

NEW PLYMOUTH

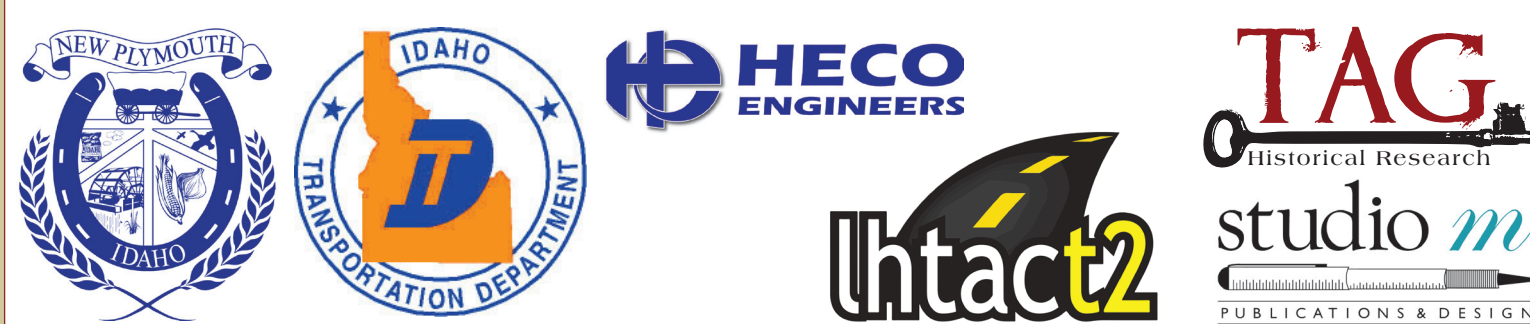
A UNIQUE SHAPE,
A UNIQUE HISTORY

New Plymouth, Idaho, was incorporated in 1896.
It is the only horseshoe-shaped town in Idaho.

SIGN 1 of 6

Follow Horseshoe Park Pathway to learn more!

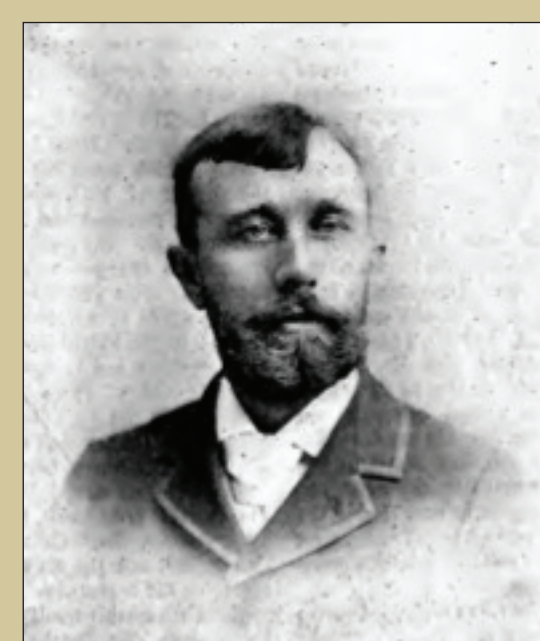
These signs created through a partnership among:



WILLIAM E. SMYTHE AND HIS VISION

“Three years ago I stood in the center of the present site of Plymouth colony, in Payette Valley, and dreamed of a model settlement.” — William Ellsworth Smythe, 1898

William Ellsworth Smythe

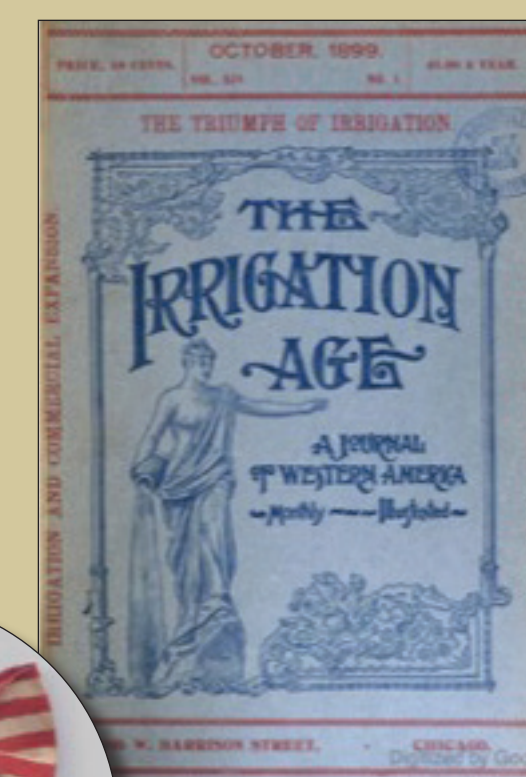


William Ellsworth Smythe.
The Irrigation Age, Volume 14.

New Plymouth, founded as a utopian farm community, was the inspiration of William Ellsworth Smythe, a New England-born journalist and irrigation promoter who played an important role in popularizing the movement toward large-scale federal reclamation projects.

A vision for a model settlement

Smythe worked for newspapers in Boston and Medford, Massachusetts before heading west to Nebraska where he became editor and publisher of the Kearney newspaper, *The Expositor*, in 1888. Smythe became an advocate for irrigation when he witnessed the devastation of the Great Drought of 1890. He promoted smaller farms and believed that 160 acres was more land than a single farmer could successfully irrigate and cultivate. Smythe's theory was that a 20-acre farm could be more efficiently and intensively cultivated. He organized local and state irrigation conventions, helped establish the National Irrigation Congress, founded *The Irrigation Age* magazine, and traveled and lectured extensively about the benefits of irrigation.

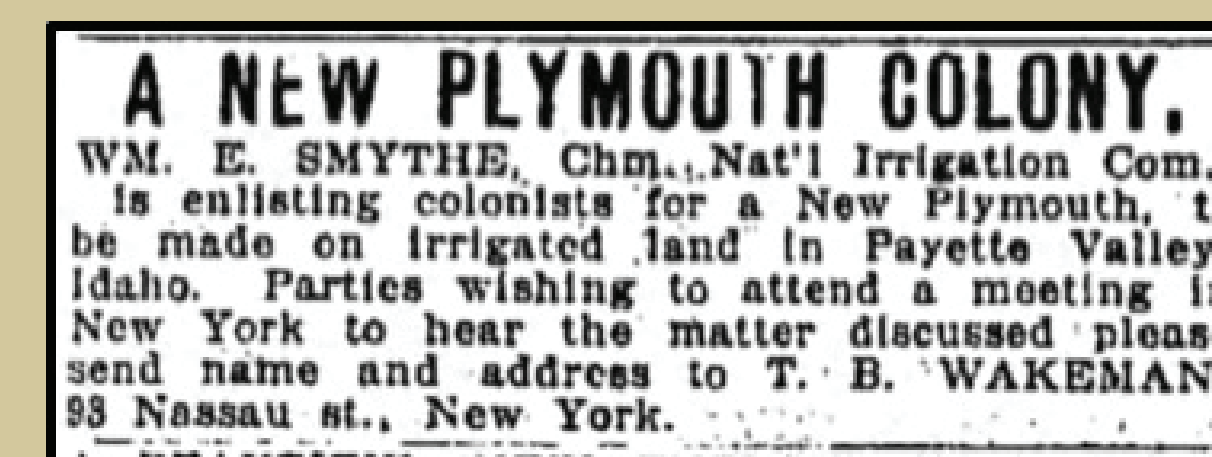


The Irrigation Age
magazine, 1901.



