

Animal Control in Early Palmyra

By Betsy Lewis, Palmyra Historian
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The early years of 19th century Palmyra had its share of wild animals that caused damage and frustrations for landowners. Over the years, bounties were placed on particular animals and the town fathers would pay those bounties to inhabitants who could prove they killed certain animals. Wolves were a consistent trouble maker and they earned one of the largest bounties. It could be a grisly business.

In 1803, the town “voted to pay the sum of \$5.00 for each and every wolf killed by the inhabitants thereof, either in this or the adjacent towns, who shall produce their head entire and make oath they killed the same before the Supervisor or a Justice of the Peace.”

1805 saw almost the exact entry in the record books but it was also decided to raise \$20 to cover the cost of the wolf bounty for the year. This would indicate the town expected four wolf heads to be brought before them.

Wolves were not the only nuisance. While wolves continued to have a \$5.00 bounty, literally, on their head, so did birds and squirrels.

“Voted to pay a bounty of \$.02 a head for each squirrel, crow, blackbird, and woodpecker killed in the town to July 1st and that any person or persons to entitle them to the bounty shall kill to the amount of ten and produce their heads to the Supervisor or Justices of the Peace...” (1806)

Also in 1806, “Voted that rams be confined from August 15th to November 1st . Penalty \$.50 as formerly. Boars, other swine, and stud horses running at large the same as last year. Wolves the same as last year. Voted there shall be no bounty on squirrels and birds. Voted to raise the sum of \$41.42 to

defray the arrears of the bounty on squirrels and birds.” It seems squirrels and birds were killed with such frequency that the town couldn’t immediately pay the bounties due.

By 1812 bounties were still being paid on “noxious birds and animals” like black and gray squirrels, crows and blackbirds. The town raised a committee of three men, Ira Selby, Levi Ward and James Reeves Esq. to be the lucky few who inhabitants went to with the heads of their kill for proof and to ensure their bounty be paid. An oath was made to the committee confirming the animals were killed

in Palmyra and that "they were not killed or taken on the Sabbath Day."

Resolved The Masters serve as some Viewers the year ensuing
Resolved To direct the Supervisor to procure a suitable spot of
ground, near the center of the Town of Palmyra
for the purpose of erecting a Banal, and that cause
the same to be erected as soon as convenient, and
the expences accruing for the same to be defrayed
out of the monies raised for the contingent expences
of the Town

Resolved The Supervisor shall procure for the Town a standard
for the sealing of Weights and Measures

Resolved Nathaniel Blackman serve as a ^{and Viewers} sealers of weights
for the year ensuing

Resolved That the Town shall give a bounty for killing
Rattlesnakes and animals ---
For black and gray Squirrels two cents per head
For Crow blackbirds, two cents, and for ground
Squirrels one cent per head as a reward hereafter

Resolved all Person who may kill any of the above
described birds or animals, between the day of the
state hereof and the first day of May next and not
after; shall produce the head of the above named
bird or animal, to a committee, chosen by the Town
for the purpose of determining the right the Person
who may exhibit the above named head, to the

Swine and geese were not to “be free commoners for the ensuing year.” This meant they were not to run free. The town also “resolved that any person within the bounds of Palmyra who shall permit his or her ram to run at large from the first day of September and the first day of November next ensuing shall pay a fine of \$2.50, one-half of said sum to be paid to the complainant and the other half to the Poormasters for the use of the poor and the said ram may be castrated with impunity.”

By 1813 and 1814, “no person shall permit his or her cattle to run at large in the streets and roads from December 1st to April 1st.”

In 1814 the town had enough money to build a town pound to contain wrangled “free” animals. The newly appointed Pound Keeper was Gain Robinson. Prior to the town building a pound, each inhabitant’s own yard was considered a pound.

By 1815 travelers should take note. The town book states, “Voted that no person shall permit his or her neat cattle to run at large on the commons or in the highways from the first day of December until the first day of April, and the owner of any neat cattle that shall be found injuring any neighbor or traveller in any way from the first day of December to the first day of April shall forfeit and pay \$1 for every such offense...”

Money collected from fines during these years established the funding to assist the poor of the community, controlled by the Poormaster.

Please follow the Palmyra, NY Historian’s Page on Facebook, contact me at historian@palmyra.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.