



Milford and the Indians bury the hatchet

By DAWN MCELLIGOTT

MILFORD, PA — Honor, respect and friendship were publicly restored to the Quick family at a Milford Borough Council meeting on September 8 as a decision was made to return the Tom Quick monument to its pedestal.

Tom Quick VII has been living with a family name that, to some, had been dishonored by a legend. The legend was that his great grandfather had witnessed the murder of the original Tom Quick and avenged himself by killing 99 Native Americans. Authorities agreed the story was acknowledged to be unlikely and hard to prove.

In 1997, Milford's Tom Quick statue was torn from its pedestal. In 1999, plans to re-erect it were tabled for further discussion in the wake of public protest. After years of discussion and research, the borough came much closer to re-erecting the monument with approval from the most interested parties.

The plans to resolve the vandalism were first drawn up at a forum on June 25, 2003. It was held at the Tom Quick Inn in Milford. The forum was attended by local historians, Native American leaders and others. A consensus was reached that without evidence of wrongdoing on the part of Tom Quick Junior, the statue should be restored to its pedestal. Additionally, it was decided that the antiquated wording on the monument should be addressed and a series of ceremonies between the Native Americans and other area residents should be performed to seal the peace.

William Kiger, who represented the Milford Borough Council at that June meeting, prepared a report of the event and read it at the Milford Borough Council meeting on July 7. In his report, he noted his efforts to meet with prominent members of the Native American community. Among them were Chief Wounded Bear of Cree/Lakota ancestry. Chief Wounded Bear has been distinguished as a representative of Native Americans at the United Nations. His son, Little Bear is a noted educator and Native American leader. They both reside in Greentown.

The report included a letter from Chief Wounded Bear in which he states that the elder Tom Quick "was the first pioneer to settle in Milford and live in harmony with the Indians until his death, paving the way for the East Gate of America." The letter concluded, "Therefore, the memorial should be for the elder Tom Quick, where all the evidence and proof is on his contribution to the area, and not to the young Tom Quick where there are so many confusing stories."

At the September 8 meeting, Kiger said, "I'm pleased to say that I think we're at the end of the Tom Quick Monument controversy. Kiger read from a memo regarding the resolution. In it, he noted that Chief Wounded Bear, Tom Quick VII and many noted historians all agreed that the Tom Quick Monument be set back in its place on Sarah Street with the following message to be cast and affixed to a stone at the head of the diamond base:

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

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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.”

After the memo was read, the meeting was opened for a public discussion.

Chief Wounded Bear said, “It’s been 75 days” since the June 25 forum. “During that 75 days we’ve contacted other Indian nations; we don’t send smoke signals anymore,” he joked. His remark brought about laughter, breaking the tension. He said he had spoken to Native American leaders all across the country. “We have unanimous agreement” that the monument was a gravesite and should be honored and the family should be respected.

Tom Quick VII was seated next to Chief Wounded Bear.

“I don’t have too much to say, but of Chief Wounded Bear and his son, I’ve made new friends that I never thought would happen.”

Professor Little Bear said that the legend of Tom Quick has never been honored in a song or a story in Native American culture. To him, its conspicuous absence in Native American art forms is another reason to consider it false. He conjectured that it may have been dreamed up to promote tourism.

“None of you should have a heavy heart about it. There is really not enough evidence that he ever killed 99 Indians. We’re all looking for truth. When it comes to historical fact, then we should stick to what we know as fact and keep investigating them until they are finally put to rest and I think because of the lack of evidence that he ever committed half of these atrocities, I feel that the monument, again, should go back and that this should be put to rest,” Little Bear said.

Audience member Perry Gower said that the borough council should wait until the next meeting before approving the resolution.

Borough Solicitor John Klemeyer disagreed.

“We have representative government, not direct government.” After further discussion, council member James Price said that “... this has been open for discussion for four years ... we can keep discussing this for six more months, six more years ... but there kind of needs to come to a point where you make the decision, and a lot of people think we may be past that point ...”

The motion to return the monument to its pedestal was approved.

“I don’t have too much to say, but of Chief Wounded Bear and his son, I’ve made new friends that I never thought would happen.”

— Tom Quick VII

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