

SCRAPBOOK

The Newsletter of the Plymouth Historical Society- Autumn 2020

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CONTACT US:

Museum & Memory House -In the Old
Webster Courthouse behind Town Hall
603-536-2337
Open Saturdays 10 AM- 2 PM May-Oct
10 AM- 1 PM Nov- Apr and by appointment

PO Box 603, Plymouth, NH 03264



PHS Museum & Memory House

Year of Disruptions

Covid -19, Upgrades, Exhibits, Programs & More!

It has been a most unusual year to say the least. We are nearing completion of a year of restoration to the Old Webster Courthouse - the oldest wooden building, specifically built as a courthouse, in New Hampshire and third in New England!

The Covid-19 virus hit mid-way through the fiscal year. Our monthly in-person presentations were provided from fall 2019 to February 2020. The Memories of Plymouth (Season 4) conducted on our PBTv station did not follow our regular schedule of April-October. Instead, it began August 2020. Our regular third/first grade tours did not take place nor did our fall 2020 yard-sale. Our latest exhibit - Lost Plymouth – Part II West Main Street was halted due to restoration projects within the building.

BUT things are looking up. Our Facebook page, which officially opened in late November 2018, has reached over 1350 visitors. Our 5th plant sale this past spring was a success! AND we moved forward with a unique fund-raising opportunity

that reminded folks of our Town. Our first puzzle (the Town Common circa 1950's) sold out on Facebook and the same occurred in-house. We initiated a second puzzle (East Main Street circa 1980's) along with a second purchase of the 1950's which resulted in even more sales. A third puzzle, featuring the Smith Millennium Bridge 2001 with an autumn theme is now available as well!

Plans for 2021 are underway. Our 2019 annual membership meeting was held Tuesday, September 22nd and our 2020 meeting met on October 6th. If the virus cooperates, the museum will open during the late fall on Saturdays from 10-1 pm. Docents will be prepared to help you with town or family history.

Your membership support (**see enclosed membership form**) is important. It assists us in preserving our most fragile artifacts, building new displays and exhibits, and continuing the programming you have enjoyed in the past.

Your financial support will help ensure a fiscally sound future for the Society so that with each ensuing decade, our artifacts will continue to be preserved to share Plymouth's story.

Thank you for your interest and support!



Old Webster Courthouse Upgrades

The Future of History Campaign is reaching its goal! Driven by the Old Webster Courthouse lately? If not...do take a look! We are on the home stretch, with all major work completed. The building was freshly painted, with trim and siding colors similar to its late 1800s appearance, as well as the door and portico. It will remain unadorned as it was at that time. This past spring the floor was refinished. This involved clearing out the interior - you can imagine the challenge of getting everything back in place! With the installation of a new entrance railing, we expect to be finished by the end of October.

The final step will be to receive approval from the Land & Community Heritage Investment Program for the work completed; LCHIP has provided half the funds used for this two-year overhaul and, thanks to your generous donations, for the remaining match! We had planned to hold a big celebration and Open House. We could not have done this without you, our loyal supporters!! Unfortunately, Covid-19 has made this impossible for the time being.

We (the Old Webster Courthouse Committee, governing boards of the Young Ladies Library Association, and the Plymouth Historical Society) are thrilled to have our beloved 1774 Old Webster Courthouse looking handsome and ready to serve for the next 100 years. Thank you for helping make this a reality.

Exhibits: Landmarks Lost to Time: Part II -West Main Street

In a perfect world you would be reading about a new exhibit focusing on suffragettes and some of Plymouth's notable women. That was our grand plan. But then Covid-19 struck. In March we stopped everything, locked the door and turned out the lights.

Our exhibit **Lost Plymouth, Part II: *the Western Side of Main Street***, had been on display for less than two months. It deserves more time! We look forward to future open hours, when you can visit the Old Webster Courthouse and enjoy getting lost in the images and stories of Plymouth in earlier centuries. Some of the buildings highlighted in the second half of this exhibit include **The Old Brick** (where today's Post Office stands), the **Congregational Church, Plymouth Holmes Academy** (now the Silver Hall parking lot), **Pemigewasset House #3**, the original Town Hall (by the Old Draper and Maynard Factory), and numerous homes, now long gone.

