

Church Yard Hunting

The Following Story Appeared in Treasure Search Jan/Feb 1988.

Editors Note: The following story is being published exactly as we received it. The author was unaware of his very rare Pony House token until our staff spotted the find and notified him. In response, he wrote back saying "Thanks for the information on the token, as it really made my day. I found it in March of 1985 while hunting with my partner Sam Bellanca in Myerstown, Pennsylvania. It was four inches deep. I've had it in a 2x2 holder ever since but never got around to researching it. The site we hunted was an old school/church turned into a nursing home. Although the home was brand new, the huge buttonwood trees surrounding the place were a dead giveaway as to the real age of the site." The author's action in this manner once again prove the worth of a very good rule...keep all finds, except obvious junk items, until they can be identified.

Being a member of the United States Army does have its advantages when it comes to metal detecting and making new friends. Having lived in Salt Lake City, Utah; Delta Junction, Alaska; Huntsville, Alabama; Reading, Pennsylvania and El Paso, Texas; I've had the opportunity to coin shoot in new environments and make many friends along the way.

One friend in particular that always comes to mind is Sam Bellanca of Reading, Pennsylvania. I was stationed there as an Army recruiter when I first met Sam. I was out coin shooting a field next to an old Army Reserve center, which just happened to be directly across the street from the oldest college in Reading (1856), when Sam walked up and introduced himself. He lived right down the street and just wanted to see if I was finding anything. Sam is retired from a railroad company and works part time as a carpenter and coin shooter. We traded stories for awhile and decided to go out together the following weekend.

That Saturday Sam was knocking on my door at 8:00 in the morning , and off we went with metal detectors and coffee in hand in his little yellow Ford. We decided to hunt only old church sites that were built before 1900. Since Sam grew up in this area he knew where to look. First stop was Myerstown, at a church built in the 1700's. Pennsylvania has lots of old churches in the country; just drive around and look for white steeples. Permission was granted and we both started hunting out front. After thirty minutes of finding absolutely nothing we moved to the side of the church. We immediately began finding coins. Down at the five-inch level were a lot of oyster shells, so I believe this was the original surface. Wheat pennies were very common, and Indian head pennies began appearing along with buffalo and Liberty-V nickels. In the silver department we found Roosevelt, Mercury and Barber dimes. I found a Standing Liberty Quarter dated 1929 that later was graded as MS-61. We recovered some silver Washington quarters but no halves. We also found a nice 10K heart shaped diamond ring which read as a pull tab and down three inches on the meter. It pays to check out these kinds of readings. Some of the Indian head pennies would also read as pull tabs, but when the depth meter says "three to five inches" you had better dig!

Next stop was New Jerusalem. We found another old church originally built in 1840 with new sections added to it. Since the front and right side were tarred, we hunted the left

side. Things were going fairly slow at first until Sam yelled over that he just dug up a Mercury dime. Then I got a signal that read "penny/dime" at four inches. I dug down four inches and hit solid rock! Rechecking the hole confirmed there was a target present. I pried the rock up with a screwdriver and there lay a 1911-S Barber dime! You just never know. A few minutes later another detector response resulted in finding a 1909 Barber half with full "Liberty" in the headband. Not bad for an area 100 feet by 100 feet. By now it was growing dark so we called it a day. Sam dropped me off at home and we made plans to go out again the following Saturday.

The week went by fast and Saturday morning we headed toward Bally to an old Mennonite church built in 1897. It just made our cut off date. The grounds around the church only produced clad coins with an occasional wheat popping up. While taking a break we noticed the grave yard next to the church had about a 20 foot grassy area on one side of the rock wall surrounding the grave yard. The other sides were now tar roads. It looked like a good place to park a horse and buggy, so Sam and I decided to give it a try. We had barely gotten started when Sam came over holding a beautiful 1897 Barber dime. It looked like it was just lost yesterday. I was working the edge by the road under a tree when up popped a 1909 Barber quarter. It was well worn, but they sure look pretty when they break the surface. After finding a few Indian head pennies (one an 1869) we headed for new horizons.

Next stop was an old church in Doylestown. It was situated on a busy intersection so headphones were a must. The church was built in the 1700's and had lots of grass on three sides. We received permission to hunt and got started right away. The first thing we noticed was the absence of trash and new coins, as if someone had already been there. The first coin I dug was only three inches deep. Would you believe a 1797 draped bust large cent! And then another! An 1807 draped bust large cent in excellent shape. We found two Liberty seated dimes, 1840 and 1891, plus one 1841 half dime and a nice walking Liberty half. Sam even found a 10K class ring under some low hanging bushes because he thought it looked like a nice place to sit down. We won't even mention all the Indian head pennies we found, but one large cent we uncovered is noteworthy. It was an 1810 classic head, in very poor shape but still identifiable.

By now you should have gotten the message...that churches are the place to find the older (but not always deeper) coins. I always tell Sam that there is at least one Indian head penny at every church built before 1900. So far I've been right (or just plain lucky). The Doylestown church was the last time Sam and I got to hunt together. The Army transferred me to Fort Bliss, Texas (El Paso) where I've been for the last two years. That's another story. Now I am on orders for Germany...ROMAN COINS. Sam, get your detector warmed up; I'll be stopping by for a visit first.