



THE "OLD LINER" NEWSLETTER

Battle of Antietam will be re-enacted twice in September 2012

By ANDREW SCHOTZ, Herald-Mail.com, December 7, 2011
WASHINGTON COUNTY —

Several months ago, there was no indication a major Civil War re-enactment would be held in Washington County in 2012, the 150th anniversary of the war. Now, two are planned — on back-to-back weekends in September.

Thomas B. Riford, the president and chief executive officer of the Hagerstown-Washington County Convention and Visitors Bureau, said Wednesday that the Battle of Antietam will be re-enacted on the weekend of Sept. 14-16 in 2012. A Gettysburg, Pa., group is planning the re-enactment, which will be held on private land off Taylors Landing Road near Sharpsburg, Riford said. In August, Chris Anders announced plans for a separate re-enactment on Sept. 8-9, 2012, on private land near Boonsboro.

The Southern Division, an all-volunteer organization, will re-enact the battles of South Mountain and Antietam and possibly the Battle of Harpers Ferry, Anders said at the time. The CVB is sponsoring the event.

A notice posted at www.150thantietamreenactment.com invites re-enactors to participate in the Sept. 14-16 event. Other than providing a registration form, the website lists few specifics about the event, other than there will be "Two Historically scripted battles each day with pyrotechnics for added realism."

There will be various programs and music demonstrations all weekend, encouraging people to check back in

mid-January for spectator tickets, the website said.

Organizers of that event couldn't immediately be reached for comment. The only listed way to contact them was an email address. The Sept. 8-9 re-enactment is scheduled to be on about 100 acres at the foot of South Mountain, near the intersection of Alt. U.S. 40 and Md. 67, east of Boonsboro, The Herald-Mail reported in August. Anders said at the time that there would be about 4,000 to 5,000 re-enactors and 2,000 spectators, making it considerably smaller than the 1997 and 2002 anniversary re-enactments, which each had about 13,000 re-enactors and up to 100,000 spectators.

The Battle of South Mountain was fought on Sept. 14, 1862, and resulted in about 6,000 casualties. The Battle of Antietam was fought on Sept. 17, 1862, and had 23,110 casualties, making it the bloodiest single-day battle in American history.

Tenth Alabama Regiment cemetery in Virginia uncovered 150 years later

By Mary Orndorff -- The Birmingham News, December 29, 2011

BRISTOW, Va. -- About an hour west of Washington, D.C., on a scrubby plot of land overrun by prickly bushes and in the shadow of dense modern townhouse developments, an Alabama cemetery was born.

Civil War preservationists with no personal links to Alabama admit to muttering a "Roll Tide" or two as they walked across the newly cleared land, the final resting place of between 75 and 90 soldiers with the Tenth Alabama Infantry Regiment.

Historical documents and archeological study pinpointed the

burial grounds, a desperate place in the late summer of 1861, when rampant disease claimed up to five or six Confederate soldiers a day at what was known as Camp Jones.

There are other signs. The area is devoid of stones, except for five large rocks dug deeply into the dirt, each cut on at least one side by a man-made tool. And the area is pockmarked by man-sized depressions, not in rows, but haphazardly, as if soldiers were buried right where they died.

That level of detail, however, was unknown until Dec. 3, when a crew of about 40 volunteers, led by a 16-year-old Eagle Scout candidate, descended with chain saws and strong arms and gave sunlight and a defined boundary to the cemetery.

"It's one of the better Eagle Scout projects I've seen," said Rob Orrison, site manager with the Prince William County Department of Public Works Historic Preservation Division. "I was blown away by the number of people that came out."

The Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park is a new, lesser-known addition to an area rich with Civil War historical sites; Manassas National Battlefield Park is about three miles away as the crow flies.

The Bristoe Station park opened in 2007 after a developer, Prince William County officials and the Civil War Preservation Trust reached a compromise. The massive farm property is to be developed for residential and office space, save for a 133-acre passive park marking the Battle of Kettle Run in 1862 and the Battle of Bristoe Station in 1863.

The private owner who sold the land to the developer had farmed for decades around the unmarked cemetery, indicating he knew its historic value. But it was overgrown



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and inaccessible. So when Dane Smith of nearby Nokesville called up looking for an Eagle Scout project, park officials recommended clearing the cemetery.

