

Dunkirk uncovers town treasures

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Former Dunkirk Clerk Bob Douglas (left) and current councilman Dan Marshman wear some of the GAR neck gear used in national events by the local chapter during the late 1800s. The colorful items were part of a collection of local historical treasures rediscovered in the attic of the municipal building.

Items from 1880s-'90s had been stored in attic of town hall

DUNKIRK — Until recently, most people in the village of Dunkirk had no idea there were two historical treasure chests stored in the attic of their municipal building. Possibly the only person in the village who was aware the two trunks of memories existed was former town clerk Bob Douglas. He had been told of the cases tucked away in the upper level of the building by former mayor and local historian the late Jim Shuff.

"I knew they were up there, but there were few others that knew about them," he said.

Douglas said he didn't have much information regarding what was stored inside the boxes. He had only looked in them once, he said, but he knew they were of historical value to the community. In recent years, said Douglas, he would think of what would happen to the material in the trunks should he not be around to tell others of their existence, so when Councilman Dan Marshman drove his bicycle past Douglas' home recently, Douglas stopped him to share the information.

Marshman, with the assistance of village workers, located the chests and carried them downstairs for inspection.

As a lover of history, Marshman said, what he found inside was very interesting.

Books from local organizations, old maps of larger cities, family correspondents and journals, all from the 1880s and 1890s, were waiting for discovery.

Douglas said as they searched through the material, he hoped to find information on families or friends he would remember, but the material seemed to predate him by several decades.

"I was hoping to find more names I would recognize, but these were before my time," he said.

Nestled in the boxes were documents from the local Grand Army of the Republic chapter, which was very active in the events of the national organization. In a bag next to the trunks contained some neck pieces believed to have been used during GAR national activities, such as the 1895 dedication of the Chickamuga and Chattanooga National Military Park. There also are maps of the city of Chattanooga. The group also attended national GAR events as far away as Denver.

Music played by the Dunkirk band members of the GAR are found in the chests.

Documents found indicate the GAR paid \$1.66 per month for rent on their building in Dunkirk.

There are journals from the Women's Relief Corporation, which helped members of the military. The Dunkirk group attended the organization's 1887 meeting in Sandusky.

There were also letters from Col. Jason P. Rush, which were written at the turn of the 20th century to his family in Dunkirk.

Material from the local Order of the Odd Fellows group also were found.

The treasure in the trunks will be sent to the Ohio Historical Society, which will keep any items it finds to be valuable to them. Marshman doubts there would be much interest at the state level on the items since they are so specific to the history of Dunkirk.

What is left will be offered to the Hardin County Museum.

Should the museum have no interest in the items, said Marshman, he is not sure what will be done with them.

"They don't really belong to the village," he said. "They belong to the community. They are personal items. I'm not sure who would maintain them. What happens to them is a question I don't have the answer to. I wouldn't want to see them destroyed ... I was never in the military, but I have a high interest in history and I value keeping the past alive as much as we can."

By DAN ROBINSON

Times staff writer

Genealogy Society agrees to accept Dunkirk treasure

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DUNKIRK — The Hardin County Genealogy Society is ready to preserve century-old records and memorabilia that were found in chests in the Dunkirk village building.

Earlier this year, the chests were discovered in the building containing individuals' letters and various memorabilia from the 1900's, coming from such organizations as the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), Woman's Relief Corps and the Oddfellows.

When Hardin County Genealogy Society President Kathy Hines learned of this discovery, she thought the items would best be preserved with the society, as it is their stated goal to preserve and protect county records.

“We really feel we are the best place for them to come,” Hines said, referring to the society’s buildings in the 200 block of W. Franklin Street in Kenton.

“If you send them to Columbus, they’re going to go in a box somewhere; you aren’t going to see them. What we promise to do for you is we will copy them first. The originals will be archivally preserved, then the copies will be made available for people to research.”

“You don’t have to be a member of Hardin County Genealogy to come and research,” she continued.

“Our doors are open. If we are open, you are welcome to come and we’ll help you in any way we can.”

Since a Times article about the discovery has been published, Hines said, she has been contacted by individuals from as far away as California wanting to know if their grandparents or great-grandparents are mentioned in any of the records.

Brad Bailey, representing the Sons of Union Veterans, said the organization has been the one to inherit GAR artifacts in the past, and suggested that if there is any such memorabilia in the chests, that the Sons would be willing to take it off their hands and preserve it.

Councilman Dan Marshman said that as he personally values history – and suggested his fellow council members do as well – and agreed that the society is the best place for the items.

“After talking with you (Hines), I personally think you’re the ones to take possession of this because I don’t know of anyone else who would go through and maintain and preserve that history,” Marshman said.

Council was in agreement with Marshman, and fiscal officer Phyllis Spencer said it’s simply a matter of time before the village can hand the items over as it first has to be decided if any legal action is needed for the process.

By TY THAXTON
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