Irrigation Congress Pin. Courtesy
TAG Historical Research.

In 1894, while at a national conference on irrigation in Salt Lake City, Smythe suggested that a colony be created in the arid American West to demonstrate the advantages of irrigated agriculture in areas that produced little rain. His ideal was a farm village colony, where villagers lived in homes at the center of the community and worked farms located around the perimeter. Local industries would also be established to make the village self-sufficient.

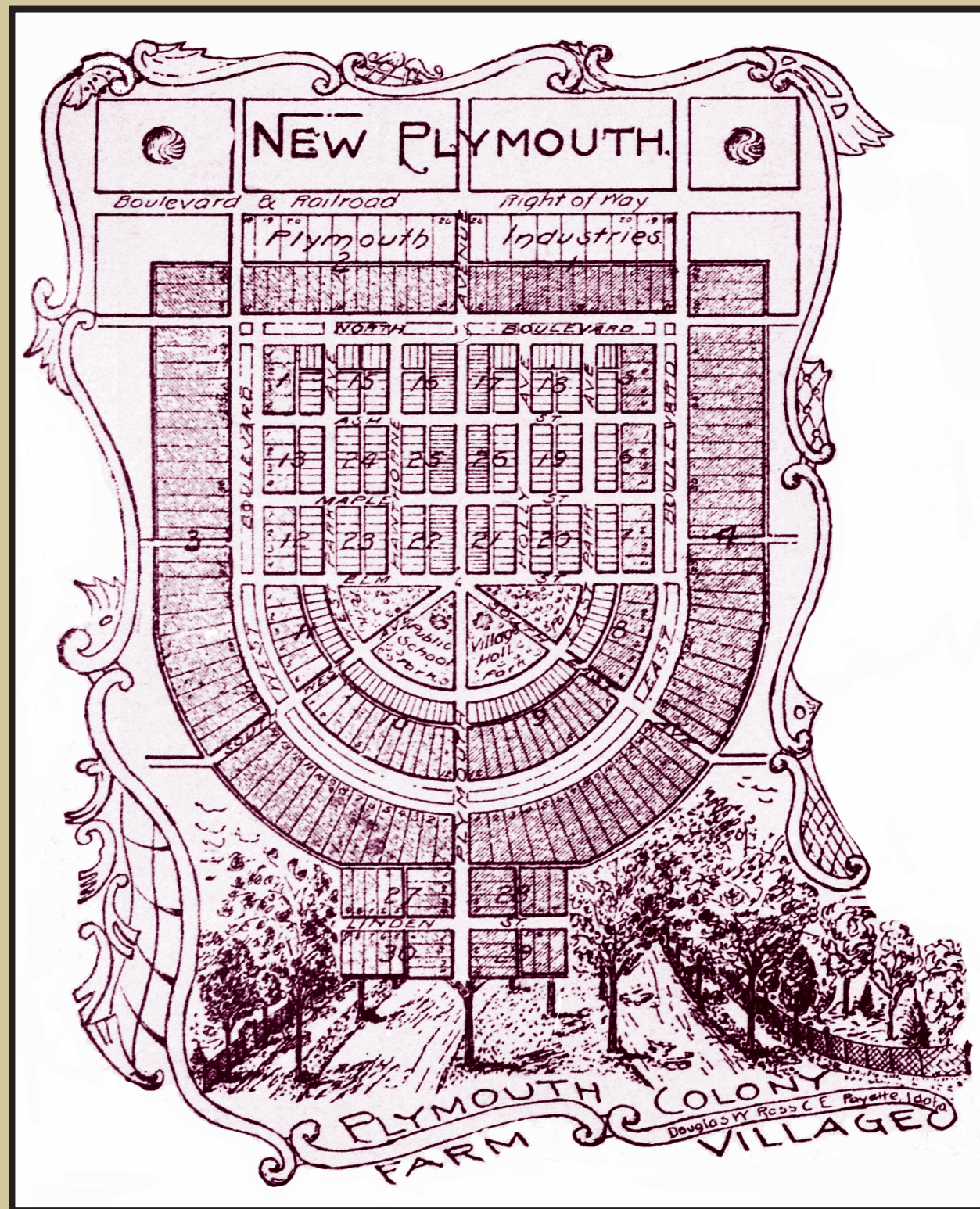


Advertisement from The World (New York, New York, March 17, 1895).

Valley of Opportunity

W.E. Smythe traveled throughout the West looking for a site for his irrigation-based farm village. He found a promising location in the lower Payette Valley and convinced a group of colonists, primarily from Chicago, to go west in 1896 to settle the village of New Plymouth.

Smythe did not settle in New Plymouth because he was involved in other projects, primarily in California, where he moved permanently. Three years after the founding of New Plymouth he returned for a visit and reported to the Boise newspaper, *The Idaho Statesman*, “I am satisfied, from our Plymouth experience, that there are people in every town and city east of the Missouri river who can be had for colonies on arid lands by this method.”



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SIGN 2 of 6

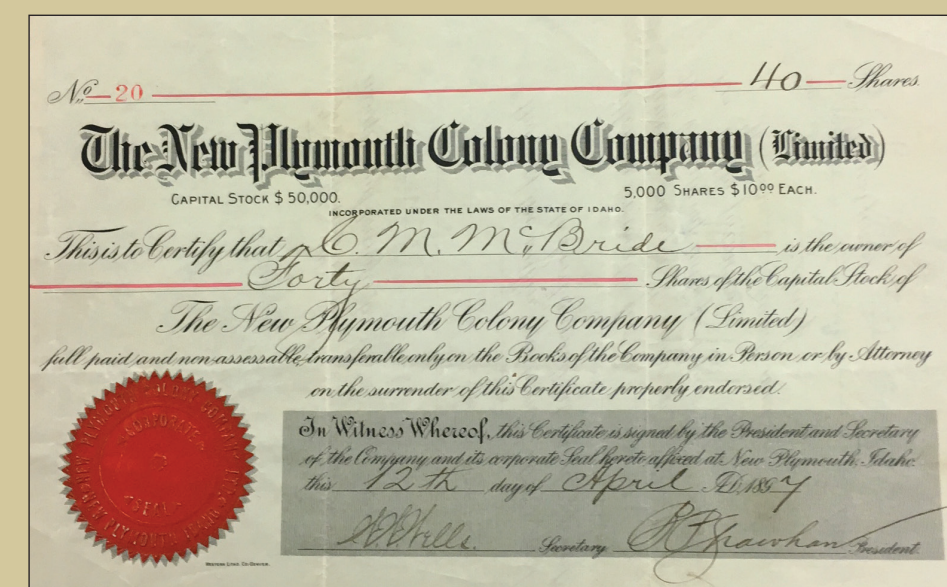
Follow Horseshoe Park Pathway to learn more!



