

Ramus/Macedonia (Illinois) Markers Dedicated

William G. Hartley & Alexander L. Baugh

In ceremonies on Saturday, 21 May 2000, more than fifty descendants of Ute and Sarah Gant Perkins, along with friends and officials, dedicated markers honoring the place known in Church history as Ramus or Macedonia. Today, the tiny town's name is Webster. It is located about twenty miles southeast of Nauvoo.

The in-town marker honors and tells about the town's settlement and history, its Mormon connection, and the Ute Perkins family. The Perkinses were original settlers and early converts there.

In 1983, Dr. Waldo Perkins visited Webster to see the grave sites of his ancestors, Ute and Sarah Perkins. Headstones known to be there a decade before no longer could be found. He decided then that the family must do something to memorialize Ute and Sarah and the "Perkins Settlement" they founded in the 1820s. During the past two years, Dr. Perkins, working with the LDS Historic Sites Foundation, Nauvoo Restoration, Hancock County people, and LDS historians, found a suitable site for a historic marker, created its text, and arranged for it to be manufactured, shipped, and installed. Then, he arranged for the Church history bus tour and for his Perkins relatives to see Missouri and Nauvoo area sites, events that culminated with the marker's dedication on 21 May.

In 1826, sixty-five-year-old Ute Perkins, a Revolutionary War veteran, became the first permanent white settler in Fountain Green Township, Hancock County, Illinois. He and wife Sarah, with their sons, daughters,

INFORMATION for this article came from William G. Hartley, who was the tour guide for the Perkins' family bus tour, and Alexander L. Baugh's article in the Mormon Historic Sites newsletter, *Site & Scene*, vol. 2, no. 1. Photographs are also courtesy of William Hartley.

spouses, and grandchildren—twelve original families—founded or lived near Perkins Settlement, as it was called. The first person buried in what is now called the Webster Cemetery was Ephraim Petillo Perkins, who died 15 September 1834. Between 1834 and 1860, other Perkinses died and undoubtedly were buried in that cemetery.

In 1839, Joel Hills Johnson and other Latter-day Saint missionaries preached in the settlement and converted the Perkins family and many of their neighbors. They became organized as the Crooked Creek Branch. A year later, Hyrum Smith organized the Ramus Stake there, with Joel H. Johnson as stake president in charge of a membership of 112. This became the main Mormon center in Hancock County outside of Nauvoo. At that point, the town of Ramus, which means “branch,” was laid out on land owned principally by Ute Perkins. There, the Saints built their own meetinghouse for church services, one of the first LDS meetinghouses ever built just for that purpose.¹ However, external and internal problems led to the dissolution of the stake in 1841.

Even though the stake had been disbanded, the town of Ramus continued to thrive as a Mormon settlement. The Illinois legislature incorporated Ramus in 1843, giving it the new name of Macedonia. At its peak in 1845, Macedonia had approximately five hundred residents, second only to Nauvoo in numbers.

At one point, Joseph Smith’s uncle, John Smith, presided in Ramus. Another person well known in LDS history who resided in Ramus/Macedonia was Anson Call. Joseph Smith visited there several times as he visited family members, held Church conferences, and solved problems within the Church. What were perhaps his most celebrated visits occurred in 1843. On 1 April 1843, Joseph Smith, Orson Hyde, and William Clayton traveled to Ramus. After spending the night at the home of Benjamin F. Johnson, they held a meeting the next morning at ten o’clock. During his remarks, Elder Orson Hyde taught two points of doctrine that the Prophet considered false—that the Savior would appear on a white horse as a warrior and that the Father and the Son dwell in the hearts of men. Later, while eating lunch at Sophronia Smith McCleary’s home, the Prophet informed Orson Hyde that he was going to correct some errors in Orson’s sermon. These corrections, given later that day, are now found in Section 130:1–3 of the Doctrine and Covenants.

On 16 May 1843, Joseph Smith again visited in Ramus. That evening at the Johnson home, he gave the family instructions on the priesthood. These instructions are found in the first four verses of D&C Section 131. Verses 5 and 6 were part of a sermon the Prophet delivered the following morning.

The Saints living in Ramus saw Joseph Smith not only in his prophetic

role but also in his role as a family man and member of the community. It is a well-known fact that Joseph Smith liked to wrestle and engage in the sport of stick pulling. On one visit, the Prophet pulled sticks with Justus A. Morse, the strongest man in Ramus, and beat him using only one hand. Later, during the same visit, Joseph wrestled with William Wall, the most expert wrestler in Ramus, and threw him.

