

Where the Cannon is suppose to be



## **Cannon in Stanberry City Park to be Restored**

STANBERRY, MO — Numerous members of the Raymond Sager American Legion Post #260 approached the Stanberry City Council with questions about the removal of a historic cannon recently removed from the city park for repairs. Legion post members reviewed the cannon history and then expressed interest and concern that the cannon be properly restored and placed in a secure spot to prevent vandalism. Legion members also offered funds to restore

## **Cannon, part of town's heritage, finds renewal**



Ken Newton | St. Joseph News-Press

Lloyd Poff, a resident of Stanberry, Mo., and commander of American Legion Post 260 there, led the effort to restore a Civil War-era cannon that has resided in the town's park for more than a century.



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Cannon, part of town's heritage, finds renewal By Ken Newton St. Joseph News-Press | 0 comments

Lloyd Poff did not know about that, though. Not as a child when he played on the cannon — technically, a Griffen Gun, he points out — at the city park in Stanberry, Mo.

The Civil War-era ordnance resided there for more than a century, part of the community's heritage, a civic fixture that people saw and then took for granted seeing.

The cannon, with its 816-pound barrel, fell into disrepair and eventually became unsafe to display in a public space.

"It's heartbreaking to see something like that, that you've always known as a kid, just see it deteriorate to where they couldn't even have it in the park," Mr. Poff said.

So he decided to do something about it. Always good with his hands, skilled with wood tools and adept with a welding torch, he became a cannon restorer.

Mr. Poff has worked as a cabinet maker and furniture builder. He has done concrete work and laid blocks.

With the Air National Guard, he served as an airframe mechanic for C-130s, including overseas in Desert Storm.

Rebuilding a cannon made a century and a half before? That took some thinking.

And some research. He learned that the cannon, known as a three-inch ordnance rifle, had been the creation of an inventor named John Griffen. The Union Army would buy at least 1,400 of these artillery weapons from the Phoenixville, Pa., manufacturing facility.

This particular one was number 272, according to an imprint on the muzzle. Others can be found on display at the battlefield at Gettysburg.

Mr. Poff said the cannon came from the New York Arsenal, by way of Fort Leavenworth, in May 1897. The Grand Army of the Republic Marion Post 119 in Stanberry accepted delivery. He speculated that Post 119 probably had no property, so the ordnance got displayed in the town's centerpiece park.

There, it would attract the attention of generations and the ravages of decay.

"I was willing to spend the time to do it," said Mr. Poff, commander of the local American Legion Post 260. "My great-grandfather was a Civil War veteran and he escaped from Andersonville (prison) and made it out alive. That's another thing that makes it close to my heart."

He contacted people in Phoenixville, where a museum now celebrates the iron works. Folks there sent along plans for the carriage. He set up a fund at the local bank for donations. He made an outbuilding on his property the epicenter for the restoration.

"I knew he wanted to do it so bad," his wife, Judy, said. "We had to let some of our stuff go because it just took so much time. But it was worth it."

From Ohio, he ordered white oak, the strong lumber used to make the original Griffen Gun. Authenticity seemed essential to the project, Mr. Poff said.

"I wanted to put it as close as I could to the way it was built originally," he explained.

Bill Steinhausen, also of Stanberry, would lend a hand, along with his brother Don, owner of Steiny's Machine Shop, which fabricated some of the parts.

The chest-high and iron-encased wheels that would bear this heavy armament had to be commissioned. "The wheels were more than I wanted to take on, because that's an art," Mr. Poff said.

After almost two years of work, he unveiled the nearly restored cannon (a few fine points to touch up) at the town's Fourth of July celebration.

Stanberry officials hope to put the cannon back in the park once a shelter has been erected to cover it. Two coats of primer and three coats of finish paint will only last so long against the elements.

Mr. Poff reflects on why a small-town cannon represents bigger things.

"I would like to think when this is displayed in the park, when the young kids read about this, that they will think about what happened in this country and how we got to be a free nation," he said. "I hope they'll look at that and think about all the blood that has been shed for our freedom."

Ken Newton can be reached at [ken.newton@newspressnow.com](mailto:ken.newton@newspressnow.com). Follow him on Twitter: @SJNPNewton.

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