

Revolutionary find returned to Groton grave

Grave marker of Joshua Bentley, who aided Paul Revere's ride, found in Arizona

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GROTON -- John Raya walked into an Arizona antique shop last year not expecting to find the grave marker belonging to an American Revolutionary War veteran in Massachusetts.

Before he was about to leave, the owner showed Raya a grave marker purchased from an estate sale. It was a cast iron cross with a figure of a minuteman in the center and the letters "SAR" for the Sons of the American Revolution. He immediately knew he found a piece of history.

"You never saw \$50 come out of my pocket so fast," said Raya, who is 1st vice president of the SAR Oaks chapter in Michigan.

Through research, he learned that the marker belonged to Capt. Joshua Bentley, who was buried in Groton at the Old Burying Ground.

Bentley fought in the war and most notably rowed Paul Revere across the Charles River in 1775 to make his famous midnight ride. He also served at Castle Island in Boston and supplied weaponry and ammunition to George Washington's army during the Revolutionary War.

The 12-inch marker had been missing for more than 75 years and presumed stolen, according to the Massachusetts Daughters of the American Revolution.

On May 5, Raya, his wife, and members of the Michigan Society Sons of the American Revolution traveled to Groton to return the marker to Bentley's grave.

A ceremony featured attendees in period dress, colonial color guards, and regiment groups that fired musket volleys.

Helen Davis, a descendant of Bentley, and Sean Conley, a descendant of Revere, attended.

James Walker, president of the Oaks chapter who came with Raya to Groton, is a descendant of Bentley by marriage, Raya said.

Finding the marker was a sign of divine providence, Raya said. The discovery has given him a sense of pride and is a way for him to share a piece of history with his community and the nation.

"It hit me that by finding the marker, I'm a small part of history," he said.

The last time an SAR marker was returned to a grave site was about three years ago, Raya said. Like Bentley's, the marker was found in an antique shop and had the name of the patriot on it, which made it possible to return to Kentucky.

Bentley's name tag on the marker was made of copper, which helped it last over the years, Raya said. Similar ones were placed on the graves of those who fought in the Revolutionary War more than 100 years later.

"The reality is if the tag wasn't on there it would've ended up on the grave of a patriot in Utica (Michigan)," he said.

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