

Palmyra Cornwall,
Its History and Forecast

by

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Although the farm region north-east of Palmyra, Wisconsin, that area near the churches of Siloam, Pleasant Valley, and the former Zion churches, might have been called New Cornwall, it never was so named. Especially was this name applicable in the 1850 decade, for at that time the farms were almost contiguously owned by people who had left that craggy south-west corner of England known as Cornwall. These sturdy Cornish were descendants of forbears who were repeatedly defeated but never conquered. Recurrent invasions by Romans, Danes, Saxons left them as they found them__ Celts. Hardship had been bred into their very bones for nearly 2000 years. Little wonder that they could come to a region not the most fertile, in southern Wisconsin, make a living there, and beget men and women to lead others in the give and take of both past and present time.

Courageously these Cornish pioneers left a land of storied cairns and weathered monuments, a land rich in the lore of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, a land even today guarding the ruins of Tintagil Castle, and a region so quaint and beautiful that it is the Mecca of returning travelers and famous artists.

What did these migrants bring with them to this new and of unproved world of Jefferson and Waukesha counties? Not much in the line of worldly possessions but phenomenal amounts of physical hardihood and unlimited ambition. They came to a land covered with trees and undergrowth, to sandy plains and boggy marshes, to land in a glacial boulder train. People who have ever seen this geologic feature in its natural state can realize the back-breaking labor needed to rid the soil of these huge stones. Basalt, granite, and limestone rocks over a foot in diameter, some larger, interspersed at yard distances disheartened many pioneer prospectors, but not these Cornish viewers. They were used to rocks. Convincing proof of their ambition and industry is shown by the boulder fences of their farms. Only the most arduous labor cleared the land of these nocks and made them serve the needs of these land-hungry farmers. Yet they did clear the land, build log cabins,

and later frame houses, raised and educated their children, and accumulated a modicum of wealth from soil, some of which, is considered today beneath subsistence level.

Formerly Cornish men were so noted for their preeminence in wrestling that their prowess became legendary. But their new home presented a different challenging set-up. Farm work was far too strenuous to lend any surplus strength to useless wrestling. Besides these people had a serious attitude toward worthwhile things of life. In this new world opportunity knocked loudly at every door. Everyone could have an education and their hunger for this advantage, their innate ambition, their unswerving purpose was so keen that today one may find their descendants in the professions from New York to California.

In district schools (if any more exists), in grade schools, high schools, colleges and universities, one may find sons and grandsons, the daughters and granddaughters of these Cornish pioneers. The medical profession is also richer for doctors, grandsons of Cornish men who settled in this Palmyra site. Business, too, harked back to this same Cornish background, Mr. Percy Ebbott having been president for years of the Chase Manhattan Bank of New York City.

These resolute men and women had their own systems of getting an education. Lifting themselves by their own bootstraps was no fantastic, tongue-in-cheek method to them. They made this suppositious invention work. The story of one family illustrates their unwavering purpose in spite of frustration. The oldest daughter of one family had just embarked on her profession as a country schoolteacher when, at nineteen, her mother died. She gave up her position and for several years kept house for her father and the family. One by one she watched the younger members go through school until each was settled in his own chosen occupation__ One to become Supervisor of Art in East Chicago schools; a brother to become Director of Athletics in Elgin, Ill; a sister to teach in the Cleveland Ohio schools; another to become a nurse in Malone Hospital Los Angeles; and then she, the oldest sister who had so selflessly cared for the family, resumed her teaching career.

Next to the love of learning of the Cornish in this Palmyra neighborhood was their love of the church. A review of the ecclesiastic history of Cornwall will explain this love of the church and reveal the basis of integrity of the present day people.

In the spread of Christianity, Cornwall was the second missionary outpost, Ireland being the first. Filled with evangelical zeal, St Patrick sent St. Perain, another Irish priest,

to the tin miners in south-west corner of England. They gladly received him and took on his teachings with an enthusiasm that continued till the 1800's when John Wesley's Methodism was welcomed with religious fervor. Wesley had been dead about sixty years when the Cornish exodus made its way to the environs of Palmyra and Eagle. Wesley was dead, it was true, but his teachings were live and purposeful as shown by the promptness with which these pioneers began building chapels at Siloam, Zion, and Pleasant Valley, and what was more important, providing men to fill the pulpits. The Jolliffees, Wm., Samuel, and John; the Ebbotts, Henry, and Wm; J.S. Lean; Chas. Jaquith, and T.D. Williams, all were pastors at various times in these churches which were part of circuits some of which included eight outposts.

