

This Week in Saratoga County History

The Gonzalez Tragedy Revisited

Submitted by Dave Waite January 1, 2025

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Gonzalez Historic Marker photographed by Dave Waite

On Western Avenue, two miles from the hamlet of West Charlton, stands a blue and gold historic marker recalling a tragedy from nearly 250 years ago:

GONZALEZ HOME
HERE, IN 1782, JOSEPH
GONZALEZ AND SON EMANUEL
WERE KILLED AND SCALPED BY
ST REGIS INDIANS, HIS SON
JOHN WAS TAKEN CAPTIVE

Fleeing persecution for their Protestant beliefs, Don Manuel Gonzalez brought his family to America in 1690 and settled along the Hudson River. A grandson of this early settler, Joseph Gonzalez left Dutchess County for the wilderness west of Schenectady in the early 1770s. Here he settled with his family in the southwest corner of what is now the Town of Charlton, Saratoga County, on a 1500-acre tract in the Kayaderosseras Patent. This area, at that time still a part of Albany County, was known to early settlers as the “Woestyne,” or what today would be called “wilderness.”

For the next ten years, Joseph Gonzalez and his family carved a farm out of this wilderness, and until the time of the Revolution had maintained a peaceful relationship with the Native Americans in the area. Joseph’s oldest son Emanuel, a strong, well-built young man, was often

seen as a threat to the natives who encountered him. One story of his prowess tells of him being attacked by twelve Indians, and though his head was severely twisted during hand-to-hand combat, he was still able to grab a fence rail and drive off his attackers.

Living in an area where many settlers were loyal to the British, Joseph Gonzalez was well known for siding with the Patriots. In early 1782, a group of soldiers were sent from Schenectady to arrest a Tory who lived in the vicinity of the Gonzalez homestead. After convincing the soldiers of his innocence, the Tory invited them to stay in his home for the night. In an amazing act of treachery, the man left his sleeping guests and proceeded to the Gonzalez home where he told Joseph and his sons that the men were Torys and asked for assistance in murdering them while they slept. Gonzalez refused and the next morning the man was arrested. The prisoner was taken to Schenectady, where he was tried and sentenced to be hung, with Joseph Gonzalez interceding for the man, convincing the court to grant him a pardon.

Only a few months after this incident, a band of St. Regis Indians who had spent the winter hunting in Northern New York, returned south to attack the Gonzalez family. On an April morning in 1782, Joseph and his sons Emanuel, John, and a younger son, also named Joseph, along with a hired servant, were burning a field when the band of Indians approached. The elder Joseph, assuming that the group was friendly, extended his hand in greeting, only to be immediately cut down by a tomahawk.

John and Emanuel were quickly seized, with Emanuel fighting off his attacker and fleeing. Making it to a fence surrounding the field, he was again grabbed and shot in the hand when he finally broke free. Still attempting to escape, he was fatally shot while climbing the last fence separating him from the woods. While all of this was happening, one of the Indians, who remembered a kindness from the past, released young Joseph to escape to the house where his mother, sister Dorcas, and eighteen-year-old brother David were hiding.

Before the attackers had time to regroup, David hitched up a wagon and drove the family seven miles to Cranesville on the Mohawk River. From there the family continued their flight to safety and headed east another eight miles along the Mohawk River to Tinker Hill in Glenville, the fortified home of Militia Captain Teunis Swart.

Swart immediately called the militia together to pursue the attackers. Concerned for the safety of their families, the men refused to leave that day but agreed to move out in the morning. Unwilling to wait, Captain Swart and David Gonzalez immediately returned to the scene of the attack. Here they located the lifeless bodies of Joseph Gonzalez and his son Emanuel in the field where they had fallen and brought them to the family's log home where they kept vigil for the night.

The next morning the militia arrived, bringing with them Mrs. Gonzalez. Joseph and Dorcas. Together they buried father and son on the family farm. The pursuit of the Indians was immediately taken up in hopes of releasing John Gonzalez and the family servant who had also been taken captive in the raid. Unfortunately, after two days the trail was lost somewhere in

the vicinity of Fish House on the Sacandaga River when heavy rain erased all evidence of the path the band of Indians had followed as they headed northward.

Fearful of pursuit, the band of Indians moved quickly toward Canada. For days, the group went without food, with the threat of death forcing the two captives to keep up the fearful pace. Once in Canada, John was separated from his father's hired man, who was never seen or heard from again. On reaching a garrison of the British Army, John was forced into service of the Crown, though he was never made to actively participate in any campaign for fear he might escape. At that time, his surname was recorded in the military record as Consalus, a name that he continued to use for the rest of his life. As a captive of the British, he was required to make cartridges, though often substituting charcoal for much of the gunpowder to render them ineffective. In the spring of 1785, two years after the war was over, he was finally released and headed back to the Mohawk Valley.

When he finally made his way back home, John searched for his remaining family, only to find that his mother had passed away from a broken heart only months after his capture. The first family member he located was his older sister, Rebecka, who had married Emanuel DeGraff and was then living in Schenectady. His brother David had also settled in Schenectady, with his sister Dorcas having married and moved with her husband to Saratoga. As there had been no way to pay on the contract for the Gonzalez homestead, the property had been taken from the family. In the years after his return, John began buying back pieces of the property on the eastern edge of the tract his family had first settled. In 1792 John married Dorcas Hogan of Albany, and together they raised 12 children. His descendants continued on the property until 1926. Today Consaul Road off of Rte. 67 in Charlton marks the location of this early farm.