



MARIETTA CHAPTER, OHIO SOCIETY

SONS OF THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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Mound Cemetery 2021-

Keynote Address by Historian Scott Britton on the Patriots of the Northwest Territory

Patriots of the Northwest Territory

Good Morning. It is fitting that we are gathered here today to celebrate the creation of one of the most significant and consequential documents ever written in U.S. history...and yes, I would argue, even World history. Those members of the Ohio Company of Associates, many of whom are buried around us, played a vital role in encouraging the passage of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 and the groundbreaking concepts that would change the course of America. Unfortunately, the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 is also one of the least known of our country's founding documents which is why we are here today...to ensure this generation and future generations do not forget it.

I was asked to speak this morning about some of the local patriots who played such a pivotal role in America's War for Independence who moved to the frontier wilderness to forge a new country based on the principles of Liberty that they had personally fought for just a few years before. So let me begin the story of that document with an overview of the soldiers and sailors, or the families of Revolutionary War patriots, whose service and sacrifice made Marietta's settlement possible.

A vast majority of the story of the American Revolution can be told right here in this cemetery. As we've said numerous times, we believe this cemetery has the most OFFICERS of the Revolutionary War buried here than ANY cemetery in the entire country. Those 19 officers and the other 20 soldiers and sailors here, along with the descendants of countless more of those veterans that also settled in our county, give us connections to the monumental battles and events of that struggle.

We had multiple Bostonians that will move to Marietta in our early settlement. There is no definitive list that I can find of those who participated in a protest now known as the

Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770, only the list of the 5 who were killed and the 6 others injured when British soldiers fired into the crowd. Very likely there were actually several Mariettans and Washington Countians who witnessed the carnage on King Street in Boston that day. Two years later, in Narragansett Bay near Providence, Rhode Island, Captain (later Commodore) Abraham Whipple buried over there near the earthworks entrance, was the commander of a group of enraged citizens who rowed out in the dark of night and burned the King George's personal property, the *HMS Gaspee* to the waterline in an act of protest of its actions against regular colonial ship owners and business merchants. Others thought to be a part of that group were the Olney's, Tillinghast's, Hopkins', and Greene's whose families moved here to the Mid-Ohio Valley in the early days. It is the first open rebellion committed against their oppressors. In one of the greatest displays of the growing American spirit building among the colonists against their British rulers... following the burning of the *Gaspee*, British Naval Captain James Wallace sent out a decree: "You Abraham Whipple on June 10, 1772, burned his majesty's vessel the *Gaspee* and I will hang you at the yard arm!" Future Mariettan, Commodore Whipple's now famous reply was: "Sir, always catch a man before you hang him." Whipple would be a thorn in their side throughout the war... being the first to fire on a British vessel at sea, conducted the first joint Navy-Marine Corp amphibious operation in US history in a successful attack on a British supply depot at Nassau in the Bahamas, and following the war was the first to fly Old Glory on the River Thames in London.

A year and half later, on December 16, 1773, the brother of Marietta's first minister Rev. Daniel Story, along with others with local connections, dumped 342 crates of British East India Company tea into Boston Harbor at Griffin's Wharf. Another year and a half later, a 30-year old tanner named William Dawes, the ancestor of the famous Dawes' family of Marietta set off on his horse at around 9pm from his Boston home with a vital message on a dangerous mission. A frequent traveler at all hours, on that night he was again able to pass the British checkpoint at the end of the so-called "Boston Neck," Dawes rode through Roxbury, past Harvard College at Cambridge and arrived at Lexington just shortly after his BACKUP rider, some guy you may have heard of named... Paul Revere... Dawes & Revere's actions set the stage for minutemen to meet the British army on Lexington Green that will officially start the war the next morning. The famous "shot heard round the world" there occurred just outside of the front door of Josiah Munro's family home. Josiah's buried right behind you. Twenty-five of the 77 militiamen on Lexington Green that morning were relatives of Josiah. His uncle was Capt. John Parker, commander of those American patriots and Josiah's brother was wounded in the fighting. Many other locals would be part of the

fighting that would drive the best trained, most feared fighting force in the world at the time, from Concord Bridge back to their camps in Boston. One of Marietta's original 48 pioneers, Allen Putnam, a veteran himself, would see his father wounded and his grandfather killed in that engagement. Countless other locals would also participate, including my 5Greats-grandfather, Oliver Rice from nearby Sudbury.

