

SUBJECT: HISTORIC PALMYRA -1-

Tom: The first thing I would like to ask you would be some information about Historic Palmyra. I was wondering if you could tell me who actually started Historic Palmyra?

Florence: There were a group of people, and I can't tell you how long ago, the 1950's I guess, that objected to Urban Renewal tearing down our Main Street and Market Street buildings-which they were going to do. The north side of Main Street at least, that was where they were going to start. And this group of people organized into Historic Palmyra for the purpose of preventing this. At that time we were not very popular amongst many of the people of Palmyra because Urban Renewal was "the" thing to do. This made no difference because we were dedicated to the idea that the buildings in Palmyra especially (well all of them as far as that was concerned because the homes are also worth saving, but they were in no danger of it) but the Main Street was, and we fought it. One of our chief fighters was Shelley Knapp who for several years was President of Historic Palmyra and did a great deal to preserve the northern side of Main Street and much of Market Street although we did lose some. But that was how Historic Palmyra started. Well, then when Urban Renewal saw that they couldn't make it here and we'd turned everything around why we were more or less at loose ends and Historic Palmyra was in more or less abeyance, except for a committee of four of us (Marge Clark, Lorene Warner, Betty Briggs and I) who had at one time volunteered to take care of the Museum which was housed in the library. Before this Lorene's sister, who was librarian, had assisted Doris Nesbitt who was interested in genealogy and in the artifacts that were there in the library (had taken care of them)-these

things had been left by a former Historical Society of Palmyra which was disbanded due to a lack of interest and these artifacts were put in the library for safekeeping and Doris Nesbitt and Lorene's sister took care of the artifacts and on occasion would show them. Well, when Lorene's sister died, it got to be more than Doris Nesbitt could handle and so the four of us who hardly knew each other (well some of them knew each other, but I didn't know any of them very well) but we all were interested enough to volunteer a committee to take care of these and we did, and we would have exhibits and we had people sitting at the exhibits, etc. for I don't know how many years. But we needed something to be a committee of and Historic Palmyra was our mother organization. They wanted to disband, and we said, "No, no don't, just don't do anything, but allow us to be a committee of Historical Palmyra so that we can keep on with the very interesting articles which had been collected. Please do this," and so they did and there was nothing to Historic Palmyra for I don't know — three, four, five, I don't even remember how many years we did this and that was Historic Palmyra for a while. Then when we heard about the coverlets and got those, that really started Historic Palmyra up again because we had the museum to interest us and then we got the museum over there* and now we got the Phelps Museum and are really an active organization.

Tom: I wanted a brief rundown on the projects to date. So, what would it include?

Florence: The things we've done?

Tom: Yes.

Florence: Well, I think it was through Historic Palmyra that a group came from R.I.T. and did what they were doing at that time, taking

* Palmyra Historical Museum

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pictures of worthwhile buildings and architectural features in various towns and making a movie. And they did that for Palmyra, and this was part of our effort to save some of these buildings and that was a big project when this movie was shown here and places where people were really interested. And I guess it's still extant although I don't know who has it. The saving of course, of the buildings on Main Street and the buildings on Market Street (the ones that we did), was a huge project.

Then the acquiring of this building for the coverlets and the acquiring of the coverlets, and now the maintenance of the building and the showing of the coverlets and the acquisition of these rug samples and their exhibit here is another. We acquired the building which now houses the artifacts that the library had. The library had to dispose of them because they were running short of room, and they needed the room that we had been using. We had been using two, three rooms for the artifacts. They needed these and I guess the powers that be told them that they had to have it, or they won't get any funds from whoever it was, and they didn't know what to do with them. Well, it so happened that a member of Historic Palmyra knew of the interest of the four of us in these artifacts, although the members of the Library Board did not. I don't know why they didn't, but they were new to us, and we had done nothing about this for a little while because interest had lagged in the showing of the artifacts. So she said "Well I know what you can do with them." They were going to sell them and dispose of them and all kinds of horrible ideas like this, so she persuaded them to give the artifacts to the Historic Palmyra. At this time, they were clearing out this area where we are now, particularly back here, and they wanted it for a parking lot as it is now, but the building which is now the Historical Museum (Palmyra Historical Museum) which is over on Market Street, that white building. That would have been an inn for

