthy classes of warmer lands, such as Martinique and Cuba. Within a matter of decades, Tudor had expanded his reach to India, Brazil, and Australia. His ships exporting ice and chilled foods would, in turn, bring cargos of sugar, foreign fruits, and cotton back to North America, a system dependent on the free labor of enslaved peoples. As demands expanded, so did the footprint of the industry. Ice harvest centers became connected by rail, further expanding the ability to send ice and chilled goods from hub to hub, leading to the advent of refrigerated cars essential to global food trade today.

Ice harvest was not reserved to the East Coast, and Midwestern companies were quick to join in the trade, those in Minnesota among them. Not all companies traded globally, but local harvest became just as essential to local food production and consumption. Major players in the Minneapolis area included names like the People's Ice Company and Cedar Lake Ice Company. Here in Plymouth, we know several companies operated in



Electric Shortline Railroad plans for Medicine Lake Area and detail showing Miller Ice Company. c. 1913. Courtesy of Ted Hoshal.

and around area lakes, with hubs for ice harvesting including Bass and Medicine Lakes. This blueprint drawing of Medicine Lake (above image and detail) reveals the name of Miller Ice Company. Buildings such as that depicted were used for storing ice and, when properly insulated by hay and sawdust, could keep ice cool year-round. Ice would be cut from the frozen water's surface, first by horse-drawn plows and later by mechanized circular saws, in large grid-like patterns removing blocks next to large, open areas of water. Work was dangerous and usually performed by laborers and farmers who needed off-season income. Massive blocks of ice weighing as much as 300 pounds would then be brought into the house for storage until its eventual delivery. An example of what this storage operation would have looked

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*People's Ice Company Operation at Bass Lake. c. 1914.
MNHS Collection.*

(Continued from page 3)

like can be seen in this image of the People's Ice Company at work on Bass Lake. The scale of some operations seems massive, but evidence of these buildings remains somewhat ephemeral and elusive today.

In its early days, there were few legal parameters established around ice harvesting. However, over time, the industry would seek ways to regulate harvest, including trying to establish boundaries of ownership of the ice based on a percentage of shore owned by adjacent land owners. What had previously been a common, shared space open to all now had specified rights of access. Water within the lake, which in liquid form would not be commoditized in this way, suddenly had new commercial meaning.

This semi-private, semi-public nuance is one that can have exploitative results. The idea of "commons" as a natural resource equally shared by members of society has historic roots. In 1883, the economist William Forster Lloyd applied this idea to unregulated lands in Great Britain that were utilized for shared agricultural and grazing lands that, over time, became privatized. The theme was expanded in 1968 by the American ecologist Garret James Hardin in what has become known as the "tragedy of the commons." In this, the commons are seen as something as exploited and depleted within an unregulated framework. However, a criticism to this view would state that it

is first an assumption that all have equal access to these same resources. Furthermore, it fails to recognize the times communities do, in fact, gather and share resources in a way that honors this sense of something held in common amongst its members. As those who have experienced the harshness of a Minnesota winter know, sometimes these unregulated experiences of commonality bring out the truer sides of community, such as when a kind neighbor plows the sidewalk in front of your house as they see you struggling away with a single shovel in hand.

A beautiful, local example of a reclaiming of the commons for shared, public use is the Art Shanty Projects (ASP). This art festival on ice began in 2004 as an experimental take on ice fishing houses. In what is described as a "temporary autonomous zone," co-founders Peter Haakon Thompson and David Pitman held the initial vision for an art installation on Plymouth's Medicine Lake. By the next year, twenty additional artists had joined them, and from these humble origins the festivals has only continued to grow in reach and mission. Medicine Lakes's frozen water continued to host ASP through 2012 until it made a move to White Bear Lake in 2014, and then to its current home at Bde Unma (Lake Harriet) in Minneapolis. Recent festivals have boasted over 150 artists and performers and 40,000 visitors in attendance. Through their efforts, ASP creates a whole new meaning of community created above frozen water that is part art festival, part commune living, part social experiment, and fully a uniquely Minnesota experience of our winter landscape.