OPPORTUNITY: A NEW COLONY

“The materials of colonization are land, capital, and people.” — William Ellsworth Smythe

Benjamin P. Shawhan: Visionary Partner



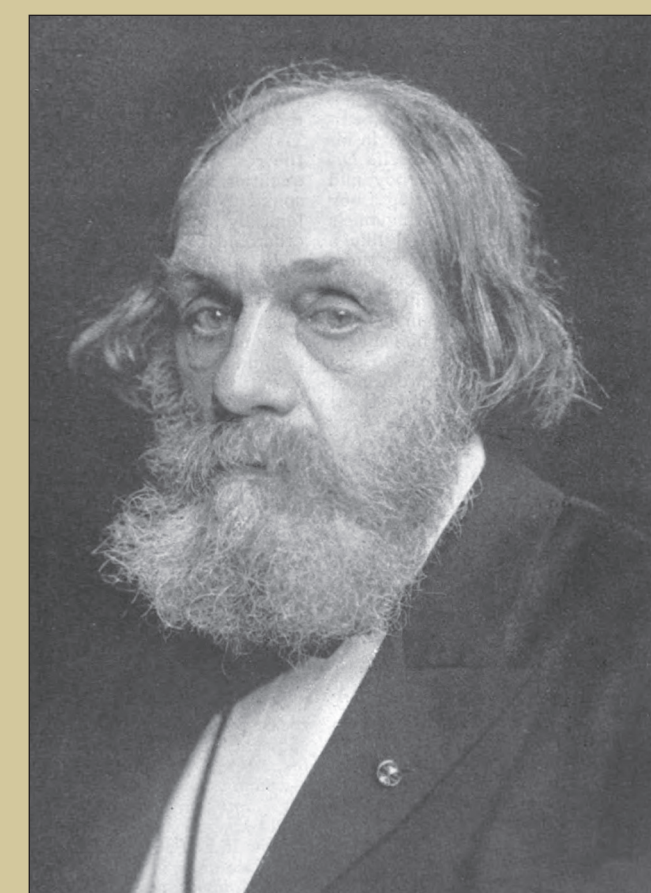
Stock certificate for The New Plymouth Colony Company, signed by Benjamin Shawhan, company secretary, 1897.

Poor health prompted Benjamin P. Shawhan to move west from New York City to Payette in 1892. Like William E. Smythe, he was interested in irrigated agriculture. Inspired by Smythe’s plans, Shawhan helped acquire land for the new village. Smythe included Shawhan

in the advisory committee that he formed that was comprised of business people and promoters from Idaho and other western states.

The Plymouth Society of Chicago

Following a visit to Idaho in 1894, Smythe promoted the planned community at a meeting with movers and shakers in Boston. The colony’s name, “New Plymouth,” was suggested by Edward Everett Hale, a Boston social reformer and author of *The Man Without a Country*. Although no one from Boston joined the colony, the meeting was reported in newspapers across the nation, sparking interest in the project. In March 1895, Smythe held a meeting for potential colonists, where they formed the *Plymouth Society of Chicago*.

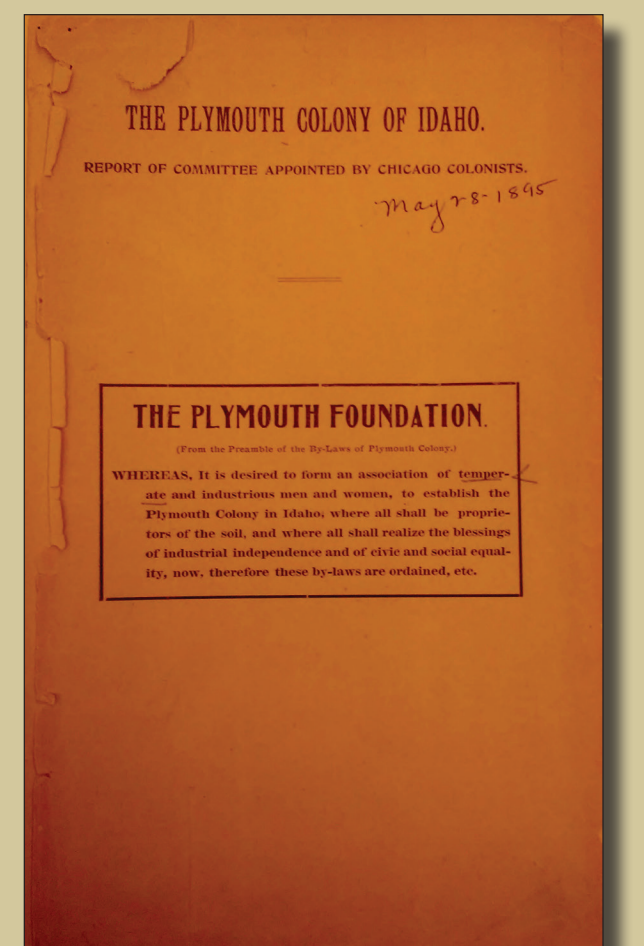


Without a Country. Although no one from Boston joined the colony, the meeting was reported in newspapers across the nation, sparking interest in the project. In March 1895, Smythe held a meeting for potential colonists, where they formed the *Plymouth Society of Chicago*.

Edward Everett Hale, born in 1822, was the son of attorney and newspaper publisher Nathan Hale. Photo public domain.

Eventually, 250 people enrolled. After a series of meetings, Smythe invited a group of two women and five men to visit Idaho so they could see the proposed location for themselves. After their trip to Idaho’s Payette Valley, the group reported, “The condition of soil, climate, and water supply are more favorable than represented, and the location is as advantageous for a colony of people who decide to engage in fruit and diversified farming as can be found in the Pacific Northwest.”

Thirty-five families initially moved to Idaho to build the *New Plymouth Farm Village*, which became one of Idaho’s most notable communities.