A muddy trail leads to the section of Bristoe Station Battlefield Heritage Park being cleaned up as part of Dane Smith's Eagle Scout project. (Photo by Mary Orndorff)

Smith's father, Brian, recalls hearing the details about the project.

"When I heard it was an Alabama regiment, I was like, 'Great, I work for an Alabama bank,'" Brian Smith said on his second straight chilly December Saturday at the site. He is the lead Washington lobbyist for Regions Financial Corp.

The volunteers, under Dane Smith's direction, cleared the underbrush, cut down trees, put up a split-rail fence and built a bridge over a creek. Their work was approved by Orrison, who told them which trees to remove and how not to disturb the ground. Tree stumps were left intact. The stone grave markers -- three of which Orrison knew were there plus two others uncovered during the work -- were marked with bright pink tape. The park had earlier used radar to detect the disturbed dirt of the gravesites so they could estimate a cemetery boundary.

Soldiers marching by a nearby road in 1862 wrote of the row of cedar trees leading toward a clearing with wooden grave markers engraved with the names of the dead. Several years later, someone else wrote that the markers were in stone.

"Who knows when they were changed?" Orrison said.

Old pictures indicate that some of the stones were engraved, but they are missing.

Eventually, mulch will be placed on the path to the cemetery, and Orrison

wants to raise the money to pay for a memorial plaque at the entrance, listing names of the 40 or so soldiers known to be buried there. He's hoping to have that work done in time for a September dedication ceremony. The gravesites will be mapped and the site open to tourists. Park officials hope that by registering the cemetery, genealogists and historians will help them fill in the blanks of who else might be buried there, and descendants will visit their ancestors.

"It is a little sad that we won't be able to tell them exactly where they are," Orrison said.

The Tenth Alabama Infantry Regiment included companies from Jefferson, Shelby, Calhoun, Talladega, St. Clair, Calhoun, DeKalb and Talladega counties, according to the Alabama Department of Archives and History.

A second overgrown plot across the pasture is believed to be where Mississippi soldiers are buried.

Check Lincoln wrote day before being shot is found

AP. January 12, 2012

BROOKLYN, Ohio (AP) — A personal check that Abraham Lincoln wrote the day before he was assassinated is among those that were rediscovered by an Ohio bank.

The Plain Dealer in Cleveland reports that 70 checks were found in a vault at Huntington Bank's Columbus headquarters, including checks signed by George Washington, Mark Twain, Charles Dickens and Thomas Edison. Some are being displayed at branches throughout the state.

The Lincoln check had been made out to "self" for \$800.

The checks had been stored in a vault since at least 1983, when

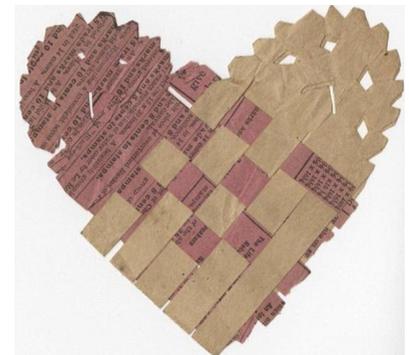
Huntington took over another bank. An employee had begun looking through old boxes last year, which led to the discovery of the checks.

A valentine card to the wife he never saw again: Soldier's heart-breaking love token among treasure trove of Civil War artifacts unearthed from basements and attics

By Simon Tomlinson and Meghan Keneally, MAILonline.com, December 27, 2011

The heart-warming hand-made valentine that a Confederate soldier sent to his wife is one of the 25,000 Civil War artifacts collected to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the long, bloody war.

For years, mementos like this one gathered dust in attics and basements, but now states all over the country are calling on descendants to allow archivists to scan their heirlooms and present a fuller picture of life during the War.



This makeshift valentine was stitched together in a basket weave by Confederate soldier Robert King to his



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wife Louiza. He was killed in 1862 before he saw her again

The heart valentine was created by soldier Robert King, who used his penknife to cut one sheet of a newspaper and a used envelope together so that he could intertwine the two in a basket weave pattern while serving on the front lines.

After finishing, he folded it and sent the memento to his wife Louiza in Montgomery County, Virginia, probably in a folded piece of paper because envelopes were few and far between during the war.



