

The Truth about the Monument

by: Perry Gower

<http://www.tristateunity.org>

<http://www.lenapevoices.org>

On August 29, 1889, the newspaper headlines read, "In Honor of Tom Quick" (New York Times), "Indian-Slayer Quick's Monument" (New York World), and "A Great Day for Milford: Centennial Celebration of the Inauguration of our Present Constitutional Government ... then a Glorification of Tom Quick, the Red Revenger" (Port Jervis Evening Gazette). The previous day, the small town of Milford, PA, the seat of Pike County government, erected a monument to honor Tom Quick, the legendary 'Indian Slayer'.

This memorial stood along the streets of Milford for over 108 years, until its panels were vandalized in December 1997. Insurance proceeds were designated to pay for the monument's repair, but a successful protest led by Native Americans both near and far kept it from being re-erected. However, this past September, the Milford Borough Council voted unanimously for its restoration and planned its rededication for this coming spring.

The Tom Quick monument was originally donated by and "the inscriptions...were made under the direction of Hon. Wm. Bross, of Chicago," (Milford Dispatch, 9/5/1889) a descendant of the father. "And to the efforts of one man, principally, was the success due. Rev. A.S. Gardiner worked persistently and indefatigably, against public sentiment, it may be said, to erect a monument to 'Tom Quick, the Indian Slayer,' and he has succeeded." (Milford Dispatch, 8/29/1889)

Monument, by definition, means 'a lasting reminder' and 'a remembrance of a person or event in history.' However, monuments do not just recount history; they also instruct us how to interpret that history. Even more interestingly, they tell multiple histories, not only relating the events heralded in their inscriptions but also the proceedings leading to their dedication and preservation.

Most of the interpretations heralded on the Tom Quick monument have little historical evidence and are, at best, embellishment of stories passed down through generations. Although these inaccuracies may be reason enough to question the justification for this monument, one only needs to look at why it was erected in the first place to uncover the primary reason it should not be reinstated. Let us review that second history, the 1889 dedication of the Tom Quick monument.

To whom was this monument dedicated? Although some articles and the poster announcing the day's festivities mention both 'Tom Quick and his father', it is apparent from the headlines, articles and speeches recited that day that it was almost entirely to glorify Tom Quick. On the base at the front of the monument is inscribed: TOM QUICK, 'The Indian Slayer' or 'Avenger of the Delaware'.

Recently, it was suggested that the dedication "was done in support of the troops in the west. And words like 'savages' were designed to draw a specific - and at the time patriotic - response from the audience." (The News Eagle 9/25/2003) However, this writer did not find even one reference to 'troops' in any article, speech or letter of the day. Some have even referred to it as the 'Settlers' monument, but Rev. Gardiner's speech clearly contradicts that reference. "But one man has said on our streets today, 'Better set up a monument to Tom Paine, than to Tom Quick.' But why make the comparison? ... Others say that monuments might as worthily rise to the memory of other pioneers in the valley of the Upper Delaware. Be it so," he proclaimed.

One might wonder what made this man such a hero, so worthy of a monument to honor his memory. Legend has it that, during his lifetime, Tom Quick killed 99 Indians to avenge the death of his father at the hands of 'savages'. Most historians, however, believe he actually killed less than a dozen Indians. One of the legends considered more likely to have occurred is that of Tom Quick's massacre of an entire Indian family at Butler's Rift (a composite of three narratives as detailed in a 1977 book by historian Vernon Leslie).

Tom had been hunting in the vicinity of Butler's Rift with little success and was about to return to the cabin of a settler where he was living temporarily, when he saw an Indian with his squaw and three children traveling up the Delaware in a canoe. The youngest child was an infant.

Tom was concealed in some reeds along the river as the Indian family approached. When he was able to see the occupants of the canoe clearly, he recognized the brave as an Indian who had been a visitor at his home before the French and Indian War and had participated in frontier outrages during the conflict.

Quick ordered the Indian to come ashore at gunpoint, and, since the Indian had heard of Muskwink's murder, he turned very pale. When the savage had approached the shore with obvious reluctance, the Avenger inquired concerning the family's starting point and destination - and received courteous answers. Tom then informed him that

he had reached his journey's end and reminded him that his tribe had murdered Tom's father and "several of his relatives" during the French and Indian War. Not unmentioned was Quick's oath of vengeance.