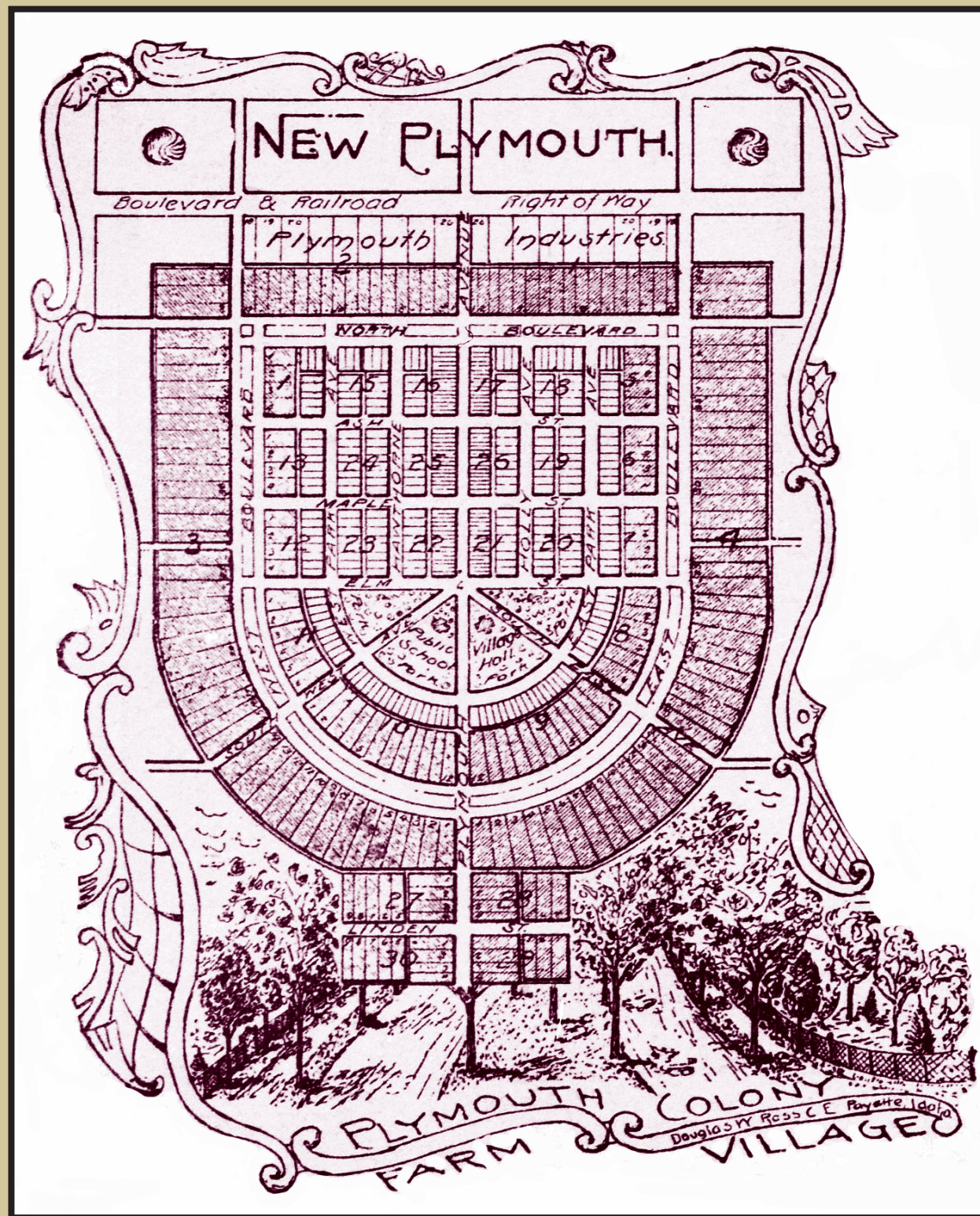
Cornelius and Annetta McBride Collection. Courtesy Idaho State Historical Society.



Top: Page from promotional pamphlet for New Plymouth Colony, 1897. Idaho State Historical Society Vertical File.

Right: New Plymouth pioneers. Left to Right: Louis Wachter, Mr. Stevens (first name unknown), Jim Creasy, and Walter Burke. Courtesy Idaho State Historical Society, 78-2.79.





NEW PLYMOUTH

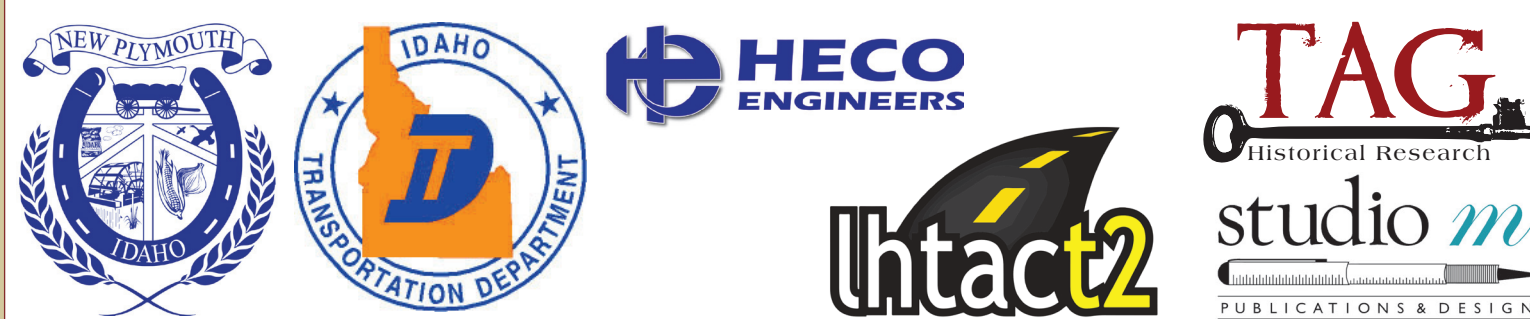
A UNIQUE SHAPE,
A UNIQUE HISTORY

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SIGN 3 of 6

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NEW PLYMOUTH TAKES SHAPE

“Thus we live within one hundred feet of our neighbor, within easy reach of school and church, in a village laid and beautified by ourselves, where each individual may enjoy the aggregated effort of a community, and yet be the sole owner and proprietor of his farm and “Home Acre.”

— New Plymouth Colony Promotional Brochure, 1896

An Un-u-sual Plan

Initially, the plan for New Plymouth was a rectangular grid with a central section reserved for public and commercial buildings, similar to the plans used for towns across southern Idaho. The final design was shaped like the letter “u,” a horseshoe shape with the open-end facing north.

Douglas William “D.W.” Ross: Irrigation Engineering Pioneer

The design of the uniquely shaped town was the creation of Canadian-born civil engineer Douglas William “D.W.” Ross. In 1886, he moved to the U.S., where he first worked as a railroad company surveyor. In 1890, he became a topographer at the U.S. Geological Survey. There, he was assistant to Arthur D. Foote, who surveyed for desert land reclamation. Ross was fascinated with irrigation, and eventually managed irrigation systems in Idaho and Washington. He was a Payette resident when he created the design for New Plymouth in 1895. He served as Idaho’s state engineer from 1899 to 1903, and was supervising engineer for the newly-created U.S. Reclamation Service (now Bureau of Reclamation). In 1908, Ross moved to California, where he continued to work as an engineer for irrigation projects until his death in 1935. New Plymouth, with its horseshoe shape, is Ross’ lasting legacy.



D. W. Ross. Photo from The Irrigation Age, Volume 8: January, 1895.

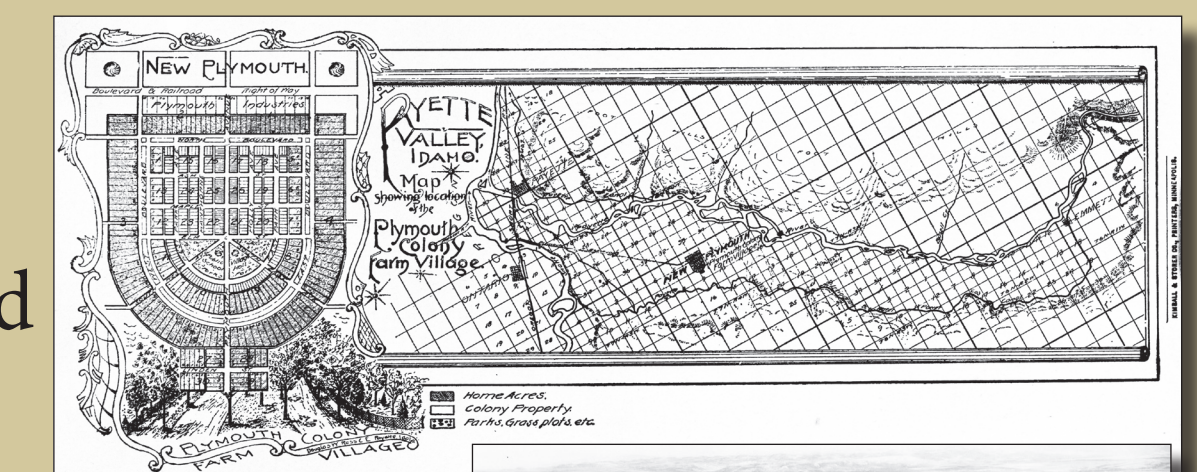
“Home Acres”

The village plan (“plat”) was completed and lots were sold to colonists for \$20 an acre, with company stock at \$20 a share. With the purchase of 20 acres, they received a “home acre” in the village. During the winter of 1895-96, the 325-acre town site was laid out, and a village hall and two “tract” houses were built.