When opened, the valentine showed two people sitting opposite one another crying, which helped to show Mr King's feelings even if he couldn't do so in person

When folded, it was about 4 square inches and looked like a woven heart. Once in her hand, Louiza could then open the heart and find that the seemingly random dotted holes were actually intentional so that the valentine turned into the shape of two people sitting opposite one another, crying.

Also enclosed are two other trinkets with basket weaves- one that looks like a spade and one that is similar to a book mark. Clearly Mr. King had some spare time in between the

battles to dedicate to the craft while he dreamt of his far off wife.

The memento must have come as a bittersweet token of his affection when Louiza received it: Mr. King died in battle and never saw his wife or their child again.

It is stories like this one that show the emotional weight behind the artifacts that have been collected by the Library of Virginia which is just one of the state libraries preparing for the milestone anniversary.

This still-unfolding collection will help states expand existing collections on the Civil War and provide new insights into an era that violently wrenched a nation apart, leaving 600,000 dead. Much of the Civil War has been told primarily through the eyes of battlefield and political leaders.

These documents are adding a new narrative to the Civil War's story, offering insights into the home front and of soldiers, their spouses and African-Americans, often in their own words.

Historians, who will have access to the centralized digital collections, are excited by the prospect of what the states are finding and will ultimately share.

'I think now we're broadening the story to include everybody — not just a soldier, not a general or a president — just somebody who found themselves swept up in the biggest drama in American life,' says University of Richmond President Edward Ayers, a Civil War expert. 'That's what's so cool.'

In Virginia, archivists have borrowed from the popular PBS series 'Antiques Roadshow,' travelling weekends throughout the state and asking residents to share family collections, which are scanned and

added to the already vast collection at the Library of Virginia.

Started in September 2010, the Civil War 150 Legacy Project has collected 25,000 images.

Virginians have been generous, knowing they can share their long-held mementos without surrendering them, said Laura Drake Davis and Renee Savits, the Library of Virginia archivists who have divided the state for their on-the-road collection campaign.

'They think someone can learn from them rather than just sitting in their cupboards,' Savits said of the family possessions. 'And they're proud to share their family's experience.'

Patricia Bangs heeded the call when a friend told her about the project. She had inherited 400 letters passed down through the years between Cecil A Burleigh to his wife, Caroline, in Mount Carmel, Connecticut.

'I felt this would be useful to researchers, a treasure to somebody,' said Bangs, who works for the library system in Fairfax, Virginia. In one letter, she said, Cecil writes of Union troops traveling from Connecticut to Washington, crowds cheering them along the way.

The letters, like many collected by archivists, are difficult to read. Many are spelled phonetically, and the penmanship can be hard to decipher. Typically, they tell of the story of the home front and its daily deprivations. Researchers in Tennessee, a battleground state in the war, teamed up with Virginia archivists earlier this year in the border town of Bristol. Both states have seen their share of bullets, swords and other military hardware.

'We have grandmothers dragging in swords and muskets,' said Chuck Sherrill, Tennessee state librarian and archivist.



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Documents are fished from attics, pressed between the pages of family bibles and stored in trunks.

Wisconsin, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan and many other states have similar programs, or at least are trying to gather materials for use by scholars and regular folks.

Pennsylvania has been especially ambitious in adding new layers to the state's deep links to the Civil War, including a traveling exhibit called the 'PA Civil War Road Show.'

The 53-foot-long museum on wheels also invites visitors to share their ancestors' stories and artifacts in a recording booth. The remembrances will be uploaded on the website PACivilWar150.com.

Some people are even donating items unsolicited.

In Maine, for instance, some residents have submitted letters from ancestors who served in the war, but the sesquicentennial also saw an unusual submission from James Hosmer.

Hosmer's mother, Mary Ruth Hosmer, died in 2005. He was going through her possessions in Kittery, Maine, when he made a discovery: dozens of carte de viste, small photographs carried by some Union troops, an early version of dog tags. They were stored in a suitcase in an attic.

'The state archives was quite thrilled with it,' Hosmer said.

The Virginia archivists said they were especially pleased by a submission from the family of an escaped slave who wrote of his love for a woman named Julia at the same time he fled his master for an outpost on the Chesapeake Bay, where Union ships were known to pick up men seeking their freedom. David Harris found his freedom in 1861, serving as a cook for Union troops.

