

AROUND THE STATE

Civil War gravestones get cleaned, repaired

By HANA IKRAMUDDIN
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Matt Mickelson stooped down to examine a tombstone at Glenwood Cemetery in Mankato.

He was preparing to clean it, but first he carefully ran his hands along its edges to feel for small chips and cracks. The delicate old stone belonged to a Civil War veteran, and it was the oldest that Mickelson had ever cleaned.

Mickelson was doing the work for the Friends of the Boy in Blue Civil War Veterans Memorial, a Mankato nonprofit aimed at preserving Civil War history and monuments. The organiza-

tion wants to clean or replace Civil War gravestones in Blue Earth County, starting with about 125 in Glenwood Cemetery.

"Even though it was years and years ago, [the Civil War] had some type of effect on who we are today," said Mickelson, who started his company Headstone Revival early this year. "With this kind of project and service, it won't be forgotten."

Once he made sure the stone wouldn't fall apart during cleaning, Mickelson rinsed it with water and doused it with an eco-friendly mold and mildew clearing solution in a squeeze bottle.

While he waited for it to

seep into the stone, Mickelson used his phone to look up the history of the grave, which belonged to Sgt. Milton Hanna, a Medal of Honor recipient who enlisted in Minnesota, fought in the Civil War and died in 1913 at age 71.

"It just kind of gives you a little bit more of a perspective of what some of those soldiers put themselves in front of to stand for their country," he said. "You appreciate the stone a little bit more when you get that background story."

After a few minutes, Mickelson, a 37-year-old Nicollet resident, carefully began to scrub — a process that took more than an hour and a half, using a scratch-resistant

horsehair brush to protect the stone.

Many of the graves he has seen so far have been covered in moss, he said. Dark stains on the stone disappeared during the cleaning, but it would take weeks for the chemicals to finish their work and fully restore the stone to white.

"But once you get the solution on and you really start scrubbing it in and seeing the results, it gives a ... sharper image of what the stone is," he said. "It gives you the meaning behind the stone, and it's not just something on a plot of land."

More than 930 Civil War soldiers either enlisted in Blue

Earth County or were buried there, including one Confederate soldier buried in Glenwood, said Julie Schrader, a Mankato resident and member of the Friends of the Boy in Blue.

Schrader has spent years compiling a database of Civil War veterans who died or were enlisted in the county, and her list is still growing. She has found names through history books, online records and the Blue Earth County Historical Society.

"My interest was just in trying to find out who all these men were and what became of them," she said.

Over the years, the organization found that many Civil

War veterans' graves had fallen into disrepair, Schrader said.

"Some [gravestones] were broken, some were missing entirely," she said. "Descendants are long gone, and there's no one to take care of them anymore."

Schrader said she thinks that between raising funds and finding all the graves, the process could take years.

"Then, hopefully, with the success that comes from this ... we can continue on to other surrounding counties to pay respects to Minnesota Civil War veterans," Mickelson said.

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CURIOUS MINNESOTA



The "Longfellow Boom," which some describe as a "house-shakingly loud" booming or crashing noise, seems to happen only at night and in summer months.

SOURCE ELUSIVE FOR 'LONGFELLOW BOOM'

By JASMINE SNOW • jasmine.snow@startribune.com

Neighborhood forums are awash in reports of unusual noises like fireworks and gunshots. But something more mysterious has been pestering the residents of Minneapolis' Longfellow area.

For several decades, people living near the Mississippi River in south Minneapolis have reported hearing what's become known as the "Longfellow Boom." Some describe it as a "house-shakingly loud" booming or crashing noise that seems to only happen at night during the summer months.

Max Nesterak, deputy editor of the Minnesota Reformer publication, is one of many area residents searching for the cause of the racket. His theory is that the boom "might have something to do with the river." But after fruitless research, he reached out to Curious Minnesota, the Star Tribune's community-driven series fueled by reader questions.

The sound has been so persistent over the years that the city's Police Department, Health Department and City Council members have all put their ear to the ground trying to figure out what is going on — to no avail. It even drew the scrutiny of the FBI in the run-up to the Republican National Convention in 2008.

Boom theories abound among neighbors, who speculate that it could be exploding electrical transformers, sewer issues, fireworks, freight trains, or even a fault line on the Mississippi River. Others joke that it's the work of extraterrestrials. (Please send your ideas to Curious@StarTribune.com.)

"There was one night — like 4 in the morning — where I was shaken awake by [a boom] so, so loud, it was shaking the window panes," said Julie Rand, who has lived in the area for more than a decade. "It was a kind of thing where I was sure an explosion happened like just across the street. ... I just was sure that somebody's boiler blew

up, and that their house was gonna be on fire or something."

