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# Eight huge stone gargoyles return to Worcester

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WORCESTER - Eight 3,000-pound stone gargoyles are back in the city, almost a decade since they disappeared.

The gargoyles once graced the former Chestnut Street Congregational Church, built in 1896. Until Friday, their exact location remained a mystery.

Their disappearance led to worldwide media coverage and "field trips" to a warehouse and a mansion.

"I am thrilled," Deborah S. Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester, said as she watched the gargoyles unloaded. "It's been a long time coming, and many times it felt like it would never happen. It's great."

For most of their lives, the gargoyles, carved by Timothy J. McAuliffe, were sedentary. They were comfortably perched on two towers at the former Chestnut Street Congregational Church.

But beginning in 2006, the brownstone beasts left town and made a journey that had Ms. Packard searching a warehouse, tramping through woods in Connecticut, and investigating tips that placed the gargoyles all over North America.

"It's such a crazy story," said Ms. Packard.

In 2006, the new owners of the church at 5 Chestnut Street, Liberty Church, removed the stone beasts for structural reasons.

When the city's Historical Commission agreed to waive the demolition delay ordinance so the work could be done at once, a condition of approval ordered the church to store the gargoyles in the basement until money could be found to restore them.

Unbeknownst to city preservationists, the gargoyles were too big to fit down the church stairs. So they were sent to a warehouse of the company doing the restoration work: Monaco Restorations Inc., in Southbridge.

Monaco Restoration filed for bankruptcy in July 2009, and Monson Savings Bank seized the company's assets, which included the gargoyles. The gargoyles were put up for auction in February 2012. They did not sell.

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Meanwhile, the Chestnut Street church building was up for sale in August 2014. It was at this point that Preservation Worcester learned that the gargoyles were missing. The news caused a media sensation, as the initial Telegram & Gazette story prompted stories by The Boston Globe, The BBC, The Associated Press, and news outlets from as far away as Japan.

By December 2014, members of the historical commission learned the gargoyles had been sold to Charles Arment Jr., owner of a Springfield trucking company. Mr. Arment told the city he was unaware of any prior claims on the gargoyles and was not interested in returning them, according to Preservation Worcester.

Liberty Church transferred ownership of the gargoyles to Preservation Worcester in April 2015, which allowed the organization to file a January 2016 lawsuit against Monson Savings Bank and Mr. Arment, seeking return of the gargoyles on the grounds that they were not the bank's to sell.

On Friday, everything came to a resolution, as a flatbed truck loaded with gargoyles pulled into Raymond James Restoration Inc., in Worcester, and Mr. Arment was reimbursed the \$7,500 by Monson Savings Bank that he had paid for the stone beasts.

"It took a long time, but it's kind of a resolution where everybody wins," said attorney James D. O'Brien Jr., who worked pro-bono for Preservation Worcester. "You can't point a finger at anybody who was intentionally doing anything detrimental."

Mr. Arment declined to comment, only smiling and turning away when asked how he felt. But as he and workers guided the forklift to unload the stone creatures one-by-one, you could see the affection that he held for the sculptures.

"It's unbelievable, there's not one thing wrong with them," said Raymond James Simoncini, president of Raymond James Restoration Inc., and a member of the Preservation Worcester

board of directors. "It's all regular wear and tear ... he not only had them, he stored them and he took care of them."

As for the gargoyles' future, Ms. Packard said Preservation Worcester would like to see them ultimately return to their position atop the church. But the top of the towers has been demolished and would need to be rebuilt. The original stones for the tower, which were also saved, remain missing.

It is more likely that the gargoyles will be relocated to some public place in the city, perhaps made into a fountain, with the hope that they may someday return to the Chestnut Street church, Ms. Packard said.

"The important thing is they belong to the city," Ms. Packard said.