

NORTH CAROLINA ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

109 EAST JONES ST., RALEIGH, N.C., 27601-2807

FALL 1994, Volume 4, Number 3

NEWSLETTER

The Desecration of William Preston Mangum's Grave

Collecting artifacts of the past has been a favored pastime of many for almost as long as there have been artifacts to collect. Most collectors these days are satisfied with buying items from flea markets, antique shops or other collectors, or spend their weekends scouring the plowed fields that once were sites of past activities. Most collectors are honorable and sincere in their interest in the past, and get a personal satisfaction from owning, learning about, and displaying their "finds." Sadly, however, there are those among us who have no philosophical qualms about crossing the line from honest and ethical collecting to illegal and unscrupulous looting. Sometimes, their actions enter the realm of the immoral and perverse.

One of the most appalling cases of looting in North Carolina occurred in the winter of 1983, when one or more individuals robbed the marked grave of William Preston Mangum (July 13, 1837 - July 28, 1861), located in northern Durham County. Mangum, a Second Lieutenant in Company B of the Sixth NC Regiment of the Confederate States Army, was fatally wounded at the First Battle of Manassas (Bull Run) in July 1861.

The events and communications surrounding the death and burial of Mangum are well documented in the *Papers of Willie Person Mangum*, edited by H. T. Shanks (1950-1956) and summarized in a report by Archives and History researcher Michael Hill (1984). Willie Person Mangum was William's father and a well-known orator and politician of the day, serving in both the House of Representatives and Senate, including a term as Senate President *pro tempore*.

Near the end of the fighting at Manassas, a Union round struck William in the chest. The round hit a bible tucked inside his coat, and a letter from a Captain Webb to Mangum's parents indicated that while the wound was serious, "...the Surgeons assure me he will get well...." Unfortunately, due to a shortage of clean bandages, gangrene set in and William died on July 28. The bible is now curated at the North Carolina Museum of History. The body was shipped to Hillsborough for burial.

William's father, said to be deeply affected by his death, died only six weeks later and was buried next to his son in the newly created Mangum family cemetery, located some 500 yards from the family home. Several other members of the Mangum line were eventually laid to rest in the cemetery; the last in 1978. New headstones were erected for most of the graves in the 1940s.



Disturbed grave of William Preston Mangum, Durham County.

Photo by Mark Mathis

The Division of Archives and History got involved with the case at the request of the Durham County Sheriff in November, 1983, following a report of grave-robbing at the site by a local hunter. Only William's grave had been robbed, clearly because of the potential for Civil War era artifacts, specifically the tunic buttons and belt buckle. When Michael Hill and I visited the site with the sheriff's detectives, we found a gaping hole with fragments of casket and clothing scattered in and around the grave. We also found skeletal remains, even locks of hair.

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Using local informants, and with the cooperation of the Sheriff's Department and State Bureau of Investigation (SBI), an effort was made to track down the culprit(s). One of the methods used involved matching threads and dirt found on a broken button recovered from the grave fill with those found on one of several comparable Sixth Regiment buttons recently displayed and put up for sale by a collector in a neighboring county. A sample of thread was clandestinely removed from one of buttons by a potential "buyer," an informant, and sent to the SBI for comparative analysis. Although the threads were comparable, there was not enough other evidence to prefer formal charges. The case was never solved, even though we were and remain relatively sure of the identity of the grave-robber. Eventually, the disturbed remains were reinterred in the grave.

The W.P. Mangum grave-robbing case is just one of many reported in North Carolina over the

years, albeit receiving more notoriety than most. Articles about the case appeared in *Civil War* magazine and newspapers throughout the country, and still raises the ire of righteous Civil War buffs and artifact collectors whenever mentioned.

Looting for artifacts is not limited to Civil War sites, however, though it may strike closer to home and heart for some. Unscrupulous and ignorant collectors damage or destroy prehistoric and historic archaeological sites regularly. Unsatisfied with what they find on the surface of the ground or in antique shops, they willingly cross the line between the moral and immoral, legal and illegal, and permanently destroy small but significant portions of our national heritage for personal greed and edification. Fortunately for the rest of us, their numbers are few. But then, it only took one or two to desecrate William Preston Mangum's grave.

Mark A. Mathis

News from the Otarre Chapter

The Otarre Chapter of the North Carolina Archaeological Society hosted two chapter meetings in 1994. Forty to fifty members and friends attended each of the meetings both of which were hosted by the US Forest Service at the US Forest Service Experimental Station in Asheville.

