

# Bits Of The U.S.S. Constitution

by Lynne Belluscio

I can't remember when I discovered the note in the 1952 annual report of the Historical Society that mentioned that "our former townsman, Bryant Currier gave us a historic cane and case to the delight the heart of every schoolchild.

The cane itself is made of oak taken from the old frigate Constitution. The case is of pine from Faneuil Hall, the Cradle of Liberty. Both are inlaid with bits of wood from historic homes and trees and sites about Boston." Since we only had one cane case that I knew of, I was pretty sure I had the right one, but there wasn't a cane in the case and I couldn't find one that would fit. It had been quite a few years since I searched for the cane, but I really wanted to find it for the summer exhibit of "Curiosities." So I brought the case back to the office and took a good look at it and discovered that yes indeed there were little bits of wood inlaid into the case and each square had a number stamped near it. There were also inlaid American flags and a Masonic emblem.

I headed up to the third floor of LeRoy House where the canes and

parasols are stored, determined to find the Constitution cane. There weren't any with the small handle on top, so I looked at the straight canes, and finally, I discovered a straight shank that was missing its handle. And sure enough, there were little bits of wood inlaid in the cane, with stamped numbers. I had found the cane made of oak from the U.S.S. Constitution and it fit into the case. The internet is a wonderful thing! I found that the museum in Boston near the U.S.S. Constitution, "Old Ironsides" has twenty canes. Their website includes a photograph of one that belonged to Moses Safford.

In 1833, Old Ironsides was refitted and tons of discarded wood was scarfed up by souvenir hunters. The ship had been sailed from the Washington Navy Yard to the Charlestown Navy Yard under the command of her old captain, Isaac Hull. Hull had ordered all the wood and copper removed from the Constitution shipped back to Washington for re-use. (I guess we'd call it recycling.) He had canes, boxes and other souvenirs made from the material and he sent these trinkets to friends and public officials.

The same thing happened in 1857 and every time the ship was overhauled. In fact, an entire carriage was built for President Andrew Jackson from Constitution wood. So it's hard to tell when our cane was created. I have called and left a message with the curator at the Constitution Museum, to see if they have one with the little pieces of inlay.

As for the cane case, Faneuil Hall was built in 1742. In 1806 it was expanded according to

plans by Charles Bullfinch. It has undergone several renovations and I know that in the late 1800s the wood beams were replaced with steel girders, so perhaps that was when the cane case was made.

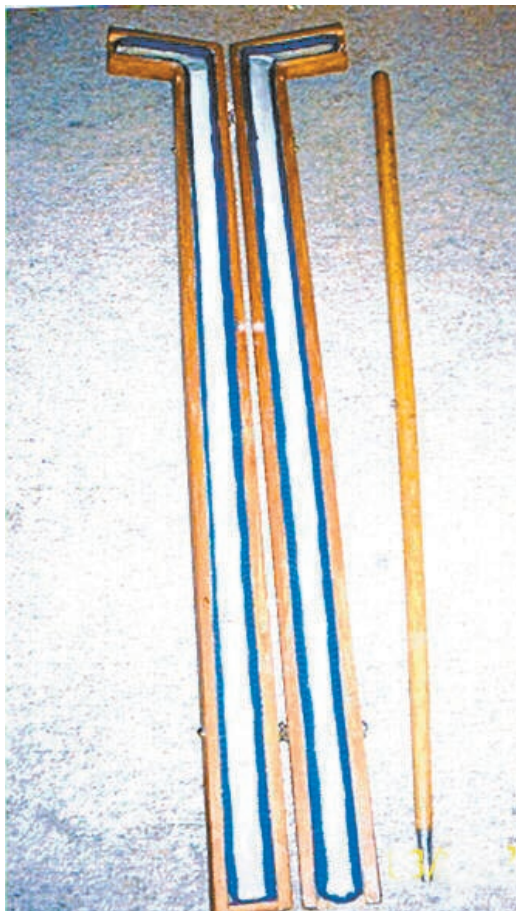
Perhaps a little more sleuthing will turn something up. In any event, the cane will be part of the "Museum of Curiosities" that will open the evening of May 5, at the annual meeting

of the Historical Society at 7:30 pm at LeRoy House. The meeting is open to the public and light refreshments will be served.

The program for the evening is by Thomas MacPherson, of SUNY Geneseo. His program is about his Sicilian grandmother and his Scottish aunt and a comparison of their



lives in LeRoy. The election of trustees will take place that evening. Dan Diskin and Donna Barefoot have agreed to serve a three year term and Sue Doemling and Bruno Difazio have agreed to serve a second three year term. Please join us for an interesting evening.





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