

Some Interesting Facts about the Display Case Artifacts

This educational display case contains artifacts left behind by early inhabitants of the City of Centerville and Washington Township. I unearthed the individual artifacts described below, which date from 1838 to the 1980s, using a metal detector. After cleaning, researching, and preserving each artifact, I assembled them into this display case which was then donated to Centerville-Washington History. Remember every artifact has a story to tell, if we're willing to listen.

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January 7, 2024

1. 1838 Large Cent: This large cent was the only noteworthy find from this property – but I didn't realize just how much until researching *A Sense of Place*. According to pages 171-173, 1838 was a pivotal year both for Quakers in the southeast quadrant of Washington Township as well a prominent Quaker Solomon Miller. Just a decade earlier, the Quakers had split into 2 factions: Orthodox and Hicksite. Solomon Miller, who according to tax records had owned 5 pieces of land and 3 mills in the township, began to sell his property in preparation for moving to Springboro. In 1838, he sold the 160-acre farm where this large cent was found. By 1840, he no longer appeared in the tax records, signaling that his move to Springboro was complete.

What are the odds that the one artifact found was minted the same year he sold the farm? Miniscule. Over the next 20 years other Quakers left Washington Township and all that remains visible above ground is the Sugar Creek Meeting House Cemetery found in the bend on Clyo Road between East Centerville Station Road and East Spring Valley Pike.

2. Cracker Jack Tootsie Toy Army Tank (c. 1930s-40s): From 1912 until 2016, children eagerly opened their box of Cracker Jack for the toy prize inside. During the 1930s and 40s, TootsieToy supplied die cast metal toys to Cracker Jack. Although not intended to be a scale model, the general shape of this toy with its four road wheels most closely resembles the Japanese light tank Type 95 Ha-Gō (also known as the Ke-Go). It was used by the Empire of Japan during the Second Sino-Japanese War, at Nomonhan against the Soviet Union, and in the Second World War. It proved sufficient against infantry, but like the American M3 Stuart light tank, was not designed to combat other tanks. Approximately 2,300 were produced, making it the most numerous Japanese armored fighting vehicle of the Second World War.

On 21 April 2016, Cracker Jack's parent company Frito-Lay announced the toy prizes would be replaced with a digital code which allows families to enjoy their favorite baseball moments through a new one-of-a-kind mobile experience.

3. Bell of Sarna (c. 1938-78): Sarna Brass was started in 1920 at Manhasset, NY, by Sajan Singh Sarna. Born in Rawalpindi, British India (now a part of Pakistan), Sarna came to the U.S. to study and found that Americans loved Indian handcrafts. In the early 1930s, despite the Great Depression, he began importing and selling handmade goods from India.

After dreaming about a bell in 1938, he changed his focus to importing brass bells. Each bell, which came with an attached story, grew in popularity peaking in the 1960s when they were known as Bells of Sarna. The stories were about a huge variety of topics including sacred cows, holidays, and the history of the company to name just a few. When Sarna died in 1978, the company changed its name to S.S. Sarna, Inc.

4. Southwest-style buckle (c. 1980s): This eye-catching belt buckle was found on top of the ground! Made of pot metal and a plastic turquoise stone, it may date to the 1980s when the southwest style was in vogue. Shirley Fritz at C&J Connection in Centerville thinks that a hobbyist made it due to its poor quality and added that “no manufacturer would let that go through”. She added that the crack likely occurred during casting as the molten metal at that location was probably inadequately mixed.

5. Brass Stirrup (c. mid-1800s): Two things make this base of a brass stirrup unique from the others I’ve donated to Centerville-Washington History before. First, the small width indicates this stirrup was to be used either by a woman or child. Second, it is in remarkably good condition for being approximately 160 years old. In fact, it is as if it was lost shortly after manufacture.

6. 1957W Play Nickel: When this “coin” was uncovered there was cause for much excitement because I thought it was my first ever trime – a silver 3-cent piece minted from 1851 to 1873. Alas, when the dirt was removed, the Latin phrase “Falsa Pecunia” appeared meaning “False Money” in English. However, interestingly enough, some of these play nickels sell for more than a real nickel on the internet!

Because these coins come in different denominations such as pennies, dimes, and quarters, to this day adults can use them to teach children how to count money. With the rise of credit, debit, and gift cards along with crypto-currency, paper money and coins could become a memory in another generation or two.

7. Acanthus Finial (c. 1800s?): What is an Acanthus you ask? It is a flowering plant whose leaves have inspired designs in art, architecture, and more since the ancient Greeks. What I believe is a finial has 3 Acanthus leaves cast in bronze. While an exact match for it has not been found, one similar dates to the 19th century, which is consistent with the age of School House #3 that once stood where the finial was uncovered.

Typically, finials are used on flag poles, lamps, and curtain rods. Because it has a small 7/16” inside diameter hole that is unthreaded – my best guess is it once capped a flag pole. If you close your eyes and travel back to 1890, one can picture the American flag hanging from a pole with this decorative finial. At that time the flag had 38 stars – one to represent each state in the union.

8. “Forty-Niner” Plant Tag (c. 1949): “Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold from the American River!” shouted Samuel Brannan in 1848 as he walked through the streets of San Francisco swinging his hat and brandishing a vial of gold flakes found at Sutter’s Mill. That news travelled fast for the times, and the following year people from all across the United States made their way to California seeking their fortune by prospecting for gold. Unfortunately, few of these hardy souls, dubbed “Forty-Niners”, found their fortune. In stark contrast Brannan became California’s first millionaire in part by selling supplies to the prospectors.

A century later Armstrong Nurseries paid homage to these people by introducing a hybrid tea rose by the name “Forty-Niner” for which they received plant patent number 792 the year earlier. Who knew such a small tag had such a big history story to tell?