



## CHICORA FOUNDATION, INC.

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March 9, 2001

Dr. Ted Rathbun  
Department of Anthropology  
University of South Carolina  
Columbia, SC 29208

Re: 600 Elmwood, Bag 12, Items 1-3, Metal Coffin Handles

Dear Ted,

I have briefly examined the materials you provided yesterday, March 8, 2001. These remains consist of two identical and nearly complete sheet metal short bar handles with a continuous lug or socket (identified here as Handles #1). Also present are parts of one (MNI) cast white metal short bar handle with two lugs and a rolled sheet metal handle (identified here as Handle #2). Both had considerable quantities of a red clay adhering.

### Handles #1

Handles #1 have a socket measuring about  $9\frac{1}{2}$  by 3 to  $3\frac{1}{4}$  inches with 6 inches between the arms or hinge devices. The sockets, of relatively heavy gauge stamped metal, were silvered and there are remnants of this silvering still detectable. The handle bars were oval, measuring  $1\frac{1}{8}$  by  $\frac{7}{8}$  inches and were constructed of rolled metal with a seam to the rear (adjacent to the coffin itself). The handle bars were secured in the arms using rivets.

The handles were attached, using philips head screws (two per handle), to a wood coffin. A small amount of that wood is still intact around the screw threads, being "cemented" there by the iron corrosion products. The wood, however, was not sufficient to allow me to identify the species. I also found fragments of what appears to a fabric adjacent to the metal. Its position suggests that the coffin had a cloth covered exterior.

Catalogs suggest that while four handles might have been used, six were more common. Consequently, it appears that between half and a third of the handles have been recovered. The items are of a size consistent with the coffin of an adult.

The handles are also bent and warped in an unnatural manner. The only similar damage I have seen was in a coffin which had been extensively damaged by a backhoe.



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Handles of this general form in stamped metal were available at least by ca. 1920 and became increasingly popular so that by the 1950s they dominated catalogs. I have been unable to identify the specific design, although it is generally similar (though not a match) to designs in the Dixline Casket Hardware catalog (ca. 1960s) and the Sterling catalog (ca. 1950s-1960s).

### Handle #2

Handle #2 consists of two cast white metal lugs with white metal arms. The hollow handle was of circular rolled iron having a diameter of  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch. The handle bar was secured to the individual arm of each lug using an iron rivet. There is too much of the bar lost to determine whether one or two handles are represented (i.e., there is one left lug and associated handle fragment and one right lug and associated handle fragment). Corrosion precludes determining what type of screw was used to attach the lugs to the coffin, but the presence of screw holes suggests that the handle was used on a wood coffin. The cast decoration consists of dots and cross hatching under a scroll motif.

Catalogs seem consistent in anticipating that six handles would be used on each coffin. Consequently, it appears that only one (or at most two) of six handles is represented.

These handles are also bent and broken, again consistent with destructive force (i.e., I have not seen this damage in archaeological collections). The white metal, however, is somewhat more fragile than the stamped iron.

Handles of this type are found in the late nineteenth century and continue into the first quarter of the twentieth century. The cross hatch design is very common during the earlier period and is seen on many of the bail handles offered by Miller Bros. & Co. from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The particular hinge style, however, continued to at least 1920 and was commonly used by Sargent. While somewhat similar short bar styles are found into the second half of the twentieth century, they are typically of stamped metal. Cast white metal seems to have lost favor.

### Conclusions

Based on this brief examination, you have specimens from two distinctly different handle styles which also are likely to have different temporal episodes.

Handle #2 is most likely to have come from a coffin dating from the last quarter of the nineteenth century through the first quarter of the twentieth century. Handle #1 is most likely to have come from a coffin dating from the second half of the twentieth century. It is unlikely

#1  
"Socket"