This brings us to the events and battles of the war with local connections: We have descendants of Ethan Allen who with the Green Mountain Boys and one of the leaders of the Ohio Company, General Samuel Holden Parsons captured Fort Ticonderoga in upstate New York. We had settlers who defended Bunker Hill, forced the British to abandon Boston, endured great suffering and starvation to carry out their mission to attack Quebec, crossed the Delaware River on Christmas Day with George Washington to attack the Hessians at Trenton. We even have children of those Hessian mercenaries who became part of the fabric of our local history. Many local patriots survived the brutal cold and hardships of Valley Forge and the oppressive heat with Molly Pitcher at Monmouth. A Mariettan James Mitchell Varnum, buried just 4 blocks from here, recruited and led the first integrated continental unit, the 1st Rhode Island Regiment, that included white, black, and Native American soldiers that would fight side by side from the Battle of Rhode Island to Yorktown.

They led attacks at Saratoga, were responsible for the "Great Chain" at West Point and even designed and built the forts that protected that key position that would become the home of one of our most revered military educational institutions. Even a member of my own family from the nearby community of Rainbow just up the Muskingum River outside of Marietta helped to unravel the treason plot by Benedict Arnold to turn over that post to the British. We had cousins and descendants of General Nathanael Green that called Marietta their home and local veterans that fought under Daniel Morgan at Camden and Cowpens in the Carolinas and were among the 100 Americans who stormed Redoubt #10 that broke the British defenses at Yorktown which forced their surrender and eventual peace treaty that gave us our independence and the land that we now call home.

Mariettans helped put down the 3 major mutinies in the American armies during the war. They sat on the military committee that tried and HANGED British spymaster Major John Andre, were held as prisoners of war on the notorious British prison ship *Jersey* and one brief resident, a man largely forgotten today named Johnson Cook who was wounded 10 times during his service, was one of just a handful of recipients of the highest award given during the American Revolution, the Badge of Military Merit.

It is a history that not just Mariettans and Washington Countians can be proud of, but all of us as Americans can admire on this Memorial Day weekend. With these shared experiences they helped shape the language and content of the Northwest Ordinance. I encourage all assembled here today to read through the Northwest Ordinance this weekend especially. Passed by a majority of all 13 state delegations of the Continental Congress, this Ordinance became the framework for our US Constitution, and more specifically a template for our Bill of Rights. While reading it, I would also like you to imagine what our country would look like today if the whole country, not just the future states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota, had adopted 3 provisions of the Ordinance that were not incorporated in the US Constitution just 2 years later, namely: The third article, which stated that “Religion, morality, and knowledge, being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged;” In that same article-“The utmost good faith shall always be observed towards the Indians; their lands and property shall never be taken from them without their consent; and, in their property, rights, and liberty, they shall never be invaded or disturbed, unless in just and lawful wars authorized by Congress; **BUT** laws founded in justice and humanity, shall from time to time be made for preventing wrongs being done to them, and for preserving peace and friendship with them;” and finally Article 6-“ There shall be neither slavery nor involuntary servitude in the said territory, otherwise than in the punishment of crimes whereof the party shall have been duly convicted.”

The Northwest Ordinance of 1787 was truly an extraordinary document, written by extraordinary leaders, and supported by extraordinary patriots and heroes that we honor especially this weekend. I’ll finish with a paraphrase of our SAR Recessional and add an extra item to that saying: “Until we meet again, let us remember our obligation to our forefathers, who gave us The Northwest Ordinance, our Constitution, the Bill of Rights, an independent Supreme Court and a Nation of Free Men.” May God Bless their service, their sacrifice, and the United States of America. Thank you!