



Lost for more than 50 years, gold cane returned to Palmer officials

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Lori Stabile, The Republican



From left to right, Hendrik Gideonse and Sarah M. Longden of Maine, stand next to Palmer Town Council President Paul E. Burns, and Historical Commission members Robert J. Ring, Lorraine Novak and Harold L. Olson on Saturday at the Palmer Town Building. Burns is clutching the long-lost Boston Post Cane that was missing for 50 years. Longden found it in a kite box when she was cleaning; her late father was a Palmer selectman. The cane was given to the oldest resident in town before it went missing. Photo by Lori Stabile

PALMER – When Maine resident Sarah M. Longden opened an old kite box belonging to her father, a former Palmer selectman, she expected to find a kite, not the town’s gold-headed Boston Post cane that had been missing for more than 50 years.

News that the cane may have been found quickly spread among Historical Commission members, who waited in anticipation on Saturday morning at the Town Building for Longden to arrive with the cane.

They were eager to see if the mystery of the lost cane had finally

been solved.



Also on hand was Town Council President Paul E. Burns, who proclaimed it “the real deal, 50 years later” after inspecting the golden inscription: “Presented by The Boston Post to the oldest citizen of Palmer, Mass.”

The officials were amazed that the ebony cane with the 14k gold head has found its way back home after all this time.

“When they called me and told me, I said, ‘Oh my God.’ It’s great there are honest people out there. We had no clue where it was,” Historical Commission member and former Police Chief Harold L. Olson said.

Burns said, “It’s wonderful to have this back in our community. It’s great that it’s come back after 50-plus years. I think we’re grateful to Sarah for returning it and recognizing the value of it.”

Historical Commission member Lorraine Y. Novak said they thought the cane would never be found.

“I’m just so excited that the cane has finally come back . . . We had almost given up hope,” Novak said.

Historical Commission Chairman Robert J. Ring also was pleased.

“It’s nice to have the source of the tradition with us. It’s a little thing in a lot of ways, but it’s a big thing in some ways . . . it’s a tie to the past,” Ring said.

Longden, 71, said her father, the late George B. Cheney, served as a selectman for 25 years until he left Palmer to retire to Maine in 1961. He passed away in 1992. Longden said she is sure that he didn’t intend to take the cane.

“I’m sure that it was an oversight,” Longden said.

Longden said she was going through boxes that belonged to her parents when she stumbled

across the kite box. Her partner, Hendrik Gideonse, a former selectman in Maine, knew right away it was a Boston Post cane, having presented many himself.

She and Gideonse were on their way on Saturday to homecoming at Amherst College, and figured it was the perfect opportunity to return the cane to Palmer.

Ring said Palmer isn't the only town to ever lose its cane. But Palmer is unusual because it happened twice.

Stephen Nowak, also a Historical Commission member, said the last person to receive it was Daniel H. Splaine in 1952. Before that, he said the cane was missing for 50 years, after having been presented to Nelson Fisher in 1909. He said newspaper clippings indicate the cane was returned to the town offices by a woman in 1952 who left before anyone could question her.

The tradition of honoring the oldest male in town began in 1909 as a promotion for the old Boston Post newspaper. But the canes were supposed to be given back after that individual's death, and that's when they often went missing.

Ring said that the commission has been given replica canes to the oldest man and woman in town for the past 20 years. The recipients of those canes can keep them; Ring said it obviously became too hard to track them down after their owners passed.

While Burns said he had "no idea at this moment" what they will do with the cane, he did emphasize that they do not intend to lose it for a third time, and may display it somewhere in town. "It makes sense to preserve it in some fashion so it doesn't get lost again," Burns said.

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