By spring of 1896, colonists from Chicago, Nebraska, Montana, and other regions arrived in New Plymouth to build their homes and develop their farms. An 1896 brochure described the town, which “resembles a great boot heel,” with “Home Acres” 100-ft-wide by 435-ft-long, bordering a two-mile boulevard, with a 40-ft roadway on either side. Smaller lots were planned inside the horseshoe, leaving the middle area for business buildings. The brochure noted that on these acres, “...colonists

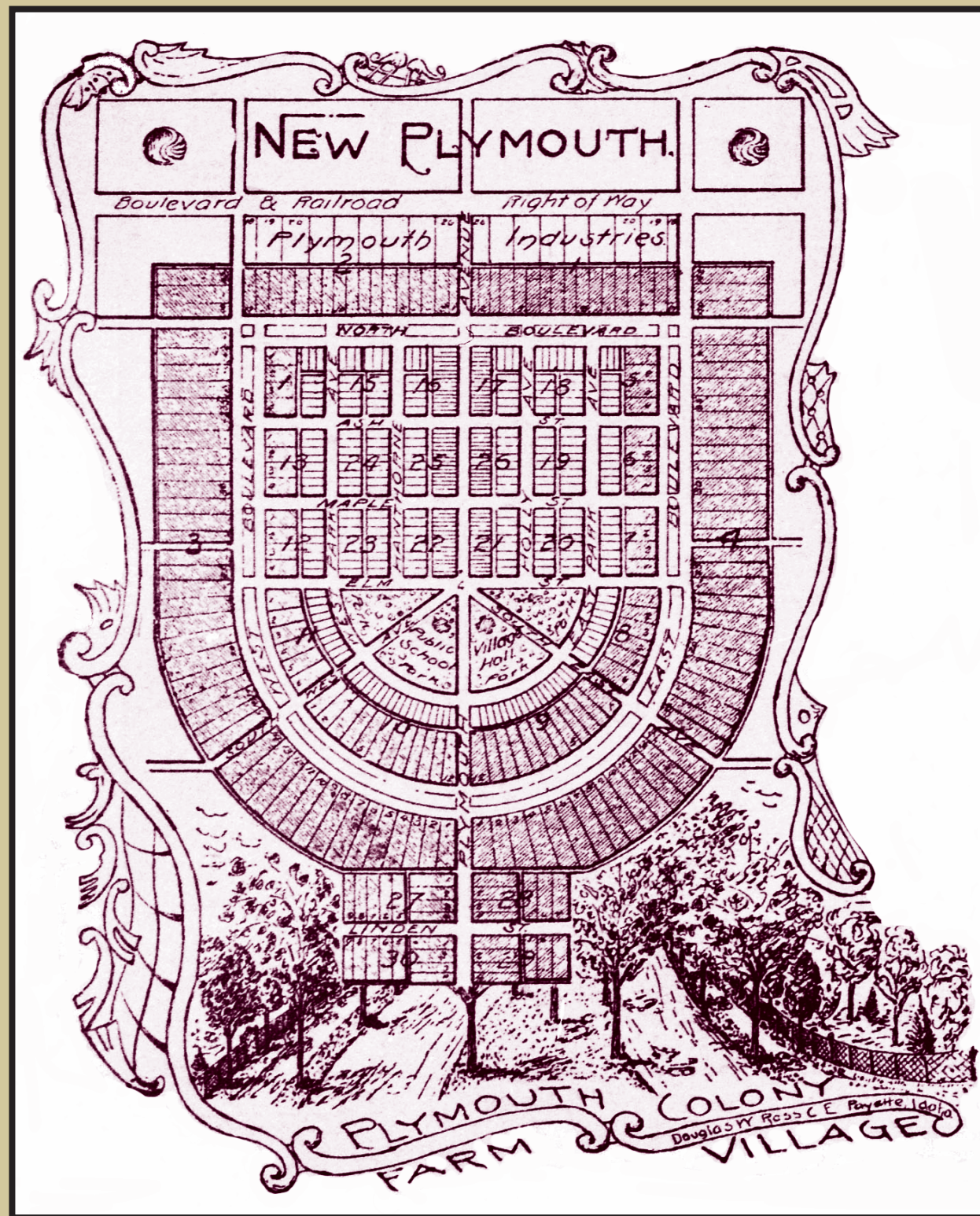


New Plymouth colonists’ first picnic, 1897. By Thanksgiving, the Idaho Statesman noted colonists’ work to build homes and clear orchard lands, “they are certainly endowed with a great deal of energy and grit...”



New Plymouth map. Idaho State Historical Society, 74-2-19. Village photo, Idaho State Historical Society 79-124-70.

can raise everything necessary for the family and to spare, and at the same time make a house, the beauty of which need only be governed by the taste and resources of the owner.”



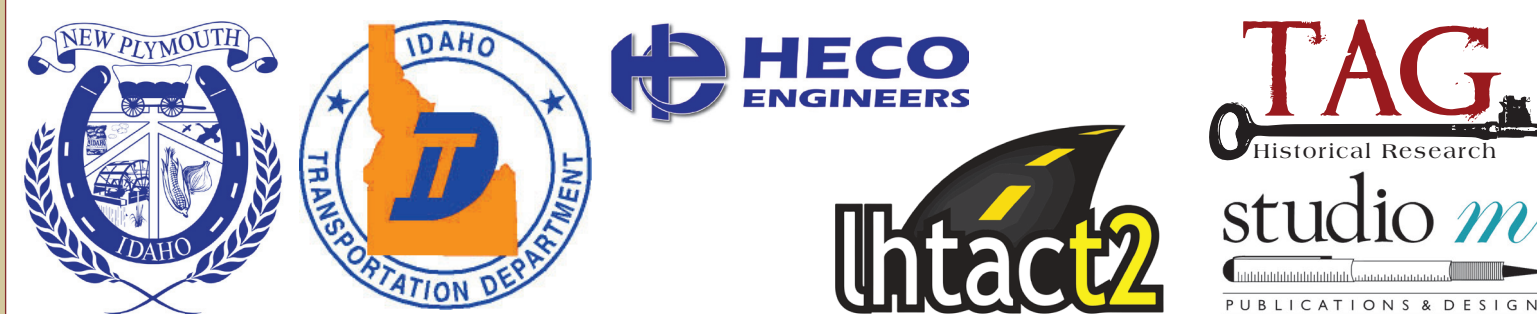
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WATERWAYS: PAYETTE VALLEY IRRIGATION

“To be able to turn on the rain, and then turn it off again, and that’s what irrigation does.”

— Attributed to Benjamin P. Shawhan

Irrigation in New Plymouth

New Plymouth and the Payette Valley are known for orchards that produce excellent apples, peaches, cherries, and other fruits. In the arid west, irrigation systems are necessary to provide water for orchards, sugar beets, and potatoes.

