

WAUKESHA COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM

Classroom Activity—Victorian Life & the Springs Era Program

Postcards from the Springs

Objective: Students will design postcards depicting a springhouse, then imagine they are Springs-Era vacationers and write letters home describing their experiences in Waukesha.

Note: This activity can be done in conjunction with the Spring Water Label activity, with the students depicting the same spring they have invented.

Materials:

Half-sheets of cardstock or heavy paper
Crayons, colored pencils, or markers
Pencils

Backstory:

During the Springs Era, postcards were very popular. People would buy them to keep as souvenirs or to send to friends and family. Many postcards of Waukesha depicted springhouses, which were highly decorated and very beautiful pavilion structures. Others showed hotels like the Fountain Spring House, theaters like the Silurian Casino, and other sites around Waukesha. Visitors often purchased albums for their souvenir postcards, which they would take home and show to their friends just as they would show photo albums. When people sent postcards to their friends or family, they wrote about the places they visited, the activities they engaged in, and the people they met in Waukesha.

Activity:

- Pass out half-sheets of cardstock and drawing materials, and instruct students to draw a picture of a springhouse. Be sure to also include a label with the name of the spring, and “Waukesha, Wisconsin.” Refer to images of Waukesha springhouses for ideas.
- Have students imagine they are Springs-Era visitors to Waukesha and compose a letter home on the back of the postcard. You may wish to brainstorm a list of Springs-Era activities on the board for ideas.

Questions to Think About:

- Why do you think people of the Springs Era sometimes preferred to send postcards, rather than letters, to their friends and family back home?
- If you were designing a postcard depicting a scene from Waukesha today, what would you put on it? Why?