

The Circle of Franklin History: Historical Perspective

by Teddie Storey

The Epilogue of the “The Story of the Susquehanna Turnpike” book, written by Dorothy Kubik, is very poignant and timely. “Sluman Wattles helped to turn the wilderness into a prosperous settlement on the Ouleout. It grew through the busy years of Turnpike travel, ‘It was once an important place’.” but when the Turnpike failed, the area fell into decline. Fleeting entrepreneurship that flowed and ebbed. She talks of the Village of Gilboa, once a thriving community, “nothing remained, except for the foundations, which still can be seen when the water of the Schoharie Reservoir is low” The same can be said of other once thriving communities now under the other reservoirs in our area, the once thriving farmland now laying fallow because of the farm buyouts of the 1980’s. What once was, is gone. She went on to say, “When Europeans first saw the Catskills area, they saw gold. We have been searching for gold ever since. When we did find it—in turnpikes, railroad, hotels, boarding houses, tanneries, acid factories, reservoirs—the gold proved to be counterfeit, and we were left the poorer.” This brings to mind the changes we are seeing today. Continued land acquisition by NYC to protect ‘their’ water, the threat (or promise) of fields and forest giving way to solar arrays and wind farms, the challenges faced by local farmers to survive, the high price of real estate making it difficult for locals to own a home, and businesses struggling to find workers. Now, we are seeing another economic development trend: tourism, the draw of the baseball camps and need for overnight lodging opportunities. Are we again looking at gold in “them thar hills”? Will it be fleeting or sustain our area? As we look to the future, I hope that we will be thoughtful of ‘the long haul’. There is hope. We still have some wonderful, active dairy farms. We now also have local producers of fruit, vegetables, meats, eggs, and other foods and craft products. We have a wonderful museum, farmers’ market and farm stands. We have homes that are being restored. People are showing renewed interest in our history and historic places. Old Franklin Day and the Stage Coach Run art celebration are again active. We have restaurants, antique and specialty shops, local craft people, a gourmet food store and White’s Farm Supply. We have local contractors of all kinds. We can buy anything from local fieldstone to handmade soap. Yes, there is certainly a place for tourism hopefully done keeping in mind respect for neighbors and the environment. Let’s work together to continue to restore our local economy, looking toward a long term plan for continued prosperity. Let’s make it work this time.