

## A link to the past?

### Pair searches for historic time capsule at base of Revolutionary War monument

By Jill K. Dion  
Editor

Tom Beirne and Gary Gianotti thought they should point their eyes toward the ground to look for a time capsule that may be buried near a Revolutionary War monument at Milford Cemetery. Now, they think they may have to look up.

The two men, after studying the Revolutionary War monument dedicated in 1852 to 46 soldiers who died of smallpox, believe the time capsule reportedly buried with it may be seven feet off the ground, entombed in the monument's upper base.

Beirne, a former alderman; and Gianotti, a history researcher, came across documentation referencing the time capsule when they were looking for information last week about remains of the Revolutionary War soldiers who died of smallpox and were buried in Milford.

Since the skull of a soldier, described in state archives as belonging to one of the 46 soldiers, was initially donated to the New Haven Historical Society in 1907, the two men were looking for a rare book that chronicles society donations.

When Beirne found the book last week in an online search of state book stores, he didn't find the information he sought

about the soldier's skull, but he did find reference to a time capsule buried at the base of the Soldiers Monument.

He and Gianotti first thought a reference to the base of the monument meant they should look at the ground, at the foot of the entire monument. Now they think the reference may indicate the capsule was placed at the base of the obe-

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lisk, which sits high off the ground atop a tall base structure.

"Mr. Beirne did check out the monument and could not find the capsule the day he received the book in the mail," Gianotti said. "I went down the next day to the monument and could not locate the capsule. My guess was it would be buried under the monument base. May have to pick up the monument, I was thinking. So, I remembered Mr. Beirne's e-mail, saying 'under the base of the obelisk'. We looked in the wrong place. The base is the base of the obelisk and not the base the obelisk rests on."

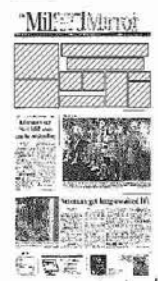
The book that Beirne found indicates the time capsule contains newspaper clippings and other items, presumably from the 1850s or the Revolutionary War period.

Gianotti hopes it also contains authentic war documents and symbolism from the Revolutionary War.

Both men hope it points to the location of the mass grave where local history says the Revolutionary War soldiers were buried.

"A stone-cut access panel was made and sealed in cement," Gianotti said, describing what he saw when he looked up toward the base of the obelisk last week. "Very fine-lined seems, old school masonry craftsmanship.

"The stone is coarse and brown," he continued, "not dense like granite or marble. Had someone in the past opened the panel, we would see not such as good a seal and most definitely cement smearing on the seams. We would even see two cement colors of different cement



mixes used, original and the newer. I see a clean-as-a-whistle cement seal and feel confident that what is said to be inside is indeed still inside.”

Although local history indicates the soldiers, plus Stephen Stow, a Milford man who cared for them, were buried on the southern part of Milford Cemetery, no one has been able to find the exact location. The monument is believed to have been constructed in an approximate location of their burial 75 years after the men died.

City Historian Richard Platt still has some doubt that the mass grave is at the Milford Cemetery because he believes smallpox victims would have been buried in a less populated area.

Beirme and Gianotti hoped to meet with Ray Scholl, superintendent of the Milford Cemetery, this week to talk about the possibility of trying to open the base of the monument to see if the time capsule is there and discover what light it can shed on local history.

Scholl said that decision will rest with himself and the cemetery board. He plans to find out exactly what Beirme and Gianotti want to do before broaching the idea with the board, he said.

Beirme and Gianotti gathered at the cemetery Tuesday with University of New Haven students and their professor, who used radar equipment to inspect the monument. They believe they saw a compartment that could contain a time capsule.

“The professor will bring the data back to the school with him, analyze it and send us a report,” Beirme said.

Beirme speculated the state archeologist or another preservation expert will have to be on hand if a time capsule is found. Gianotti agreed they would want someone with expertise to be there if the capsule is found.



**Above, Gary Gianotti points to an area of the monument that may be a door of sorts to reach a time capsule inside. In the photo below, the Milford Mirror has inserted a black arrow onto a photo of the monument base to indicate the lines that appear to surround the opening.**  
**(Photos by Jill Dion)**