

For your consideration,

A local newspaper benefits its community in ways no other group can. That truth became particularly evident to readers of the Dickinson County News as they picked up their morning paper on Aug. 24. The DCN's five-part "Stolen History" series told how the paper's lone news writer had been working behind the scenes for four years to bring about the return of a Native American artifact that was stolen decades ago from the Gardner Cabin Museum in Arnolds Park.

And he'd finally done it.

Helping right an unknown wrong

The 150-year-old newspaper's reputation was evidently enough for a timid tipster to call up then-staff writer Seth Boyes in April of 2019 and confess that her now-deceased relatives had broken into the museum during the early days of the Cold War era and snatched a beaded leather pipe bag for themselves.

The museum's founder, Abbie Gardner Sharp, was one of only two survivors of the Spirit Lake Massacre of 1857, and she later converted the log cabin where her family had been murdered into a museum. There, she told of her harrowing experiences as a captive of the Wahpekute Sioux war chief Inkpaduta — her museum became one of Iowa's earliest tourist attractions and is still in operation today as a state historic site.

The caller wanted to return her ill-gotten heirloom, but she asked to remain anonymous in print to avoid bringing shame on any innocent relatives who might still call the Iowa Great Lakes home. Boyes agreed to act as a go-between, but what started out as a simple courtesy to the local museum quickly became a major research project.

State caretakers couldn't simply accept the pipe bag from Boyes — it was after all stolen goods.

A blood relative of Abbie Gardner had to be willing to consent to the pipe bag's return before the state could legally take possession of it. The quest to find Gardner's kin called on all Boyes' skills as a journalist. He interviewed local historians, combed through yellowed news clippings, pored over handwritten census records, contacted far-flung museums and submitted government information requests to ultimately keep the promise he'd made to his source.

Eventually his efforts paid off, and the pipe bag was returned to the museum's display case on Aug. 17, 2023. Officials with the State Historical Society of Iowa said the reclaimed pipe bag will help better illustrate the complex relationship between northwest Iowa's early settlers and its indigenous people — a concept which has become increasingly important to museum staff and volunteer groups as they plan potential restoration work on the cabin site.

Truth over revenue

The DCN also amplified lesser-heard voices in the community this contest year.

A local pastor called the paper, saying residents of a nearby trailer park were being displaced. The land had been sold to a developer who then gave the tenants 90 days to vacate their homes — and several felt they could not afford to relocate that quickly.

Boyes reached out to the developers in preparation for his coverage of the story. The company responded in an unsigned email, saying "a few partners in the project are very good clients of your newspaper with large weekly ads, and they have wished no negativity toward this project to ensure a lasting business relationship going forward."

The DCN's Publisher Brad Hicks and the the newspaper's owner Christopher Hall both agreed with Boyes that the story should move forward regardless of potential losses in advertising revenue — it hit news stands July 12, detailing the residents' predicament alongside what little information the developer was willing to provide. Boyes also supplemented the story with records from the county assessor, and he took the time to independently confirm whether some of the locations the developer suggested residents consider relocating were viable long-term options — several, such a state campgrounds, were not.

Sharing of time and talents

Boyes was invited to be a guest speaker during the Dickinson County Museum's History Lives series in March of 2023. He presented his research on Hotonhowashta — or John Other Day — who was one of the Sioux natives tasked with ransoming Abbie Gardner from Inkpaduta on behalf of the state of Minnesota in 1857. Other Day later became a major figure in the Sioux Uprising of 1867 and the namesake of Dickinson County's Lake Minnewashta.

The DCN also continues to partner with area high schools to welcome local student job-shadows throughout the year and give them a glimpse into the industry. This contest year, Boyes hosted Okoboji High School student Grace Pausley on Oct. 13, 2022, Harris-Lake Park student Morgan Vanderveen on March 8, 2023, and Spirit Lake High School student Sage Gathercole on March, 22, 2023.

Outside the newspaper, Boyes serves on the executive committee of Good News Community Church in Okoboji, which drafts and updates church policies. He also volunteers as part of the church's food pantry team, taking time off work to meet biweekly truck deliveries from the Food Bank of Iowa at and stock shelves.

Boyes serves as one of five advisory team members for the Iowa Lakes Community College Photography Department. Boyes and other local professionals discuss how changes in photography methods affect their respective fields, and they provide feedback to help adapt curriculum and better prepare students for photography careers.

Sincerely,



Seth Boyes
News Editor - Dickinson County News