

June 23, 2003

A Thumb Well Do

THE THUMB WAS STOLEN BY NIGHT FROM THE statue of President William McKinley on the Plaza sometime in May 2003. Noticed days later, the thumb's disappearance mobilized Arcata. Mayor Bob Ornelas personally posted a \$500 reward for its return. Area sculptors pondered possibilities for crafting a replacement thumb.

The case was cracked when a stranger asked Billy Dobbins for a cigarette at Clam Beach. As he rolled one, the man handed him a pudgy bronze appendage. "I thought it was a toe," Dobbins said. "It's off the statue of McKinley," the man told him.

Dobbins, an unemployed general laborer from Abilene, Texas, was aware of the \$500 reward and notified authorities. The thumb thief was granted immunity in exchange for the thumb. It was returned June 13, 2003.

Concluding a story that made national news, welder Mike Callaghan reattached Big Bill's missing rigid digit, then patina-matched it with an acid treatment.

Four days after accepting his reward in a City Hall ceremony, Dobbins was arrested after what police said was a drunken brawl at a McKinleyville trailer park. Dobbins was found passed out in his car not far from where he had first seen the stolen thumb. He claimed he'd been surrounded by pro-thumb theft vigilantes who called him a "snitch."



A text from a local newspaper recounts the story of McKinley's thumb being stolen, then returned in 2003.



Memorial Service Held for William McKinley at Humboldt County Courthouse, 1901

McKinley never set foot in Humboldt County

Text reads, "Memorial service for William McKinley at Humboldt County Courthouse, 1901 / McKinley never set foot in Humboldt County."



Reproduction from San Francisco newspaper, dated 5/10/1905, recounting how the statue survived the 1906 earthquake while awaiting delivery at the foundry in San Francisco.

Next I would like to talk about obstacles to removing the statue and what to replace it with. I've read in the newspapers an estimated cost of 35,000 dollars to remove the statue. If it is really bronze, Arcata Scrap has offered to pay \$38,000 for the metal alone.

I think that Niles, Ohio the town where McKinley was born might be happy to pay 80,000 dollars for the statue.

Arcata has changed in the last 100 years. Arcata is no longer owned by George Zehndner who scalped native americans, and chased the chinese and Jews out of town. William McKinley was George Zehndner's hero, NOT OURS!

I think it is finally time for each and everyone of us to pay our respect to the Wiyot people, the people who came before us. This land did and always will belong to the Wiyot people. I think we should let them decide what to replace the statue with and I have asked them to send their elders to speak to us.

Recreation of notes from testimony delivered at an Arcata Council meeting in the 1990's, arguing for the removal of the statue. The town, for various reasons, from missing the gazebo to wanting to celebrate an author instead, has attempted to move or remove the statue since it was installed.