Early settlers in the Payette Valley established homesteads along streams where water could be easily diverted to irrigate the low-lying farmland. Colonists from New Plymouth formed an irrigation district to divert Payette River water to their land.

The area around New Plymouth is served by two canals: the Noble Ditch and the Farmers Canal, diverted from the Payette River. The combined canals diverge into two separate canals that are independently owned.



Left: Fruit packers. Courtesy Idaho State Historical Society, 78-22.4A.
Right: Payette Valley orchard, circa 1910. Courtesy TAG Historical Research.



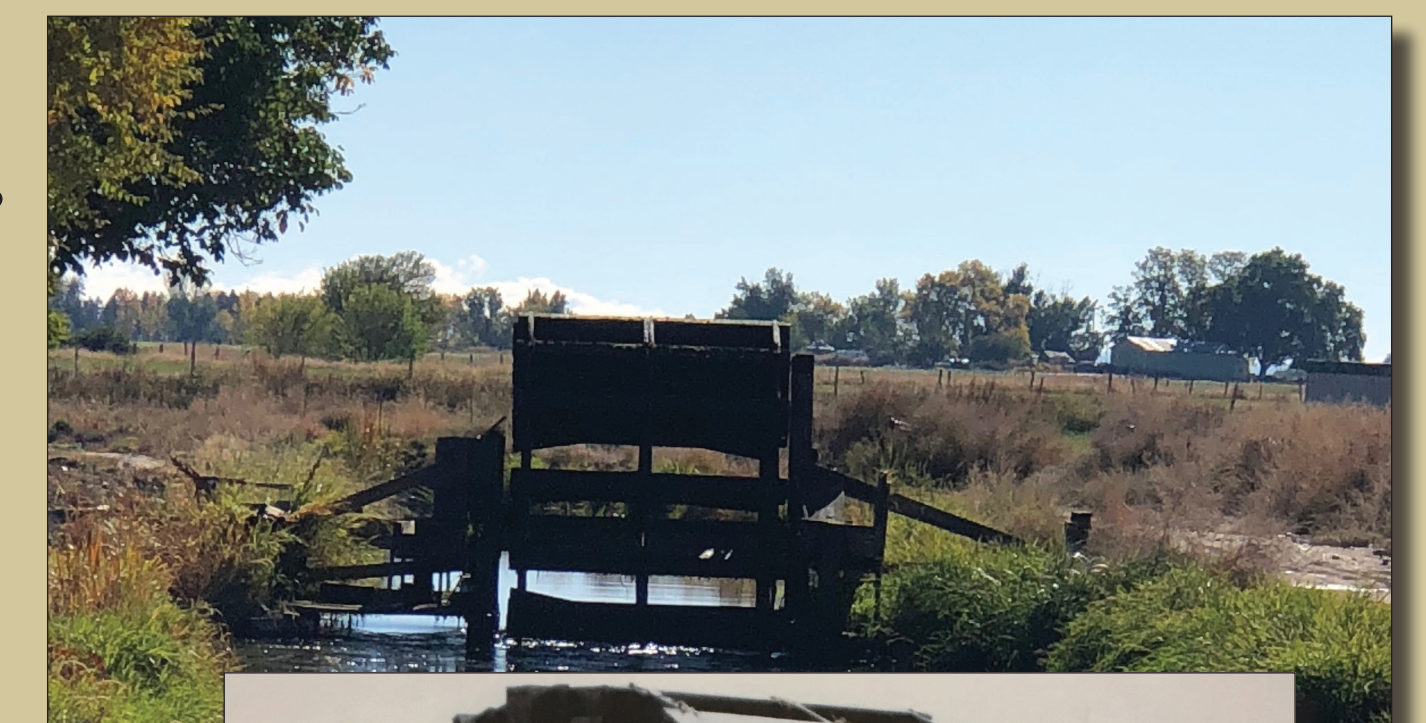
Payette Valley advertisement, 1907. Courtesy Cornelius and Annetta McBride Collection MS263, Idaho State Historical Society.

Waterwheel Wonder

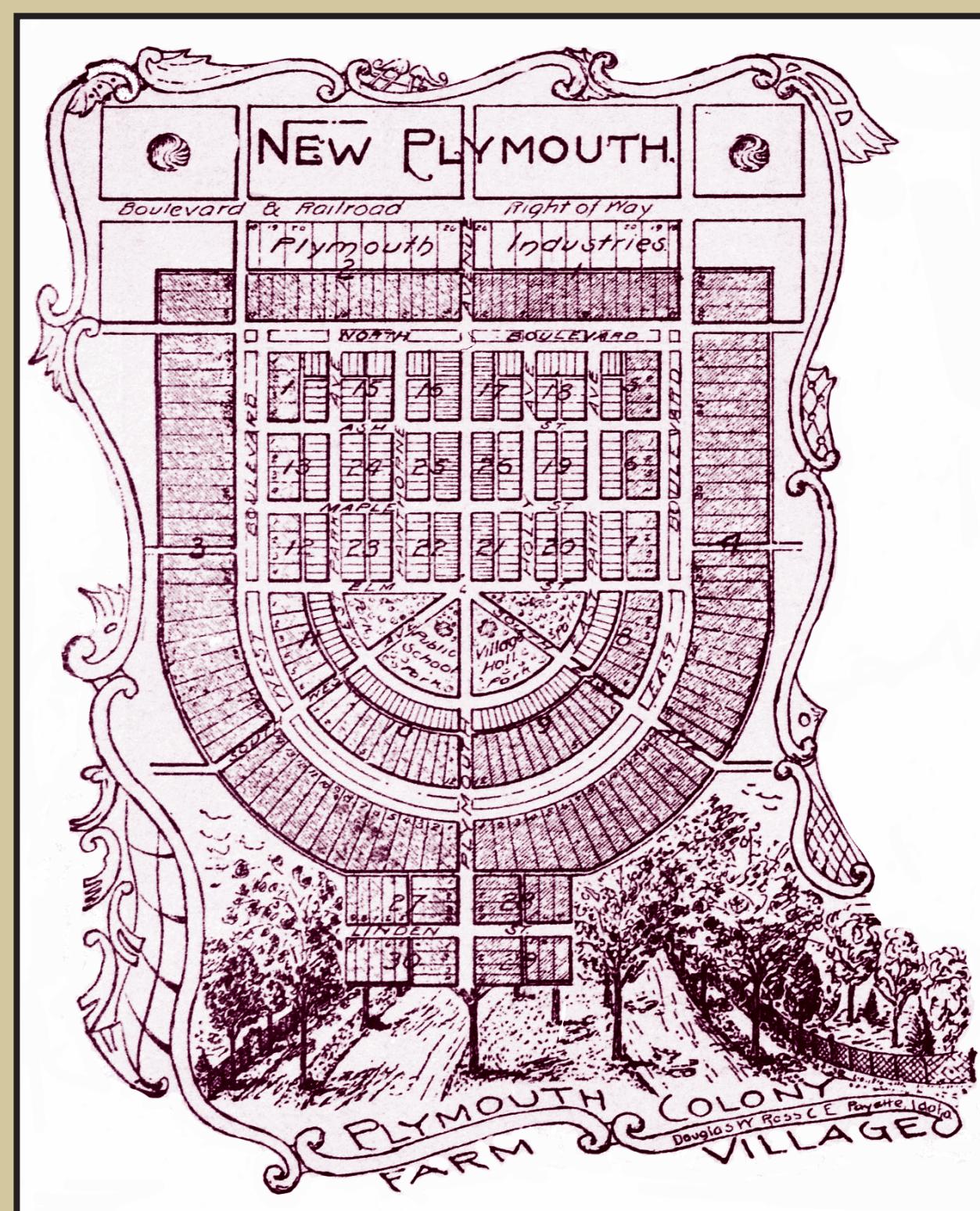
By the beginning of the 20th century, farmers needed help lifting water from the river to crops and orchards. Irrigation districts placed water wheels in their canals to lift the water into the lateral ditches so that it could reach needed areas. At first, farmers built their own designs for the wheels, and some were as wide as the canals, but they were easily destroyed by refuse and other items that floated down the canal.