Interest in Christian service is still continuing by the fourth generation of these first settlers. Miss Mary Trewyn is Social Secretary in Monterey, Mexico, really a missionary job disguised in name to preserve political harmony. John Hooper, grand-nephew of Rev. T. D. Williams, has returned from three years service in South Congo, is now studying at Garrett Biblical Institute with the intention of making his life work in the mission field. Recently he married a young woman who was also serving in Africa during his previous term.

Still living on the farms north and east of Palmyra are descendants of the first early settlers. Almost daily from other farm regions, Auction Sales give evidence of farmers giving up their patrimony. Farm economy is too competitive. Boys in other communities cannot see the merits of an occupation that necessitates a fifteen hour day, an eighty hour week, no paid vacations, and remuneration half of what industry pays.

In spite of this unfavorable economic balance, descendants of the Uglows, Hoopers, Jolliffees, Gilberts, Congdons, Meeches, Leans, Northys, Orchards, Ebbotts, and Trewyn still farm in this rural community on some farms settled as early as 1836 and many more in the 1840's. The Old World tradition that land gives status still grips the hearts of this ethnic group.

The writer of this sketch is presumptuous enough to predict that there will always be this Cornwall. True, marriage into other ethnic groups brings in new blood and new ideas, but strangely enough, the character of the community remains the same. The new

bride or groom has keen respect for the person to whom he has pledged his troth, hence he or she adjusts to the ideas of the resident spouse.

The basis of this prediction is found in the present day activities of the young people. Their 4H Clubs, F.F.A., MY F, (Methodist Youth Fellowship), and Honor Societies are the guiding influence of their future careers.

The MYF society, however, will not contribute to the permanence of this Palmyra Cornwall, but it will and does add to its standing. It offers the larger view, the greener pastures to some and its influence will help to fill the Peace Corps and the Mission Field. It will take many far from Siloam, Oak Hill and Pleasant Valley. The old home cannot shelter all the children. Some of them must find their own home and work-stead.

One of the yearly projects of this group is their practice of inviting foreign students to their homes during the Thanksgiving recess, students of different religions and far different backgrounds. The friendliness and generosity of the hosts paint a far different picture of America than that blazoned by the hate-filled sketches of the Communists. Many of these students will go back to their homes with a memory of simple hospitality and kindness which will sow seed for a healthy crop of true democracy, and in years to come Uganda, Mali, and Zanzibar may have a civic make-up minus our color bias.

Organizations which very definitely work for the permanence of this rural community are the Honor Society, the 4H Clubs, the FFA and FHA. From the time these boys and girls enter High School, the Chinese proverb, "Every journey begins with the first step" is real to them, and this corollary might be added and helpful "All journeys, no matter now distant or difficult the road, are made up of steps". The first step for them is maintaining high standings in their studies. The Honor Roll, preliminary to membership in the Honor Society, marks progress toward some goal, one probably not known at this stage. Many of these boys and girls of Cornish lineage are found on the Honor Rolls of local High Schools.

The same names are found in the membership lists of the 4H clubs and the FFA. Parents of these young people fully realize the worth of these organizations. Their programs are a buttress of strength to farm living. Projects in raising animals, in crop nurture, home management, and civic practices, in a step by step manner, are suited to every child, giving him his own money and thereby making him self-reliant. Fairs showing the results achieved

in the various projects furnish the incentive for utmost judgment and unflagging care in every developing process. Top prizes to be won by the best animal, biggest crop, most toothsome food, or the neatest garment are big. One such prize was a trip through several western states won by John Ebbott; another was a trip through Europe sponsored by the FFA and won by Bill Thomas.

Almost all contestants are kept interested by the numerous gradations of prizes, at least six placements are granted. Through participation in 4H, FFA, and FHA, children become skilled in farm practice. They have lost their hesitancy and fear in whatever phase of rural living they undertook. They have become masters and are ready to take over farm life for themselves.

At maturity these Palmyra boys and girls are ready to evaluate a way of life made beautiful by the hills and dales of this rolling farm country, a life without boredom, one free of sophistication and shallowness. In truth they realize that they love the land, that this grip of the land is not a shackle but a fond embrace and through this love of the land Palmyra Cornwall will retain its security, its permanence, and its high character.