

In the Beginning...Early Palmyra

By Betsy Lewis, Palmyra Historian

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As I take over the Palmyra Historian position from Beth Hoad who held that position for 20 years, I hope to build upon the research and writings that Beth and other esteemed historians did so well over the years. They communicated our community's history but also incorporated their own interests and included their own observations to that history. My research and observations will do the same. Many thanks to Beth for helping us understand our community a bit better. Beth, you have made your mark and our community is richer for it.

For my inaugural article about Palmyra, I am selecting a small part of our beginning rather than repeating much of what is already known. For a more thorough early history, I refer you to past Historian Bob Lowe's early history of Palmyra which can be found here:

<http://www.palmyrany.com/about/1700.htm>.

While unofficially, early Palmyra was referred to as Swift's Landing, it soon became the District of Tolland. It remained Tolland until 1797 when, with no fanfare, the town's meeting was called to order for the district of "Palmira." From that date forward we have been known as Palmira interchanged with Palmyra, the spelling that survived.

Records of the District of
Tollond 1796, Liber A.

At an annual town meeting holden at the house
of Gideon Durfee within and for the District
of Tollond on the first Tuesday of April 1796
John Swift Esq. Moderator of the Meeting

Chosen, John Swift Esquire Supervisor,
Jonathan Edwards Town Clerk,

Voted to choose the remaining town officers by
nomination.

Voted to choose three Assessors

Jonathan Warner

Fortus Goldsmith.

Thompson Sherman

} Assessors.

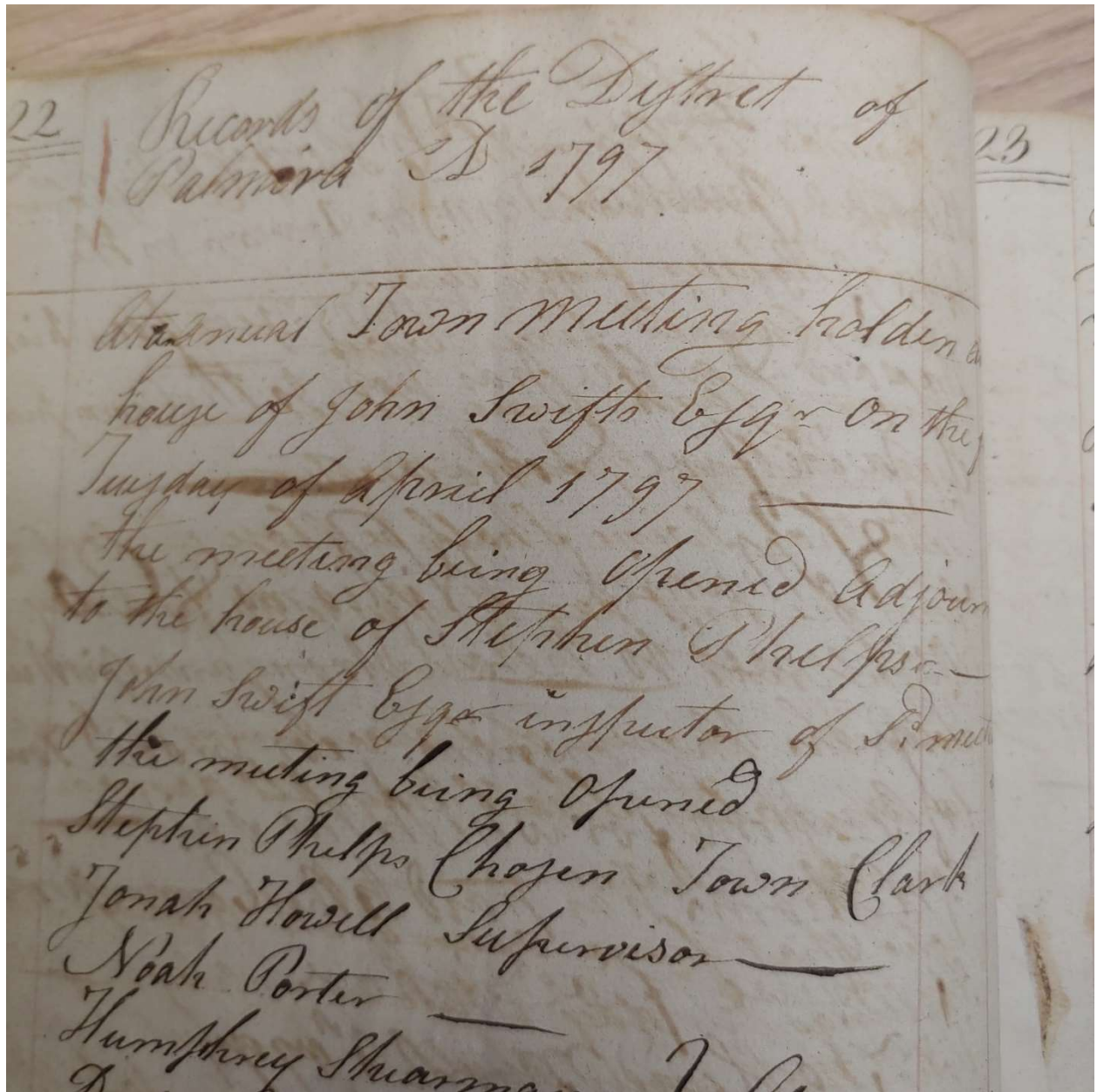
Voted to choose one Collector.

William Porter Collector.

Noah Porter

2. 1796

Picture taken from the 1793 minute book for the Town of Palmyra, Palmyra, NY.



Picture taken from the 1793 minute book for the Town of Palmyra, Palmyra, NY.

Laying out the town

Surveyors had their work cut out for them. Here is a snippet from the 1793 town minute book where a road was being laid out. You can see life was a little wilder than we might have imagined. (Note:

the question marks appear where the text was illegible.) Imagine having to locate a specific tree with a particular mark on it. To help you decipher this text, one rod is equal to 5.5 yards.

“A record of a survey road in No. 10 and 11 in the 2nd Range and Nos 11 & 12 in the 3rd Range beginning in the line between Widow Martha Whites and Darias Comstocks farms where the dug way easterly from ? Martha Whites house. ? said line thence N. 85° W 50 rods thence S 40° W 23 rods thence S 70° W 30 rods to a hard maple tree marked H – standing in the line between the Martha Whites & Noah Porters farms thence S 2° W 192 rods to a beach tree marked H...”

An entry in the town minute book for 1811 (p. 155) states that the “letter H for common brand, for the town.” By the above entry, it appears the letter H may have been in use several years before the entry in the minute book.

Other notable information in this quoted text is we learn who some of our earliest settlers were. The Comstocks and Porters often appear in early record books. Of particular interest is Widow Martha White. Women were rarely named in early records. It is a great find when a woman’s name is located. When women were noted, they were identified by their husband’s name. For example, before Widow Martha White became a widow she would normally have been identified as Mrs. John White, or whatever his given name may have been. You will be reading more about some of Palmyra’s women through this column. It’s time they came to light.

Please follow the Palmyra, NY Historian’s Page on Facebook, contact me at historian@palmyrany.com or stop in to see me at the Palmyra Town Hall, 1180 Canandaigua Rd., Palmyra during my office hours. They are held monthly on Thursdays from 7-8 PM when the Palmyra Town Board meets in Palmyra, February 27, March 26, May 28, June 25, July 23, August 27, September 24. Other times by appointment.