



North Canton homeowner Doug Wechter, right, and metal detector enthusiast Scott Brown display the history that Brown unearthed around Wechter's home, which was built in 1841.

Julie Vennitti Botos / Canton Repository

Toy cars, coins & brothel token. Metal detectorist unearths cool finds on Stark property

[Tim Botos](#) • November 13 at 5:58 AM

NORTH CANTON – Sometimes, treasure is in the eye of the beholder.

And guys like Scott Brown, a metal detecting enthusiast, and Doug Wechter, a local history buff, just so happen to see riches through a similar lens. So, it's no wonder their serendipitous meeting a year ago led to a series of metal searches, which have yielded a fortune.

Not in conventional dollars and cents.

Sure, some of the 130 items Brown unearthed from Wechter's yard at 730 Portage Street NW, could fetch \$30 or \$40 apiece on the open market — not that Wechter would ever sell any of it. The finds are too crusted with sentimentality and oozing with history to part with them. Together, they tell a nearly 200-year story about the life and times of those who've lived on and near the site.

"I can just sit back and imagine who might have touched these pieces," said the 58-year-old Wechter, who affectionately refers to his city home and its two-thirds of an acre property as "The Homestead."

A button that dates to between the 1790s and 1840s may have fallen off of Catherine Peple's dress; after all, her husband, Ezra, built that house on Portage street in 1841. Maybe Ezra Peple is the one who lost a suspender clip, which Brown lifted from the soil this summer.

An 1863 Army-Navy Civil War token could have belonged to Henry Holl, a Civil War veteran, who wrote 165 biographies about the people of New Berlin, before it was called North Canton. Perhaps an uncovered 1870s Indian head penny fell out of William H. "Boss" Hoover's pocket when he still ran a tannery, years before he created a vacuum cleaner dynasty.



Metal detector enthusiast Scott Brown unearthed many interesting items on the property of Doug Wechter in North Canton.

Julie Vennitti Botos / Canton Repository

"I love finding things of historical value," said Brown, a retired math teacher who lives in Doylestown. "And this front yard here was just polluted with all kinds of old stuff."

The rest of Wechter's tract also relinquished its share of pieces during Brown's eight separate trips this spring, summer and fall. Brown will be back again this fall, too, to hunt some more.

The Homestead's hunting grounds

Wechter and Brown met in November 2023.

Wechter had stopped by Beysley's restaurant to speak with a group of old-timers who'd graduated from the former North Canton (NoCa) High School. As vice president of the North Canton Heritage Society, the meetup was part of Wechter's research for a project that included saving the arch from Portage Street Elementary before it was razed.

Turns out, Brown's mom, Jane Brown, was one of the old-timers at Beysley's. Brown had driven her to the gathering. Wechter and Brown struck up a conversation. Wechter shared details about his historic house, situated on what was once a 50-acre farm. Brown gave Wechter his phone number and figured he'd never hear from him again.

But months later, Wechter contacted Brown.

Wechter asked him to use his metal detector to search the property.



A 2-cent piece uncovered by metal detector enthusiast Scott Brown from Doug Wechter's North Canton home, which was built in 1841.

Julie Vennitti Botos / Canton Repository

With more than three decades experience, Brown has found everything from a .25-caliber pistol to diamond rings and necklaces. He's helped many find lost items, such as he did a few years ago, in solving the mystery of John Schick's long-lost 1967 Hoover High class ring.

Brown prefers to search old properties, such as farmhouses or land that once housed a home or business. Brown always allows the property owner the option to keep what he finds.

On the first trip to Wechter's home, though, Brown wasn't overly enthused. He saw a neatly manicured lawn, ground cover on the side and a driveway and garage to the rear.

Didn't exactly look like prime hunting grounds.

Brown soon learned otherwise.

From the Pepples to the Wechters, and 183 years

Wechter loves The Homestead, and he probably knows more about its history than anyone.

Ezra Pepple was born near Hagerstown, Maryland, in 1810. He arrived in Plain Township around 1825 and settled in Nimishillen Township. He married Catherine Wertenberger in 1833.

They had two daughters, Lydia and Susan. A trained carpenter and a farmer by trade, Pepple built the house on Portage Street, which was part of their 50-acre farm. The Pennsylvania German-federal style farmhouse rests on a foundation made from fieldstones.

The farm had grown to 60 acres when George Donner, a son-in-law, bought it from the Pepples' in 1874. The site changed hands several times in the 1900s, as it was carved into smaller lots.

Gary and Rita Wechter bought the house and its current lot in 1968. They raised four children — Dave, Ann, Amy and Doug — in the old house. Doug Wechter bought it in 2018.



