



knee-deep in history

The Scribe

October 2021

Palmerton Area Historical Society
www.palmertonhistorical.org

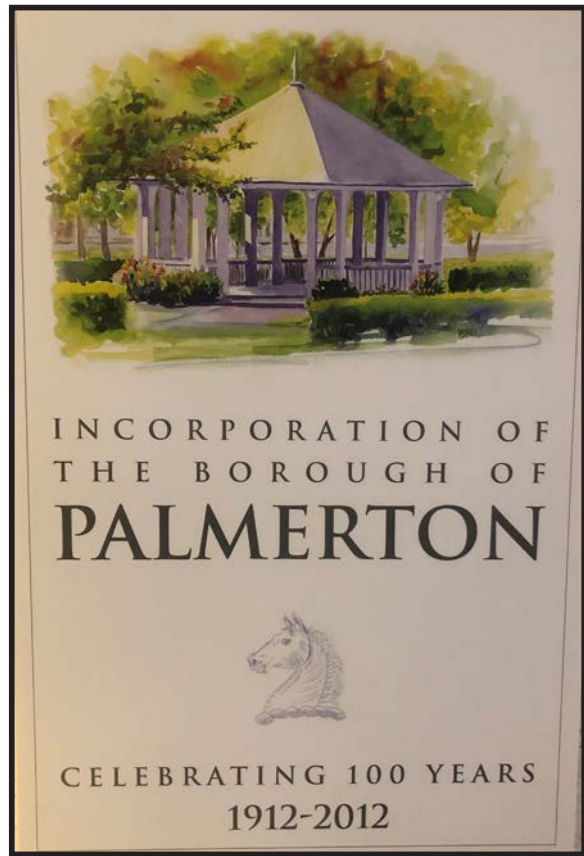
A Quasquicentennial? *Palmerton's History Continues*

It has an ominous ring to it and yet it is a cause for celebration! In less than 18 months Palmerton will celebrate a quasquicentennial - the 125th anniversary of its founding – a date generally accepted as July 3, 1898. Will special events be scheduled to mark the date? Will there be a parade? Will history books be updated to reflect the changes that have occurred in the community?

Much has happened in the years since Stephen Palmer and his associates took the first step in 1893 to create what they referred to as “the greatest single industrial community devoted to the production of zinc.” They acquired property, drew up plans, selected contractors, and hired employees and in less than ten years their lofty prediction was being fulfilled.

The community of Palmerton and The New Jersey Zinc Company were often looked upon as being one and the same and yet their stories are in fact different. The NJZ story was first formally summarized in the 1948 hardbound book “*The First Hundred Years of The New Jersey Zinc Company.*” Copies of this popular book are still available from the Historical Society.

Palmerton’s history began a half-century after that of NJZ, and five times since its founding, occasions were celebrated. In 1923 the town marked its Silver Anniversary and in 1937 the Silver Jubilee of its incorporation. Again in 1962 and in 1998 special events reminded citizens of the town’s unique heritage.



Courtesy of Paula Zelenka

(continued on page two)

