

Buried Treasure

John Crawford wasn't looking for buried treasure. He just wanted to put in a new fence.

John's shovel hit the wooden box buried underground. He didn't think he'd found something valuable. He was angry. He just wanted to finish the fence.

John's wife, JoAnne, had been asking him to finish the fence. They had a new puppy, Chewy. Chewy liked to run. He loved living on the farm where there was a lot of space. But Chewy had gotten off the farm several times. He was bothering the neighbors' animals. JoAnne was worried that Chewy would get lost or hurt. So she began asking John, every day, to finish the fence. The area was wooded. It had never been fenced. John made a plan to put the fence between the trees.



John and JoAnne Crawford had lived on the farm since 1986. They grew some small crops. They had corn and berries. Mostly they had wanted a farm to give their four children a lot of space to run around and play. Their youngest son, Brian, is now age 22. He lives nearby. He was helping his father dig holes for the new fence.

John's shovel struck a hard, solid object under the dirt. He wanted to quit digging. He wanted to look for an easier place to dig. Brian encouraged him to find out what was buried there.

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

They moved a few shovelfuls of dirt. Then they realized the object was some kind of wooden box.

"We completely forgot about the fence. We tried to figure out what was in that box," John said with a laugh. "We started making bets about what was inside."

"I guessed it was nails and hammers or something. The box seemed kind of heavy," explained Brian.

"I figured it was just trash. Back in my grandparents' day there weren't any garbage trucks to pick up people's trash. So people would burn most of their trash. Then they'd bury whatever couldn't be burned. I just thought the box was some old trash."

It took two hours to uncover enough of the box to get the top off.

Using the tip of one shovel, John was able to get the lid off. Inside they saw layers of old newspaper.

"The newspapers were dated from April of 1983. This means that the box was buried just a

few years before we bought this farm,” John explained. “It wasn’t really all that old.”

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

They were very surprised when they took off the newspaper wrapping.

“It was tarnished. But I knew right away what it was,” John shook his head and laughed. “I was standing on 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. Each was a little more than 5 inches long. Each bar was stamped with numbers. The numbers told the weight: 50 ounces.

The value of silver is based on its weight and changes with the stock market. Right now, one ounce of silver is worth about \$27.

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

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

“That’s more money than I make 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 wonder about who the silver originally belonged to. I want to know what it was for. I want to know why it was buried here.”

Legally the silver belongs to John and his wife. They bought the land. The stuff on the land comes with it. “We bought the farm and the house. That includes all the trees and plants, all the rocks. And these silver bars too. It just feels kind of strange to keep so much money. We know it wasn’t meant to be ours.”

John and his wife are trying to track down who was living on their farm in 1983. That’s the date on the newspapers. “That’s probably when the bars were buried,” John explained. “We need to try 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.