

# What Price Liberty? A Family Answers the Call

 by Tom DeWeese

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When their ship from the Netherlands docked in the harbor of New Amsterdam (now New York City) in 1688, Garrett Hendricks DeWeese, and his wife Zytian, could not have known of the historic events that would direct the destiny of their future family. Nor could they have known how those future sons and daughters would be central figures in molding those events.

Almost one hundred years after Garrett landed on American soil, his descendent joined others in a great struggle to overthrow the oppressive rule of the King of Great Britain. The growing DeWeese family found themselves heavily involved as some served in the militias, while others served in the Continental army and navy.

Philadelphia became the hotbed of revolutionary activity as the Continental Congress met in Independence Hall. The Congress struggled over monumental decisions. Should a new nation be declared or should a list of grievances be presented to the King by loyal subjects? The stakes were high. Never had any British colony broken from the mother nation.

But the passion for true liberty from tyranny began to burn deeply in the hearts of citizens, and so finally, the decision was made. The Congress produced a Declaration of Independence. By signing that document, the members pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor, not only their own, but that of every citizen in what was to become their newly declared nation.

The Congress signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4,

1776, but it was not until a few days later that it was officially presented to the people. It was a monumental occasion, full of drama, apprehension, and anticipation. The American people would never again witness a more significant event for their nation – its actual birth.

It was decided that the public reading of the document would take place on July 8, in front of Independence Hall. John Adams assigned the task of organizing the event to the High Sheriff of Philadelphia. His name was William DeWeese, Sr., a direct descendent of Garret DeWeese.

But, as Sheriff DeWeese stood on the platform listening to the defiant message as it was addressed to the most powerful force on earth, the King of England, little did he know the pain and suffering his actions would cause his family in the coming years. Hit especially hard would be his own son, William DeWeese Jr., who lived somewhat north of Philadelphia.

The year following the signing of the Declaration of Independence was disastrous for Washington's Continental Army as it suffered a series of setbacks, lacked needed food and supplies, and lacked solid military training.

Starving, freezing, demoralized, and unmercifully chased by the British, the Continental Army, in the dead of winter, showed up on the doorstep of William DeWeese Jr. You see, he owned part of a forge. The community around William's property was named after the business he was involved in. It was called Valley Forge.

And so, for one fateful winter, the young nation's only hope, its army, rested, regrouped, and trained on the grounds of William DeWeese's land. As the Spring arrived, the army marched on, eventually to victory.

But for William DeWeese Jr, the experience was a disaster. Not only did the Continental Army eat him out of house and home, ravage the countryside, but the British also brought havoc by

burning some of his buildings and destroying his business. William was even briefly thrown into a British jail. William never fully recovered financially, living the rest of his days in poverty. A bill he sent to the government for reimbursement for helping to keep the Continental Army alive during its worst winter stands today, unpaid. Americans can still visit William's house, preserved at the Valley Forge national park.

Interestingly, one of the soldiers who served at Valley Forge and even lost a toe to frostbite, was my great, great Grandfather, the Reverend Joshua DeWeese. After the war he resided in Fayette County, Pennsylvania. From there, in 1804, two of his sons, Thomas and Jethro and their wives, decided to make the trek west, heading for Columbus in the Ohio territory. They began to suffer illness as they travelled westward across the unsettled territory. Finally, as they reached the banks of the Licking River, still more than 35 miles from Columbus, and still weak from the illness, they could go no farther. As they lay there, not knowing what to do, some people who lived in the area discovered them and nursed the party back to health.

Thomas and Jethro were so impressed by the kindness of these folks that they decided to stay in the new community that was just being established there on the banks of the Licking River. It was named Newark, Ohio. There they purchased property, started farms, and raised their families. 145 years later, another Thomas was born on the banks of the Licking River, and resided on the east side of Newark, less than five miles from where the first Thomas had owned his property. Yes, I am a direct descendent of that Thomas.

Other DeWeeses moved further west, to Kentucky, Indiana, and the plains of Kansas. They traveled the Santa Fe Trail, lived in sod houses, and taught their children in one-room schoolhouses. They constructed businesses and established farms to help build the economy of the new nation. And the record shows that time and again, DeWeeses took up the call to

fight for the nation which William and his son sacrificed so much to help create.

Thomas B. DeWeese of Michigan served in the U.S. Cavalry under General George Armstrong Custer during the desperate battle of Gettysburg. Another DeWeese rode with Teddy Roosevelt up San Juan Hill. And a DeWeese even rode with Doc Holiday, creating unknown havoc. Throughout history, DeWeeses continued to impact the nation. There is a DeWeese Gulch in the Bad Lands of the West, and a DeWeese Museum in Canon City, Colorado.

I regularly receive letters from people all across the nation, describing encounters they have had with a DeWeese, perhaps a teacher, a neighbor, or a business owner. All want to know if I am related. The answer is yes. All DeWeeses, no matter how the name is spelled, are related to that first family member to come here, Garrett DeWeese. The DeWeese family, working arm in arm with millions of other courageous pioneers, defied certain death from the wilderness that surrounded them by creating the means then needed for survival. And they risked their lives, their fortunes, and on occasion, even their sacred honor to assure that their children would be free to create an even greater nation.

So which generation faces the greater foe? That of our fathers who challenged a vast, untamed wilderness with primitive tools and boundless courage, or that of their sons and daughters who now face mad men attempting to bring back the wilderness and denounce human progress? Today, our children face a much more insidious foe than any imagined by the troops that camped around the DeWeese house at Valley Forge in that desperate winter of 1777. The very homes and businesses that were the crowning achievement of our forefathers' struggle from the wilderness may be wiped away as this new enemy seeks to abolish private property rights. This monster even seeks to erase our proud history from textbooks and "de-educate" our children.

It must be asked. Will we, the descendents of those patriots, exert the same dedication, the same profound belief in the freedom of the individual, and the same passion for ownership of the land as did our forefathers to defeat the enemy of freedom? Remember, they stood ready to sacrifice everything, including their homes, wealth, and safety, for the right to make their own decisions and live as they chose. Will we be willing to engage in the debate to defend those principles against the new force which denies these truths of our founding fathers? For that is the very root of the meaning of liberty.

I'm proud of my family and its incredible history. And I do not hesitate to stand and fight for those principles of freedom, just as they did. As I continue pushing forward in the unending battle for liberty, two visions keep reappearing in my mind, and they will not let me rest. First, when I take my last breath and finally stand in front of the Pearly Gates, I find myself looking straight into the approving eyes of William DeWeese and the rest of the DeWeese family. In the second vision, I am greeted by George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams, each with hands extended as they say, "Well done, Tom." Then I'll know I've made it to the Camp of Freedoms Heroes. Until then, there will be no rest.

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