

Local

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SECTION C

'HISTORY DETECTIVES' IN COLUMBUS

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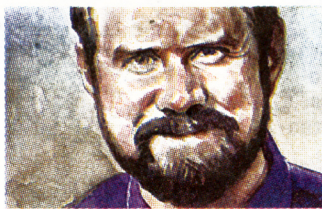
Emma Davis, left, director of the PBS series "History Detectives," discusses the filming with associate producer Annie Heringer; Antonio de la Cova, professor of Latino Studies at Indiana University; and Tukufu Zuberi, sociology professor at the University of Pennsylvania. PBS filmed parts of the program at the Columbus Museum and at Columbus State University.

Mystery whipped

Sometimes when a person insults your home and family by implying neither's respectable, you just have to jump him and beat him senseless with a stick.

That's what South Carolina Congressman Preston Brooks did to Massachusetts Sen. Charles Sumner in 1856, days after Sumner in a speech said Brooks' nephew, Sen. Andrew P. Butler, was a Don Quixote devoted to slavery.

Butler "believes himself a chivalrous knight, with sentiments of honor and courage," Sumner said. "Of course he has chosen a mistress to whom he has made his vows, and who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him; though polluted in the sight of the



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world, is chaste in his sight; I mean the harlot, slavery. For her, his tongue is always profuse in words."

Brooks walked onto the Senate floor to find Sumner seated at his desk, and told him the speech was an insult to South Carolina. And then, according to one newspaper

account: "Without waiting for any reply . . . he immediately struck Mr. Sumner a violent blow over the head with his cane, while Mr. Sumner sat in his seat unable to extricate himself, cutting by the blow a gash, four inches in length on his head." Brooks continued to beat Sumner as the cane broke.

This made him a Southern hero whose fans sent replacement canes, of which few now remain in the family. But one memento of the moment does: a riding crop.

This a descendent, William Bonham of Long Island, N.Y., still owns. It is about 20 inches long, having lost some rawhide.

See **HISTORY**, Page C11

HISTORY | Whip a gift from local man

From C1

An intriguing inscription on its gold handle brought a camera crew to Columbus on Tuesday to shoot footage for public television's "History Detectives."

Scrolled around that handle is a Bible verse, Proverbs 26:3. "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back." Also inscribed is this: "P.S. Brooks. Columbus, Ga. J.E. Davis."

Bonham's family thought the "Davis" meant the crop must have come from Confederate President Jefferson Davis. But why did it say Columbus?

Because it actually came from John E. Davis, who lived right across the river in Summerville, Ala. Davis was in the Columbus Guards, as a private in the Creek War of the 1830s and a captain in the Mexican War of the 1840s. He was an ardent secessionist and served the Confederacy under Paul Semmes until the general was mortally wounded at Gettysburg. Davis returned to Columbus to be quartermaster and later paymaster for the local post. He died at Summerville in August 1864.

Having determined who Davis was, the TV producers wondered: Why would Brooks have kept Davis' crop, but not the many canes he was sent?

It could not have anything to do with Davis' Civil War service. Brooks died in 1857, years before the war.

The producers suspect the two may have met during the Mexican War, possibly through Gen. John Quitman, a nationally famous Mississippian for whom Quitman, Ga., is named. It's the seat of Brooks County, named for Preston Brooks.

In the Mexican War, Brooks served with South Carolina's Palmetto Regiment, a frontline unit that saw fierce fighting. But Davis was with the Columbus Guards, which according to a unit history "had no part in the many battles, but were involved in several skirmishes." It's still not clear if these two men were ever in precisely the same place at the same time.

The production company was at the Columbus State

University archives Tuesday morning filming Columbus native Ken Thomas doing some of the terribly exciting things professional historians do, such as going over census records to try to find John E. Davis. Later the crew was to shoot some footage at Linwood Cemetery, where Davis is buried.

Producer Emma Davies said this episode of "History Detectives" will be on Georgia Public Broadcasting sometime over the summer.

It will air right after "Antiques Roadshow," she said — not a bad lead-in for a show about an 1850s artifact.

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