According to long time New Plymouth resident *Don Chandler*, technological advances helped farmers design a more efficient waterwheel. The new design was narrower, and less than half the width of the canal, built with a “millrace,” a concrete bypass to allowed debris to pass the wheel.

New Plymouth has been famous for these waterwheels, even into today. Look for them along the irrigation canal, a short drive east of town.



Waterwheels near New Plymouth, 2018.



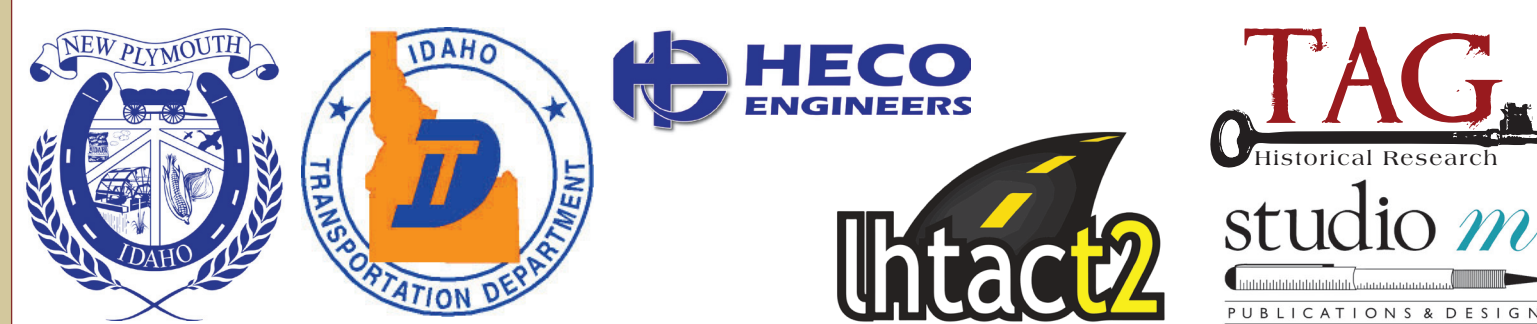
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WHERE DREAMS BECAME REALITY

“No more a weary waste of sagebrush and rabbit haunts, it is fast becoming an Eden in the desert...” — *Idaho Daily Statesman*, June 24, 1896

Building a Town: New Plymouth “Firsts”

New Plymouth colonist *Mrs. Phoebe Lynch* recalled that in 1898 when she arrived in New Plymouth, the business section of town consisted of *Compton and Steel*, a combined grocery and post office, two colony houses and village hall, a ditch office and a blacksmith shop.

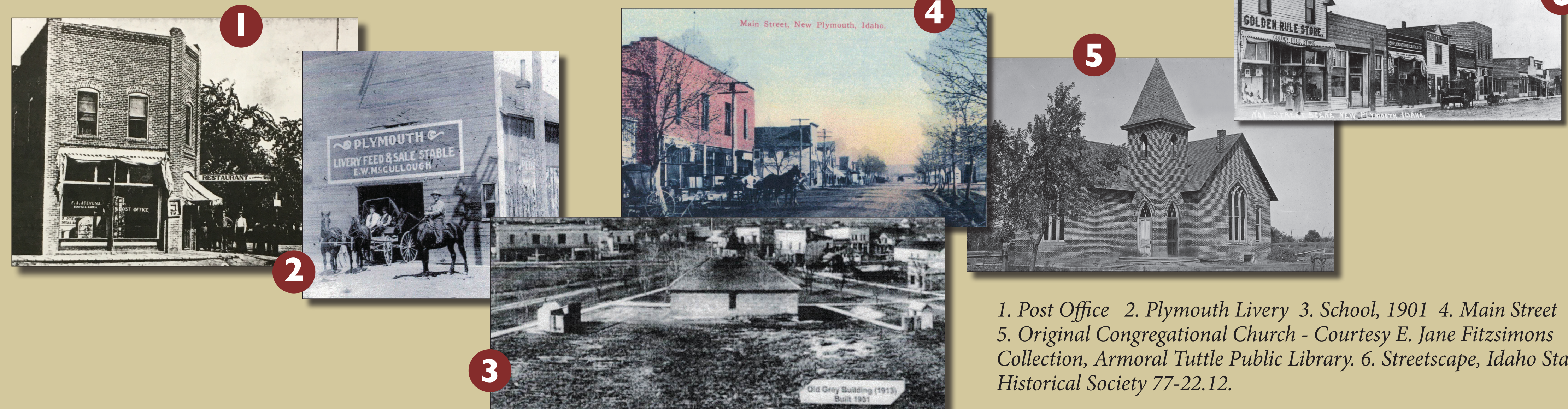
The *Village Hall*, built for town stockholder meetings, served many purposes. It was used by clubs, social organizations, and churches, as well as for a library. Until the school was built in 1901, students also used the Village Hall for classes. The building still stands today, although moved from its original Plymouth Street location to Elm Street, across from the First Baptist Church; it is remodeled into a private residence.

Colonist *Walter Burke*, a blacksmith, opened one of New Plymouth’s first businesses. Many of New Plymouth’s original colonists were from Chicago, but *Walter and Katie Burke*, who arrived in November 1896, came to New Plymouth from Montana. According to local lore, Walter transacted the first business in town, charging 25 cents for a job. Eventually he sold the blacksmith shop and operated a large orchard.