*Art Shanty Projects on Medicine Lake. 2008.
Photo courtesy of Denny Strunc.*

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This process provided for the hiring of the PHS's first Historical Society Manager, Dr. Natasha Thoreson, in 2018. Dr. Thoreson was with the Society through fall of 2019. Rebekah Coffman joined as Manager in February 2020 and has been overseeing daily operations as well as the rehabilitation of the museum's interior, a second phase of collection inventory, connecting with and building our volunteer base, and developing new outreach initiatives such as our Virtual Open House series and the historic site mapping project.

As 2020 has shown, historic institutions have needed to rapidly evolve to maintain relevancy and provide community value through the many changes these unprecedented times have brought. It has only affirmed the need for the PHS to re-evaluate its role within this atmosphere. The Board believes the transfer of operations will allow for the Plymouth History Museum to be a vibrant and engaging place for community members to connect with local history in new and exciting ways.

If you were unable to attend our meeting and have further questions about the process, please be sure to check our website on the "Events" page for a posting of the resolutions discussed and a Question and Answer sheet about the process. We are thankful for the member and volunteer support it has taken to reach this point, and we will continue to rely on your support as we move forward into this new phase of reaching our mission to discover, preserve, and share historical knowledge of Plymouth for our community!

OBJECT SPOTLIGHT: BENJAMIN WINKLER PHOTOGRAPH

Keeping on topic with our frozen theme, we selected this photo found as part of our most-recent phase of collection inventory at the museum. The photograph features a young man by the name of Ben Winkler, who was, as the back of the image reads the "Son of Barbara Roehl Winkler and Dave Winkler." Through this image, we will explore a moment in the life of a frozen water deliverer.

Census data tells us a Benjamin Winkler was in fact born in 1878 to John David Winkler and Barbara Roehl Winkler. The Roehl family holds a Plymouth connection, as seen on the 1898 Plat Map of Plymouth Township, which reveals the Roehl family name in areas west of Medicine Lake and north and south of Highway 55.



Benjamin Winkler delivering ice for the Crystal Ice Company. c. 1905.

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A middle-child from a family of seven children in total [siblings included Margaret (1870-1952); John David (1872-1942); Mary Ann (1873-1954); John P (1876-1938); Katherine (1882-1919); and Rose (1883-?)], Benjamin would marry Mary Mainz in 1903 at the age of 25. They would, in turn, have three children of their own: Benjamin John (1904-1980); Pearl Margaret (1906-1973), and Florence Sara (1907-1989). Within Minneapolis Directory Listings, we see Benjamin Winkler had an interesting and varied occupational history. His early resume includes positions in and around the Minneapolis area with work as a Frame Maker for Bintliff Manufacturing and as a Laborer for companies such as the Minneapolis Threshing Machine Company and Sushansky & Wade [a box manufacturing company]. These early years also reveal young Benjamin dabbled in another field: the ice trade. In 1900, he is registered as a laborer for the City Ice Company and later, from 1905-1907, he is noted as Driver for the Crystal Ice Company. It is in one of these capacities that we find Mr. Winkler in our featured photo. If you look closely behind his head you can just make out ghostly lettering that appears to read "Crystal."

As was discussed in our main article, the ice harvesting process was not for the faint of heart. The delivery process also reads as an arduous process. Deliverymen would take ice from its storage locations and slide it down runways toward their delivery wagons. The ice would be washed both at this point and again when delivered. To signal their ice needs, customers would place signs in their window specifying how much they desired. Hatchets were then used to carve a block of ice to its requested size. Large tongs, as seen in our featured photo and exemplified to the right, demonstrate how deliveryman would handle the large, slippery blocks of ice as they were moved to and removed from the wagon bed. Delivery men would then bring the ice into a customer's home and to the icebox, sometimes through a dedicated small door. Iceboxes, not unlike that in our collection (pictured right), were typically made of wood with a tin or zinc lining and sawdust insulation. Ice would be inserted in the box and would keep items inside cool for 1-2 days (seasonal dependent). As blocks melted, water would be collected in a pan below and need to be discarded regularly.

