

## Somerset's long-lost Boston Post cane 'hiding in plain sight' at historical society

By Jo C. Goode

**Herald News Staff Reporter**

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SOMERSET — Back in 1909, the town was one of hundreds of communities in New England to receive an ebony cane with a solid gold head to present to its oldest citizen as part of a marketing scheme by the former *Boston Post* newspaper.

Now town officials hope to rekindle that tradition after a historic 103-year-old cane was recently uncovered at the Somerset Historical Society.

How or when it made its way there is a mystery.

"It was hiding in plain sight. I don't know how it got there and any explanation is 100 percent speculation," said Diane Goodwin, historical society director.

The cane, meant to be passed along to the town's next oldest resident after the holder of the cane dies, was not listed on any of the historical society's inventory lists and there is no historical documentation about the elderly recipients, she said.

Questions of the whereabouts of the *Boston Post* cane surfaced after the town presented 105-year-old Belinda "Bella" Flanagan with a certificate honoring her longevity for her July birthday, said Selectman Donald Setters, who is a historical society member.

That's when Town Administrator Dennis Luttrell told him the story about the cane and its history. It got the pair wondering what happened to the town's *Boston Post* cane.

"Honestly we thought we'd never see it again," Setters said.

In the meantime, Goodwin said she, too, was thinking about the cane.

"I knew it existed and I was thinking 'whatever happened to that cane?'" Goodwin said.

Doing some online research, Goodwin found a photograph of the ebony cane. At the historical society, a display case holds about five antique canes, and lo and behold, she said, there it was.

"We had it all the time," Goodwin said.

It is one of 431 canes fashioned out of African Congo ebony and purchased by Edwin Grozier, publisher of the now-defunct *Boston Post*, who presented the canes to boards of selectmen across the region. Originally, it was only presented to male elders, but that tradition changed in 1930 when women were included.

On the 14-carat gold handle of Somerset's cane is the inscription "Presented by the *Boston Post* to the oldest citizen of Somerset, Mass. To be transmitted."

Founded in 1842, the *Boston Post* shut down in 1956.

Goodwin said the cane is a symbol of respect in deference to the wisdom of the elders of a community and is a tradition still followed in many New England communities.

To keep with tradition, the historical society will return the *Boston Post* cane to the town at tonight's Board of Selectmen meeting.

Volunteer Richard Shane said there are so many ways the cane could have come to the historical society, but is glad the "the town wants it back and that we had it."

Setters, who called the discovery of the cane one small piece of the town's historical puzzle, said there is no definite plan for the *Boston Post* cane, but there is discussion to re-establish some form of the tradition of honoring the town's oldest citizen.

"We're talking about having it placed in a showcase in Town Hall for the public, along with a ceremony for the eldest of our citizens, they deserve that honor. I think it's so important for town pride and a sense of town spirit," Setters said.

Now that word about the discovery of the *Boston Post* cane is getting around, Goodwin said she hopes anyone who has information about past town recipients will come forward so the historical society can chronicle the history of the cane.

Anyone with information can contact members of the Somerset Historical Society at 508-675-9010 or [somersethistorical@yahoo.com](mailto:somersethistorical@yahoo.com).

Email Jo C. Goode at [jgoode@heraldnews.com](mailto:jgoode@heraldnews.com).

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