Scott Brown, left, and Doug Wechter talk about some of the artifacts unearthed from Wechter's property in North Canton. Brown has used a metal detector to scour the property on eight visits.

Julie Vennitti Botos / Canton Repository

"My parents were such good caretakers of The Homestead, and their preservation efforts resulted in the Ezra Pepple house being given a preservation award in 2019 by the Canton Preservation Society," he explained. "I couldn't bear to see someone else buy and subsequently remove some of the house's character, such as replacing the clapboard siding with aluminum siding."

Through the years, the Wechter family had discovered objects, such as two grinding stones, broken pottery, glass bottles and an 1861 broad ax — all likely remnants from previous owners.

Brown, though, was able to find what the Wechters couldn't see — some items just a couple inches beneath the surface; others buried a foot deep. During and after each hunt, Wechter and his family shared text messages about Brown's finds of the day.

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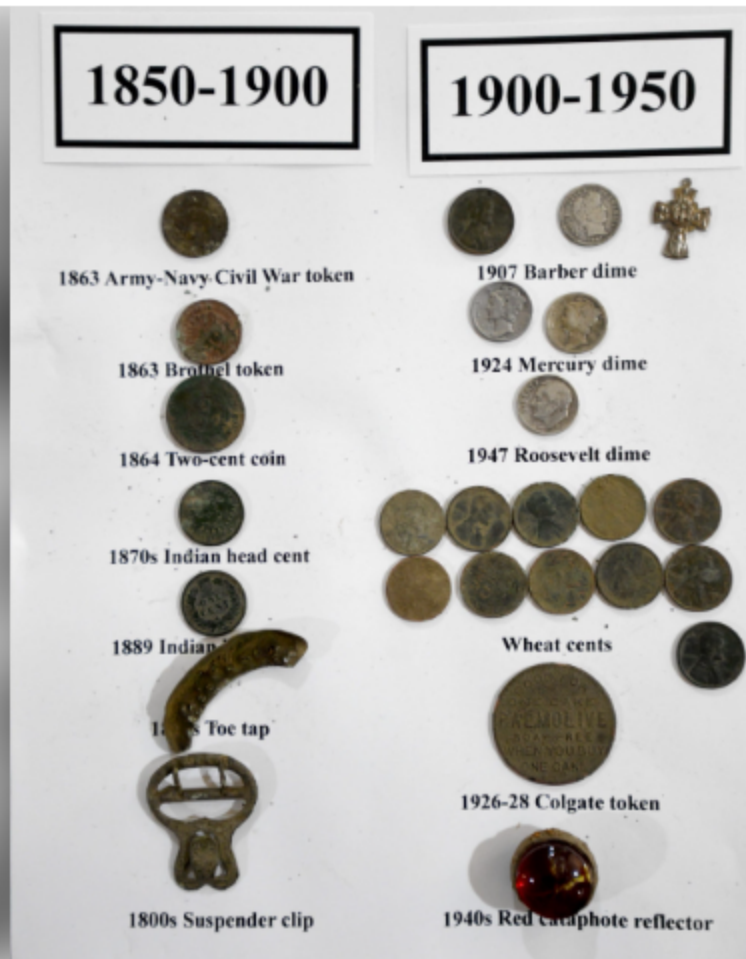
"Little time capsules," Wechter said.

The cars, the coins, the brothel token

"My siblings and I are the beneficiaries of the curious nature, expertise and dedication that Scott has to his hobby of metal detecting," Wechter said, adding that some of the finds, which belonged to the Wechters themselves, rekindled many childhood memories.

Like the smattering of old toy Matchbox and Hot Wheels-style cars, which Doug played with near a sandbox.

"My mom was always after me to clean up my cars," he recalled.



A sampling of items which Scott Brown unearthed at Doug Wechter's North Canton home. In all, Brown found 130 artifacts, with the help of a metal detector.

Additional finds from eras long before the Wechters include:

A half-dozen pennies, each with two drill holes, which were probably part of a bracelet; dozens of coins from the 1800s and 1900s, a reflector from a 1940s stop sign, a rare TootsieToy die-cast toy race car from the 1950s, harmonica reed plates and a couple of ahem ... R-rated items.

One is a tin for condoms; the other an 1863 brothel token.

The latter features a modification of the word "cent." A different four-letter word, which also begins with the letter "c" is a tell-tale sign of the token's one-time use. Customers purchased such tokens to pay for a prostitute's services — she would then return the token to a house madam.

"The Homestead continues to provide clues to the past people who have walked these grounds," Wechter said. "Who knows what interesting objects of the past are yet to be discovered."

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