



This Union soldier belt buckle was discovered recently behind Turner Hall as crews from Ben Wienen Landscaping excavate the area. The belt buckle will be added to the collection at the Galena & U.S. Grant Museum on Bench Street. *Mark Van Osdol photos*

Pretty special find

Excavation crews discover Union belt buckle buried behind Turner Hall

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GALENA—It's not every day an important piece of history just falls into your bucket.

But that is exactly what happened on Thursday, Oct. 30, when Nick Wienen found a Union issued belt buckle while he worked with the Ben Wienen Landscaping crew doing excavation work behind Turner Hall on Bench Street.

Wienen noticed the buckle in the bucket full of dirt on the backhoe and scraped away from the hillside. He stopped work to take a closer look.

He's glad he did.

Upon further investigation, Wienen discovered the piece of history he'd unearthed from four feet of soil. The belt buckle would have been used during the Civil War, from 1861 to 1865, according to Nancy Breed, executive director of the Galena & U.S. Grant Museum, just down the street from the excavation site.

The buckle, Breed noted, is in surprisingly good

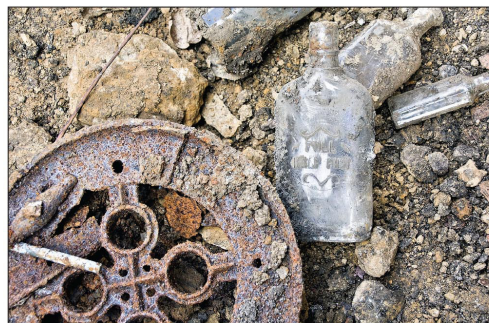
condition, considering where it was tucked away. One edge is bent, but other than that, the buckle looks pretty good.

Wienen agreed to donate the buckle to the museum, along with some other objects that were discovered during the dig as well. Those items include some Galena pottery shards and perfectly intact beer bottles from breweries in Galena, Freeport and Dubuque, Iowa. The two Galena bottles will go to the hometown museum, while the others will be offered to historical societies in Freeport and Dubuque since the Galena/Jo Daviess County Historical Society's policy is to return items to where they originated.

"Although the museum has several other Union belt buckles in our collection, we are thrilled to add another one, especially during our sesquicentennial commemoration years," said Breed. "Who did it belong to? A Civil War veteran who continued to use the utilitarian belt buckle after his return from the war? Perhaps he had a construction or maintenance job at the Turner Hall site. It will remain a mystery!"



Nick Wienen, front right, noticed a Union soldier's belt buckle in the backhoe's bucket as he worked with the Ben Wienen Landscaping crew to excavate the area behind Turner Hall. He presented the buckle to Nancy Breed, executive director of the Galena & U.S. Grant Museum. Also present were Matt Oldenburg, zoning administrator of the city of Galena, back right, and Tom Wienen, back left.



In addition to the belt buckle, crews also found Galena pottery shards and beer bottles, perfectly intact, from breweries in Galena, Dubuque, Iowa, and Freeport. A comb, above right, was also found buried in the soil.