

SWAMP Company

Sons, Wives Ancestors for Middleburgh's Preservation Coalition

December 2, 1995

Dear Friends.

I am writing you this letter to remind you again of our next SWAMP CO. meeting this coming Saturday, December 9th, at 6pm in the Berea Fine Arts Building, 323 East Bagley Road (the little old schoolhouse across from Roehm Jr. High School).

I wish to warmly welcome your attendance and also share the following, very powerful feelings with all of you.

On Sunday, November 19th, I walked down Bagley Road to visit the Hickox burial plot and look around, as I have done quite frequently in the last several months. During most of these visits there has been someone with me; my parents, my sister, my brother, other family members and friends perhaps, to take pictures or to simply look around. Last Sunday I stood alone on the once sheltered hill that was supposed to serve as an eternal resting area for our community's pioneer founders.

As I contemplated in front of the disrespected graves of the Hickoxes and Hepburns, a cold wind blew, the sun's rays snuck through threatening skies, and unclear sounds of encircling birds hovered in the north nearby. What I felt that day I cannot transfer to paper. My heart sank, my anger rose, and sadness rocked my insides. I will not tell all that I thought or all that I felt as I stood there that day, nor could I expect anyone to understand or wish anyone to feel all that went through me. But I would like to tell you a few things I thought about that I hope you will all respect and attempt to understand.

I thought about all of the history of the area, all that I have read and learned and all that I hope to still learn. And I thought of what it must have taken for Jared Hickox to walk through untamed wilderness from Connecticut to Cleveland to begin a community we now simply call home. And I thought of the Fowles brothers and others who came next, who toiled and sacrificed with courage and conviction and compassion.

And I thought of recent years, here, and of disappearing history.

Of neglect, disrespect, ignorance and apathy.

I thought about the SWAMP CO., an attempt to save some of what's left of our community's legacy and an effort to foster education, appreciation and preservation concerning local history. I thought about how each local history links with our rich national history, and of all the ideals and freedoms debated

over by founding fathers and sacrificed for on battlefields by people we should never forget. And I thought of recent times, again, here, and of disappearing history. Of neglect, disrespect, ignorance and apathy. And I thought of people responding to me, to letters I have written, to the formation of the SWAMP CO., to our inaugural meeting on September 21st, and to things related that have gone on since.

I thought of being chided because of a letter I wrote, published in the *News Sun*, which criticized local public officials for their lead role in plowing over our own and their own history. I was chided by one I respect and admire in the field of preserving the past but who evidently refuses to see where the destruction starts.

I thought of phone calls I began receiving the day after our inaugural SWAMP CO. gathering in someone's attempt to arrange a facade, under the guise of a meeting, to appease those who purport to be concerned with the fate of the Hickox burial plot. I thought of the politics that had already started around, and perhaps to circumvent, a group I had formed to function beyond the realm of chicanery and gamesmanship.

I thought of all that happened and was said leading up to the Hickox gravesite "meeting" in early October and during the "meeting" itself, which I viewed on videotape thanks to trusting people who captured the moments for me (and for anyone else who would like to witness why true progress stalls). I thought of being told that it was a bad and unwise decision on my part to openly endorse certain political candidates for recent election in the last letters I sent to all who attended the inaugural SWAMP CO. meeting.

I thought of being told by someone I hold dear and whose opinions weigh heavily with me that I went too far by supplying SWAMP CO. supporters with campaign literature of challengers to city council incumbents. I thought also of my apparent failure to make it clear to everyone that I would never attempt to speak on anyone else's behalf but that I would likewise never be afraid to speak my own mind and from the dictates of my own heart.

I wondered about today's day and age and I thought of our heritage and forefathers and all who gave their lives for our freedoms, knowing they and all they fought for are betrayed and disgraced each time one person fears open and free expression.

I wondered also, as I stood on that cold, butchered hill containing the earthly remnants of our local community's ancestral spirits, who will speak for Jared Hickox? Anyone who truly believes they have a good answer to that last question, please write me or call me and let me know and set my heart at ease. Who will speak for Jared Hickox?

Who will appreciate, respect and defend our heritage? Is it the mayor? Is it any body at City Hall? Is it any or all of our neighboring historical associations? Is it

the developers who, through rezoning magic, are granted privilege of planning and buying chunk after chunk of our homeland but who live far, far away?

Anyone who is yet so bold or wise enough to advise me on my words or actions concerning the preservation of our local historical and natural attributes, or anyone else who simply seeks a good heart- wrenching, please go to the Hickox/Hepburn burial ground and stand there in silence, alone, if you can find a time when bulldozers aren't there homogenizing the landscape.

Stand there as I did with your human expertise silent and your spirit accepting. I guarantee you will be talked to. You will feel something dying. But you will not be left without hope. And it will ring much louder in you than would the voice of any mayor or status seeker. If you listen carefully, your insides will shake like thunder, and just maybe eyes will begin to open and spines will begin to straighten.

The good mayor of Middleburg Heights was quoted recently as saying it is not the job of local governments to preserve history. But is it the job of local governments to destroy it?

Because, make no mistake, that's what is happening and who is doing it and anyone who pretends otherwise may as well fold up the SWAMP CO. tent and begin holding costume balls where everybody dances and drinks tea and pretends reality away.

I would never want anyone to hesitate to criticize me, constructively. No one should be beyond criticism. But can we please, please, all move beyond the fear and the bullshit? And if anyone feels bad, angry or disappointed over my saying that I promise the feelings pale in comparison to the disgust deep within me over the annihilation of our history.

We will be meeting on December 9th to share in discussion and opinion and to learn about our own local history. We will talk about what we hope to do to preserve our history, both what's left of it physically and what still survives in documentation and memory. We will focus on the Hickox burial site area, because that's where it all began and that's where the destruction of our past must stop.

I hope to see you there, and as I plan on putting together copies of related history pieces for each person in attendance to keep, I would very much appreciate it if you could call and leave a message for me if you plan on coming, to help give me an approximate, accurate count. I thank you for your time, your understanding and your support, and I wish you happiness and love.