One longstanding building was the **Tufts Block**. John S. Tufts arrived in Plymouth in 1861. He opened a dry goods store in the downtown area, and later became a druggist. Around 1880 he built a large three-story wooden structure on the corner of Main Street and Highland Avenue, where the Northway Bank is today. Known as the Tufts Block, the upper floors housed other organizations and businesses, including a company of the NH National Guard, formed in Plymouth in 1884. Sadly, the Tufts block burned in 1930 (see article below *Fires that Transformed Plymouth*).

Lost Plymouth, Part II has plenty to enjoy, including beautifully enlarged cutouts of many of the buildings. We look forward to a few visitors at a time when it seems appropriate and safe for all to reenter our museum October 24th!

Programs

Fall programming began with a fascinating **History of the Young Ladies Library Association** by Stephanie Osborne, President, and Christina Mason of the YLLA. Organized in 1873, the YLLA created and ran Plymouth's first public library and was instrumental in the building and expansion of the Pease Public Library. An excellent video narrated by Betty Batchelder provided an overview of YLLA's history. The PHS leases the Old Webster Courthouse from the YLLA which remains on land owned by the Town of Plymouth.

In November, Glenn Knoblock presented a talk on **African American Soldiers and Sailors**, supported by the NH Humanities to Go program. Glenn described the role played by African Americans during the American Revolution in the fight for independence. Both free African Americans and those that were enslaved were key elements in manning state militias and Continental Army units, as well as serving on the high seas in the Navy and on privately armed ships.

In December, the **Wreath Making** workshop, held annually at Dick and Kathie Flanders home, exhibited its best attendance to date with 52 folks enjoying this festive activity.

After the January break, we started 2020 with a program entitled **King Phillip's War** by Don O'Connor, an early President of PHS and local history buff. This war was an armed conflict between 1675 and 1678 between Native Americans and New England colonists. It was the Native American's last-ditch effort to avoid English authority and stop settlement on native lands. The war decimated the Narragansett, Wampanoag, and many smaller tribes and mostly ended Indian resistance in southern New England, paving the way for additional English settlements.

Given the impact of the coronavirus, the PHS decided to postpone and reschedule planned public programming beginning in March. The PHS did provide a display outlining the **History of Farming in Plymouth** as part of the *Local Foods Plymouth* Farmers Market in June. And in July, PHS joined the Holderness Historical Society (HHS) in sponsoring a field trip to see their **Squam Dugout Canoe**. 'Tink' Taylor of the HHS provided an historical overview of the discovery of this Indian canoe in Squam Lake by fishermen in 1939, its storage in Tilton prior to its move to the Shelburne Museum in Vermont, and its recent return to the HHS museum. Carbon dated to the mid-17th century, during the "early contact period" when native Americans first fished Squam waters, this dugout canoe is a fascinating artifact with no saw or



metal tool marks evident.

Marcia Schmidt Blaine offered her fascinating talk on **Macabre Attractions: The Willey Slide and Disaster Tourism** in August as the first virtual PHS presentation via Zoom, which was a great success. This was followed with our second Zoom presentation on the **History of Pemigewasset Hotels** by John Christ in September. Future in-person programming is planned as the virus allows in the new fiscal year.

Memories of Plymouth

Memories of Plymouth, a project spearheaded by PHS President Louise McCormack, is in the midst of its fourth year of showcasing, preserving, and honoring the stories of local people who have lived here for decades. The project is a video time capsule, creating first-person accounts of participants' memories and stories of living in the Plymouth area. All interviews are aired on Pemi-Baker TV channel 1302, and on our Facebook page (scroll down to find them). To see them as UTube videos, type Memories of Plymouth and the name of the person interviewed.

Due to Covid-19, the 2020 interviews were delayed until August with **Richard 'Dick' Mardin** sharing what life was like growing up in Holderness while working at Beebe River as a mechanic, then as Plymouth and Holderness Fire Chief, and ending the interview with his incredible fiddling skills. **Barbara Coursey Currier** provided us with an overview of growing up in the area and living in the village of Beebe River, a self-contained community that included a school, company-owned homes, grocery store, post office, and their own baseball team. Others who have agreed to be interviewed later this fall/spring include **Eunice Henderson Wentzell**, **Sally Dole Harris**, **Edwin & Marilyn Wixson**, and **Bob Moulton**.

