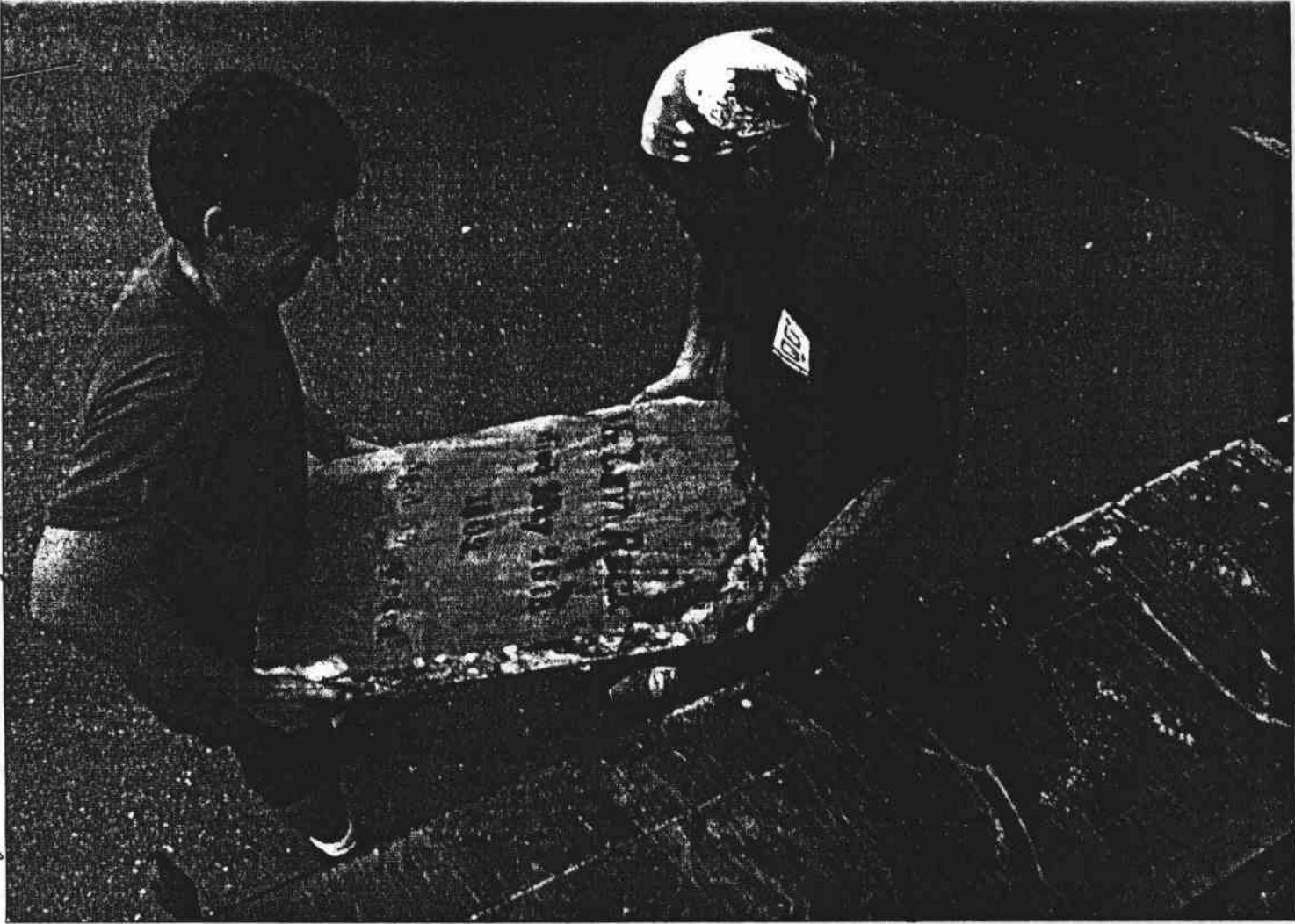
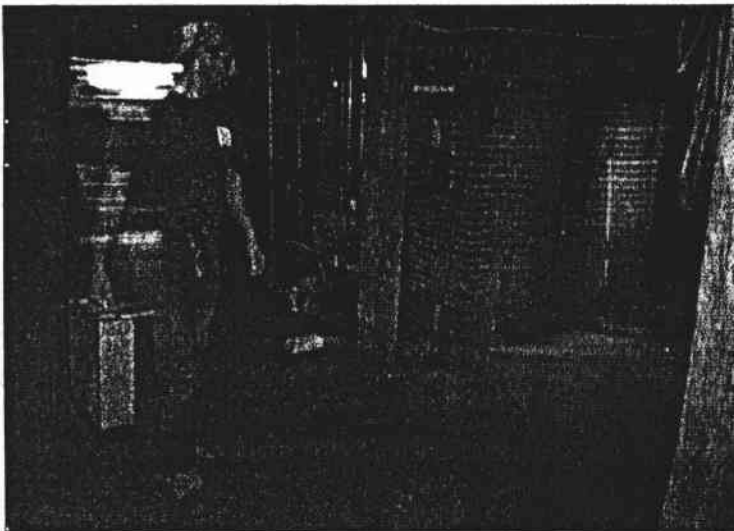


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**Craig Ambrosio** *Republican-American*  
Pedro Francisco of Prospect, left, and Armando Rodrigues of Naugatuck carry Levi Peck's gravestone into the Watertown Historical Society Museum. The stone was discovered in the basement of a home owned by Francisco and Rodrigues.

