MYSTERY SOLVED?

Remains could be lost rum-runner

Human bones found near church could be the end 83-year saga of Danny Walsh

By Tom Mooney
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SOUTH KINGSTOWN—"They found him."

The thought filled the Rev. Paul Desmarais’ mind Saturday afternoon, he said, the moment he approached St. James Chapel on Matunuck School House Road to celebrate Mass and saw all the police activity next door.

After a mystery that has endured for 83 years, the broken ground may have given up Danny Walsh, one of the East Coast’s most famous rum-runners during Prohibition, who disappeared in 1933.

“I got here as pastor 10 years ago, and everybody then was telling me the Danny Walsh legend and stories,” Father Desmarais said on Monday. "How he had set up his liquor business next door in his horse barn—running stuff between Long Island and Boston—and how he ran afoul of the bosses in Boston."

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After his meal, he waved goodbye outside the restaurant. He was never seen again.

The lead story in The Journal on Feb. 11, 1933, reported that Walsh had been kidnapped for a $40,000 ransom. Family members visited a Boston hotel room to pay off the ransom, but Danny was not returned. The story said some “Chicago interests” had engineered Walsh’s disappearance, upset that he was encroaching on their territory in Western Massachusetts.

Over the years, rumors had Walsh being dumped overboard off the nearby Charlestown Breachway or into other watery graveyards, wearing a pair of cement shoes. Some former farm workers would report seeing a deep grave on the horse farm lined with a white powder that they assumed was quicklime, a favorite masking agent of the criminally minded to stanch the smell of a decomposing corpse.

Father Desmarais said the church owned the former Walsh property until October, when it sold it to a developer who began setting new house foundations two weeks ago.

While the fate of Danny Walsh officially remains a mystery, his possible resurrection beside the chapel seemed an inescapable topic of discussion for many at Sunday’s Mass, including himself, Father Desmarais said.

“I told them I might be the new host of ‘Unsolved Mysteries.’”

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