Myers Inn Museum

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From the President's Desk . . .

Central Ohio in November 1776: Winter Approaches a Divided Frontier

by Mike Wise

As November 1776 brought shorter days and colder weather to central Ohio, the American Revolution entered its second winter with no resolution in sight. Far to the east, General George Washington's army struggled against advancing British forces, while the Ohio Country faced a different kind of uncertainty. Here, the approaching winter threatened to disrupt trade, travel, and diplomacy at a time when Native nations and American pioneers were increasingly concerned about the future of the western frontier.

Central Ohio remained predominantly Native territory, with Shawnee villages along the Scioto and Mad rivers and Wyandot communities farther north. The Delaware (Lenape) maintained important settlements along the Muskingum River and its tributaries. Although permanent European American settlements had not yet appeared in central Ohio, pioneer activity along the upper Ohio River and in Kentucky was increasingly affecting the region's inhabitants.

For pioneer families in western Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Kentucky, November required careful preparation. They had to gather and store corn, preserve meat, collect firewood, and repair cabins before winter weather restricted travel. At settlements such as Boonesborough and Harrodsburg, families also had to maintain defenses against possible attacks. These communities' isolation made cooperation essential, especially when supplies grew scarce or communication with eastern settlements was interrupted.

Meanwhile, the Revolution continued to shape developments along the Muskingum River. At Schoenbrunn, near present-day New Philadelphia, Moravian missionary David Zeisberger and Christian Delaware families sustained a community with homes, cultivated fields, a church, and a schoolhouse. The mission settlement of Lichtenau, just south of present-day Coshocton, was established in April 1776 and served as another center of Christian Delaware life. These communities represented an unusual effort to preserve religious fellowship, education, and peaceful relations amid the widening conflict. **Goto Page 2**



Chris Killeya Replacing Broken Balustrades

In addition to the bees going in to the pillar and wall of the porch, our volunteers discovered many broken balustrades in the railing near the right pillar. You do not go to a store to replace them. Chris made new ones to match the originals in the railing. Damon Bower painted them and now they look beautiful and are safe once again. Many thanks for volunteers!

Our History Matters— But Who Will Preserve It?

By Mike Wise

Our Big Walnut area history is more than a collection of old photographs, artifacts, and dates. It is the story of our community—its people, struggles, achievements, and traditions. It helps explain who we are, where we came from, and what makes Sunbury and the surrounding communities such special places to call home.

But preserving that history raises an important question: **Who will tell our stories in ten or twenty years?**

For many years, dedicated members and volunteers of the Big Walnut Area Historical Society have worked to preserve our community's heritage. Through the Myers Inn Stagecoach Museum, educational programs, historical research. and (Goto History Matters Page 2)

From the President's Desk

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For the Shawnee and other Native nations, the continued growth of American settlements south of the Ohio River reinforced longstanding concerns about territorial expansion. British officials at Detroit maintained their influence through established trading and diplomatic ties, while American representatives sought to prevent a broader war on the frontier. Native leaders faced difficult choices, recognizing that neither British victory nor American independence necessarily guaranteed protection for their homelands.

November also brought changes to everyday life. Native families relied upon stored crops, hunting, and established trading networks to prepare for winter. Traders and messengers sought to complete journeys before worsening weather made movement more difficult. The coming season could temporarily restrict military activity, but it could not resolve the competing claims to the Ohio Country.

By month's end, organized Revolutionary War campaigns had left central Ohio largely untouched. Yet the region's future was increasingly tied to events beyond its borders. Pioneer families struggled to establish permanent homes along the surrounding frontier, while Native communities sought to preserve lands they had occupied for generations. As winter approached, both groups faced an unsettling reality: the Revolution was becoming a struggle not only for political independence but also for the future of what was then known as the American West.

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community activities, they have helped ensure that the experiences of those who came before us are remembered.

Consider some of the remarkable stories from our area. Union General William S. Rosecrans, baseball legend Billy Southworth, and even the raccoon credited with saving the Sunbury Bank are part of our distinctive heritage. Beyond these familiar names are countless ordinary residents whose lives, sacrifices, and accomplishments helped shape our community.

Each photograph, document, artifact, and family recollection holds a story waiting to be discovered. Yet these stories do not preserve themselves. They require people willing to uncover, interpret, protect, and share them.

That is why the Historical Society needs your help.

Our Society has benefitted immensely from dedicated volunteers who have contributed countless hours—and often many years—of service. Their efforts deserve recognition and gratitude. Yet we cannot assume that the same individuals will always be available to carry on this important work.

We need new members who believe our local history is worth preserving. We need volunteers willing to contribute their time and talents. Importantly, *we need individuals willing to serve as trustees*, helping guide the Society's activities, programs, preservation efforts, and future direction.