'I love to read the sweet letters that come from you, dear love,' Mr. Harris wrote to Julia. 'I cannot eat for thought of you.'

The diary of Union soldier Frederick Watkins is one of the more remarkable artifacts in the collection, as the hole from a bullet used in the famed Battle of Gettysburg is still shown so clearly.



A life-saving diary, complete with bullet hole, which protected Frederick Watkins, of the 4th New York Light Artillery Battery, from death thanks to it being tucked into his breast pocket during the Battle of Gettysburg

Mr Watkins was a member of the 4th New York Light Artillery Battery and he kept notes of their troop patterns during 1863, commenting on their trail throughout many of the East Coast states.

Shown in the picture to the left is his remarks for the week of the Battle, which took place from July 1 to July 3.

Though he was shot three times during the Battle, Mr Watkins was extremely lucky, as he wrote that one bullet hit his hat, another his blouse, and the third hit his leg. The one that hit his blouse is presumably the same one that went through the journal, apparently slowing it down enough so

that he did not sustain any fatal injuries to the chest.

Viewers can read his entry from the 3rd which details the event: 'Yesterday after I was wounded I was taken to a barn where my wound was dressed. Today I was moved to the third core hospital in a grove.'

In spite of the gapping hole in the diary, he continued to use the journal even after the bullet passed right through the book's spine.

'If you think about it, paper was at a shortage during the war and so it's not terribly uncommon to use whatever scraps they had,' said archivist Laura Drake Davis.

Mr Watkins survived the war and returned home to New York at the end of the war. He married Carrie Rawson Woodman well after the end of the war on 28 June 1866. originally an engineer, Ms Davis told MailOnline that Mr. Watkins headed public work campaigns and railroad projects in New York, Connecticut, New Jersey and Kentucky.

Civil War museums

changing as view on war changes

By MARY FOSTER, AP, January 9, 2012

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Inside Louisiana's Civil War Museum, battle flags line the walls. Uniforms, swords and long-barreled guns fill museum cases beside homespun knapsacks, dented canteens and tiny framed pictures of wives that soldiers carried into battle.

In the back, there's a collection devoted to Jefferson Davis, one-time president of the Confederacy formed by the southern states which seceded from the United States in 1861, complete with his top hat and fancy shoes at the spot where his body once lay in state.



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It's all housed in a little red stone building next door to the bigger and much more heavily visited Ogden Museum of Southern Art and near the National World War II Museum. Yet 150 years after the Civil War, the little museum finds itself struggling — like others both in the North and South — to make changes and stay relevant with new generations.

For some museums, that means more displays on African-Americans or exhibits on the roles women played as combatants and spies. For others, it means adding digital maps and electronic displays to attract tech-savvy youth. Or it may simply mean adopting a wider, more holistic approach to the war — without taking sides.

But it's not always easy for museums to update their exhibits because of the high costs, curators say. And some would-be visitors' dollars are kept away by the perception that southern Civil War museums are one-sided — or even racist — because of the legacy of slavery in the South.

"It's a challenge on several fronts, one is getting enough money for it," said John Coski, historian and library director at the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia. "Most have recognized the need to make the transition to a more modern perspective, but for some that's a struggle. Especially in the South, there are still strong feelings about some of these museums."

Louisiana's museum opened in 1891, then called "Confederate Memorial Hall: The Battle Abbey of the South." The combative name was dropped in the 1960s and today it's seeking a "more inclusive, broader" perspective, museum curator Patricia Ricci said. It has been invited to become affiliated with the Smithsonian Institution, which will further spur the effort to

showcase a more modern interpretation of the war.

"I think we will add some information on the Union effort here," Ricci said.

"And we will probably make some other additions with it. It always comes down to money, and we never have enough."

Today, the museum has the second largest collection of Confederate artifacts in the U.S. Visitors can view the uniforms of eight Confederate generals from Louisiana, rare swords and rifles, more than 125 original battle flags and rare photographs.

Ricci, the museum's curator of 31 years, notes that fewer people have visited the museum with each decade since the 1950s. But the 150th anniversary offers hope that a tide of new visitors will arrive. Attendance in December was up by 800 people over 2010, Ricci said.