Palmerton Area Historical Society

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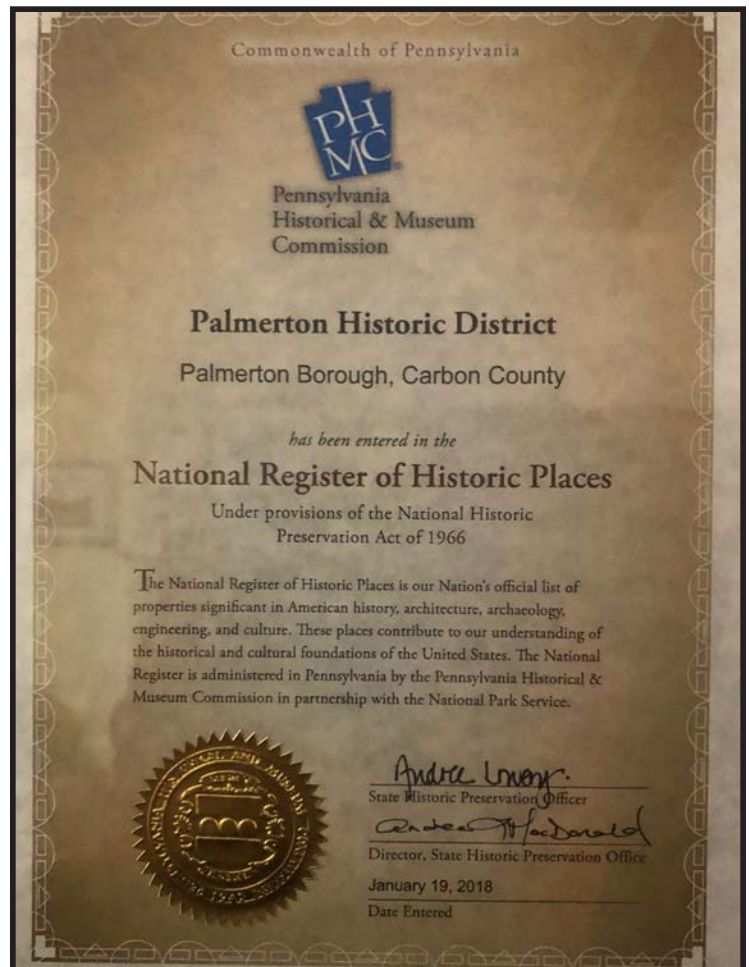
"The Scribe" Editorial Staff

Jane Borbe, Peter Kern & Susan Steigerwalt

A Quasquicentennial? *story continued from front page*

Most recently, in 2012, the town marked the centennial of its incorporation and Paula Zelienka accepted a commission to design a poster (shown on front page) to commemorate the event. A limited number of 8x10 and 11x17 copies are still available for purchase from the Historical Society.

In 2018, Palmerton was designated a National Historic District. This status is a great source of pride to the community and visitors are reminded by the banners that hang along Delaware Avenue. Will the quasquicentennial slip by with hardly a mention or will the community be challenged once again to celebrate the anniversary of the founding of Palmerton? Stay tuned!



It Happened Fifty Years Ago *26th Amendment to the US Constitution*

As the decade of the 60's came to an end the Vietnam war was on the front page of the news every day. Anti-war protests were an almost daily occurrence and culminated at Kent State University in 1970 when four unarmed students died after being fired upon by the Ohio National Guard.

It was against this backdrop that President Richard Nixon endorsed the adoption of a constitutional amendment to lower the voting age to 18. The Supreme Court had ruled that Congress could not force states to lower the voting age – only a duly approved amendment could do that.

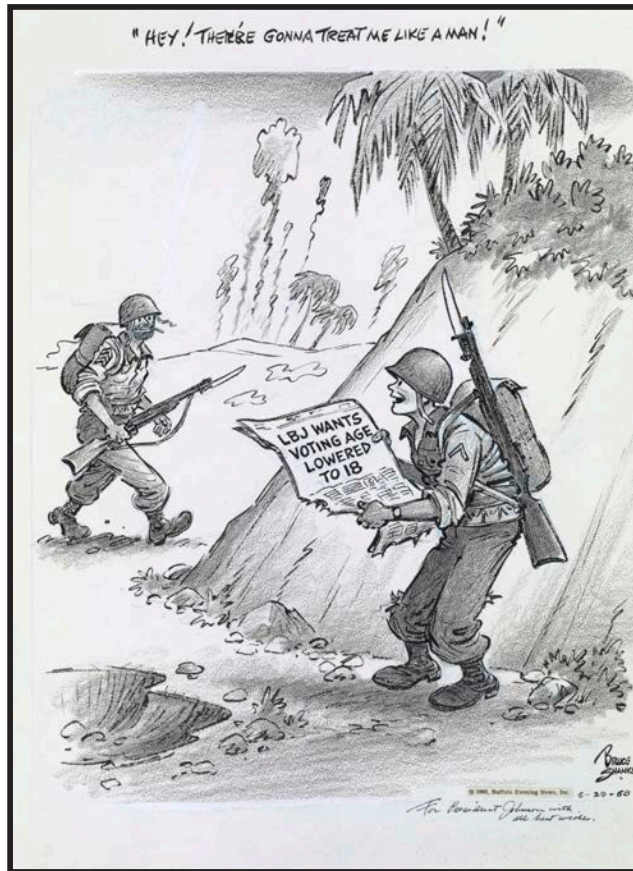
A half million troops were engaged in Vietnam and 50,000 had given their lives. When 18-year-olds were dying for their country the words “Old Enough to Fight, Old Enough to Vote” carried much weight and on March 10, 1971, by an almost unanimous vote, the United States Senate approved the 26th Amendment to the Constitution - “the right of citizens of the United States, 18 years of age or older, to vote, shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of age.....” Two