Work schedules for icemen could be brutal, sometimes working seven days a week and on holidays. In the days of horse-drawn wagons, a daily schedule may began as early as 4:30am to provide time to feed and prepare the horses for a long day of delivery, with the workday's end not until 7:30pm. It's little wonder we see Benjamin Winkler transition from this industry in 1907 after the birth of his third child. His professional life continued down a varied path, including stints as a driver, bartender, machine operator, and salesman. From 1925-1928, our Mr. Winkler is listed as a confectioner, with his last listed occupation in 1929 as a grocer. Little information is found for the last decade of his life. Through newspapers, we do learn of the unfortunate loss of his horses through a barn fire caused by arson. We can only hope it wasn't the beauties pictured in this photo!



Metal Ice Tongs. PHS Collection, object 1982.6.4. Gift of Lula Winnen.



Norge Company "Bay State" ice box. PHS Collection, object 1982.5.1. Gift of Ludwig Rippe.

PLYMOUTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

SPRING VIRTUAL OPEN HOUSE SERIES



4-5PM WEDNESDAYS

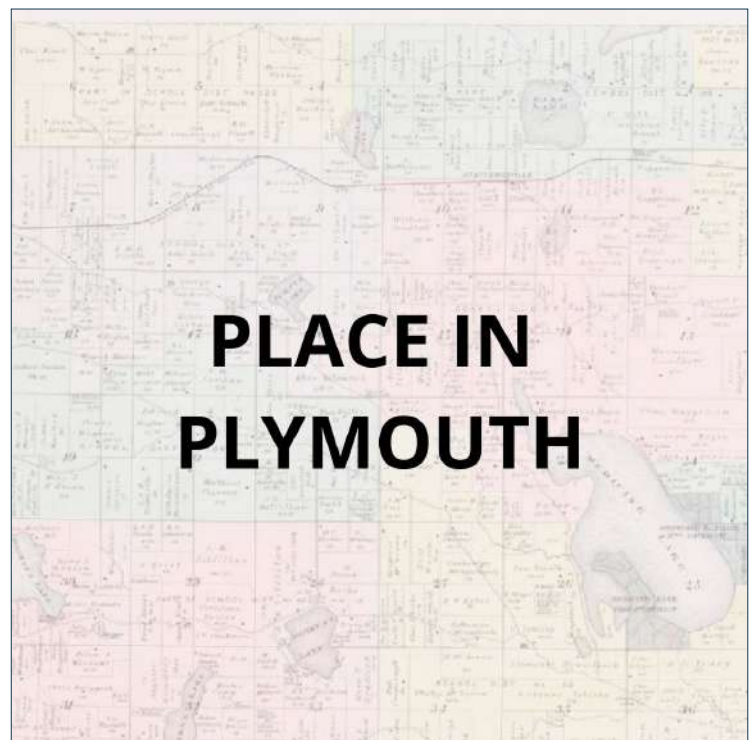
JAN. 13	APR. 14
FEB. 17	MAY 12
MAR. 14	

While the Plymouth History Museum remains closed to the public for in-person open houses, we have begun our Spring Virtual Open House series. Join us to learn about updates of what's been happening at the museum, learn a bit of Plymouth history, and get a chance to connect with others in our community!

More information and registration link can be found at:
www.plymouthmnhistoricalsociety.org/visit/upcomingevents

The Plymouth Historical Society is in the midst of a project called "Place in Plymouth." Through a combination of archival map research, digital mapping, historic site descriptions, and oral history, we are expanding the stories of Plymouth's history. We are looking for people of all walks of life who may be interested in sharing their experiences or favorite sites in places around Plymouth.

To get involved, please contact Historical Site Manager Rebekah Coffman at rcoffman@plymouthmn.gov or 763-509-5282.



VOLUNTEER WITH US!

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



We are always looking for help from people passionate about preserving and sharing history and making a difference in our community. Opportunities include virtual and in person options, including blog post writing, collections research, collections care, 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>

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City of Plymouth Historic Site Manager

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