



SONS OF VETERANS RESERVE

OFFICE OF THE COMMANDING OFFICER

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RE: H.B. 155

It's an honor to be given the opportunity to come before this committee today and testify in favor of H.B. 155. I am a past Commander of the Ohio Department Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, and a Past National Commander-in-Chief of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War and I am currently the National Commander of the Sons of Veterans Reserve which is the uniformed military department of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

I am a Past Chapter President of the Sons of the American Revolution and a Past President of the Ohio Society of the War of 1812. I am also a United States Air Force Vietnam War Veteran and a member of the Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame.

For over a quarter of a century I have been involved in helping preserve and protect memorials erected to honor our military veterans. One of the big challenges the Sons of Union Veterans has faced is dealing with situations where people approach small communities and offer to buy Civil War cannons that have been placed as memorials honoring Civil War veterans. The local community or cemetery where the cannons are located generally need money and are promised a reproduction cannon that will be just as good, or better than the real thing.

Today I would like to share with you my experience in helping save a Civil War memorial in Wilmington which I think will provide some insight as to why we think this proposed legislation is needed.

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was a veteran's organization composed of Civil War Veterans and when the last veteran died the GAR died. However, before its demise the GAR named the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War as their legal heir. This resulted in GAR property becoming Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War property.

In 1927 the GAR post in Wilmington erected a war memorial in the Sugar Grove Cemetery. The memorial is a statue of a Civil War soldier flanked by two Civil War cannons. A member of our organization noticed those two cannons were listed for sale by the cemetery on a web site.

The Sugar Grove Cemetery is the main cemetery for Wilmington. It was owned by the Sugar Grove Cemetery Association. The following is a quote from their web site "Sugar Grove Cemetery has been providing burials for Wilmington and its surrounding county for over 150

years. We are a non-profit organization owned by all those who have been interred and/or have purchased a lot for future use within our 117 acres of land". According to a cemetery brochure almost 15,000 people are buried at Sugar Grove Cemetery Including over 1,600 military veterans.

Dr. Richard Davis, a part time professor at Wilmington College, a member of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War and the current President of the Ohio Society of the War of 1812, joined me in a visit with the cemetery officials. We explained to them that they did not own the cannons and could not sell them. We advised them that the memorial was the property of the Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War. We had a lot of records from the GAR post showing how the GAR raised the money to pay for the memorial. But, the cemetery said the cannons were theirs and they planned to sell them and replace them with reproductions. They also explained their financial problems and how needed the money they expected to get from the sale of the cannons.

According to a newspaper account the cemetery officials estimated the cannons would sell in the \$50,000 range, while reproductions would cost between \$2,000 and \$3,500. After failing to make any progress with the cemetery officials we engaged an attorney who also had no success in dealing with the cemetery officials. They said the cemetery was in financial trouble and needed the money.

Our attorney filed suit in the Clinton County Court of Common Pleas seeking a permanent injunction prohibiting the cemetery from selling or removing the cannons, plus, a ruling that the Sons of Union Veterans were the rightful owners of the war memorial including the cannons.

Shortly after we filed the suit the cemetery association announced they were going out of business. Under state law when a cemetery association goes out of business the city is required to take ownership of the cemetery. The city was easier to deal with but they also claimed they owned the memorial and the cannons.

After several months of negotiations we reached an agreement with the city and the court issued the following judgment: "The Court Orders, based upon the agreement of the parties that the City of Wilmington, Ohio, its agents, assigns, and successors in interest, are permanently enjoined from selling, destroying, or otherwise removing the Soldier's Point Memorial and/or Civil War Cannons which are a part of said monument without the express consent of the Department of Ohio, Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War." Both the city and the Sons of Union Veterans achieved their goal which was to keep the cannons in the Sugar Grove Cemetery.

Had the Sons of Union Veterans not intervened, those two valuable cannons placed in the Sugar Grove Cemetery by Civil War Veterans would now be gone. The buyers of these cannons promise the plastic reproduction cannons that are used as replacements for the real thing will last forever and will require no care or maintenance. Unfortunately, that is not always true.

A GAR memorial in the Fayette County Jasper Township Cemetery was in very poor condition when the trustees approached us and asked if we would help them repair it. A Civil War cannon and a stack of cannon balls that were a major part of the memorial had disappeared several years ago. The trustees did not know if they were sold or stolen by someone. The Sons of Union Veterans agreed to help the trustees restore the memorial, but we could not afford to buy a Civil War cannon so the Sons of Union Veterans helped pay for a

plastic reproduction cannon. It looked great. But during the first winter water somehow got into a seam and froze causing the main casing to break and the cannon tub was ruined.

The Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War has been around since it was created by the GAR in 1881. In 1954 we were granted a Congressional Charter. Two of our most prominent members spear headed that effort. They were General of the Army Douglas MacArthur and Army Major General Ulysses S. Grant 3rd, grandson of President Grant. General Grant also served as the National Commander-in-Chief of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

Our congressional charter requires us to perpetuate the memory and heritage of the Grand Army of the Republic and the men who saved our Union of States. We are confident that H.B. 155 will be a great help to us as we continue that mission.

This proposed legislation will also help preserve the memorials that have been and will be erected to honor those who have served our country in other wars. One of the high lights of this proposed legislation is the fact that it cost the taxpayers nothing and should serve as a deterrent to those who would desecrate the memorials honoring our military Veterans.

I ask that you vote in favor of H.B. 155.

Robert E. Grim

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National Commander
Sons of Veterans Reserve





