



Monument faces continued controversy

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MILFORD, Pa. - Of the 97 plaques across the United States that include phrases such as "Indian slayer" and "savages," one monument in a small northern town has stirred controversy between local American Indians.

Tom Quick, who lived from 1734 to 1795, was memorialized in a monument erected in Milford in 1889. Legend says that Quick killed 99 Indians after an Indian killed his father, Tom Quick Sr., in 1756. It marks Quick Jr.'s grave on Sarah Street with plaques at its base perpetuating the legend.

When vandalism destroyed the monument in 1997, it was removed until 1999 when a flurry of letters from a small group of residents asked that it be re-erected. Deciding it a matter that the Indians be included in, the Milford Borough Council looked for someone to contact. Council president Matthew Osterberg said that because there is no state recognized tribe and no Indian Bureau in the state, he spoke with Wounded Bear Burke and his son, Frank Little Bear, Cree from Canada, who live about 10 miles away. It was decided that the repaired monument, owned by the Borough, will be put back, but many say that whose homeland and whose right it is to decide what should be done was not given consideration.

When the Council contacted them in April, the Burkes invited the community to speak at a meeting. They said they also spoke to many leaders nationwide, including Pennsylvania, to ask how they'd like this handled.

"The worst thing they could do is sweep it under the carpet," Little Bear said. "The atrocity is to forget about the past. Because society has a wonderful way of covering up history, it's important not to cover this up."

"No one is trying to erase history, it is impossible to do so," said Deborah Little Sitting Bear Fischer-White Eagle, Apache and Seaconke Wampanoag of Mount Pocono. "The point is the glorification of history and the twist of reality."

Reflecting the viewpoints of many local Indians, White Eagle said that if Milford wants to enter a new age, "then put a monument to the Lenape people and recognize them. Cree from Canada should have no say in the Natives in the United States. We have no say in their affairs."

The monument was originally erected as a Settlers Monument to increase commerce to the area. Even then, when 10,000 people gathered in the one-square mile town to witness its unveiling, it was controversial. The legend was placed on the monument as it was seen in the mindset back then, Kiger said.

Today's Milford is a town of every flavor and color and not racist, as portrayed by the original monument, said Osterberg.

"It's a sensitive issue," he said. "We think we've done the right thing. We're not out to offend anyone."

"What is documented is that they were out hunting for the day," said Little Bear. "Tom, who became an alcoholic, witnessed his father being killed by an Indian, probably near Port Jervis, but we don't know if it was a Lenape."

Chuck Gentle Moon Demund, acting chief of the Lenape Nation of Pennsylvania, grew up under the words of his grandparents and father who cautioned him not to get in trouble in Milford or trust the Quick family.

"Our people lived in the area of Milford when Tom Sr. decided to settle there," Gentle Moon said. "We granted him his homestead with the agreement that we could have access to the river and hunting."

After about five years, Tom Sr. took to shooting at us whenever we got within range. We asked him for a council and he told us we had to meet him in the barn, as he didn't want 'stinking Indians' in his house. One thing led to another and the barn ended up getting burnt down. Tom Sr. tried to escape down the river on a barn door. We caught and killed him there. Tom Jr. saw this and swore vengeance."

Gentle Moon said, "The biggest issue is that healing does come from this. All other things are secondary. I do not believe, however, that all parties involved in the issue have the best intentions of our people in mind. Believe me. They know who we are. If they are so willing to put this monument back up, why is it they are so un-willing to listen to the outrage of all this?"

Resident Perry Gower said there was no announcement about the Sept. 8 Borough meeting when the proposal for the monument was presented.

"After their presentations, I stood up to request a delay in the vote so the public could review the plan," said Gower. "But they declined and unanimously voted in favor."

Councilman William Kiger said the issue is between the Indians.

"We've settled this," said Kiger. "The tribes, including the Lenape, signed off on it."

When asked which Lenape tribes, Kiger said that Bart Standing Elk Cartwright of Yardley, Pa., signed off on it.

Standing Elk, member of the Delaware Nation of Western Oklahoma, said he told the group that the monument should be put in a museum or library and not back onto its pedestal.

Little Bear said a meeting will be held in November to allow everyone a chance to voice their opinions. While no date has been set for its re-erection, the monument will boast its original words and a message, the idea of Little Bear, included on a new plaque affixed to a stone at the diamond base:

"This is a gravesite and should be respected as such.

This monument and its inscriptions reflect a dialog and mindset of the era in which it was first erected circa 1889, which was 94 years after the death of Tom Quick.

Many stories have been written about Tom Quick but there is not enough documented evidence to separate truth from fiction. However, research into his life continues to be encouraged by the Pike County Historical Society.

This gravesite is under the care of the Milford Borough Council with the approbation of members of the Cree Nation, long recognized as peacemakers."

One of the oldest traditions of the Cree is to take a pipe and walk through a battlefield to the opposing tribe and offer peace. If the walker made it without harm, it was considered a good journey.

"Everyone will at some time in their life have to walk through a battlefield," said Little Bear. "That's how we're looking at it. We have support of different nations. There's been way too much propaganda."

This article can be found at <http://IndianCountry.com/?1068837883>