



## Crystal Lake Historic Preservation Commission

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### **Colonel Palmer House**

660 East Terra Cotta Avenue

Built 1858

The Colonel Palmer house, located at the northeast corner of the intersection of Route 176 and Terra Cotta Road, was built in 1858. The house is a combination of Greek Revival and Federalist architecture. The Greek Revival components of the design include the gable-end entry and heavy cornice. The Federalist features are the tall six-over-six windows arranged in a highly regular fashion and the lack of ornamentation. Andrew Jackson Simons, a local stonemason who had come to the area from New York in 1848, is responsible for the trademark cobblestone foundation that is shared with several other prominent buildings in Crystal Lake.

Gustavus A. Palmer and his wife Henrietta were early settlers of McHenry County. In 1840, they arrived here after a three-week journey in a covered wagon from Livingston County, New York. Gustavus Palmer was born in Nunda, N.Y. in 1805. Over a period of years, Palmer purchased 300 acres of land from the Federal Government. His homestead came to be known as “Palmer’s Corners.”

“Colonel” was a title of respect given to Gustavus by his friends and neighbors. Colonel Palmer was a founding member of the Nunda Masonic Lodge, and meetings were held in his home. In later years, local legend tells of popular dances held in the home attended by participants who rode many miles in their buggies. Colonel Palmer and his wife Henrietta lived in the Crystal Lake area for over forty years until their deaths in December, 1884. They both died within days of each other from Typhoid Pneumonia. According to their joint obituary, the funeral service was to be preached in the Baptist Church at Crystal Lake, but before the long procession of sleighs arrived, the church was so full they had to move the services to the much larger Congregational Church. The Palmers are buried below a single headstone at the Lake Avenue Cemetery in Crystal Lake.

Early in 1979, as part of an annexation agreement, five acres of land including the Colonel Palmer House and outbuildings were donated to the City of Crystal Lake. At that time, a group of dedicated citizens organized the Colonel Palmer House Restoration Association. This organization worked for many years to raise funds to help restore the Palmer House. The Colonel Gustavus A. Palmer House was placed on the National Register of Historic Places by the State of Illinois and the United States Department of the Interior and National Park Service on May 24, 1985. It is the only structure in Crystal Lake to be listed on the National Register. In 1997, the Colonel Palmer House became the first property to receive the City of Crystal Lake’s Landmark Designation, thereby protecting the building from demolition, neglect, or inappropriate exterior changes.

In 1998, the Crystal Lake Park District entered into an agreement with the City of Crystal Lake. The Park District has leased the property for 100 years at the rate of \$1 per year. A portion of the Palmer House is currently the office and library of the Crystal Lake Historical Society.