weeks later, the House added its approval by a similar overwhelming vote.

In record-breaking time of less than four months, the amendment was ratified by the minimum requirement of 38 State legislatures and on July 1, 1971 it was formally adopted and became the law of the land. Eventually, 43

states gave their approval and seven failed to act when the matter became moot.

Not all proposed constitutional amendments are adopted. A 1924 Child Labor amendment failed, and in 1982 the Equal Rights amendment met the same fate. In 1985, efforts failed to gain approval for the treatment of the District of Columbia as a state.



Amending the Constitution is an arduous business – as it probably should be. If the requisite three-quarters of the states have not approved a proposed amendment within seven years of its submission, the action automatically dies. However, times change and a future generation is free to reconsider these and other changes to this important governing document.

Horsehead A New Era in Palmetto

Forty years ago - at precisely 12:01AM on the morning of October 1, 1981 - few people were awake to witness an important event in Palmerton's history. At this moment, a new company, Horsehead Industries (HHI), acquired the assets of The New Jersey Zinc Company (NJZ) from its former owner, Gulf+ Western Industries (G+W).

The acquisition was significant in many respects and the complete story would require far more pages than allocated here.

This brief summary might whet the interest of readers

of The Scribe to use the vast resources of the Internet to learn more.

G+W had acquired NJZ in 1966 as the first of many companies the conglomerate would absorb over the next two decades. Shortly after the acquisition, NJZ's corporate headquarters were relocated twice - first to City Line Road and then to 65 E Elizabeth Avenue in Bethlehem. G+W's taste for acquisitions soon added Marquette Cement to its portfolio and together with NJZ they formed the nucleus of a Natural Resources Group.

As times changed, G+W began a search for a potential buyer for NJZ - a search that would take them to Europe and beyond. When these searches failed to attract interest, several NJZ senior executives embarked upon a plan of action that would eventually become popularized as a "leveraged buy-out." The executives,

led by William Flaherty, brought together a group of private investors and together they obtained bank financing to complete the purchase. NJZ was now a wholly owned subsidiary



of Horsehead Industries.

But the promising beginning was soon shaken as the price of zinc began a steady decline that, together with new environmental standards, would have a dramatic impact on Palmerton. The vertical retorts of the West Plant, that had been a mainstay of zinc metal production for fifty years, were shut down



NJZ's historic Sterling Hill zinc mine at Ogdensburg, NJ was still producing quality zinc ore for Palmerton's East Plant kilns, but

Industries

Palmerton History Begins

the cost of mining and transporting it was becoming uneconomical. At the same time, the domestic steel industry was generating almost one million tons each year of a waste product that contained 20% zinc – an amount almost identical to that of the ore mined at Ogdensburg. The steel producers were willing to deliver this to NJZ at no cost and when attempts in 1986 failed to gain a reduction in local taxes at Ogdensburg, the mine was shut down. The Palmerton plant of NJZ now had a prominent role in zinc recovery.