The Spring Meeting in April featured a presentation by Mark Mathis, Office of State Archaeology, on the excavations of the Broad Reach site in Carteret County, and John Cable, New South Associates, on the excavation of the Young Harris site in North Georgia. The afternoon featured a wonderful demonstration of aboriginal technology by Mike Murrow, of Albemarle.

The Fall Meeting, in early November, featured presentations by three local archaeologists. Rodney Snedeker, US Forest service, talked about the very successful USFS Volunteer excavation at the Appletree site in Macon County. David Moore, Western Office Archives and History, talked about the turn-of-the-century mound excavations in Caldwell County, and Anne Rogers, Western Carolina University, talked about her current research on 16th century Spanish beads. Many visitors brought artifacts for identification (including two fluted points!).

The Otarre Chapter is looking forward to a productive year in 1995. We hope to hold our second Summer Field Day and also sponsor additional volunteer activities. Anyone who would like to join the Otarre Chapter is asked to be sure to mark your preference on your NCAS membership renewal.

Volunteer Night at the Research Labs of Anthropology

Beginning in January 1995, the Research Laboratories of Anthropology in Chapel Hill will be open on Tuesday evenings for volunteers to work with a Native American pottery collection. The pottery is from the seventeenth-century Upper Saratown village site, located in Stokes County, and it is being analyzed as part of a dissertation project. Thus far, more than 75 vessels have been reconstructed and thousands of potsherds have been sorted and described. As work on only about half of the collection has been analyzed, your help with the remainder would be greatly appreciated. If you are interested in getting hands-on experience about how pots were made in the seventeenth century, please come on Tuesday evenings from 7-9pm, beginning January 17. Interested people can call Jane Eastman at (919) 644-7373 in the evenings for directions or more information. Thanks.

Board Members

Board member elections were held at the October meeting in Greenville. Steve Davis replaced Mark Mathis as editor, Bill Conen remains Treasurer, and Vin Steponaitis remains Secretary for three-year terms. New board members include Mark McCravey and Margo Price replacing Stephen R. Claggett. Thank you Steve and Mark for a job well done.

Free Catalog of North Carolina Books Features New Titles and Best Sellers

Entertaining books about daring rescues by U.S. lifesavers along the treacherous Tar Heel coast and the Wright brothers' exploits at Kitty Hawk are among the recently published titles offered for the first time in a new catalog from the Historical Publications Section of the North Carolina Division of Archives and History. Also offered for the first time in the 1995 catalog is a new volume in the award winning Colonial Records of North Carolina series.

Among the Historical Publications Section's longtime best sellers are paperback books about legends, lighthouses, pirates, Native Americans, the Lost Colonists, African Americans, the Civil War, and highway historical markers. New titles and those of genealogical interest are designated in the catalog.

To receive a free 1995 catalog with descriptions and information about how to order more than 140 North Carolina titles, write: Historical Publications Section, Division of Archives and History, 109 East Jones Street, Raleigh, NC 27601-2807, or telephone (919) 733-7442.

Remember, NCAS members are entitled to a ten percent discount on all publications.

1994 NC State Fair Exhibit

The archaeology exhibit at the 1994 North Carolina State Fair (located in the Kerr Scott building) featuring the United Carolina Bank Site in New Bern, 31CV183 (Craven County) was again a tremendous success. It appears from semi-official tallies that we reached over 20,000 people with the exhibit.

Cooperative, work-intensive efforts like the Fair exhibit benefit our group through new memberships and enhanced public identities. We attract people's attention by showing them artifacts and photographs. And then we can pass along the real "message" about the need for protecting and interpreting North Carolina's archaeological resources. Public education at its best.

NCAS Newsletter Publication Schedule

All NCAS members are encouraged to submit articles and news items to Dee Nelms, Associate Editor, for inclusion in the *Newsletter*. Please use the following cut-off dates as guides for your submissions:

Spring Issue March 31
Summer Issue June 30

Fall Issue September 30
Winter Issue December 31

1995 Dues

If you have not already renewed your NCAS membership for 1995, please do so on or before January 1. Your continued support is appreciated.

NCAS Officers

President: Richard Terrell, 3789 Hoover Hill Road, Trinity, NC 27370.

Vice-President: William D. Moxley, Jr., 2307 Hodges Road, Kinston, NC 28501.

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Executive Board Members: Mark McCravey, Thomas Padgett, Anne Poole, Margo Price, Larry Rose, Ruth Y. Wetmore.

Happy Holidays