Fearing death, the Indian tried to be conciliatory and said that it was a time of peace, that the hatchet was buried, and that they were now brothers. In reply, Tom promised eternal war against the redskins and shot the Indian who jumped from the canoe into the river where he died.

After the brave had been killed, Tom waded into the river and tomahawked the squaw and the two elder children. Even after her head had been cleft by the blade, the squaw tried to reach her youngest child. Tom afterwards declared that the children "squawked like young crows" when he dispatched them.

As he was about to kill the infant, the Avenger momentarily relented because the child smiled at him. The upward raised tomahawk fell, however, and Tom afterwards explained his completion of the massacre by saying "Nits make lice"; in other words, Indian children grow into murderous adults.

Whether legends like this are true or not, whether Tom Quick killed just one, a dozen, or ninety-nine, he was obviously honored with a memorial because of those deeds. In Rev. Gardiner's speech, he asks, "And when Tom Quick is brought to the bar of public judgement, we are to put ourselves in his place, and then to judge. Who can say that he did not exhibit surprising forbearance towards the savage who had taken the scalp and life of his father?"

An article printed in the Wayne Independent of July 25, 1889 answered, "...but there are some characters whom Christian and civilized people should never honor with monuments. Of such character is Tom Quick, the Indian killer. His life, as it has come down to us through tradition, containing somewhat of fact perhaps, and much more of fiction, is that of a cruel, bloodthirsty revengeful monster of a man, who murdered defenseless woman and children as well as men, in time of peace. Such a character neither appeals to the heroic, chivalric, nor brave and is undeserving of any monument to perpetuate his cowardly career, for any man is a sneaking assassin who will go out hunting with another as it is said that he did with friendly Indians, then fall behind them and shoot them after having a friendly hunt with them for the day."

I would also like to address the two primary justifications currently offered to me for rededicating this monument.

'You are trying to erase history ... you can't change history.' Tom Quick is the most frequently discussed person in Pike County history. Over fifty books and articles portraying Tom Quick and his legends can be found in local libraries and historical societies. At least five books were devoted exclusively to that purpose, including those written by William Bross and the Rev. Gardiner themselves in 1888. I am not suggesting that Tom Quick be erased from our history, only that he not be honored for his murderous deeds.

'It was the mindset back then.' First, there was no prevailing mindset during that time. In fact, many references, including those mentioned earlier from the Wayne Independent and Milford Dispatch, described the opposing public sentiment. Another excerpt from the Port Jervis Evening Gazette (8/29/1889) reads, "We wish to congratulate Rev. Mr. Gardiner on the grand success of an undertaking which at first seemed so unpopular and so impossible to accomplish." Second, with regard to that 'mindset', allow me to remind you that at one time in this country's short existence, it was acceptable to auction and enslave people, tearing children apart from their parents. Would we find it acceptable today to commemorate those slave auctioneers and owners as heroes in the name of history?

Could it be that some among us still agree with the values that led to the glorification of a racist murderer in 1889? Surely, we would deny this. But confirming that this monument reflects a prejudice of earlier times, and then not renouncing that prejudice, amounts to endorsement of that same prejudice.

Finally, this is not a history that is being archived for those who are interested in finding out about it, behind the doors of a library, museum or historical building. We are glorifying this history for everyone to see. We are saying, 'Hey, this is important; we have it out on our street; we want everyone to read this!' In fact, in the past we have promoted this distorted history by listing the monument as a tourist attraction, and if it is re-erected, we will probably do so again in the future. This is not the message our community should send to the greater public or our future generations. We should not be erecting a monument that honors someone for killing innocent Lena'pe Indians, or any culture of Peoples.

What will the newspaper headlines read this coming spring? Please join me in urging the Milford Borough Council to remove this racist monument from public view once and for all! Pike County is rich in both natural beauty and fascinating history, going back centuries with the Lena'pe civilization here in the Minisink valley. Together, we can create more positive ways to celebrate our diverse history. And with a little faith, maybe the headlines will soon read, 'Lena'pe Peacemakers and Descendants of the Milford Settlers Celebrate a New Beginning of Healing and Brotherhood'.