

Season's Greetings



From



THE PALMYRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

DECEMBER 1986

Dear Members:

My five years as an officer in the Palmyra Historical Society have provided me with growth and experience as a member of a hard working and dedicated group of people. I have seen this group of people change an unkempt building into a Registered Historical Landmark, a carriage house full of a multitude of items sorted, cleaned and auctioned. These hard working people have kept the tradition of Old Settlers Day, auctions, rummage sales and money-making projects to help our organization be known and kept alive. Our organization has offered our door open to many visitors on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. Our video tapes of our Old Settlers are available for viewing by organizations and families. Our organization is for all.

I thank the Palmyra Historical Society for the opportunity to serve as a board member, as its vice-president and president.

Donna Fanshaw
President

PALMYRA HISTORICAL SOCIETY MARKS 10TH ANNIVERSARY

Ten years ago, in August of 1976, a small group of Palmyra citizens gathered for the purpose of discussing the preservation of the community's heritage. From that gathering, our local Historical Society developed and it was officially chartered on October 26, 1976.

Now, with over 200 members and many more contributors, the Society is making rapid strides in developing its property and research facilities. A fine video-tape collection of the recollections and experience of elder citizens has been developed,

the Carlin House has been restored and furnished, many projects have been designed to raise money for the continuance of our activities and an informative newsletter is published five times a year to keep area persons and members informed and to chronicle local history.

The future has been brightened with the start of a building fund which the Society hopes will culminate in the building of a museum adjacent to the Carlin House.

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OLD SETTLERS COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN
Steve Steinhoff

In previous columns I have brought to you some of the stories and folklore of the Indians who once roamed the shores of the Scupernong and the rice lakes. Now we are going to greet the white man and join him in settling the area. Again some will be fact, maybe in some instances even a bit distorted by the failings of human memory, and some will be folklore.

This is the story of the beginnings and growth of a small Wisconsin village and the men and women who pioneered the area and made it prosper. It is a story which was duplicated many times in this state, since Palmyra is a typical small village nestled between two lakes, one natural and the other man-made, in the scenic Kettle Moraine.

Palmyra was birthed to the sound of the swinging ax of Cyrus Horton, who chose this area for settlement in 1839. About two years earlier, Daniel Melendy had come to the area immediately to the east and in 1839 he purchased many acres of land from the government. This is the area known as Melendy's Prairie. It was resold in smaller plots to settlers who came from Vermont and also Cornwall, England. Among the families represented were well-known local names such as Sherman, Chapin, Piper, Burton, Carlin, Weld, Bolser, Pierce, Turner, Lean, Peardon, Gates, Stacy, Allen, Ball, Crerar, Uglow, Gilbert, Calkins, Cooper, Reich, Pett, and many others. Many of these families also played important roles in the story of Palmyra.

Wisconsin had become a territory on July 4, 1836 and the land west of Milwaukee, which was still a small settlement, was attractive to the settlers arriving from the east. It was land easily available and needed only hard work and accommodation with the Indians to provide a good home.

The chief attraction to Horton and those who came after him was the potential of the Scupernong Valley and its swift flowing creek. Back in those early times water was a source of both power and transportation, as well as a necessity for life. Settlements, almost invariably, were founded on waterways.

Word of the desirability of the swift flowing Scupernong spread to the neighboring Whitewater and Cold Spring settlements and the pioneer era of Palmyra was soon in full

swing. Abram Brinks, who operated a sawmill on the Whitewater Creek at Cold Spring arrived here in 1842 and lost no time in attempting to harness the Scupernong to mill-power. However, fate had not meant for Brinks to be the founder of a settlement in this area. While still working on the foundation of the new sawmill, he accepted a generous offer for the property from David J. and Samuel R. Powers.

The Powers completed the construction of the mill and celebrated Christmas Day 1842 by sawing the first lumber in the immediate area. The first frame building was erected by Cyrus Horton.

David and Samuel Powers were operators of the Whitewater Hotel when they heard of Brink's activities on the Scupernong. Aware that lumber and flour were in greatest demand and that both needed water power for milling, they journeyed to the site to look at the property. The area had a different appearance from the present, a large-spreading, grassy meadow covering what is now Spring Lake. Taking an instant interest in the tract, they offered to buy from Brink, but thought the asking price too high so they made the return trip to Whitewater. Discussing the merits of the deal on the trip, they changed their minds and returned the next day to make the purchase and begin completion of the mill. This change of mind is the cornerstone on which rests the story of Palmyra, for it was David Powers who was the founding father of the community and who is remembered in the structure of the Powers Memorial Library which was donated by the Powers family.

The Powers were students of the bible and, impressed by the oasis-like appearance of the area, named the plot "Palmyra" after a city in an oasis of the Syrian desert. The area south and east of Palmyra is sandy and together with the springs which were later to make the village famous, the name is most appropriate.

Our story will continue in the next newsletter.