During the exodus from Illinois in 1846, a major portion of the settlement traveled together as the "Macedonia Company." They crossed Iowa and then wintered twenty miles east of present Council Bluffs, Iowa, creating a settlement they named after the one they left, Macedonia. By the end of 1846, their former town of Macedonia in Illinois contained two dozen or more vacant homes once lived in by Mormons. New families moved into Macedonia, and the town was renamed Webster. Today, Webster is a quiet, rural community consisting of a few homes and several dozen inhabitants.

At the Saturday morning in-town marker's dedication service, Nauvoo Stake President Durrell N. Nelson presided. Nauvoo historian and bishopric member Mike Trapp, who supervised the monument's installation, gave the invocation. Non-Mormon Webster resident Wilbur Scheurmann, who donated the land on which the marker stands, expressed his pleasure for being able to help memorialize the town's history. Rob Clark, vice chairman of the Mormon Historic Sites Foundation, explained his organization's goals relating to preserving LDS historic sites, including their newly announced project to develop a historic district in Kirtland, Ohio. By erecting the marker, he said, the Perkins family made a "magnificent contribution" to preserving Church history. He referred to recent lottery winners and posited that being part of the Perkins heritage was worth far more than any lottery jackpot. He asked if the relatives would be willing to trade their Perkins heritage for a million-dollar lottery prize. (A couple of youths in the audience joked that they could be tempted to consider it.) Dr. Perkins explained how the Perkins family settled the area, told about LDS Church developments there, and related how the marker came to be. Dr. Barry Johnson, a Brigham Young University sociology professor and Perkins descendant, gave the benediction.

(The marker states that the Macedonia meetinghouse was the first LDS meetinghouse outside of a temple, but historical research shows that the first LDS meetinghouse was in Vermont in the 1830s and that Kirtland had one building that served as a meetinghouse, as did Saints in Clay County. Nevertheless, given the fact that Nauvoo had no LDS meetinghouses, the one at Macedonia has LDS historic importance for the Nauvoo era and region.)

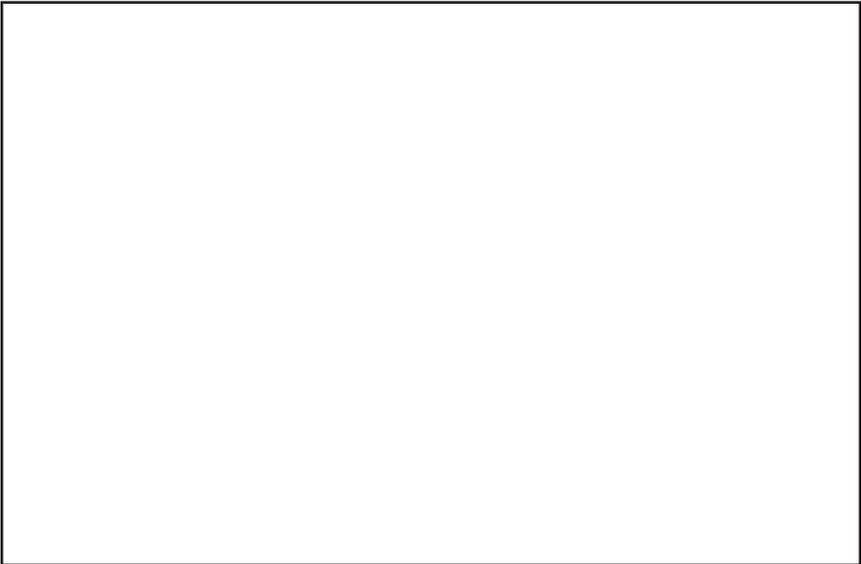
After that marker was dedicated, the group adjourned to the Webster

Cemetery, two blocks away. There they unveiled and dedicated two cemetery markers. One is a headstone for Ute Perkins (died 1844) and wife Sarah Gant Perkins (died 1845), paid for by the Ute V. Perkins Family Organization. The upright, longer-than-taller granite headstone's back side contains a short history of Perkins Settlement, Ramus/Macedonia, and Webster. The other granite marker, flat and six inches above ground level, memorializes by name six other Perkinses believed to be buried in the cemetery.

Webster Cemetery, it should be noted, contains headstones for Katherine Smith Salisbury (Joseph Smith's sister) and Joel Hills Johnson's wife, Annie Pixley.

