

Milford Moments in Time

By Joyce M. Clark

Most people living in Milford will tell you it is one of the greatest places to live and raise a family. But for someone who is looking for buried treasures, Milford is also a great place to explore.

For the last three years, Milford has provided Mark Van Sickle with numerous hours of adventure and fun as he scours the area for historical treasures. Mark uses a DFX (the Cadillac of metal detectors and still made in America) when searching for interesting artifacts. In addition to finding money and jewelry, Mark has unearthed a button from a Civil War Infantry Officer's uniform, a Grand Army of the Republic medal struck in 1891, a bronze rosette from a horse's bridle, and a grain scoop with lots of character.

In addition to finding modern-day coins, Mark has come across approximately 30 coins that are historically noteworthy. For example, the site of an 1880's buggy repair shop on South Main yielded an 1864 2-cent piece. Mark is fascinated by the old coins he finds, and researches the items so he can better understand their value and history. Through research, he learned that this 2-cent piece was minted from 1864 to 1873 and is the first coin to contain the words *In God We Trust*. This statement began appearing on coins due to increased religious sentiment during the Civil War.

Other historic coins Mark has found around the area include an 1858 Flying Eagle Cent, an 1872 Indian Head Cent, and a 1912 D Barber Dime. Another favorite find for Mark is a Radio Orphan Annie Decoder Wheel similar to the one often mentioned by Ralphie in the holiday movie, *A Christmas Story*. Rounding out memorable moments for Mark was the day he found a live round of 30-30 ammunition in the yard of a local home. He gave this "treasure" to the Milford Police Department for safe keeping.

Mark is very conscientious about the process he follows when hunting for treasure. He likes to research old Plats from the area so he can identify where interesting, popular buildings once stood proud. He also reads local history books and talks to residents that enjoy sharing the history of Milford .

Once Mark identifies a property he would like to investigate, he contacts the owners and obtains their permission. He also likes to split any profits with the homeowners as he believes that it is only fair. Mark also abides by what the Detectorists' community calls the *Code of the West*, which is to try and reunite lost class rings with their rightful owner. He has only had the privilege of doing this once, when the face of a local homeowner lit up as Mark dug up and presented him with his lost wedding ring.

Mark's strategy is to start in the front yard of a home since this is where buggy traffic, foot traffic, and most outdoor socializing with neighbors took place long

ago. He then moves to the backyard where sheds, barns, and privies were located. Once Mark's metal detector registers an item, he likes to perform what he calls *dirt surgery*. He is extremely careful to excavate the items, and if there are any minor lawn scars after *dirt surgery*, they disappear after the next rainfall. If Mark could only provide one piece of advice regarding metal detecting, it would be to avoid cleaning or polishing the coins you find as it reduces their value.

For a history buff like Mark, hunting for treasures around Milford, the place he loves, adds extra spice to his life. Mark believes a quote from Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* sums up his passion for his hobby: "*There comes a time in every rightly-constructed boy's life when he has a raging desire to go somewhere and dig for hidden treasure.*"



Caption: Locally excavated 1881 Indian Head Cent (photo courtesy of Mark Van Sickle)



Caption: Caption: Locally excavated 1912 D Barber Dime (photo courtesy of Mark Van Sickle)