**History of Palmyra**

The land on which Palmyra now stands was originally inhabited by the Lenni Lenape Indians to whom the white man gave the name Delawares, who were members of the Algonquin family. This Indian tribe once enjoyed great dignity and power. Other Algonquin tribes settling in Pennsylvania were the Shawnees, the Nanticokes and Conoys. Tribes of the Iroquoian family of Indians living in Pennsylvania were the Susquehannocks, the Conestogas, and the Tuscaroras.

The first white men came into this area about 1650, or before, and were explorers or traders. The explorers were mainly concerned with scouting the new territory and gathering first-hand information for the future purchase of tracts of land. The traders were concerned mainly with trade with the Indians. They carried with them the usual stock of trading goods such as blankets, beads, kettles, iron axes, guns, etc. to trade for the pelts of fur bearing animals.

It has been said that a trading post with a stockade built by Indian traders was located several hundred yards north of the 300 block of West Main Street. Early citizens tell of a pond, and the outlines of a stockade could be seen years ago. A study of the cultural remains of the Indian campsites with their arrow points, axes and tools gives proof of the various tribes who used this valley as a hunting ground.

The only remaining thing to remind us of the Indian inhabitation of the area is the names they gave to the streams and mountains - Swatara Creek, the Indian name Swahadowry, corrupted from Schada-dawa, means in Susquehanna Indian "where we feed on eels" - Quitapahilla Creek, corrupted from Cuitpehelle, meaning "a spring that flows from the ground among pines" - Kittatiny hills, corrupted from Kittochtiny, a Delaware word meaning "the endless hills." There were several reasons why the early settlers were drawn to this area to build their homes and raise their families. The first was the traders who went back to the established settlements with glowing accounts of the good rich land and pure streams with fish and game in abundance. Another reason was the desire of William Penn to found a colony of small independent farmers. In his advertisements of his promise in the Eastern European countries, he stressed the opportunity for a poor man to own land. In addition, Penn's charter of civil rights and freedom of religion appealed to those people who desired these rights and were living in virtual serfdom.

In the beginning, a large portion of the land in Pennsylvania, perhaps most of it, was occupied by the settlers without legal rights, as squatters. Squatter rights were favored because of the abundance of good land, loose business methods of the proprietaries, long distance to the land office, overwhelming number of settlers, and slow method of settling the titles of the Indians. Most of the early settlers who settled in this area known as the "back country" during 1717-1740, especially the German and Scotch-Irish immigrants, did not take the trouble to acquire title by legal rights but simply squatted on unoccupied land. Because of this squatter method of settlement, it is difficult and sometimes impossible to trace family migrations and/or land record titles, however, an investigation of early land records indicates clearly that Palmyra and the surrounding area was settled by two different European nationalities - namely, the Scotch-Irish and the German Palatinates.

The Scotch-Irish were Scotchmen who had migrated to Ireland under Elizabeth and James I, but as time passed, they became dissatisfied with the rule of the English authorities and the native Irish. They came to America in large numbers because of political, religious, and economic reasons, although the economic reason was the most compelling. They were a hardy, self-reliant and courageous people who adapted to the wilderness and the frontier, and they preferred that way of life. They led the westward advance of settlements and therefore were the first line of defense against the Indians. Being of a restless nature, and not mixing well with the German element, they moved westward into Cumberland County. They were political minded and took an active interest in government once they were established. They were Presbyterians, and you can trace their movements from Philadelphia westward by the churches they built on the way, Donegal in Lancaster County, Paxtang near Harrisburg, Derry at Hershey, and Silver Spring near Carlisle.

Over the passing years most all of the Scotch-Irish have died away or moved to another part of the state. There are few indeed today in the Palmyra area who can trace their ancestry to the Scotch-Irish who settled here. Many of these early settlers are buried at Old Derry Church and on the "Old English" cemetery near Grantville.

The following were early settlers - David Mitchell, John Campbell, Henry Walker, George Aspey, James Caruthers, Thomas Ewing, Widow McCallen, William Sawyer, James Wilson, James Galbraith, John McCord, Robert McClure, and many others.