Not everyone needs to be a historian. In fact, some of our greatest opportunities rely on skills that have little to do with historical research. Organizing activities, maintaining facilities, assisting with exhibits, managing records, using technology, communicating with the public, and helping with special events are all valuable contributions.

Even a modest time commitment can make a meaningful difference.

We especially encourage younger residents, young families, and emerging community leaders to get involved. As Sunbury and the Big Walnut area continue to grow, we must connect newer generations with the heritage of the communities they now call home. Younger members bring fresh perspectives, technological skills, creative ideas, and the energy to keep our history relevant and accessible.

America's 250th anniversary of independence in 2026 offers a powerful reminder that national history is built on thousands of local stories. The people who settled our communities, started businesses, served their country, raised families, and built the institutions we enjoy today were part of that larger American story.

Preserving their experiences is not simply about looking backward. It is an investment in the future.

The Historical Society's continued success will depend not only on the dedication of its current members but also on our willingness to welcome others to its work. Personal invitations can make a significant difference. If you know someone who enjoys history, values community service, or has talents that could benefit the Society, encourage them to get involved. **Better yet, invite them to attend a program or to volunteer alongside you.**

As our community grows and changes, preserving its identity while embracing its future is exactly the balance our forefathers sought to establish.

Our history matters, but without people committed to preserving it, much of that history could eventually be lost. Goto 3

In the Beginning. . . .

How Big Walnut Area Historical Society Was Born

The Hopkins House stood at the corner of Granville and Columbus Streets facing Sunbury Square in very poor condition. Community Library staff knew the building was featured in "Early Homes of Ohio" written by Frary in 1936, and in Asher Benjamin's,"The Architect or Practical House Carpenter" written in 1848 showed eave cornices that are on this building. Now it was going to be a parking lot. Many people traveled to other countries to visit houses like this and we were going to let this go.

Thanks to Annette Roberts, in 1978, Harold McMillan (in memory of his wife) donated the Hopkins House to the Community Library to make a place where children of all ages could learn to enjoy local history. Rachel Edwards was the Library Director and the plans were made to use the facility for the local history collection and build a new library on the surrounding lots which had been given to the library.

Polly Horn became the Library Director, a bond issue was passed for the new library, plans were drawn up and the staff was getting ready for the ground breaking when Don Hoover of Schooley Caldwell discovered all the land did not belong to the library. Mainly a 15x 15 foot piece in the middle still belonged to the Hopkins family in California. They wanted a million dollars for the downtown lot.

After much legal hassling, our lawyer determined the 15' x15' would never belong to the library so the board had to find another location. After driving up and down roads all over the school district, the Miller farm was the best choice for the library. Millers agreed to sell the land to the library if we could get their farmland zoned commercial. This had been tried a couple of times but the village had turned it down.

Ray Wirick and Polly Horn went to Sunbury Council and presented the case for changing the agricultural zoning to commercial so a library could be built on Milller's land. They thought they lost the decision by one vote when they left the meeting but they each got a phone call from lawyers saying the it had to be turned down by 2 votes so they won and could build the new library. Don Hoover of Schooley Caldwell redesigned the Library to fit the new lot thus 44 Burrer Drive became home to Community Library.

Community Library was under construction when the Board decided it could not spend the time to raise funds to make the Hopkins House a safe useable building for local history so they tried to sell it. The few interested wanted it for a Bed and Breakfast but lacked funds to save the building. It once again looked like the building would become a parking lot.

On March 23, 1993, a group of interested people met in the Sunbury Lions Club building at the corner of Morning and Cherry Street to see if there was enough interest to form a local historical society.

Three goals were the basis of the new organization:
1. To collect and preserve the history of the Big Walnut Community
2. To protect the historical landmarks of the Big Walnut Community.
3. To share the history of the Big Walnut Community.

Thirty three residents attended the meeting including Polly Horn, Director of Community Library and Jeannette Curren, a Trustee of Community Library.

Horn explained about a Survey of the Big Walnut Community her committee had completed with the Ohio Historical Society for the Delaware County Planning Commission. Individuals worked with the villages and townships to locate items of historic interest so they could be considered for protection as developers move into Delaware County. Results of this survey is on the reference shelf at Community Library.

Jeannette Curren explained that the library board was willing to give the Hopkins House to a group who would continue with the museum idea discussed with Mr. McMillan. Thus the Big Walnut Area Historical Society was formed.

Curren agreed to serve as president, Will Neff vice president, Horn as secretary, Cliff Cook as treasurer. At the meeting, Ed Nice (of the Truman Thomas House) gave $5 to the museum fund and Sarah Doan gave $10. Our Historical Society was born.

At the May 1993 meeting Mike Atkinson, John Bricker, Richard Helwig, Virginia Helwig and Dick Helwig, Ann Nelson, Polly Horn, Margaret Garee, Julia Hewett and Jeannette Curren had each paid their $10 to be Charter members.