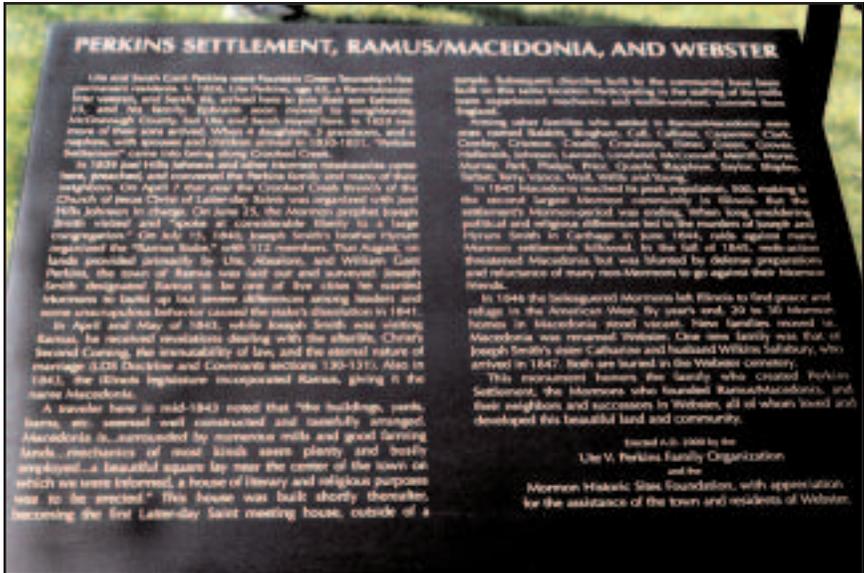
Notes

1. The present Webster Community Church was built in 1897 on the site of the earlier LDS meetinghouse.



*Rob Clark, Dr. Waldo Perkins, Gene Perkins
May 20, 2000*

*Dedication of marker at Webster, Illinois, honoring the Perkins Family
and the Mormon Stake/Branch of Ramus, or Macedonia.*



The marker at Perkins Settlement, Ramus/Macedonia, and Webster, Illinois, dedicated May 20, 2000.



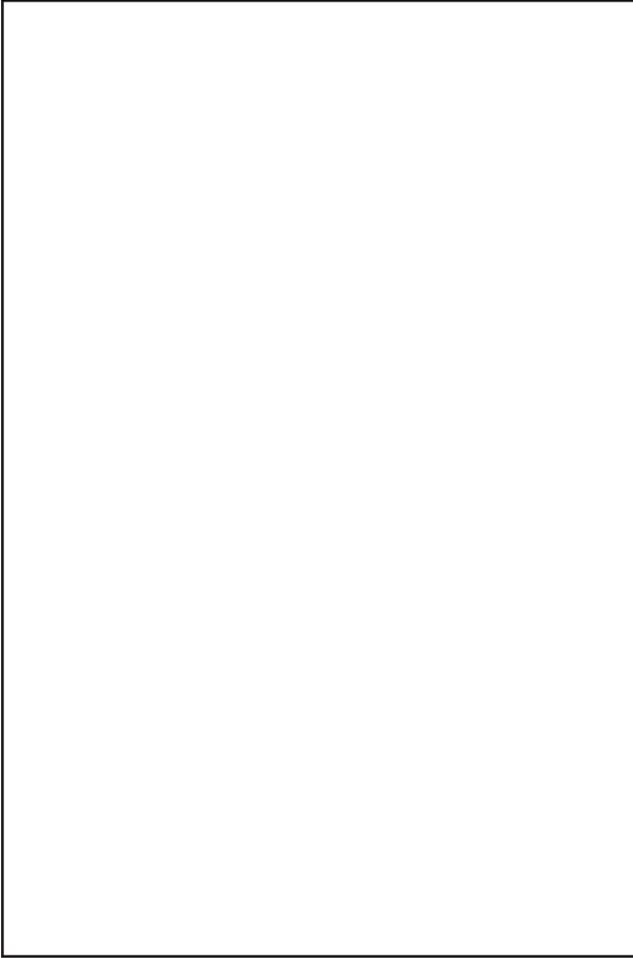
Back side of Ute and Sarah Gant Perkins Marker, Webster County, Illinois, dedicated May 20, 2000.



Marker showing Perkins family members buried in Webster, Illinois Cemetery, May 20, 2000.



Katherine Smith Salisbury
(sister of Joseph Smith)
Headstone,
Webster, Illinois Cemetery,
May 21, 2000.



*Marker for Annie Pixley Johnson,
Webster, Illinois Cemetery, May 21, 2000.*