

Long-missing ancient grave markers turn up

By LISA RATHKE The Associated Press Dec 21, 2006 Updated Oct 27, 2018



MONTPELIER — A pair of 18th-century tombstones that disappeared 35 years ago are headed back to their rightful resting places, capping a bizarre saga in which one of them was stolen a second time. "It's a wonderful story for a number of reasons," said Nancy Osgood, president of the historical society in Norwich, where one of the tombstones originally stood. "To have two stones by a known carver to come back to cemeteries from which they were taken is wonderful." The slate markers — one from a cemetery in Norwich, one from a cemetery in Lebanon, N.H. — stood at the graves of Isaac and Deliverance Waterman, young siblings who died within days of one another in 1775 and were buried together, and Mrs. Mary Wright, who was buried in 1782 in the Old Pine Tree Cemetery, in Lebanon, N.H. One stone reads "Isaac Waterman died at the age of six months on Sept. 7, 1775, and Deliverance Waterman died at age of seven on Sept. 10, 1775, sons of Samuel & Sarah Waterman." The stones were originally removed by an unidentified photojournalist researching stone carver Gershom Bartlett in the early 1970s, according to authorities. The photojournalist, who is ill and now in a nursing home, apparently took the tombstones in a bid to save them. "The wife reasoned that after all the work and research, he just couldn't bear to leave the stones there and let them deteriorate further," said Mike McFadden, a police detective in Belfast, Maine, where the stones turned up about three months ago. He wouldn't identify the couple. The man's wife had hired a company to clean out her basement and the tombstones — which were in it — ended up being taken to a transfer station, a little worse

for the wear. One was cracked apart, the other was broken off above the date. The attendant notified Belfast town cemetery supervisor Steve Boguen, who agreed to take them and seek their origins. Boguen repaired the 3-1/2-foot-high, 90-pound Waterman stone before propping it against a building at Grove Cemetery in Belfast — only to have it stolen. McFadden, who learned that the stone had come from Vermont, contacted the Vermont Old Cemetery Association, a volunteer organization that tends to old grave sites. The group found a Norwich cemetery that contained stones carved by Bartlett, whose memorials were known for his hook-and-eye design. It also looked up town records to find the birth and death dates of the two children. In mid-October, the Waterman stone turned up again — dropped off at a church in Belfast with an anonymous note from someone who wanted it to be returned to its rightful place, McFadden said. With the mystery of the stone's origins solved, McFadden then set about returning them. Last week, he made a five-hour trip to deliver the stones to Vermont, giving them to the president of the Vermont Old Cemetery Association, who promptly locked them in his garage. On Thursday, the tombstones will be returned to the Norwich Historical Society, pending their placement on the graves. "These do disappear from time to time and I think it's terrific to have them back," said D. Peter Waterman, of Thetford, a probable descendant of the children who will be on hand Thursday at the Historical Society. The other stone will be returned to Wright's grave in the Lebanon, N.H., cemetery. No date has been set for that. The photojournalist will not be charged, McFadden said. Possessing a tombstone in Maine is a felony, with a statute of limitations of six years. "It's one of these weird things and I'm hoping it will bring attention to what's happening in cemeteries, as far as restoring them or vandalizing him," said Thomas Giffin, president of the Vermont Old Cemetery Association. For McFadden, whose detective work helped forge the happy ending, the saga of the stones was a remarkable story. He says there's a message in it for would-be grave robbers. "Everybody should know that these tombstones are going to outlive you, you're not going to keep it a secret forever. Someone's going to find out you stole it," McFadden said. —————— On the Net: Vermont Old Cemetery Association: <http://www.sover.net/7/8hwdbry/voca/>