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A Letter

Response to the Article “Archeology of the Village of Gilboa” by Dr. Michael Jacobsen

Kristen Wyckoff

As the Chairperson of the Gilboa Museum Committee I felt the need to respond to Dr. Jacobsen’s article. I and other members of the historical society were quite offended about the article’s history of our town and many of the facts quoted were wrong. A letter has been written with explanations of each mistaken quote to the archeologist, Dr. Jacobsen and I will mention a few here.

In Jacobsen’ summary of our town’s history he quotes “the city’s offer to buy their property became an opportunity for a better life outside the village.” Wrong. I don’t think anyone was happy from the interviews we did with our historical society or from Board of Water Supply reports that they fought for their “fair market value,” to the diaries that exist of families today. The people did not want to leave their homes or their way of life; it was forced upon them. It certainly was not felt to be an opportunity.

“The reservoir submerged many buildings” Wrong. All buildings were tore down or burned before the reservoir was filled.

“Over the years, trees, and brush reclaimed the area . . . became overgrown hiding the village’s historic past.” This was because the city owned the land, fenced it, and wanted the trees and brush to grow.

“Much of the memory of life in the village during the 1800’s has faded away. However, the village’s unwritten history awaits rediscovery.” Our memories of the old village of Gilboa have not faded away. We have many personal diaries that tell of their way of life, quite completely, as well as numerous magazine and newspaper articles. Many, many descendants of these early Gilboa people still live in the area. We have many maps: 1855, 1866, 1902 and others that show just where each house was in the village and who lived there. Censuses through the years tell all about each family. A large collection of photographs show pictures of the houses, the people and their life. Our history has been well preserved because of the tragic elements of our past.

“But nothing (is known) of how they fed and housed their employees.” Wrong. We have complete collections of annual reports of the Board of Water Supply for all the years of the construction and these reports describe how they fed and housed their employees, even photos that show the inside and outside of these buildings.

Regarding Solomon Mackay: “The historic records are silent about the personal history of this family. . . .” The correct spelling is Mackey and we know a lot about the Solomon Mackey and his many descendants. We have a folder about an inch thick on Solomon. And we are quite sure they had a “matched set” of dishes!

We realize that Dr. Jacobson is hired by NYC to do this research prior to any construction that is going to take place on the dam in the future. Our community is grateful for any information we may not have been aware of about the people; especially since we are not allowed to investigate our own ancestors or go on the property at all. I think Dr. Jacobson should be more sensitive to the ancestors of today and giving the impression that Gilboa was suffering and the people wanted to leave! Gilboa was like any other town at that time going through industrial changes such as the tanning industry vanishing and the introduction of cars that allowed tourism to diminish in the Catskill area. Other towns went through it, Prattsville, Stamford, and Roxbury for examples, are still here. People are still allowed to live there.

There are many more little false statements in the article that have been brought to Dr. Jacobson’s attention that I shall not scrutinize here. We may be a little sensitive from generations of anger and resentment, but families don’t forget when cemeteries of loved ones are removed and children and grandchildren can never go back and visit their ancestral homes, never ever.

In writing this letter “we” have the documents, newspaper articles and photographs to back up all the information. The “we” referring to the Gilboa Historical Society and our local town historians Richard Lewis and Beatrice Mattice.

Sincerely,

Kristen Wyckoff

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