

Long-lost Boston Post Cane reclaimed

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Lexington — Without the help of any hats, whips, guns, or witty rejoinders, a mother and son uncovered a golden Lexington relic last Friday.

Elaine and Sam Doran found the 1909-era Boston Post Cane, a treasure on which the Minuteman Cane Award was founded, at the Munroe Tavern. Like something from an Indiana Jones movie, it required the Dorans to research its history and last known whereabouts, and then find two separate pieces: first the headpiece, then the stick.

“When we put the two together, it was just a perfect marriage,” said Elaine Doran, collections manager for the Lexington Historical Society. “It’s great that the two pieces are together again, and we’re excited about it.”

The cane had been missing in town since the 1970s. Former Lexington Minuteman editor Alice “Mickey” Hinkle used her power to search for it, albeit unsuccessfully, in the 1980s.

This summer Sam Doran was hot on the trail, however. The 14-year-old historian and archivist’s assistant for the Lexington Historical Society dug through documents and old Minuteman newspapers in the library, and through him much of the cane’s history has now been exposed.

The Boston Post Cane was originally a publicity stunt by the newspaper of the same name. The Post gave each town in Massachusetts a cane that was to be carried by the oldest male resident in town. When that resident died, the cane would be passed on to the next oldest resident, and so on.

The cane has a 14-carat-gold head, and the staff is made from Gaboon ebony from the Congo in Africa. It was created by J.F. Fradley & Co. of New York, according to the Post’s original letter to Lexington’s

selectmen.

Lexington’s first recipient was Charles Brown, who was born in Lexington May 2, 1816. He was 93 years old when he was presented the cane in August 1909.

After the first presentation, the selectmen asked the Lexington Historical Society to become the custodians and arbiters of the cane, since selectmen would eventually cycle out of office.

In an official letter dated Sept. 9, 1909 to Society President Dr. Fred Piper, Board of Selectmen Chairman Frank D. Pierce wrote, “We therefore desire that the Historical Society act as the custodians of the cane, and see that at the decease of the present holder that it is presented to the next oldest citizen of the town.”

From then on, the Society kept track of the cane. Doran said he is unsure when the cane went out of circulation, but it was accounted for in the society’s collections in 1965. The cane was last passed on to a resident in 1931.

In 1974, the Society moved the Hancock Clarke House back to its original location after the owner of the property, Ruth Brigham Jackson, deeded it to them at her death. The cane was stored in the house or in the brick “fireproof room” on 35 Hancock St., because it was lost during the move.

“It just sort of got put into a box with other canes instead of being kept in its own specific place,” said Doran.

The cane’s two pieces were apparently separated, with the golden headpiece put into a different storage container.

They remained separated, and forgotten, until Sam Doran took an interest. His original interest was sparked when he learned that a relative through marriage, Michael Montague, once held the cane.

Then he came across the society’s 1909 annual report, and the letters from the Boston Post and Pierce.

“That’s what sparked the recent discovery of the cane,” he said.

In the 1980s, there was a renewed interest in the cane, but efforts to find its location were unsuccessful. In its stead, Hinkle and David Williams created the Minuteman Cane award to honor Lexington’s senior citizens. The cane is awarded to a resident age 80 or older who has made important contributions to the town. It is presented on Patriots Day.

Susan Bennett, the executive director of the Lexington Historical Society, said the Dorans deserve all the credit for uncovering the cane.

Bennett said Elaine Doran had cataloged every item in the Hancock Clarke House before it closed for renovation this year, and computerized the database.

“Because of this inventory, which is now in a computerized database, we were able to put two and two together, and realize the two pieces of the cane belonged together,” said Bennett.

When Sam’s determination and Elaine’s hard work combined on Friday, they were able to find both pieces and match them up.

“You put [Sam] on the case of anything, and he’ll solve it,” Bennett said.

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