If you are interested or know someone who would enjoy sharing their memories, contact Louise at 536-2337 or at louisem@plymouth.edu. Your children, grandchildren and friends will appreciate your willingness to participate in sharing your Memories of Plymouth.

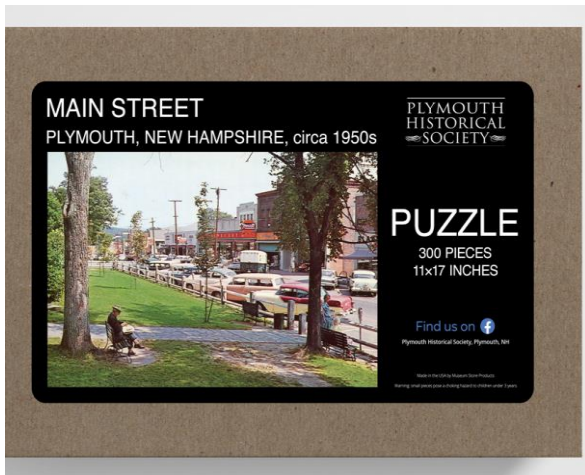
Donations

As folks clean out their attics during these trying times, PHS has been blessed with interesting historical donations. We want to thank all donors who are helping us keep Plymouth's history alive for future generations. They include, but are not limited to the following. **Dick Mardin** – photos of the Plymouth State Fair when the complex was burned by area fire departments. **Henry Ahern** – Smith Millennium Bridge artifacts. **John Clay** – late 1800's Plymouth Town Reports (physical & digital) and two scrapbooks. **Bob Barkey** – artifacts and history from Pemigewasset Hotel III. Bob's parents managed and owned the Hotel from 1946-56. **Phil Harvey** - quilt made in 1989 by the elementary students of Kaye Lovejoy Radimen. **Joy Webster** – Child's Gazetteer, state school booklet/Thomsen, Profiles of NH. **Joyce Bruce** – Pressy print. **Sandra Haskell** – Royal Eagles artifacts. **Exeter Library** – Two Ezra Stearns and an Eva Speare history volume 1963-2013. **Patsy Conway Needs** – pictures of Plymouth. **David Fletcher** of Kalamazoo, MI - 1963 booklet, theatre script with Speare's signature. **Betty Morrill** of Rumney – Bugalow Weaver's artifacts (loom on table), pillows, rugs, cards from 1930 and bills/statements from 1924-27. Time capsule bottle from **Harold Wilkins** (made by G. Carpenter). Old photos from

Bridgewater Historical Society. Post cards from **Scott Bennett. Harold Ryea** – his grandfather’s military jacket used in the Mexican War. **Judy Dearborn’s** family – Plymouth Enterprise articles 1955-2019.

Fundraising

Fundraising efforts support PHS activities and programs and help balance the budget. We rely on your enthusiastic support for our Plant Sale in May, our Yard Sale in September, and the Wreath Making in December! We had a very successful Wreath Making event last December, ‘best ever’ Plant Sale this past spring, but had to cancel the planned Yard Sale. The great news is our very successful retail sales from puzzle sales! If you have not as yet purchased a puzzle (only \$16.99 each) we have 3 choices which make great gifts (1950’s or 1980’s Main Street or Covered Bridge).



Financial Report 2019 -2020

<u>Income:</u> Membership Dues.....	\$1640	<u>Expenditures:</u> Programs/Publicity.....	\$1304
Membership Donations.....	\$2455	Operating Expenses.....	\$1644
Other Donations and Grants.....	\$1434	Utilities.....	\$2857
Retail Sales.....	\$3362	Retail Production.....	\$1412
Fundraising.....	\$2030	Storage	\$ 315
Miscellaneous	\$ 850	Dues, Fees & Other.....	\$1119
Total	\$11,576	Total	\$8651

Fires that Transformed Plymouth

Every town can recall a loss of a house, business, church or more during their lifetime. Plymouth and its surrounding communities were no exception. Our current exhibit, Lost Plymouth, shares photos of several buildings on both the east and west side of town that we have lost to fire since the town was founded. The town learned from each loss. Now each business or home have fire extinguishers. Plymouth enhanced its fire services by enlarging the fire department, purchasing more equipment, and increased staff, and shifting from volunteers to full-time. Quicker response meant that there were fewer lives lost. During the 1800's, the Plymouth's Fire Co. was located on Main St. where the Pemi Youth Center is currently located. The Plymouth Fire Department (PFD) was incorporated in 1831. In 1916, a fire at Plymouth's hospital prompted the town to acquire a house and barn on Highland St. for its base. Recently, Plymouth expanded its fire headquarters by acquiring the adjacent Olmstead home.

