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## *The Bill of Rights is Returned to North Carolina!*

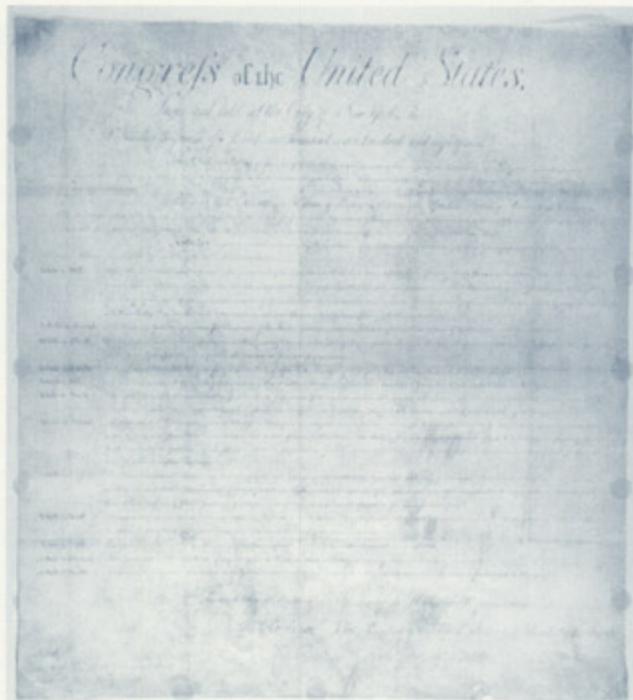
With the issuance on August 4, 2005, of a long-awaited ruling by Judge Terrence Boyle on the ownership of North Carolina's original copy of the Bill of Rights, our state's copy was returned home for the first time in 140 years. The original had been sent to North Carolina by George Washington in 1789, but was stolen by an Ohio soldier during the Civil War when Union troops seized the State Capitol in April 1865.

The Bill of Rights has surfaced several times since then, most notably in 1925 and 1995, when offers to sell the stolen document back to the state of North Carolina were rejected by state officials. North Carolina officials maintained throughout the document's absence that the state should not have to purchase what already belonged to it! The document's value has been estimated at \$30 million or more, but as far as North Carolina's history is concerned, it is priceless.

Wayne Pratt and Robert Matthews bought the North Carolina copy of the Bill of Rights for \$200,000 in the 1990s. In 2003, Pratt and Matthews approached the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia about selling the document. Through Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell, Governor Michael Easley learned of the document's whereabouts. What developed was an FBI sting operation that recovered the copy, pending a legal decision on ownership. The document was put in federal custody, its future unclear as legal battles began. Since that time Pratt has given up his claim to the document, but Matthews has continued to fight and has filed a lawsuit in Pennsylvania. He has claimed that the document was legal "spoils of war," taken from a state that had seceded from the Union and had thereby given up its right to constitutional protections. U.S. Eastern District Court Judge Terrence Boyle, however, in his ruling

citing the 11th Amendment, ordered that the Bill of Rights be returned to North Carolina. Governor Easley took possession of it on August 4 under heavy guard by state troopers. Experts say that Matthews' chances to repossess the Bill of Rights are now greatly diminished.

The document's transfer from federal custody back to the state of North Carolina was a victory for generations of state officials who have been involved in efforts to recover ownership. The Bill of Rights is currently being housed in the North Carolina State Archives and will undergo careful analysis for potential conservation.



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