Rand said she has heard the noise 10 to 12 times. She described it as a "low, loud booming noise ... like something crashed," but different from a gunshot or a car crash.

Sound sleuthing

Plenty of work has gone into rooting out the source of this phenomenon.

Minneapolis City Council Member Andrew Johnson, who represents the southeastern corner of the city, said he was part of a project to triangulate the location of the boom via aircraft noise sensors and towers at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport. Despite the precise machinery, he said they never found the location of the noise, which has been reported to come from different places at times.

"This has been going on long enough, you would think ... that somebody would still have seen something," Johnson said. "Given the number of times that this has happened over the years, you still think you'd have a speeding car going away. Or somebody would say, 'Hey, I saw the flash right out my window,' or that sort of thing. But to the best of my knowledge, that hasn't happened."

Noise problems are under the purview of the city's Health Department. The agency has received and investigated multiple calls about the boom in the past without success, said Patrick Hanlon, director of the department's environmental programs. No one has called them about it in the last five years.

"We deal with a lot of noise issues, and we just could not figure out what [the boom] was," Hanlon said.

The Minneapolis Police Department has investigated the boom several times. MPD spokesman Garrett Parten said they have no updates on what might be causing it.

A spokeswoman for Xcel Energy, Lacey Nygaard, said that while they aren't sure what has caused booms over the years, they are not "aware of any outages or impacts to Xcel Energy equipment when they have occurred."

Former Star Tribune columnist Jon Tevlin and ballistics expert William Gurstelle spent a night in summer 2010 roaming the area looking for the cause. At the time, Gurstelle called the sewer gas theory "not probable" and ruled out sonic booms and anarchists. He later said he thought the booms were not related, but "people love to be part of the mystery, and so they link the booms."

Interest in the boom is kept alive in online forums such as Twitter, Reddit and NextDoor. There, neighbors periodically come together in comment threads to discuss their thoughts on the boom and what it could be.

A local expert

Fiona Quick, a writer who has lived in Longfellow for most of her life, has been meticulously documenting the phenomenon since she returned to the neighborhood to help care for her mother in 2008. In 2010, she compiled her research into one thorough blog post and has since been a reliable Twitter presence anytime the booms occur.

Quick's theories mostly involve human activity, such as improvised explosives, people throwing firecrackers in the water to catch fish or people just generally "being stupid by the river." Her lead theory, however, is that there are many causes, and proximity to the river makes the sounds louder.

"Because you're down by the river, the sound echoes inordinately," she said. "Where I live is in a built-in kind of swampy area where ... the sound moves and the ground is kind of a built-in spring. So everything is river-based, water-based and the sound travels differently."

WEST DULUTH

DNR restoring fish and wildlife habitat

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Minnesota Land Trust are beginning work to restore fish and wildlife habitat at West Duluth's Perch Lake, formerly a bay of the St. Louis River.

The restoration project, scheduled through October and again in January and February, involves dredging 770,000 cubic yards of sediment to restore deeper water, marsh and fish spawning areas.

Then, as the Minnesota Department of Transportation repaves Hwy. 23 next summer, a 16-foot-wide culvert will be installed under the highway to improve water flow and fish passage between Perch Lake and the St. Louis River.

Construction of a railroad and the Hwy. 23 embankment had previously reduced the lake's connection to the river, which brought low oxygen levels and shallow water depths from accumulated sediments.

REID FORGRAVE

EVELETH

Iron Range grants open to applicants

The Minnesota Department of Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation is accepting applications for fiscal year 2023 grants that will provide financial assistance to communities in northeastern Minnesota.

Most grant cycles opened July 1, with the exception of culture and tourism and drilling incentive grants, which open Aug. 1.

Among the grants:

- Community grants, which can be used for commercial redevelopment, infrastructure and residential redevelopment.
- Mining grants, which can be for mine/land reclamation or for drilling incentives to explore new mineral deposits.
- Business energy retrofitting and downtown building rehabilitation grants.

REID FORGRAVE

OLMSTED COUNTY

Housing, taxes top resident concerns

A recent Olmsted County survey shows residents are happy with the area's quality of life and amenities but continue to worry about affordable housing and local taxes.

Residents gave relatively high marks to the area's overall quality of life, scoring a 73 on a 100-point scale. They also ranked outdoor recreation higher in importance than in previous years.

Housing and taxes topped a list of potential problems in the county, with homelessness, poverty and a lack of good jobs close behind. Residents also ranked mental health issues and drug use as the county's top health challenges.

Survey results showed residents aren't as satisfied with the overall quality of Olmsted County services. Residents rated county services at 58 out of 100, a dip from 2019's result of 61 out of 100.

TREY MIEWES