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From the President's Desk **Central Ohio in July 1776: Independence Declared, Uncertainly Deepened** *By Mike Wise*

In July 1776, central Ohio remained far from the formal centers of revolutionary politics. Yet the consequences of the conflict between Great Britain and the American colonies were becoming increasingly visible throughout the Ohio Country. While delegates in Philadelphia declared independence on July 4, the Native villages, hunting grounds, and river corridors of central Ohio occupied a different world—one in which the language of liberty mattered less than the practical question of who would control the land once the fighting ended. For the Shawnee, Delaware, and Wyandot peoples of the region, July 1776 was not a moment of national celebration but one of growing caution, calculation, and unease.

The Ohio Country in midsummer was alive with movement. Rivers such as the Scioto and Muskingum were fully open, forest trails were dry, and travel by canoe, horseback, and foot became easier than at any point since the previous autumn. This seasonal change intensified the strategic importance of central Ohio. British influence continued to radiate southward from Detroit, where royal officials and traders sought to preserve Native alliances and discourage any accommodation with the Americans. British agents and their intermediaries reminded Native leaders that, whatever the colonies claimed about liberty, American victory would almost certainly mean more settlers crossing the mountains and more pressure on Native lands. In that sense, the British argument retained real force. The Crown could still present itself as the lesser threat to Native territorial claims, even if British power were distant and uneven.

American leaders on the frontier understood this danger. From Fort Pitt and from settlements in western Pennsylvania and Virginia, colonial officials and traders sought to maintain open communication with Native communities in the Ohio Country. Their principal goal in mid-1776 was still not conquest of central Ohio, but prevention: preventing the British from turning the region into a base for raids, and preventing Native nations from aligning decisively with the Crown. American diplomats and agents therefore continued to urge neutrality, assuring Native (Goto 2)

Coming August 11 **Delaware County** **Sherman Bridge** **Building Family** *by David Simmons*

David Sherman moved from Connecticut to the Village of Berkshire, where he worked as a carpenter specializing in wagons. He soon began bidding on county bridge projects, and during the 1850s was counted among the area's most prolific bridge builders. Before he died in 1867, several of his sons joined him in the business. It was, however, his nephew Everett Sherman from Galena who most famously followed in his footsteps, developing his own patented bridge truss in 1877. In the 1880s, he began specializing in an 1846 bridge truss whose patent had long since expired and made it into a highly successful business venture whose influence stretched from Delaware County into western Ohio.



David Simmons

After introducing covered bridges and their unique history and designs, Simmons will explore the impact of the Sherman Family on Delaware County's river and stream crossings. It is a story that ends up in Preble Co. where six of Sherman's covered bridges remain.

Simmons is an officer of the Ohio Historic Bridge Association. He has more than four decades of experience at the Ohio History Connection—formerly Ohio Historical Society, in Preservation Division and then on the editorial staff of their popular history journals. Simmons is co-author of the book *Covered Bridges: Ohio, Kentucky, West Virginia* published in 2007. He was one of the primary editors of a new book printed by the National Park Service titled *Covered Bridges and the Birth of American Engineering*.

He, his wife and terrier-mix dog live in Galena, occupying a braced-frame house built in 1836.

BWAHS Has New T-Shirts

Once again the Myers Inn Gift Shop is carrying new T-Shirts. These are worn by volunteers and are also available to visitors and friends of the Myers Inn Museum at \$20 for small thru XL and \$22 for XXL and XXXL.



From the President's Desk

Continue from Page 1

leaders that the colonial struggle was directed against British tyranny rather than against indigenous peoples. Such claims rang hollow for many in Ohio. Native leaders had already seen years of settler encroachment, broken promises, and war, and they had little reason to assume that a new American republic would restrain land-hungry frontiersmen any better than the old empire had.