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long years and then when that family had died out, it had become a lawyer's office, and next to it of course is the Green Bar, the smaller building. They wanted that building so that they could put the roadway in and then they would have left the former lawyer's offices there, but she wouldn't sell it. So, then they decided to get rid of it, they were going to tear it down. Well, Jackie O'Connell, who was one of the ones instrumental in getting the coverlets here, was President of Historic Palmyra at that time and she was phenomenal as far as raising money was concerned. She went to the village and said, "Could we have this building?" and they said, "No, you can't afford to move it." Well, it was true that we didn't have any money, we never have any money, but she said, "Well if I can get the money to move it, can we, have it?" Well, tongue in cheek, yes, you know. So she raised in one-week pledges enough to move the building. The man who moved it was very kind to us and community-minded and he moved it for \$8500.00, which is cheap for that thing because it is a huge building, and they moved the whole thing. First, they were going to move only the front part and I begged and begged for the rest of it because we really needed it for what we wanted to do with that building and so we got the whole thing and he moved the whole thing. And it was a community affair, everybody watched. You'd find crowds of people whenever he was moving the thing across the lot and he moved it across there and here it is and that is now our Palmyra Historical Museum.

All the artifacts that we had to take out of the library, had no place to go until we got this building and that was about a year that they were without a home; except that the four of us, it so happened, all have barns, we also have big houses. The things that would go in our barns, we put in our barns. The things that would be hurt by

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staying out in the cold all winter long or the heat all summer long, we put in our houses. When we got this building, then they were moved to this building. Interesting-fun things, you know, you can see why we're interested.

Well then, the Phelps building was of great interest to Agnes Griffith who was the one who gave us this building. She could remember when she was a little girl going down there and getting candy from the store etc. Well, when Sybil Phelps died, Historic Palmyra acquired this building with Agnes* help (a great deal of it because she would put up the money, and then they would pay her back as they could). That is how they got that and that they are restoring as it was to what extent they can. The downstairs was a store and then there were three stories above that. The first story above the store was their main floor for living and then there was another story above that for bedrooms and the attic type on the very top. There was also a little tenant house (so-called) a little gray house next door. That land, of course, is adjacent to the lots where the present Historical Society, (Historical Museum) is. Agnes owned those two lots, and she gave them to us to put the building on when we moved there and of course, it is right adjacent to the other two so there*s a complex there right across the parking lot from here.

Tom: So, it all came together nice.

Florence: Yes, it all came together very well. Well, there, that is what Historic Palmyra has done.

Tom: Where have most of your finances come from that you have? Florence: Dues, but not too much because our dues are not high. For the Phelps Building, they get grants and we have had some grants for this. But we prefer not to get grants (both of us who are working on these two buildings) because the government tells you too much what to do

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and we are too independent-minded. We want to do our own thing.

No grants over there and there have been a few here which-well for instance-one of them was to frame these rugs and one of them was to buy a machine which we don't use (it's unsatisfactory) that sort of thing, just a few of these from America the Beautiful for example. They've given us grants. But what we do mostly, every year we have a Christmas Bazaar. Historic Palmyra runs that and whatever of the three organizations or Historic Palmyra need money, they can get from there as much as can be afforded. We probably make a couple of thousand a year on that. The Historical Museum Committee has an antique show during Canal Town Days and that * s where we get most of the money for that building. And we have the gift shop here which raises most of the money for this building. And then we have received outright grants (gifts) from Mobil. Mobil gave us the money to do this room. This was just a shed when we bought it, a storage shed, and we've done this with it. Garlock's gives us money every year to do whatever we will and we have got two thousand a year from the village that helps us to no end. That's chiefly where our money comes from.

Tom: You also have a lot of volunteers workers, don't you?

Florence: Oh, everything is volunteer. We have no paid workers whatever. We did have CETA, and they do have CETA over there working, but we don't pay them, we never have paid anybody. It's all volunteers. As a matter of fact, when we had a CETA worker in here, volunteer work fell off, because, well-"Let her do it she's getting paid for it." A lot of people wouldn't volunteer. Now we haven't anyone in here anymore and people are coming back and volunteering again. It's interesting.

Tom: Have you really received any opposition at all from the town?

Florence: Well, no, no — after the Urban Renewal bit was done, we haven't. I do think that they begin to worry about so many pieces of property being taken off the tax rolls. See this was, across the way, and then when we got the Phelps property and that is, they're not very happy and I think this is why the Mormons when they acquired their block on Main Street were very careful to say, "Well we'll pay our taxes for everything that isn't exhibit" (as I understand it). I don't want to say for sure as I don't know what the arrangements were. But they made it known that they would pay taxes because people were getting sensitive and I don't blame them. Well, we're a museum town now, it's just an unusual thing, I guess.

Tom: What future projects do you have planned, or have you just got yourself into enough now?

Florence: We're in enough. We want to complete this room. The future things that we planned are just extensions of what we are doing now. Like for instance, we need a rug in this room, and we will get it. We want to have craft classes connected with this organization, this part of it and we have someone now who will head that up. And I don't know how often, the plans aren't completed yet, but that sort of thing is what we planned.