By June of 1993 the group was getting organized. Due to overseeing the construction of the library, Horn passed the secretary's job to Sarah Doan and Maxine Longshore. Ray Wirick co-signed for the bank account, Rick Helwig made Charter Membership cards. Dick Helwig collected data from other historical societies and presented proposed Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws to the group. David Brehm agreed to serve as legal counsel to review and prepare the documents for the state.

Grants were not easy to come by. In 1997 State Representative Joan Lawrence got us $100,000 state money when she retired which was a real boost.

Frustrations ran high. At one board meeting things got hot and the officers all quit leaving former secretary Polly Horn the only officer. She agreed to become president if none of the others would leave until the project was completed. Thus began the long haul of raising $2,000 then spending it, raising another $2,000 and spending it over and over. Retired Larry Mitchell oversaw the renovation.

When Lawson's tore down the old filling station, they donated the cellar stones Jakie Burrer had put in his basement from the Sunbury Quarry. These were cut and the fireplace in the 1816 room was reconstructed.

In 2005 Larry Mitchell gave notice he needed to quit the job. When Horn retired in 2005 she petitioned the State of Ohio to become the project manager but she had neither an architect's nor an engineer's degree. For months she called before they finally said she could try it if an architect would supervise her. She called Don Hoover again and explained. Thankfully he agreed if she would always discuss each thing before moving ahead with it. She called the State and ask if Don Hoover of Schooley Caldwell could be her supervisor. The reply was 'Do you know Don Hoover,' she said "Yes and here is his phone number, he is expecting your phone call." The State agreed.

When she found there was no building code booklet, Horn called for an inspection and wrote down everything on legal pads that didn't pass, Inside Outside, Attic thru Basement. The notes were transferred to like trades and Don Hoover went over all with her so she would hire people in the right order. Don recommended or approved each of the craftsmen to do the jobs. Finally the Myers Inn Museum was opened July 4, 2008, in time for July 4th Open House. Cost till then was $512,000.

However there were still things to do. Drywall was donated by Porter Drywall Company, and a $16,000 grant for it was used to replaced the leaking roof the library installed. An ADA ramp was built to the meeting room door. Railing were installed on all the entries. Jeff and Lanny George finished installing a kitchen June Campbell had paid for in honor of her husband. Jeff and Lanny also finished the meeting room and restrooms. Wood floors has to be sanded and refinished and sometimes replaced. Matt and TJ Hoover oversaw installation of security lights. Volunteers cleaned, painted walls and woodwork. Others assembled and installed the display cases from Fling Hardware to fit in the museum.

Because the opening to the stairs had to be made bigger so people going upstairs would not hit their heads the banister and railing was raw 2x4s with quilts hanging over them. One day Dan Bania visited the museum and asked about the railing. He was from upper Ohio in Delaware to work on some jobs for friends. Horn had asked several people to give her bids on a hand rail but they refused. Dan loved doing jobs with old hand tools. For the cost of 2 stair treads and the railing, he handmade the railing, spindles and painted them.

Before the Embarq sponsored a Chamber of Commerce After Hours in the Myers Inn on October 12, 2006. Volunteers put in 300 hours in 30 days getting ready.

Altogether over $632,000 was raised to finish the facility there was lots of love and donations in the job.

Blacksmith's Forge started with a donation of a granary from Bill Comesford's farm. It was disassembled and rebuilt with the used lumber and new lumber from DeWitt's Lumberyard near Vans Valley. It is near the original Sunbury Blacksmith's forge of Cornelius Wilcox who was here in 1866. Rick Helwig oversaw the construction and now oversees the use of the facility.

Between 2010 and September 28, 2013 BWAHS was busy raising $176,400 for the Statue of General Rosecrans by Alan Cottrill that is on Sunbury Square. The Statue was Tom Paul's idea, started by the Rosecrans headquarter group and BWAHS finished it.

Big Walnut Chamber of Commerce was looking for a home so we rented the front room with it own entrance for the cost of our utilities to them and we would not have to raise the cost of utilities annually. We have continued this until this year when we could see we were are raising that money thru memberships and donations. The room is now museum display space.

Our History Matters continued from 2

BWAHS invites you! Become an **active** member, volunteer your time, or consider serving as a trustee. Trustees meet for an hour monthly to take care of the business of the society, determine programs and activities to pursue, and maintenance of facilities, Whether you can contribute a few hours occasionally or are interested in a leadership role, there is a place for you.

Visit www.bigwalnuthistory.org or attend one of our monthly programs, held on the second Tuesday of each month (except December and January) at 7:30 p.m. in the Myers Inn Stagecoach Museum. We are open 12 to 3 on Saturday and Sunday beginning in December.

The question is not simply whether our history matters. It is whether we care enough to preserve it for those who will come after us. Our history has been entrusted to us. Its future depends on who steps forward today.