



Photos by Lon Slepicka/Journal

David D. Duvall, above, spearheaded family efforts to move Gabriel Duvall's skeletal remains to his old law office on Marietta estate.

Descendants of Duvall bring remains back home

By ELLEN GOODMAN
Journal staff writer

Former Supreme Court Justice Gabriel Duvall has returned to his red brick house after a 142-year absence.

The bones of the best-known Duvall were removed from an unmarked grave last month and reassembled on a table in what had been his law office in his Glenn Dale home.

The justice's descendants, many of whom still live in the area, began talking about exhuming his body and moving it back to his former home at Marietta in Glenn Dale more than three decades ago. The original grave site and the historic home had been separated by a newly cut road and the gravesite had been vandalized at times.

In the last two years, The Society of Maren Duvall Descendants obtained legal permission and the aid of an archeologist to move the remains.

Retired Smithsonian employee Richard Muzzrole located the grave and exhumed the body last month, said David Duvall of Croom, who works for the county Board of Education and is president of the society. Muzzrole has labored for almost two years at the grave site and made a 99 percent

positive identification of the remains, Duvall said.

Gabriel Duvall was buried in a mahogany casket with a glass window over his face, said David Duvall. And Duvall said fragments of an outer casket and green velvet were found around the mahogany casket.

Duvall said it is likely that Gabriel Duvall was clothed in a shroud because three white buttons were all that was found to fasten fabric around him.

David Duvall had been a regular visitor to the grave site, slipping out at lunch to watch the excavation and exhumation. He lifted the skull of Gabriel Duvall out of the ground himself.

Among the other remains found were the backbone, portions of the neck, the left arm, the left hip and both legs. David Duvall said he also found a small gold filling in one tooth and has shown it to a dentist friend to examine for historical significance.

David Duvall said holding the head of his ancestor was

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Handles on the casket of Gabriel Duvall.

Family returns Duvall's remains to his old estate

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"spooky" and reflecting on it was "awesome."

"It's a satisfying feeling to know exactly where you came from," said Duvall. He mused some more: "It doesn't really help you know where you are going."

David Duvall said the remains will be reburied in a formal ceremony once the remains have been positively identified.

The remains will next be taken to the Smithsonian Institution for examination. Key to making a certain identification of Gabriel Duvall is a fracture to one arm received in a carriage accident that was reported in a local newspaper at the time. It is not clear whether the right or left arm was injured.

Gabriel Duvall was born in the 18th century. He was a friend of Thomas Jefferson and was at different times a state representative, comptroller of the federal treasury and a Supreme Court justice.

He married twice and had one son from the first marriage. He had the federal-style house with

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David Duvall

keystone windows at Marietta built for him and his second wife after he was appointed to the Supreme Court in 1812. The house was finished in 1813.

His son died in 1831 and his daughter-in-law died the next year. His wife, Jane Gibbons Duvall, died in 1834. Gabriel Duvall, after whom the high school in Lanham is named (although it is spelled DuVal), had only two grandsons when he died the next year.

His second wife, Jane Gibbons Duvall, is thought to have been buried at his side. His mother-in-law, Mary Gibbon, his son, Col. Edmund B. Duvall, and two children of the colonel, Mary Frances Duvall and Gabriel Duvall, are thought to have been buried at the original gravesite, too.