For Native communities, July was therefore a month of political strain. The Delaware, whose towns along the Muskingum and its tributaries occupied an important middle ground in eastern Ohio, generally remained the strongest advocates of neutrality. Their leaders recognized the danger of committing too early to either side and sought to preserve trade and peace where possible. But neutrality itself was becoming harder to maintain. The Shawnee, whose communities had already suffered from recent violence and from the aftermath of Lord Dunmore's War, had fewer illusions about the long-term intentions of Virginia frontiersmen. Reports of militia activity, continued settlement pressure, and British courtship all sharpened debate within Shawnee towns. The Wyandot, tied more directly to the Detroit sphere, also had to weigh the advantages of British trade and military support against the risks of being drawn into a broader war.

The Declaration of Independence itself likely had little immediate direct effect in central Ohio, but its implications were profound. It signaled that the colonial rebellion was no temporary protest that might be settled through compromise. The war had become a struggle for political separation, and that meant the Ohio Country's future would be shaped not by a negotiated royal adjustment but by the outcome of a prolonged contest. For Native peoples, this changed the stakes. If the colonies prevailed, they would likely press westward with fewer imperial restraints; if Britain prevailed, Native nations might preserve a stronger diplomatic counterweight to colonial expansion, though never a secure one.

July also brought the ordinary pressures of summer life that intersected with wartime uncertainty. Planting, hunting, and trade continued, but all under a cloud of suspicion. Travelers carried not only goods but intelligence. A rumor from Detroit, a report from Fort Pitt, or a sighting of armed men on a trail could alter the mood of an entire village. Central Ohio remained outwardly quieter than the eastern battlefields, yet the region was being steadily drawn into the Revolution's orbit. By the end of July 1776, the Ohio Country had become more than a distant frontier. It was an increasingly important diplomatic and strategic borderland, where Native nations, British agents, and

American frontier leaders all understood that the war's outcome would shape the future of the land itself.



People Gathering for the Reading

Thanks to Big Walnut's 250th Anniversary Committee

by Damon Bower

Over 100 residents attended President Wise's reading of the Declaration of Independence on July 8th (July 8th 1776, was the first public reading of the document). Big Walnut's 250th Anniversary Committee planned and executed this event by sending out invitations, providing an audio system, refreshments, mementos, and written information for adults and children, and a video "interview" of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin in the Meeting Room. Many visitors toured our Inn/Museum and learned about the significance of the "Declaration" by listening and reading. We thank Big Walnut's 250th Anniversary Committee and our volunteers for their efforts in sharing historical facts regarding our nation's history.

250th Anniversary of the Reading of the Declaration of Independence Read From the Myers' Inn Balcony By Mike Wise

**"July 8, 2026, 6:00 p.m. EDT, Sunbury, Ohio-
Oye, Oye, Oye. (Hand bell rings 13 times).**

Good evening and welcome. Thank you for joining us for this community reception of the reading of the Declaration of Independence.

At this very moment, in communities across the country, people are gathering to read this founding document aloud and to reflect on the ideas that helped shape our nation.

Goto Page 3



Mike Wise Reading the Declaration

“Now, 250 years after its adoption, the readings include thousands of Americans on all 7 continents, from Europe and Africa, across North and South America, across the Pacific (including Australia), to Asia, and to Antarctica. Americans will be reading the Declaration of Independence together from above the Arctic Circle (Wiseman, Alaska) to below the Equator (American Samoa).

“Thomas Jefferson wrote the first draft of the Declaration of Independence and explained that he “was not striving for originality of principle or sentiment.” Instead, he hoped his words served as an “expression of the American mind.” The American spirit, principles, and values memorialized in the Declaration of Independence 250 years ago are valid today, as are the personal and collective responsibilities we share in protecting and perpetuating these values.

“250 years ago today, July 8, 1776, colonists gathered in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, for the very first reading of the Declaration. Since its adoption, this document has been a steady symbol of our country’s commitment to freedom. We gather this evening in that same spirit of civic engagement.

“So how did it happen? What does it say and mean? In the early 1700s, more and more colonists became convinced that Parliament intended to take away their freedom. In fact, Americans saw a pattern of increasing oppression and corruption happening all around the world. Parliament was determined to bring its unruly American subjects to heel. Britain began to prepare for war in early 1775. The first fighting broke out in April in Massachusetts. In August, the King declared the colonists “in a state of open and avowed rebellion.”