While NJZ continued its struggles at Palmerton, the corporate headquarters of Horsehead Industries was occupied with plans for expansion. These started with the acquisition in 1983 of a small pigments plant owned by Reichold Chemicals in Brooklyn, NY. This was followed in 1985 by the much larger acquisition of Great Lakes Carbon. While these acquisitions were taking place, plans were made to move the corporate office from Hackensack, New Jersey, to 204 East 39th Street in New York City. Several years later they were again moved to the 34th Floor at 110 East 59th Street . It was the 1987 acquisition of St. Joe Zinc that had the greatest impact on Palmerton. St. Joe was owned by the Fluor Corporation and the

marriage of these two large zinc companies had to pass federal antitrust scrutiny. Once completed, the merged zinc companies took the name Zinc Corporation of America. For practical purposes, The New Jersey Zinc Company was relegated to history.

Following the St. Joe acquisition, there was a continued decline in Palmerton operations as most were transferred to the St Joe plant at Monaca, Pennsylvania. Palmerton was able to convert the steel industry's waste into a 60% zinc product that was ideal for St. Joe's electrothermic zinc furnaces. Eventually, ZCA's Palmerton plant became strictly a zinc recovery operation and the 1500 employees it had in 1979 had dropped by 90%.



The Horsehead story is far from over and would require more space. In 2002 Horsehead Industries declared bankruptcy. The new owner, Horsehead Corporation, subsequently declared bankruptcy in 2016 and emerged as a new company – American Zinc Recycling. Companies may come and go, but Stephen Palmer's legacy lives on in the town that bears his name.

Post Office Cancellations

Pictorial Designs

Twice in recent years, the Palmerton Post Office approved special cancellations to mark community anniversaries. In 1998, the Palmerton Chamber of Commerce held a contest for a design that would serve as a logo for the centennial and could also be used for commemorative envelopes. From among the dozens of entries the design by a student from the Carbon Career & Technical Institute was chosen. Alas, the name of the winner has been lost in the archives and the Historical Society asks for someone to identify him so that he may be appropriately recognized.

In 2012, Paula Zelienka came to the fore with a classic example for a postal cancellation. After receiving approval from postal officials her design was cut into a custom rubber cancellation stamp. An example of the commemorative cancellation is shown here.



Since it takes as much as three months to receive the approval of the Postal Service, if the community wishes to submit a pictorial design for a cancellation it is not too soon to start thinking about it.

2021 Monthly Program Schedule

all programs held in the Knight's Gallery of the Palmerton Library at 7pm unless otherwise noted

November 9

Pennsylvania Tour Photos

Lynn Shupp

December 5

Ecumenical Service &

Christmas Party

3pm at Little White Church

Dinner Following at Bert's Steakhouse

***Thanks go to the Society volunteers
who helped make this year's
Palmerton Festival a resounding success.***

Bandstand Dedication Rescheduled

“Henri” Brings Heavy Rains

As the poet Robert Burns once said, “The best laid plans of mice and men can still go wrong.” So it was with the dedication of the newly refurbished bandstand scheduled for “Palmerton Day” August 22nd. Hurricane Henri was barreling up the east coast and although a direct hit was unlikely, five inches of rain were headed toward Pennsylvania. With the annual Palmerton Festival only three weeks off, it was decided that the “Palmerton Day” festivities be put off to a more appropriate date in 2022.

The formal re-dedication of the bandstand took place at the Palmerton Community Festival on September 11th. It followed a moving tribute commemorating the 20th anniversary of the terrorist attack on the United States. The accompanying photograph during a recent rehearsal shows the enhanced lighting and inherent beauty of this Palmerton landmark. Thanks go to all who helped restore this community treasure.



photo courtesy Carl Kern



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**Palmerton Area
Historical Society
Heritage Center**

410 Delaware Avenue
(610) 824-6954

**Thursdays & Saturdays
10am-1pm**

