

Buried Treasure

John Crawford wasn't looking for buried treasure when he started digging in a remote corner of his farm. He just wanted to put in a new fence.

When John's shovel hit the wooden box buried underground, his first thought wasn't that he'd found something valuable. He was just angry because he didn't want any delays getting the fence finished.

John's wife, JoAnne, had been nagging him to get the fence finished for weeks. They had a new Border collie puppy, Chewy. Chewy liked to run and loved living on the farm where there was a lot of space. But Chewy had gotten off the farm several times and was bothering the neighbors' animals. JoAnne was concerned that Chewy would get lost or hurt. So she began asking John, every day, to add a section of fence along a back area of the farm. The area was wooded, so it had never been fenced, but John made a plan for where he could dig holes for fence posts and put up a fence that would work around the trees.



John and JoAnne Crawford had lived on the farm since 1986. They grew some small crops,

including corn and berries, but mostly they had wanted a farm to give their four children a lot of space to run around and play while they were growing up. Their youngest son, Brian, now age 22, still lives in the area and was helping his father dig holes for the new fence.

When John Crawford's shovel struck a hard, solid object under the dirt, he wanted to quit digging and look for a way to move the fence hole to someplace easier to dig. Brian encouraged him to find out what was buried there.

"The shovel had made a thud kind of sound, not like the clank you hear when the shovel hits a rock. It could have just been the root of a tree, but I thought it was worth checking out."

They had moved only a few shovelfuls of dirt before they realized the object was some kind of wooden crate.

"We completely forgot about building the fence and focused completely on figuring out what was in that box," John said with a laugh. "We started making bets about what was inside."

"I guessed it was left-over construction materials, nails or something, since the box seemed kind of heavy," explained Brian.

"I figured it was just trash. I remember my grandparents telling me that back in their day, before there were garbage trucks that would drive around picking up people's trash, people would burn most of their trash and bury whatever couldn't be burned. So when I saw the box, I just thought it was some old trash."

It took two hours to uncover the top of the box and to clear enough space around the edges to be able to get the top off of the crate.

Using the tip of one shovel, John was able to slowly pry the lid off the top of the crate. Inside the box they saw layers of old newspaper.

“The newspapers were dated from April of 1983, which means that the box was buried just a few years before we bought this farm,” John explained. “So it wasn’t really all that old.”

Brian pulled the first object out of the crate. “It was a rectangular block, wrapped in another piece of newspaper. I was surprised at how heavy it was, a few pounds at least.”

But that surprise was nothing compared to the surprise they got when they took off the newspaper wrapping.

“It was tarnished, but there was no doubt as to what it was,” John shook his head and laughed. “I was standing in the back corner of a farm holding a bar of silver in my hands.”

And there wasn’t just one bar. There were 25 of them.

Each bar measured about 3 inches wide and a little more than 5 inches long. Each bar was stamped with numbers to indicate its weight: 50 ounces.

The value of silver is based on its weight and fluctuates with the stock market. Currently, one ounce of silver is worth a little more than \$27.

That means that one bar was worth around \$1350.

The total value of all twenty-five bars was around \$33,750.

“That’s more money than I make working at my job for an entire year!” laughed Brian. “Enough for a really nice new car.”

“Enough to take the entire family on a great vacation,” sighed John. “But I can’t stop wondering about who the silver originally belonged to, what it was for and why it was buried here.”

Legally the silver belongs to John and his wife because they bought the land; there’s an expectation that when land is purchased, they get what comes along with it. “We bought the farm and the house and that includes all the trees and plants on the property, all the rocks. And these silver bars too. It just feels kind of strange to keep so much money when we know it wasn’t meant to be ours.”

John and his wife are doing some research to track down who was living on their farm in 1983, the date on the newspapers. “That’s probably when the bars were buried,” John explained. “We need to at least make an effort to find out who the silver belonged to.” But they won’t be giving it all back.

“We thought maybe we’d offer them half. Doesn’t that seem fair?” asked John.

In the meantime, John and Brian have a fence that needs to be finished.