The 150th anniversary observances began in April with the commemoration of the first shots fired at Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina. It will end in four years with remembrances of the Confederate surrender at Appomattox in Virginia.

For now, the Confederate Museum draws just a fraction of the visitors who flock to bigger museums nearby, averaging about 16,000 people a year. That's down from some 20,000 visitors before Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005.

The museum's main revenue source is the \$7 fee collected from each visitor, leaving it forever scrambling to make ends meet. Many of the artifacts are in need of restoration; the building needs a new slate roof and still hasn't added the handicapped facilities it wants.

"We have to be very frugal," Ricci said. "I look at the World War II museum which gets millions of

visitors and wish we could get just part of that."

Some visitors do stumble upon the museum after visiting the others nearby — and are surprised by its scope.

"I think it's a very important part of our history," said Rose Adams, 47, visiting from Dallas. "This is a wonderful display, full of such interesting things. I just happened on it after going to the World War II museum."

Interest in the Civil War got a huge boost in 1990 with the airing of Ken Burns' Public Broadcasting Service documentary on the war, still the most-watched public television series ever.

"One of the interesting things is that the series did in the North was it really provided a sense of ownership of the Civil War, which had been since 1865 the province of the South," Burns said. "We ceded the interest generally to the South, which is unusual, because it's usually the winners who write the history, not the losers."

But he notes museums that may have once been shrines to one side or another are adapting new kinds of displays exploring the war from new angles.

"I think a lot of that is changing and getting more centered on the war and not a distorted idea of it," Burns said. "Basically museums have started to interpret a more holistic look of the war."

In Charleston, the National Park Service has worked to make anniversary events more hospitable to blacks, offering events featuring Gullah story tellers and basket weavers, discussions of slavery and programs with re-enactors portraying black units that fought for the North. Gullah is the culture of the



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descendants of slaves who live on the region's sea islands.

Later this year the Charleston Museum will mount an exhibition about Robert Smalls, the slave who commandeered a Confederate transport vessel and piloted it past Southern batteries to the blockading Union fleet. He later served five terms in Congress from South Carolina.

Still, the feeling that southern museums dedicated to the war are racist is a lingering problem, said President and CEO of the Museum of the Confederacy in Richmond, Virginia, Waite Rawls.

"It's still one of the greatest challenges Confederate museums face, and we are all working on it," he said. "Unfortunately the Confederate flag was used as a symbol of white supremacy in the civil rights era. We got hit with a double whammy of the 1860s and the 1960s."

NJ Civil War Statue Head Found

Mystery remains as to who decapitated soldier statue

By Karen Araiza and Dan Stamm, nbcphiladelphia.com, December 12, 2011

Someone whacked the head off the statue of a Civil War soldier that stands in Bridgeton, New Jersey's City Park.

It's an act reminiscent of the opening of *the Simpsons* where the head of Jebediah Springfield is sawed off.

But this is no laughing matter for authorities in the small town.

"I feel very strongly that monuments dedicated to the memory of our national heroes should be preserved," said Bridgeton Police Chief Mark Ott.

"Those who have served with honor and integrity and continued on that path after returning safely home, should not have to suffer the indignity

of having the memory tarnished by such an act."

Originally a \$700 reward -- including \$100 put up by the police chief himself -- was offered for finding the head.



But the head -- valued around \$3,000 -- was found Monday morning in a pond not far from the statue. It's possible that recent high water levels caused by heavy rains caused it to become submerged.

Despite having the head back, officials still hope to find whoever sawed it off in the first place.

The vandalism was especially upsetting because of all the men from Bridgeton who served in the Civil War.

"This town sent 100 men to the Civil War and four years later only 35 returned," said Bill Conway who alerted police about the beheading.

Police weren't exactly sure how vandals chopped the head off, considering the statue's height.

Petersburg man pleads guilty to damaging battlefield

By MICHAEL BUETTNER, Progress-Index.com, December 8, 2011

RICHMOND - A Petersburg man whose house was searched earlier this year, revealing a potentially explosive Civil War-era artillery shell, has pleaded guilty to federal charges of unlawfully taking Civil War relics from the Petersburg National Battlefield.