We will briefly review a few of the businesses, hotels, and homes that have been destroyed by fire, starting with a popular train stop in Plymouth for tourists: the first **Pemigewasset House** which burned in 1862. The rebuilt **Pemi Hotel II** burned in 1909. Both were located near the Railroad Square. A third fire of the **Pemi Hotel III** in 1934 was saved by the PFD. The hotel stayed in business until 1958 when Plymouth Teacher's College (PTC) purchased the property, razed the hotel and built the Pemi Dorm there.

Benjamin Dearborn's Store and Green's Tavern (now Northway Bank) was located at the corner of Main and Highland Street. Initially burned in 1869, the store was rebuilt by Mrs. Dearborn and Plummer Fox from Campton, John Mason of Bristol, and Tufts from Gilmanton. Unfortunately, fire again consumed this area. Fox erected the three-story **Fox Block** while the **Tufts Block** was located at the corner of Main and Highland Streets.

On January 16, 1911 the first **Draper & Maynard Sporting Goods Factory**, a three-story wooden building, burned to the ground. Fire Chief Renfrew and crew arrived quickly on the scene. It was below zero and the wind was blowing a gale, but they saved the Universalist Church and the Town Hall next door. The owners immediately erected a new four-story brick building by late 1911 (still standing).

Constructed in 1903-04, **Plymouth High School** was located at the corner of High and School Street. On February 25, 1914, the building burned but was quickly rebuilt in the same location. On January 29, 1916, the **Emily Batch Hospital** burned as the PFD, then located on South Main Street, could not get their hose carts pulled up Highland Street in time. Another fire at **Chase's Lumber Mill**, located in the hollow below Warren Street, becomes the next victim to fire on December 28th, 1917, turning the piles of logs and lumber to ash. The business moved to Laconia after this disaster.

Located just below the freight depot by the B&M tracks, the **Chase Grain Company** burned on January 2nd, 1924. The next major fire occurred at the **Tuft's Block** on December 2, 1930. This was one of the largest buildings at the time, and the fire also destroyed the **Fox Block**.

Historic houses were also consumed by fire. One old landmark, located between the Kidder and Rollins Block, built in 1800 by Steven Webster was later known as the Lucius Howe House when purchased around 1850. It was taken by fire on February 16, 1932. Another major fire struck early morning on January 5, 1943 when the **Kidder Block and Methodist Church** were both destroyed by the fire causing major financial losses. Stores, offices, and apartments were all swept by flames which also spread to the church before being brought under control by the PFD and area FD's from Laconia, Bristol, Campton, and Woodstock. The **Kidder Block** was occupied by O'Briens Clothing Store, Percy Ayer's Insurance Office, Stevens Hardware and Peasley's Drug Store on the first floor and the Masonic Lodge Hall on the second floor, while the third floor was occupied by Robert Wakefield's Law Office as well as a family which fled down a fire escape. The J.J. Newberry Department Store occupied the first floor of the second block with offices on the upper floors.

The **Plymouth Congregational Church** was built in 1836 and burned in 1983, a day so many of us remember well. Located next to Town Hall, the church was destroyed by an arsonist. Folks who were baptized, married, and attended church services and school programs there were devastated. A new church was built in 1985. As recently as 1993, on the East Main Street at the Rollins Block, a devastating fire put Biederman's Deli out of business for eight months while Volpes Market, established around 1914, closed for good. The market had been established about 100 years earlier by Gaspar Borella as a fruit store. Most recently, Scott and Patti Biederman expanded the store and renamed it Chase St. Market.

As stated above, the people who started these businesses/hotels/homes gave their 'heart and soul' to create a livelihood where they could prosper and benefit the growth of the town. With disaster, they were resilient and persevered to build again in most cases. Yes, there were other fires occurring along Main Street and throughout town, more stories for another time.