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*A Partnership Approach to Developing American Indian Programing
An Exhibit Space for the American Indian History of Delaware County
Ohio*

*Benny Shoults, Curator of the Meeker Homestead Museum, Delaware
Ohio*

Presentation given on October 5, 2018

He' which is hello in Lenape or Delaware.

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My name is Benny Shoults, I am a volunteer for the Delaware County Historical Society and the Curator of the Meeker Homestead Museum.

Let me start by sharing what inspires and motivates me and the reason I became involved in this project.

My ancestors came to the Ohio in 1801 and settled in the Paint Valley area of Ross County. A few of my ancestors received land grants for serving in the Revolutionary War, while others came and purchased land. Knowing this has left me mindful that my ancestors played a role in displacing the American Indian here in Ohio. So, my involvement in this project is, in some small way, an act of recognizing a wrong. I can't undo what happened more than 200 years ago, but I can help educate

future generations to show an appreciation and respect for the American Indian people who were in Ohio and Delaware County when the Colonial Americans arrived.

The Meeker Homestead Museum is one of two museums of the Delaware County Historical Society. Our first museum, called the Nash House, is a late 1800's home and is located near downtown Delaware. Our second museum, The Meeker Homestead Museum opened in 2016 and is located a few miles south of Delaware along the Olentangy River.

The museum is in a house that was built in 1823 by Forest Meeker. Within the house there are 12 rooms and presently there are 6 rooms being used for themed exhibits or exhibit spaces that feature our collection of artifacts. One of the larger rooms has been dedicated for telling the story of the Indigenous People who inhabited Delaware County long before the Colonial Settlers came to Ohio. The exhibit space is designed to change when we are ready to introduce new information or new objects related to the history of our County's Indigenous People and the migrating tribes who hunted and settled here in the 1700's. We want our visitors to know that the story is large and multifaceted, and when they return, another part of the story will be revealed.

How are we doing that?

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First and most important- We are learning too, yes, it's a complex story about this fascinating part of the Delaware County history and we want to share our discoveries with the people of Delaware County as they unfold. The process is slow, thoughtful and satisfying. We are seeking assistance from the resources of the Ohio History Connection and other resources that will unfold as the journey continues. Unlike many of our exhibits, this is an ongoing project, it has no completion date, instead it will be a series of exhibits. These exhibits are to become part of a display archive with referenced information and cataloged objects that were shown in these individual exhibits. These display archives can then be used in future exhibits, perhaps in other creative ways.

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I am here today to share some of our experiences in developing the current exhibit and share a few ideas that are being considered. The purpose for this exhibit space is really in four parts, 1, portraying the ancient peoples and their cultures that were in Delaware County, 2, the history of the major tribes who hunted and settled there in the 1700's, 3, the history of the encounters of the Indian tribes and the

early pioneers and 4, a thoughtful look at the present Delaware, Seneca and Wyandot descendants.

The current exhibit is rather general in scope. We know that the only way to begin a project of this size is to actually begin, and that's what we have done. It may not be as grand as we imagine it to be someday, it may have information that will evolve, but it allows us to grow in knowledge as we present this story to our visitors. In this first exhibit we wanted to cover three of the four areas I mentioned.

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We have displayed items in glass cases, which I will describe later, that we are fortunate to have in our archives. Artifacts such as a collection of stone tools including Points, Grooved Axes, Pestles, and Celts, some dating to the Archaic Period, these artifacts that had their origin in our county from donations by local land owners over our seventy-year existence. We were aided in the identification of many of these artifacts by Eric Olsen, who at the time was serving his internship with the Ohio History Connection. It was clear the area we now call Delaware County was the home of a few ancient peoples, like Hopewell, Cole and Kame Cultures. We have maps showing early locations of the various tribes that came to the Delaware area. We have a DVD running called "Beside Our Springs and Streams", stories

of the early encounters of Indians and the early settlers. Also, along one wall are the illustrations used in the film.

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This past June we added a diorama of a known local Indian Village called Pluggy's Town. The diorama was designed and built by a local high school art class. This idea was introduced by Brent Carson, a retired history teacher and our President Emeritus. The class used the historical descriptions of the town to create this wonderful display. Not only did it provide a visual depiction of this historic site, but it allowed the community and students to be part of this important exhibit. Also, from our archives, we have a "Corn Cracker", though not a tribal relict, it was modeled from a tool developed by the American Indian and made by a local pioneer.

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In the center of the room we developed a display that you can walk around as you can see here. We configured the glass display cabinets in the center of the room and built a center tower that supplied vertical wall space to display informative graphics. The lights were installed in the umbrella of the tower to light the cases below and to light the entire room. The design of the center lighted display allowed us to keep from installing lighting in the ceiling, keeping the integrity of this

1823 house. The graphic panels tell of the three primary tribes and brief descriptions about each of the tribes that were in Delaware County. The OHC and Stacy Halfmoon were helpful in getting the tribal names and descriptions correct. We were gaining a sensitivity from the suggestions and understanding the story that was taking place in the early 1800's was not what years of television and movies left us to believe. No, our visitors need to have a more realistic view of the conditions and the circumstances of both the American Indian and the early pioneers, by doing this can give a more complete and truthful history of our county.

Some future display ideas that are being considered because of the suggestions of Stacy Halfmoon: Larger wall graphics, More maps and could include removal maps and a description of how the Delaware, Seneca and Wyandot people were eventually ordered out of the Ohio lands. Agriculture and cooking methods of the Delaware, Seneca and Wyandot people. Wall graphics with broader information about the Early Woodland People. Perhaps a display about the archaeology laws and a display about our closest ancient site at Highbanks Metro Park in Delaware County.

In conclusion, keeping in mind that our museum is funded by private donations and grants and no tax dollars, we are all the time concerned

about our budget, something many of you here completely understand. This is an extra challenge but allows for innovation and creativity and fun. In the future we hope to bring more of the county residents into the museum space to appreciate the rich history that surrounds them.

wanishi or Thank you and please come see our progress

Not presented live:

Other ideas for future displays and use for the room.

Indigenous People Research Center for a deeper study of the area's

Indigenous Peoples history:

- Library of books that describe the Indigenous people and their culture.**
- A library table with two stations and two computers.**

Exhibits that focus on the current activities of the Delaware, Seneca and Wyandot tribes in Oklahoma.

- Exchange of artwork between children of the tribes and the children of Delaware County.**
- Photograph exhibit of everyday life on the reservations.**