In U.S. District Court in Richmond, John Jeffrey Santo pleaded guilty on Tuesday to two counts of damaging archaeological resources, each of which carries a maximum penalty of two years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000, and one count of depredation of government property, with a maximum penalty of 10 years in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000.

Santo originally was charged with three counts of damaging archaeological resources and one count each of depredation of government property, theft of government property and unlawful possession of a firearm. He will remain in federal custody while awaiting sentencing at a date to be determined.

According to court documents, Santo was accused of illegally excavating Civil War artifacts at the Petersburg park on several occasions between September 2007 and December 2010. On Feb. 10, 2011, federal officials including park rangers searched Santo's home in the 1800 block of Oakland Street in Petersburg. There, according to a court filing, they found "in excess of



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9,000 war relics and artifacts including bullets, buckles and assorted ordnance."

Officers also found Santo's "hand-written journal for the time period of 2006 through 2010 recounting his activities on a daily basis involving relic-hunting in the park," court documents state.

The journal listed details of Santo's relic finds and corroborated rangers' reports of spotting him in the park with a metal detector. For example, on March 27, 2009, a park intern "observed an individual matching the defendant metal-detecting within the park's boundaries. When seen, the defendant fled ... and dropped a pair of metal shears used to extract relics/artifacts from the ground, which were seized. A search of this area found 52 freshly dug holes. ..."

Santo's journal entry for that date read, "Run in (sic) with park ranger ... small pc of brass fuse 1 bTt R side."

Park rangers estimate Santo caused loss and damage in that one area of the park amounting to \$17,699, including \$15,666 for the value of the relics he took. In another area, he caused damage amounting to \$14,133, and \$6,114 in another, according to rangers' calculations.

The search of Santo's Walnut Hill home last February caused a minor emergency when law officers discovered a potentially explosive Civil War-era artillery shell. The ordnance, a Union Army Schenkl shell, was a hollow piece of steel in which gunpowder would have been packed.

Petersburg National Battlefield Chief Ranger Kevin Taylor told The Progress-Index at the time that Schenkl shells are known for being unstable. It was unknown whether the shell was live, and "Due to the dangers involved, when the shell was

discovered we called the Petersburg police for assistance," he said.

Alabama's last known real daughter of the Confederacy buried in Cullman

By Thomas Spencer -- The Birmingham News, January 9, 2012
CULLMAN, Alabama --- Alabama's last known real daughter of Confederacy, Norma Vivian Smith, was buried today in Cullman.

Smith, 89, who died Jan. 7, was the daughter of Thomas Jefferson Denney, a soldier who fought in the Civil War as part of Company H in the 31st Alabama Infantry regiment. Smith's brother, Tyus, lives in Tarrant and is in his 90s.

According to the United Daughters of the Confederacy, Thomas Jefferson Denney was born in 1843. He was about 18 when he enlisted with the Confederate Army.

He was captured by Union forces on June 15, 1864 near Marietta, Ga., and held prisoner at Rock Island Barracks, Illinois, where he signed an oath of allegiance to the United States upon his release on June 18, 1865.

He was in his 80s when he married his fourth wife, Smith's mother, Dora, who was a widow in her 40s. The Civil War veteran died at age 91 in 1934.

Daughter Vivian Smith was born on Dec. 22, 1922 in Cleburne County.

A diabetic, Smith lost a leg 30 years ago but continued to live on her own, doing her own laundry, cleaning and cooking.

Gail Crosby, president of the Real Daughter's club of the United Daughters of the Confederacy, said the organization has a list of 16 living real daughters of Confederate

veterans still living in the United States.

Thomas Strain, Army of Tennessee Department Commander, said the Sons of Confederate Veterans lists 24 living real sons of Confederate Veterans in the country.

Sword Swiped From Lincoln's Tomb Recovered

CWi, December 7, 2011 11:43 AM
SPRINGFIELD, Ill, (IRN) — A copper sword stolen two months ago from atop Abraham Lincoln's tomb in Springfield has been recovered.

A 16-year-old boy, whose name won't be released, told investigators the sword came loose when he grabbed it, and it fell to the ground breaking into two pieces. It was returned to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency during a news conference at Springfield Police headquarters Tuesday.

Catherine Shannon, the agency's acting director, says she was shocked to learn the sword has been recovered, and doesn't know if it'll be repaired.