“For the first time, many colonists began to seriously consider cutting ties with Britain. The publication of Thomas Paine’s stirring pamphlet *Common Sense* in early 1776 lit a fire under this previously unthinkable idea. The movement for independence was now in full swing.

“The Declaration of Independence was designed for multiple audiences: the King, the colonists, and the world. It was also designed to multitask. Its goals were to rally the troops, win foreign allies, and to announce the creation of a new country. The underlying message of the Declaration encourages others to join the cause and, by doing so, to join humankind’s fight against tyranny.

“The introductory sentence states the Declaration’s main purpose: to explain the colonists’ right to revolution. In other words, “to declare the causes which impel them to the separation.” Congress had to prove the legitimacy of its cause. It had just defied the most powerful nation on Earth. It needed to motivate foreign allies to join in.

“On July 2, 1776, Congress voted to declare independence. Two days later, on July 4, it ratified the text of the Declaration of Independence. John Dunlap, official printer to Congress, worked through the night to set the Declaration in type and print approximately 200 copies. These copies, became known as the Dunlap Broad sides, were sent to various committees, assemblies, and commanders of the Continental troops. The Dunlap Broad sides weren’t signed, but John Hancock’s name, as President of the Congress, appears in large type at the bottom.

“The first official British response came from Vice Admiral Lord Richard Howe and his brother General William Howe, Commander of British forces in North America, who scolded the ‘misguided Americans’ and ‘their extravagant and inadmissible Claim of Independence.’

“The Preamble to the Declaration’s stirring words was designed to convince Americans to put their lives on the line for the cause. Separation from the mother country threatened their sense of security, economic stability, and identity. Thus, the preamble sought to inspire and unite them through the vision of a better life.

“May we all consider these sacred words and reflect on how we have been blessed to live in the greatest nation on earth! (Hand bell rings 13 times) **May God bless America!**

Following the Reading....

Birthday Cake was served in front of the Blacksmith's Forge to celebrate our Nation's birth.

The Myers Inn Museum was open with docents for tours.

Again, many thanks to Mike and Diane Strait, Jessica Groeller and Mike Wise for all the details they took care of for the Big Walnut 250 Committee.

Docents Needed For Myers Inn

In order for the Myers Inn to be open and give the public the treat of seeing the displays and learning the stories behind the displays, we need docents who can accommodate visitors free hours and are willing to take the training to learn the details. Each docent will have a note book as back up for their training.

Our regular hours are Saturdays 10 to 3 and Sunday 12 to 4 but we are also open when there are events on the square. More information at 740-965-3582.

Businesses Over 100 Years Old When We Opened Myers Inn

As Curator, I wanted to save the businesses in Sunbury who had been in business about 100 years. Sunbury Grill, Sunbury News, Sunbury School and Nestles were the ones. Since then Nestles and The Sunbury News closed. Sunbury School is closing but the **Sunbury Grill is still in business.**

We were there when Nestles closed and Sunbury News moved then closed.

Red Edwards let us his unique Sports Photos and some memorabilia from his Edwards Museum and they are on display in our museum.

However, the Sunbury Grill is still serving and I have one Menu. If you have any picture, memorabilia, or stories, please share with us.

Email : Info@BigWalnutHistory.org
Or Stop in the Myers Inn

JULY 4TH PARADE FROM MYERS INN BALCONY



Restored farm wagon from Ken and Bev Herd which was converted to a Civil War Wagon for our re-enacting events years ago has been reconverted to be pulled by horses in the July 4, 2026 parade.

Horses are owned by Mr. Wickersham of S/L Horses, hired by Sunbury Galena-Rotary for this event. BWAHS President Mike Wise is riding in Civil War dress, Trustees Damon Bower and Chris Killeya are walking behind the wagon.

Not in the photo are Trustees Doug Linnabary and Rick Helwig who also worked on the wagon.

PHOTO BY KAREN SNYDER.

Many Thanks to all the volunteers who made this possible!