**OLD DERRY CHURCH  
BUILT A.D. 1720**

The Pennsylvania Germans, or German Palatinates, came from Germany, and have been commonly called the Pennsylvania Dutch. These Germans came to Pennsylvania for religious, Political, and economic reasons. Politically they were oppressed, they were economically poor, and they were severely persecuted for their religious beliefs. Like the Scotch-Irish the Germans were clannish, and from the beginning tried to keep to themselves. Throughout Pennsylvania land the prevailing language was German, that, and the differences of religion kept the Germans from mixing either with the English or Scotch-Irish. Most of the German immigrants were farmers, and as a class they flourished best in rural sections. They were not politically minded and let the Quakers run the government. To them farming was a way of life, not merely a means of livelihood. The contributions of the Germans was the promotion of agriculture, in which they excelled all other groups. They were conservative, religious, frugal, and hard-working people who lived close to the soil and added an element of strength to the state and nation.

Unlike the Scotch-Irish, the Pennsylvania Germans stayed on the land they loved, and it is not uncommon even today to find farms that have been handed down from father to son for several generations. It is also true that many of the present citizens of this area can claim these original German immigrants as their ancestors.



**BINDNAGLE CHURCH**

The following were early settlers - John Deininger, John Ober, John Bindnagle, John Early, Joseph Carmany, Michael Killinger, Johannes Bowman, Jacob Naftzger, Jacob Ricker, Joseph Forney, Anthony Hemperly, John Nye, Hans Kettering, John Gingerich, John Zimmerman, and many others.

From the time of Braddock's defeat at the hands of the French and Indians in 1755 - up until 1783, one of the hazards of the early pioneer farmer was fear o an Indian attack. Every rod of ground had to be cleared with an ax and held with the rifle. Fear of a Indian attack tried the stoutest hearts. Although the settlers in the foothills of the Blue Mountains marked the limit of actual settlement on the part of the white man, the early settlers of Palmyra were close to the mountains and had reason to fear an Indian attack.

These Indian raiding parties, of from 5 to 20 Indians usually in the dead of night fell upon a homestead, scalped the older members of the family, took the children captive, and burned the buildings, retreating back into the mountains. Even men working in the fields in the daytime had armed guards to protect them while at work.

Rupp and Egle in their histories of Lebanon Count list many outrages in the area between Manada and Indiantown Gap along the mountain. It was necessary to build defenses for these Indian raids, and in 1756 the Provincial government built a chain of forts along the Blue Mountains from the Susquehanna at Harrisburg to the Delaware at Easton at distances of from 10-15 miles apart, especially at the gaps in the mountain. These forts usually consisted of a stockade of heavy planks enclosing several block houses which served as quarters for the troops and refuge for the settlers.

It was the duty of the garrison of these forts to patrol the distances between the forts; always on the alert for Indians. There was one such fort erected in what is now Lebanon County. The site is near Inwood named Fort Swatara. Captain Frederick Smith was given orders on January 16, 1756, to build a fort at this place, and any additional works as he might think necessary to make it strong and easy to defend.

The French and Indian War came to an end, and with it came an end to the Indian raids and the soldiers and settlers could return to the more peaceful pursuits of clearing more land and building larger houses and barns.

To Dr. John Palm (1713-1799) is given the credit for the founding of Palmyra. He has been called, and rightly so, Palmyra's First Citizen, because of his prominence as a frontier doctor, a soldier, and as a citizen of long standing in the early community.

The growth of any pioneer area or village was of necessity linked to the distance from a main road or navigable waterway. In the Palmyra area all travel was over "dirt roads" up to the 1800's, either by horseback or stagecoach. The only other transportation was by farm wagon or the large Conestoga wagon.

Most of the early settlers built along the Hill Road north of Palmyra, leading from Millerstown (now Annville) to Derry and on to Harris Ferry. The road from the Bindnagle area to the settlement at Campbelltown crossed this east to west road and then passed through Palmyra. Another of the main routes to and from Palmyra was the Downingtown, Ephrata, and Harrisburg Pike, now commonly known as the "Horseshoe Pike." Over this road the farmers took their grain and produce to Philadelphia and brought back merchandise for the shopkeepers.

