

Confederate descendants help honor Union soldier

By SARA K. TAYLOR
Staff writer

It started less than two years ago when a local priest was able to secure a headstone for a Civil War soldier buried at St. Catherine's Church in McConches.

Actually, it started way before that. The Rev. Edward P. O'Connell, a Bronx native, had been trying to get a grave marker for George Brown—a black Union soldier who fought for the Union—since the 1960s.

No one was all that interested in helping the history buff priest.

He tracked down every lead only to be turned down.

Then, the Sons of Confederate Veterans said they would help.

O'Connell was a guest speaker at a meeting of the Maryland chapters of Confederate Sons when he mentioned Brown's unmarked grave. Brown, buried beside his second wife, Sarah, in the St. Catherine's cemetery made sure his wife had a headstone while he was buried in an unmarked grave.

A group of descendants of Confederate soldiers were funding a grave marker for a Union soldier, simply because, "We like any veterans with unmarked graves to be taken care of," said Jim Danbar, commander of Sons of Confederate Soldiers Post, Wolfson Bowling Camp 1490, in 2006.

On Saturday at the cemetery of what was Brown's family parish, the group will hold a dedication ceremony honoring the Union soldier's service.

"This isn't a black thing, this isn't a white thing," said Ben Hawley, one of the program's organizers and a member of B Company, 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, a re-enactment group out of Washington, D.C. "This is a historical thing."

Among those participating in the program will be members of Hawley's regiment, the Department of Maryland Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War, or SUVW, from Carbon; General George G. Meade Camp 5 SUVW of Odenton; Lincoln-Cushing Camp 2 SUVW of Washington, D.C.; Maryland Division Sons of Confederate Veterans; Post, Wallace Bowling Camp 1490 SCV of La Plata; and Maryland Line CSA Camp 1741 of Upper Marlboro.

A descendant of Brown, who currently lives in Seattle, will also be flying in for the program, according to organizers.

Hawley, whose great-great-grandfather O'Connell



The Rev. Edward P. O'Connell searched for more than 40 years to help in securing a headstone for local Civil War veteran George Brown. While some research said Brown was a private (as depicted in the background), further information uncovered he was actually a corporal.

B. Hawley fought for the Union in the CIVIL WAR as part of the 25th Connecticut Infantry Regiment (Colored), said it is a testament to the love some have for history that the Sons of Confederate Veterans would secure a grave marker for a Union soldier.

"That a Confederate man would stand up and say, 'Here's a black man who fought in the Civil War and we should do this...' Hawley said, "I'm really happy to take part in this."

Another of the program's organizers, Klaus Schmidt said the dedication ceremony is an "appropriate and touching episode of local history."

"A black man in pro-Confederate Charles County joins the United States colored troops to fight the bastion from slavery," Schmidt said. "It is a wonderful and also the new entrance here to



Rev. Edward P. O'Connell searched for more than 40 years to help in securing a headstone for local Civil War veteran George Brown. While some research said Brown was a private (as depicted in the background), further information uncovered he was actually a corporal.

because a farmer. Being of modest means, he secured a burial status for his wife, but cannot afford one for himself. How fortunate is that!"

The story of the marker goes back several decades to when O'Connell was preparing a history of St. Catherine Church Hilltop in 1959 for the church's 100th anniversary. Looking through records, he came across a small notice regarding Brown, a late parishioner. One thing led to another and O'Connell eventually met and spoke to Brown's only surviving child, his 90-year-old daughter, Mary Elizabeth.

In that meeting, in the late '60s, O'Connell realized to get Brown a headstone.

More research followed and with the help of Jack Casman, a professional genealogist who combed the National Archives for more information, O'Connell learned that Brown, who enlisted in

Dedication done right

The dedication ceremony honoring Capt. George Brown will begin at 10 a.m. March 29 at St. Catherine's Church cemetery at 1440 Port Tobacco Road, Port Tobacco.

Brown, a Civil War soldier, died in 1865.

Only recently did the Rev. Edward P. O'Connell of St. Catherine Church secure a headstone for the local war veteran.

Camp Station in Benedict, returned from battle severely injured.

Upon his return to Charles County the locals at Port Tobacco allowed Brown to buy and farm a piece of land they owned in Massons Park.

Brown was first married to Emily Thomas and had five children: Mary Emily, Joseph, Francis, Mary Catherine and Robert. Following Emily's death, Brown married Sarah Queen and together they had seven children: George, Mary Elizabeth, Mary Magdalena, John, Ada, Ann and John.

Brown's story is intriguing, especially to Schmidt, a native of the small village of Hammagden in Germany. Emigrating to the United States in 1964, Schmidt joined the U.S. Marine Corps as a foreign national and fought in Vietnam before becoming a citizen in 1975.

He has been a re-enactor and active in living history for the past eight years.

"As an immigrant to this country, I have no ancestors who fought in this horrific war," he said of the Civil War.

He spoke the day of Saturday's dedication ceremony.

"It also coincides with the 200th anniversary of Charles County — we were a young country then," Schmidt said. "While we did a lot of good things, we also made a lot of mistakes. Slavery was one of them — perhaps the biggest of all our mistakes. As a country and a people, we have come a long way since then, though in many respects we still have a long way to go."

"We need to remember Capt. Brown is retired as of who we are and where we came from in order to know on where we go from here," he said. "This dedication is not to glorify the horrors of war, but to honor the noble service and sacrifice of a local man who knew where he had to go," he said. "It is a duty right for us to follow."

staylor@northwest.com