"We do appreciate the citizen who came forward. We actually had a couple of people offering to replace the sword for free," she says. "We were very grateful for that."

Police say a series of tips led investigators to the boy, who has been charged with theft and criminal trespassing. Springfield Police Chief Robert Williams says security has been increased at the cemetery for now, but the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency says its budget is getting smaller, and permanent enhancements probably won't be possible.



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Graves at Civil War cemetery face being exhumed after 50ft-long sinkhole forces 25 residents to flee their homes

By Craig Mackenzie,
MAILonline.com, December 30, 2011
A sinkhole that forced the evacuation of 25 residents from their homes has spread to an historic cemetery, threatening dozens of graves.

Officials in Allentown, Pennsylvania, have been given the go-ahead by a judge to exhume remains buried during the Civil War.

The hole, measuring 50ft long and 30ft wide, was thought to have collapsed when a water main burst and flooded under a road.

About 60 graves in Union and West End Cemetery are threatened have been roped off after several headstones tilted.

The cemetery holds about 20,000 graves, including 714 Civil War veterans. Among them is a Medal of Honor winner, Ignatz Gresser.

Lehigh County Coroner Scott Grim said: 'If any sites are in jeopardy, than we are going to have to make that decision to excavate.'

'It's a very sensitive issue. You are dealing with a cemetery. You are laid to rest and now it is being disturbed.'

Everette Carr, president of the association which maintains the 157-year old non-profit burial ground, revealed there were are no detailed historical records beyond those whose graves have headstones.

Many of the dead were buried in wooden baskets as was the custom during that era.

A dozen homes half a block from the hole on 10th Street were evacuated

yesterday after firemen found a basement flooded. Five properties have been declared structurally unsafe.

'At this point, we don't know if the homes will have to be condemned or not,' said fire chief Robert C. Scheirer.

'Once we get the street secured, we will get into these homes and determine whether any have to be razed.'

Emergency workers have cut off power supplies and are now filling in the hole in with concrete.

Texas Sons of Confederate Veterans sues over license plates

Los Angeles Times, December 8, 2011

A group that campaigned unsuccessfully for Texas to issue a specialty license plate featuring a Confederate flag is suing the state's Department of Motor Vehicles board in federal court.

The Texas division of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, a 30,000-member group based in Columbia, Tenn., released a statement Thursday after filing the lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Austin arguing that the DMV infringed on its right to free speech by refusing the license plate design.

"The 1st Amendment clearly protects controversial speech," the group said in a statement sent to The Times, noting that the same day the eight-member DMV board voted unanimously to reject the Confederate plate last month it approved a plate that "is offensive to Native Americans" because it honors the Buffalo Soldiers, an all-black cavalry that helped fight Native Americans in the 1800s.

"The board seeks to bar the Texas SCV from expressing their viewpoint while allowing all other groups to express their viewpoint. This type of restriction is exactly the type which the 1st Amendment is designed to erase," the statement said.

Texas officials turned down a Sons of Confederate Veterans' request for a specialty plate three years ago, citing rules that banned political or controversial plates. The rules changed two years ago, and the board has since approved all 89 proposed specialty designs.

"We said if we don't get the plates we're going to sue them," Marshall Davis, a spokesman for the group in Austin, told The Times. "There are other organizations that have had to sue their states to get their 1st Amendment rights, and this is the same thing."

Davis said his group was optimistic it would prevail because "a precedent has been set" in other states.

Nine other states have approved Sons of Confederate Veterans' specialty plates, but Virginia, Maryland and North Carolina only did so after the group sued. A similar suit is pending in Florida.

Davis said the design, which features a Confederate flag as part of the Sons of Confederate Veterans' logo, honors veterans. He said the group planned to use proceeds from plate sales, a portion of which return to the sponsoring group, to educate the public about Civil War history.

Opponents called the flag a symbol of bigotry. The NAACP gathered more than 22,000 petition signatures and a letter from at least 19 state legislators opposing the plates.

Before the DMV vote, Gov. Rick Perry had said he opposed the Confederate license plate proposal during a campaign appearance in his



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bid for the Republican presidential nomination.

DMV officials told the Associated Press they had not seen the lawsuit late Thursday.