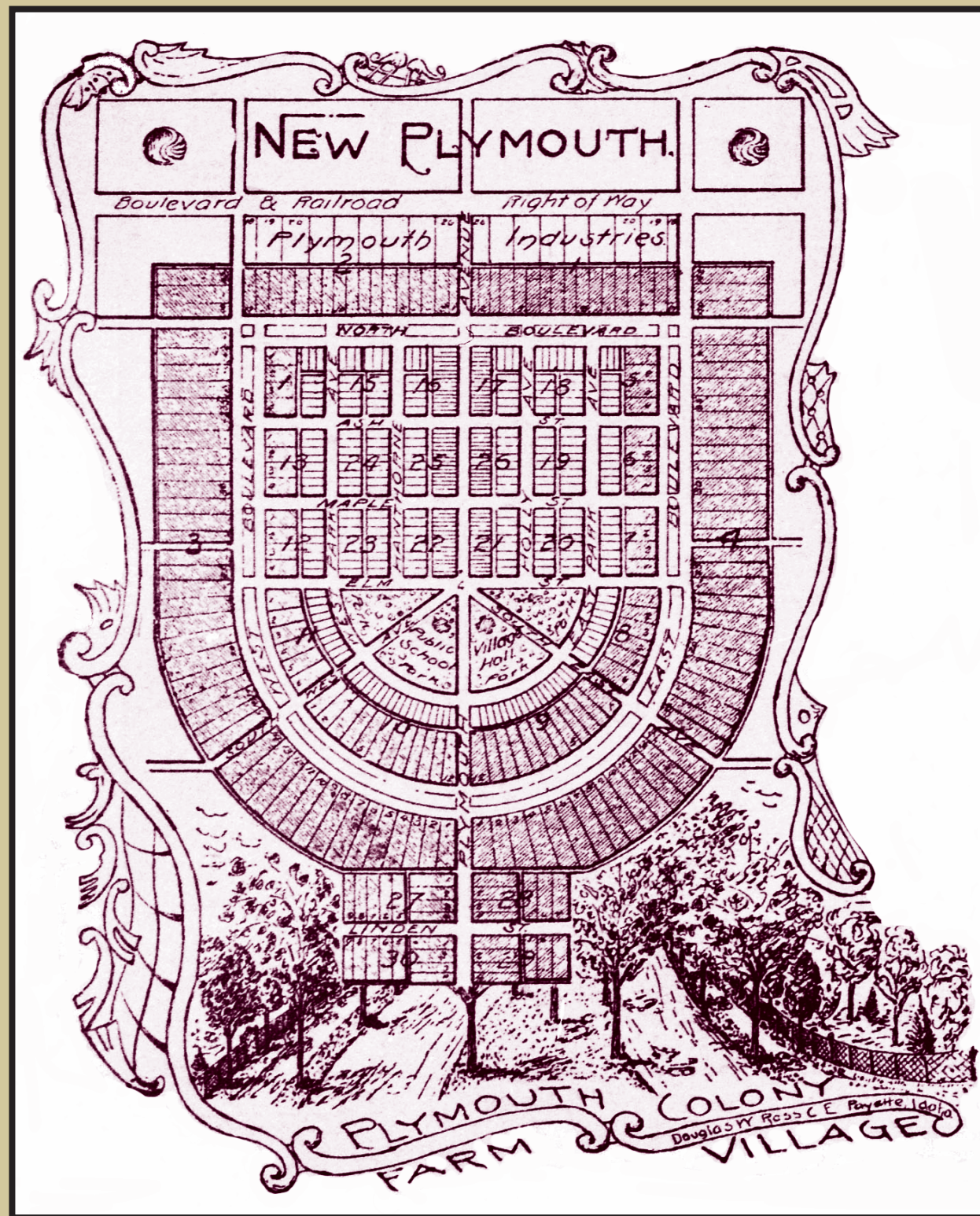
On Elm Street, *E. W. McCullough* operated the *Plymouth Livery*. Livery stables were important during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, during a period when horse-drawn transportation required stables for animal boarding with hay and grain storage. Later, McCullough’s livery building was moved to Maple Street as *Tuttle’s Blacksmith Shop*.

In 1901, on Southwest Avenue, colonists began construction of the *Congregational Church*, which was completed in 1902. The original church, at Southwest Park Avenue and Southwest Avenue, was replaced by a new building in 1920. It was designed by the Boise-based architectural firm *Tourtellotte and Hummel*, and it still stands today.

By 1910, Plymouth Avenue, the town’s main street, was bustling with banks, mercantile shops and hardware stores. There were no saloons, however, unlike many western towns. The town charter prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages to any colonizer, with the penalty of forfeiting his or her land if caught. This ordinance remained in effect for fifty years.



1. Post Office 2. Plymouth Livery 3. School, 1901 4. Main Street
5. Original Congregational Church - Courtesy E. Jane Fitzsimons Collection, Armorial Tuttle Public Library. 6. Streetscape, Idaho State Historical Society 77-22.12.



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BUILDING COMMUNITY

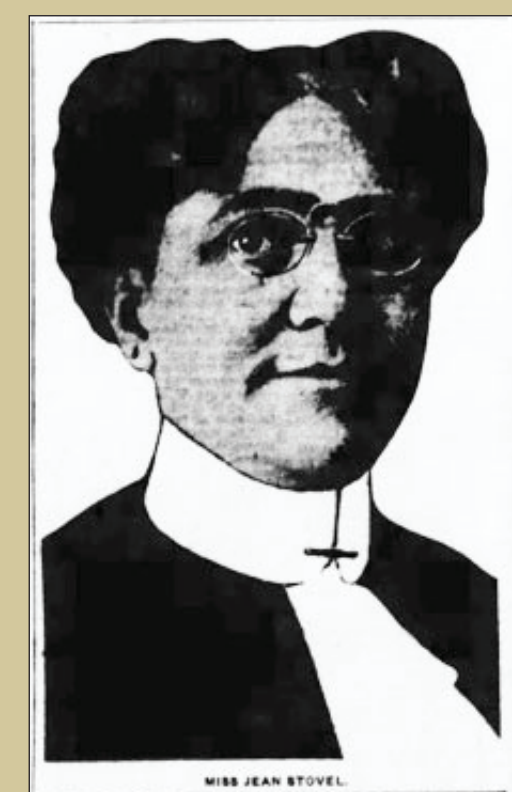
“A school marm, tired of training the young mind has proved beyond all question that a woman can run a farm and a stenographer and bookkeeper, casting in their lot together, not only superintend but work their farm and have decided that ‘girl bachelors’ can not do better than come west and get a home.” — Idaho Daily Statesman, June 29, 1896

New Plymouth Colonists

The initial group of people who chose to build a colony at New Plymouth came from every vocation. They included contractors and builders, dentists and ministers, blacksmiths and business people. Most were men, but several women also chose to meet the challenge of creating a new home in the arid west.

“Girl Bachelors”

Emma Vesey and Jennie Stovel were among the first colonists. They had a Home Acre, and cultivated ten acres of land planted in alfalfa, along with vegetables and fruit trees. The women augmented their farm income by running a store and post office, and teaching. Jennie stayed in New Plymouth for 14 years until she sold her farm and moved to Sacramento, California, where she began a career in advertising.



Original colonist Jennie Stovel was one of the village's first teachers.

A Farmer Dentist

Dr. J.B. Burns, a dentist from Chicago, planted an orchard, wheat, and oats on his twenty-acre tract. Dr. Burns did not depend solely on his farm acreage because he also practiced dentistry in Payette.

Drawing Lots

Colonists drew numbers to determine their acreages. Dr. Cornelius and Annetta McBride drew Lot Number 1. They chose 40 acres a half-mile south of New Plymouth, and planted it in fruit trees. The McBrides are credited with planting the first commercial orchard in Payette Valley (April, 1897).

The Puritan Club

Formed by the women colonists, *The Puritan Club* was a village improvement organization. One of the club's first beautification projects was planting hundreds of trees along the village streets. Clubwomen and blacksmith Walter Burke hand-watered the trees so they would not die. Today, a few of the original trees still stand in Horseshoe Park.



Annetta McBride and her son Francis. Courtesy Cornelius and Annetta McBride Collection, MS263, Idaho State Historical Society.



New Plymouth was lined with trees when it was first developed, which resulted from the women colonists' efforts to ensure a beautiful village. Top photo: Idaho Historical Society, 78-2-77. Left: Idaho Historical Society, P1987-19-25.