A direct route through the valley from Reading to Harrisburg, known as the Berks and Dauphin Turnpike, was opened to traffic in 1817. The turnpike went over the only street of the village, now West Main Street. With the opening of this road came more traffic, the stagecoach carrying passengers and U.S. Mail. With the traffic came increased activity, livery stables and blacksmith shops to care for the horses, and taverns to provide food, drink and lodging for the travelers.

During this period Palmyra had five taverns; Casper Dasher Hostelry, Washington House, Lineweaver House, Rodearmel Inn, and the Philip Matter House' All these taverns were located on West Main Street between the 100 and 700 blocks. They were built b y or before the year 1800. Later, several other hotels were opened: the Railroad House on North Railroad Street near the Reading Railroad, the Eagle Hotel where Lee's 5 & 104 Store stood, and the Washington House and the American House, both on West Main Street.

With the passage of time came the demand for more speed and greater tonnage which resulted in the building of the Union Canal several miles north of the community. The Union Canal connected the Schuylkill River at Reading with the Susquehanna River at Middletown. It was completed in 1827, and store houses were built along its banks. An extensive traffic in lumber, grain, coal, iron ore, gypsum, and merchandise were carried, and in a peak year 267,307 tons were transported. The farmers and merchants in the Palmyra area benefited by the cheaper and faster service.

With the coming of the steam age came another change in travel and transportation. On November 30, 1857, a crowd of curious townspeople lined the railroad tracks as the great "Iron Horse" . . "with whistle tooting, bell ringing, and belch-clouds of black smoke" . . . thundered through Palmyra on the newly built Lebanon Valley Railroad. Two years later it merged with the Philadelphia and Reading Company and was later renamed the Reading Railroad.

The coming of the railroad sounded the death knell for the Union Canal and the Berks and Dauphin Turnpike as a toll road. The railroad brought cheaper and faster methods of transporting people and goods.

As the town grew, stores and small business establishments were opened. Joseph Horstick, son of Conrad, kept a store on what was known as the Witmer property on West Main Street. The building has since been torn down and dismantled. The account books of the store from 1813-1825 show the price and type of goods sold at a typical country store. The books are now in the Library of the Lebanon County Historical Society, through the courtesy of the Horstick family.

Other stores and business establishments were opened: Brunner Carriage Shop, John Henry Plow Factory, Stahle Wooden Farm Implements, Snoddy Wheelwright Shop, Forney-Troxell Furniture and Cabinet Shop (later known as Wm. A. Henry, Furniture and Undertaking), saddle and harness shops, tailor shops, and the Hemperly Organ Factory.

It is quite evident that most of these small business establishments were necessary to the life of a small rural farming community. However, after the Civil War period, a change is noted in the types of business being established. A large grain warehouse was built on North Railroad Street (now Curry's Mill). The first newspaper was printed in 1878 by John M. Hoffa called "The Londonderry Gazette." A lumber and planning mill was opened to satisfy the need for new buildings. To take care of the financial affairs of the community, the Palmyra Bank opened its doors for business in 1887. A large abattoir was built, and it furnished meats to Palmyra and the surrounding area. In 1888 the first shoe factory, the Palmyra Boot & Shoe Co., was formed. Several years later the W. L. Kreider Sons, the J. Landis Shoe Co. and the A. S. Kreider Shoe Co., were also making shoes. There was a knitting mill, a paper box factory, the Annville & Palmyra Gas & Fuel Co., the Eagle Bakery, a bottling works, a dray line, flour and feed mill, and a Market House.

The first chore of the early settler, after the primary tasks of building a home, clearing the land, and ensuring a food supply, was the building of a church. After the church was built, a schoolhouse followed. The Pennsylvania Germans, 'Iike the Scotch-Irish, respected and encouraged education, although they believed that education was related to the church, not the state.

http://www.palmyrapa.com/history/history-of-palmyra.html