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Passing along Littleton's Boston Post cane

By **Nathan Lamb**
GateHouse News Service

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Littleton — A New England tradition was revived in Littleton last week, when longtime resident Hazel Plummer was awarded the town's Boston Post cane just days before her 103rd birthday.

"I'm going to pass the baton to you, as our oldest resident," said Town Administrator Keith Bergman, at an early birthday party that filled the Senior Diner the afternoon of June 16.

"Thank you," responded Plummer. "I never thought 103 would be such a big affair."

The canes were distributed to 700 New England towns in 1909 by the now defunct Boston Post newspaper, with the understanding local Selectmen would ensure it gets passed down to the town's eldest resident.

In Littleton that practice had lapsed in recent years, until Bergman received a press inquiry a couple of years back on the status of Littleton's cane. Bergman didn't know where it was, but he started asking questions.

"I just asked where it was and then people came forward," he said, adding the original cane has long-since disappeared. "...The original cane appears to have been lost at some point; that would be a mystery story in itself."

Two replicas of the cane were present at the June 16 ceremony. One had been in the safe keeping of the Historical Society for years, the other was a new replica purchased by the Friends of the Council on Aging as part of reviving the tradition.

Friends president Barbara McRae said Bergman's inquires into the whereabouts of the cane played a key role in getting them involved.

"I just said to my board, 'We need to find the cane or we need to get a replica,'" she said. "We need to do something because it's not fair that our town isn't doing this tradition, which is kind of fun."

McRae couldn't say with certainty the last time the cane was awarded to a Littleton resident, but noted the most recent name on a plaque that records recipients was from the late 1980s. She said the Friends also heard stories about how at least one cane fell through the cracks.

"What happened was that a man got it, and he wasn't from Littleton but he was in a nursing home in Littleton and apparently two months after he got the cane they moved him to another nursing home out of town and the cane went with him, but nobody kept track of it," she said.

The Historical Society cane was used for the ceremony June 16, but McRae expected the new replica —which had not yet been engraved with the town name — would be used in the future. She added they're not taking any chances with the new cane.

"The new cane is going to be put in a museum-type box and hung in this building," she said. "...When someone hits the age they get the cane, we're going to take it out of the box, let them hold it and take a picture...and they'll have their name on a plaque and get a pin."

A similar practice is used by the Maynard Historical Society, which has compiled an [online history](#) of the tradition and has followed the status of some 331 canes across New England.

Loss or theft the canes was described as a fairly common occurrence by the website, which noted Maynard's original cane was found, tucked away in a closet, in 1981—53 years after it was last sighted.

Incidentally, the original canes were described as being made of ebony, with a 14-karat gold head that's two-inches long and bears the inscription: Presented by the Boston Post to the oldest citizen of (town name) — to be transmitted.

While Littleton's original cane is still missing, McRae was thrilled that the town is reviving the tradition.

It's back," she said. "We lost it and it's back."

Meet Hazel Plummer

Birthday June 19, 1908

Hometown Somerville

Littleton resident 50 years

Extended family Married 64 years. Two children, six grandchildren, four great-grandchildren

Occupation dressmaker (retired)

Her secret?

Hazel Plummer is Littleton's eldest resident, but she said the secret of her longevity is a mystery to her.

"I don't know why I'm still here," she said. "I've always been healthy, I have a good mind, and I enjoy going out with friends, and my church and the people at it."

That said, Plummer noted her mother lived to be 94 years old, her sister, 92, and two grandparents who made 90.

"I guess we've got really good genes," she said.

Looking back

A Somerville native, Plummer worked as a dressmaker at a shop in Copley Square until marrying her husband in 1935. She said it wasn't easy starting a family during the Great Depression, but added her husband was a hard worker and it taught her how to budget — a skill she retains to this day.

Plummer and her husband bought a retirement home in the Snow Village area of Littleton back in the early 1960s. She relocated to Lyttleton Green after her husband passed on.

Plummer and her husband would eat lunch twice per week at Nashoba Tech culinary program, and she continues to dine there, saying the food is great and she's become friends with the chef and host over the years. She's also active in the Congregational Church of Littleton, saying it's a great group of people.

Plummer also gets exercise from the 15 steps to her second floor apartment.

"I go up and down the stairs two or three times if I don't go out during the day," she said.

Plummer didn't remember offhand that first president she voted for, but she remembered the days of Wilson, Coolidge and Hoover. She also remembered seeing famous aviator Charles Lindbergh when he visited Somerville long ago.

Hazel's advice

While she didn't claim any secret to longevity, Hazel did offer the following suggestions for young people:

"Just live a good clean, life, that's what I've done," she said. "I've never smoked, I've never drank; my husband had to work early, so we'd go to bed early. We were very normal."

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