# WHERE ON EARTH IS LEVI PECK?



Armando Rodrigues walks by the site in the basement where the headstone was discovered near the furnace.

**By Cindy Gillis**  
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## WATERTOWN

**L**evi Peck, apparently dead and buried — somewhere — since 1802, is not and never has been buried in the basement of a Nova Scotia Hill Road farmhouse.

State Archaeologist Nicholas F. Bellantoni reached that conclusion Friday after removing the headstone of Levi Peck from its spot within the cement floor of the basement and digging three feet into the soil beneath it.

Ground-penetrating radar equipment, used to sweep across the remainder of the cellar floor, ruled out any reason-

able possibility that Peck's remains are buried in another portion of the basement.

"He is nowhere under that basement," said Bellantoni, who was covered with a film of dirt after five hours of shoveling and sifting soil.

The Francisco and Rodrigues families, who last month bought the farmhouse and soon after heard the name and growing legend of Levi Peck, welcomed the news with obvious relief.

"It turned out for the best, I guess," Armando Rodrigues said. "We can put everything to rest as far as Levi is concerned."

The mystery of Levi Peck surfaced close to three weeks ago,

Please turn to 9A, GRAVE

# GRAVE: Stone moved to Historical Society museum

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when a relative of the late Joseph Zuraitis told Town Historian Florence Crowell about the supposed farmhand buried in the basement for nearly two centuries. The Francisco and Rodrigues families bought the property from the Zuraitis estate.

Joseph Zuraitis' brother, Daniel, said he believed Levi Peck was a member of a Watertown family. Crowell quickly began searching state and national birth and death records for some mention of Levi Peck.

And the owners of the 249-year-old house, slated for demolition to make way for a dozen new homes, sought legal counsel and then help from the state archaeologist.

In recent weeks, Crowell has found a record of a Levi Peck, born in Litchfield on June 23, 1748 — died 1802. And probate court records for the District of Litchfield, dating back to April 1803, detail the settlement of Levi Peck's estate.

Probate papers outline the cost of burial, including two headstones for \$10, but do not answer the nearly 200-year-old question of where Levi Peck is buried.

Crowell Friday afternoon said she was hoping that the answer was in the basement of the large, white farmhouse.

"I'm sorry we didn't find him," Crowell said from the backyard of the house. "I was hoping we'd find Levi Peck and put a close to the whole story."

The magnitude of the Levi Peck story surprised the owners of the 23-acre parcel, who reluctantly but graciously hosted an assortment of newspaper and television media that shadowed Bellantoni and recorded every detail of the dig toward Peck's supposed grave.

Rodrigues and Francisco worked hard to get answers on Friday, first cutting away the cement to release the headstone that reads "Mr. Levi Peck, died May 26th 1802, aged 55

years" and then, periodically, for about five hours, using a jackhammer to break up the hardpacked soil beneath the gravestone.

It was the consistency of the soil that eventually convinced Bellantoni that no remains are buried in the building's basement. Because the house's cellar is already about 5 feet below ground level, it didn't take much digging to reach "glacial till," hardpacked bedrock formed through thousands of years of glacial movements.

"If anyone had to dig through that stuff in 1802 to put in a burial, they didn't," Bellantoni said. "There is no way hand tools can get through that."

The property owners on Friday removed the grave marker bearing Levi Peck's name and donated it to the Watertown Historical Society Museum, located in the Watertown Fire District building on DeForest Street.

But before the 2.5-foot-long marble stone was carted off to the museum, it was inspected by Ruth Shapleigh-Brown, of the Connecticut Gravestone Network.

"My guess is it was a throw-away stone," Shapleigh-Brown said. "This has been in the basement all along; it isn't sugared like it would be if it were outside in the rain."

Shapleigh-Brown last week found a Litchfield newspaper from June 1802 that reported the death of Mrs. Levi Peck. But Crowell's probate records from 1803 refer to Peck's widow, Anna, casting doubt on the theory that the stone should have read "Mrs. Peck."

On Friday, Shapleigh-Brown contributed yet another possibility to the growing lore of Levi Peck.

The headstone that rested for decades in the Watertown basement lists Levi Peck as dead at 55.

But if Crowell's June 1748 birthdate for Levi Peck is that of the Nova Scotia Hill Road Levi Peck, then the age at death would be off by two years.

And that would be a good enough reason to discard the grave marker.