

THE START OF PALMERS

Todd Lindahl

January 2008

The rumors and stories had spread like wildfire through the community of Superior, Wisconsin. They were repeated in hushed tones and in small clandestine groups in places where they would not be overheard. The tales of a large deposit of copper, including a fabulous vein of the metal stretching off into the dark forest, were enough to stir every cell in a prospector to his very core. Somewhere along the wilderness north shore of Lake Superior certain untold wealth awaited. Obviously the one to locate it first and quickly lay claim to the land would triumph. There were two immediate problems however at this time in 1854. First, nobody knew for sure exactly where this magnificent deposit of copper was, and furthermore the north shore was still Indian Territory and thus off limits to white people. Negotiations were underway to establish the Treaty of La Pointe, which would cede the north shore to the United States Government, and open the region to white settlement. When this happened it would become a race to find the rumored deposit and acquire its riches.

At this time the R. B. Carleton Land, Mineral, & Mining Company was formed and included Vose Palmer as one of the members. To get a jump on other prospectors, R. B. McLean and John Parry were to illegally scout for copper along the north shore and report back to the group. The men were instructed to make note of any promising mining locations encountered. After crossing the bay in a canoe from Superior to Minnesota point, they hid in the brush until after dark. They then set out, but before going a mile, however, a group of Indians caught them and warned the men not to enter their lands. The prospectors claimed to be fishing and were allowed by the Indians to continue. A number of locations were assessed to be possible mining sites and the men soon returned to Superior with their report. Within a couple of days some men arrived from La Pointe and stated that the treaty had been ratified and the land was open to settlement.

Since no large copper deposit had been seen, the plan was to have each R. B. Carleton Company man establish a claim on the most promising lands. Vose Palmer was selected to claim an area on the Sucker River, which would eventually be named after him. The following day several of the Carleton men, including Vose Palmer, met at the Superior harbor, and after boarding a sailing craft, departed for the north shore. They were to build cabins to allow them to claim and hold the sites selected. Three men assisted Palmer in building his cabin. A short time later Sam Palmer with his wife and Roswell Palmer arrived to join Vose at Sucker River. Leander Palmer surveyed a town site at the Gooseberry River farther up the north shore that never amounted to anything.

The high hopes for a spectacular copper strike soon faded as only scattered small amounts of copper were found. The huge deposit and associated vein were never found and were probably just a myth. John Parry, the old time prospector and explorer, at a location that is within the Duluth Township area, found an ancient abandoned cribbed mine shaft in 1854. In spite of all the secrecy, clandestine maneuvering, and race to be first, someone else had beaten them at their own game perhaps more than a hundred years earlier. Regardless of these bitter setbacks, the Palmers remained and engaged in farming and other activities. Their name became synonymous with the Sucker River area and remains so to this day.

(Note: The "Palmers" site is at the junction of Homestead Road and the Scenic Highway by the Sucker River. You can still see the "Palmers" sign along the railway there, and the name still appears as a place on some current maps.)