

Highlands Historic Preservation

A Non-Profit Organization Dedicated to Preserving the Highlands’ Hidden Historic Resources

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**George Baum’s Vandalism Policies Rebuked by New York’s Environmental Protection Agency Chiefs**

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The Commissioners of New York’s top environmental protection agencies have vehemently disagreed with the actions and statements of George Baum, the former Chairman of the Kent Conservation Advisory Committee, regarding vandalism on their public properties.

In 2010, vandal and fraudster “Dr.” Philip imbrogno and his protege, Renee Fleury, threatened registered archaeological sites located on properties owned by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) in the town of Kent, Putnam County, New York. Imbrogno had previously planted foreign objects in the “King’s Chamber” in Putnam Valley, the largest stone chamber in Putnam County, in his attempt to support his theories on its origin. Imbrogno had claimed to hold a doctoral degree in Theoretical Physics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and undergraduate degrees in astrophysics from the University of Texas. He also claimed to have served as a Special Forces Green Beret officer in Vietnam in an act of stolen valor. All of these claims were false, as verified by MIT, the University of Texas, and the U.S. military. Fleury, who also fabricated her educational credentials in addition to painting graffiti on the Mount Nimham fire tower, also told a large crowd in Brewster that it was fine for anyone to “dig around” on these archaeological sites.

In April of 2010, Imbrogno asked his supporters via email to “raise the stones on Beltane”, a Celtic fertility rite celebrated on May 1st. He asked them to bring shovels, rope, and other tools needed to move stones around on registered archaeological site #A07902.000032, located in the town of Kent. George Baum, the steward of this property on behalf of the Town of Kent, failed to notify the environmental officials who owned the property in a timely manner, contrary to his stewardship agreement. Imbrogno finally backed down when Highlands Historic Preservation officials threatened to contact the authorities to prevent his vandalism. Baum also helped Fleury when the Kent police investigated her vandalism. Baum later stated publicly that the DEP and DEC did not care about things like rocks and other objects being disturbed on their properties.

When asked about Baum’s assertions that the DEC and DEP were not concerned with vandalism threats like those posed by Imbrogno and Fleury, the Commissioners of these agencies adamantly disagreed with Baum. “Digging is not permitted on City land . . . we would view unauthorized digging on City land as trespassing or vandalism and we would pursue appropriate enforcement remedies,” wrote DEP Commissioner Emily Lloyd. DEC Regional Director Martin D. Brand, in writing on behalf of DEC Commissioner Joseph Martens, stated, “Historic and archaeological sites located on State Forests, as well as additional unrecorded sites that may exist, are protected by the provisions of the New York State Historic Preservation Act. Unauthorized excavation and removal of materials from any of these sites is prohibited by Article 9 of Environmental Conservation Law and Section 233 of the Education Law. NYSDEC is fully committed to acting as responsible stewards of historic and archaeological resources under our care, custody and control. These resources will be preserved and protected wherever they occur on NYSDEC managed lands. We will take appropriate action where necessary to enforce our laws and regulations and we often work closely with local law enforcement and preservation groups to protect these vital resources.”

This admonition of George Baum’s outrageous approach to these vandals extends to those who supported Baum’s actions, and inactions. They include Jeff Green of Kent, himself an admitted graffiti artist on Mount Nimham, who served as a mouthpiece for the vandals and allowed the stolen valor miscreant Imbrogno to use his “PlanPutnam” blog to threaten the preservationists who sought to protect these resources. The members of the Kent Conservation Advisory Committee who agreed with Baum or sat in silence, including the current chair and co-chair, also share in this fiasco. And finally, the members of the Kent Town Board who “circled the wagons” to protect Baum, including former Supervisor Kathy Doherty, former Councilman John Greene, and Town Attorney Timothy Curtiss, also share in this embarrassing rebuke. Doherty paid for this fiasco, in addition to her cell tower debacle in Smokey Hollow, by being voted out of office soon thereafter. And Greene lacked any support to make another run for political office.

Those who stood with Highlands Historic Preservation against the vandals included former Kent Town Councilman Lou Tartaro, KCAC members Anne Balant Campbell and Phil Tolmach, and former members Wilma and Jim Baker. They are all to be commended for their common sense in rejecting the vandals.

It’s gratifying that the top environmental protection authorities in New York State have made clear their agreement with local preservationists like Highlands Historic Preservation that historic and archaeological resources must be protected in compliance with New York State’s laws. We will remain ever vigilant to ensure that the vandals and anti-preservationists are held accountable now and in the future.