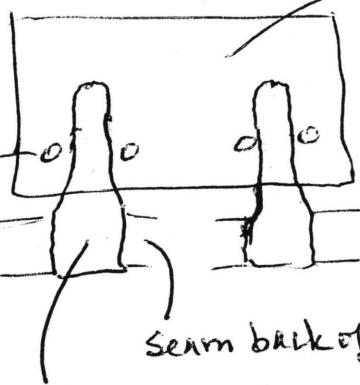
9 1/2" L

3-3/4 H

6" between handles

chrome finish

phillips head screws  
(into wood)  
on wood is fabric

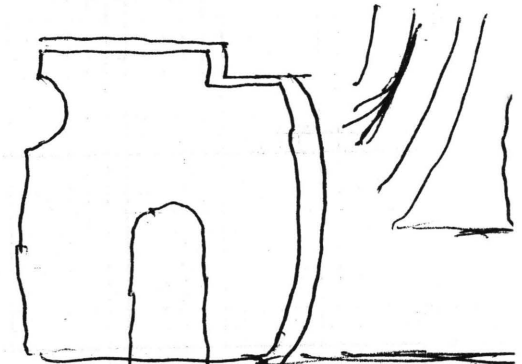


seam back of handle

back has rivet  
to hold metal bar  
in holders

steel swing bar  
steel extension holder

Similar to styles shown by  
F A Hill Co. ca 1925  
Sargent - Dixline Casket Hardware Co. '60s  
In Continental Metal Co.  
Sterling 1950s-1960s

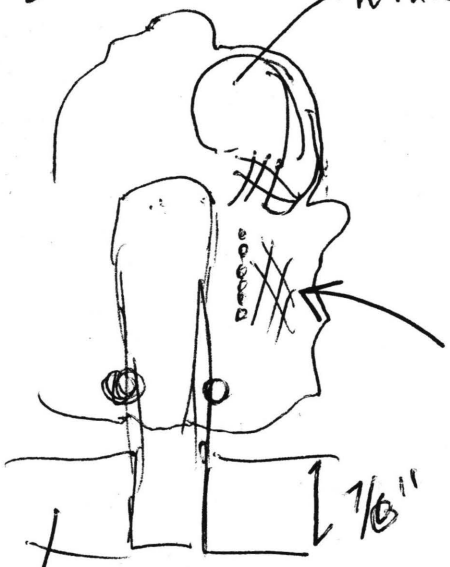


oval  
bar

1 1/8"  
1/8"

#2 short bar

white metal



IRON

similar to 2 McCLung 1912 (6 handles/set)  
3 McCLung 1902  
[w/ sim. hinge]

pattern seen on bail handles  
from 1912 c Miller Bros & Co. Boston

Sim. to hinge design shown on 1882  
Columbus Coffin Co.

1915 similar hinge ca. 1920 - Sargent

The State,

3/29/01

## Man dead 50 years reburied after bones accidentally dug up

By LORA HINES  
Staff Writer

Walter Senn was buried a second time Wednesday, more than 50 years after his death.

Bones found last month across from Randolph Cemetery off Elmwood Avenue in downtown Columbia were identified as Senn's remains, Richland County Coroner Gary Watts said.

Senn's remains accidentally were removed from a family plot at St. Peter's Cemetery as workers were preparing for the burial of one of Senn's relatives on Jan. 2, Watts said.

On Wednesday, the Senn family held a memorial service to rebury Senn and the other relative.

The worker, who was using a backhoe, didn't see Senn's remains as he was digging the burial site, Watts said. The bones were found Feb. 21 in dirt dumped near the cemetery.

A forensic archaeologist examined the bones and determined they were those of a man who had been buried about 50 years ago, Watts said.

Watts said no charges were expected to be filed against the cemetery employee because the removal of Senn's bones was an accident.

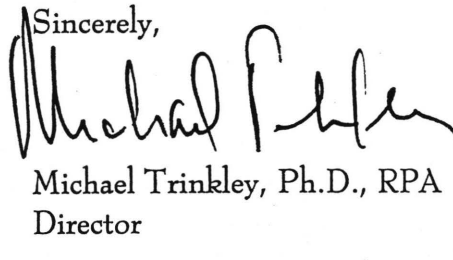
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that the two styles were used on the same coffin.

All of the handles, however, appear to have suffered extensive damage. The bending and warping of Handles #1 are consistent with disturbance by heavy hydraulic equipment, such as a backhoe.

Consequently, it is my professional opinion that two different coffins are represented in this collection — one from ca. 1900 and another from ca. 1950.

I hope this information is of assistance; please feel free to contact me directly at 803/787-6910 should you have any additional questions.

Sincerely,  
  
Michael Trinkley, Ph.D., RPA  
Director