

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 the early 1800s to 1932 or later, 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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1. Bone-handle Fork (c. 1830s-40s): This fork represents 2 firsts for me: 1) Bone handles on an eating utensil because they seldom survive being buried over a century; 2) an eating utensil made of iron – as others excavated have been brass, bronze, pewter, or silver. Although the majority of the 3 tines are missing, enough remains to date the fork to the early 1800s – probably when either George Watkins had a homestead on the property or John Kirby built his home there.

Comparing the fork as is to the “as dug” picture above, one can see how much rust had to carefully be removed by hand. Too little effort would leave rust and too much could potentially break the fragile iron stem. After cleaning, the entire fork was coated with Renaissance Wax to help preserve what remained. It shows why for every hour I’m in the field, I can spend up to 10 hours identifying, dating, cleaning, and preserving an artifact.

2. S. Kirk & Son Fork (c. 1932 or later): This beautiful silver fork of the Repoussé pattern was introduced in the United States by S. Kirk in 1826. The style is so timeless that it is manufactured to this day. This particular fork was made in 1932 or later because the word “STERLING” and phrase “S. Kirk & Son” both appear on the reverse side which indicate a later time period. Compare this elegant fork with its bone-handled counterpart to the left. Although both styles date to the same period, this fork was for the elite whereas the later utilitarian.

3. Brass Gas Arm (c. late 1800s): Before some homes were lit with electricity, wall mounted gas fixtures were used. A gas arm supplied the gas to a fixture attached at one end. The opposite end of the arm was attached to a valve which was screwed to a gas line in the wall. According to the homeowner Mr. Jack Durnbaugh, gas lines were found in the wall while renovating his home. They probably weren’t removed when the gas fixtures and arms were replaced with electric lighting.

The ornate style of the gas arm is consistent with the late Victorian era, possibly Eastlake.