

# Metal 'Detected' Treasures

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I put it in my bag and went on," he said. "When I took it out at home, I looked at it and said, 'Wait a minute!'"

Samek had found a silver "half real" (pronounced ray-ALL), the coin of the realm for Spain's empire in the new world. It was discolored to a dark brown—probably from being next to iron or copper—but the numbers 658 were clearly visible, indicating that the coin had been minted in 1658!

Finding the coin took Samek back in time. Here was an object made shortly after the pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock. When Louis XIV sat on the throne of France. When Sir Isaac Newton was a teenager. When Rembrandt was painting masterpieces. When shoguns and samurai ruled Japan.

He tried to imagine how that coin might have found its way to the shores of Holden Beach. Had some Spanish explorer dropped it while walking the beach? Or was that area covered in forest back then? Could it have washed ashore from a galleon that broke apart in a storm off Cape Fear?

Samek uses his hobby of hunting

for old coins as a teaching tool, making history come alive for his three children. They talk about what was happening in the world when the coins were made and imagine stories of how they might have been lost.

That sense of imagination is one the key to success when looking for old coins, which is Samek's specialty.

"When I see an old house with a great big oak tree nearby, I imagine that's the place people would gather on a hot day for some shade and a glass of lemonade," he said. "I think about an old man pulling out a handkerchief to wipe his forehead. And I think about the coins that might come out with it and fall to the ground."

Most people see metal detectors in use at the beach, where it's easy to dig. And Samek said it's a great place to treasure hunt, since folks are constantly changing clothes and shaking out towels.

But everywhere he goes, Samek finds places to investigate. In cities, that grassy area between the sidewalk in the street usually remains undisturbed and heavily trafficked

for many years. Coins are often dropped by people using the walkway and by others waiting to cross the street, Samek explains.

While some treasure hunters are reluctant to share their secrets, Samek is an enthusiastic promoter of his hobby.

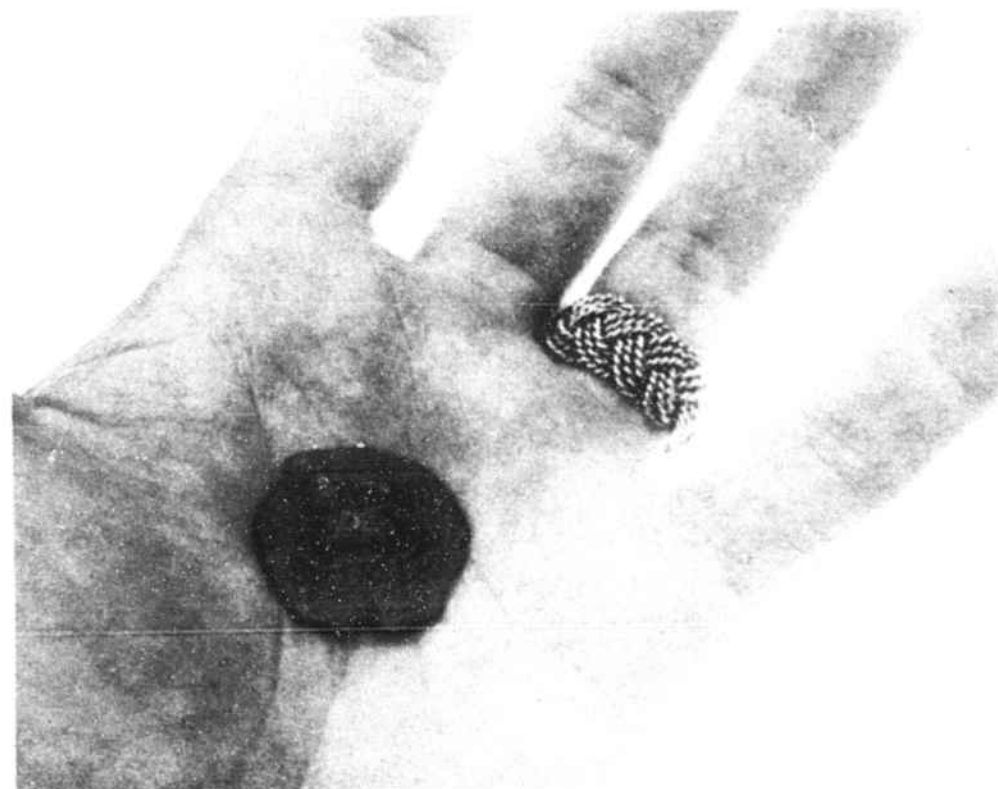
"The more the merrier," he said.

His first bit of advice for the novice is to invest in good equipment. While an adequate metal detector can be had for about \$250, Samek stresses that by spending a bit more—between \$350 and \$600—you can get a unit that is both sensitive enough to distinguish between "trash and treasure" and rugged enough to last a lifetime. The good ones can even be used under water.

"Then you've got to get out and use it," Samek said. "You won't find anything or learn to find anything by leaving it in the closet."

A good dealer can show you how to set the controls and the best ways to maneuver the detector for the most effective coverage. He can also demonstrate the subtle differences in response tones between a gold coin and an old rusty nail.

After that, you just need to prac-



A RARE FIND even for avid treasure hunters, this 1658 Spanish silver coin was found on Holden Beach after the March 13 storm.

tice and remember to go slow. There's no hurry, since "nobody ever finds it all," Samek said. Before long, after digging a lot of holes, you'll be begin to sort out the mystery that nags at your ears every time the metal detector gives a response.

"To dig or not to dig? That is the question," he said with a grin.

Samek has been answering that

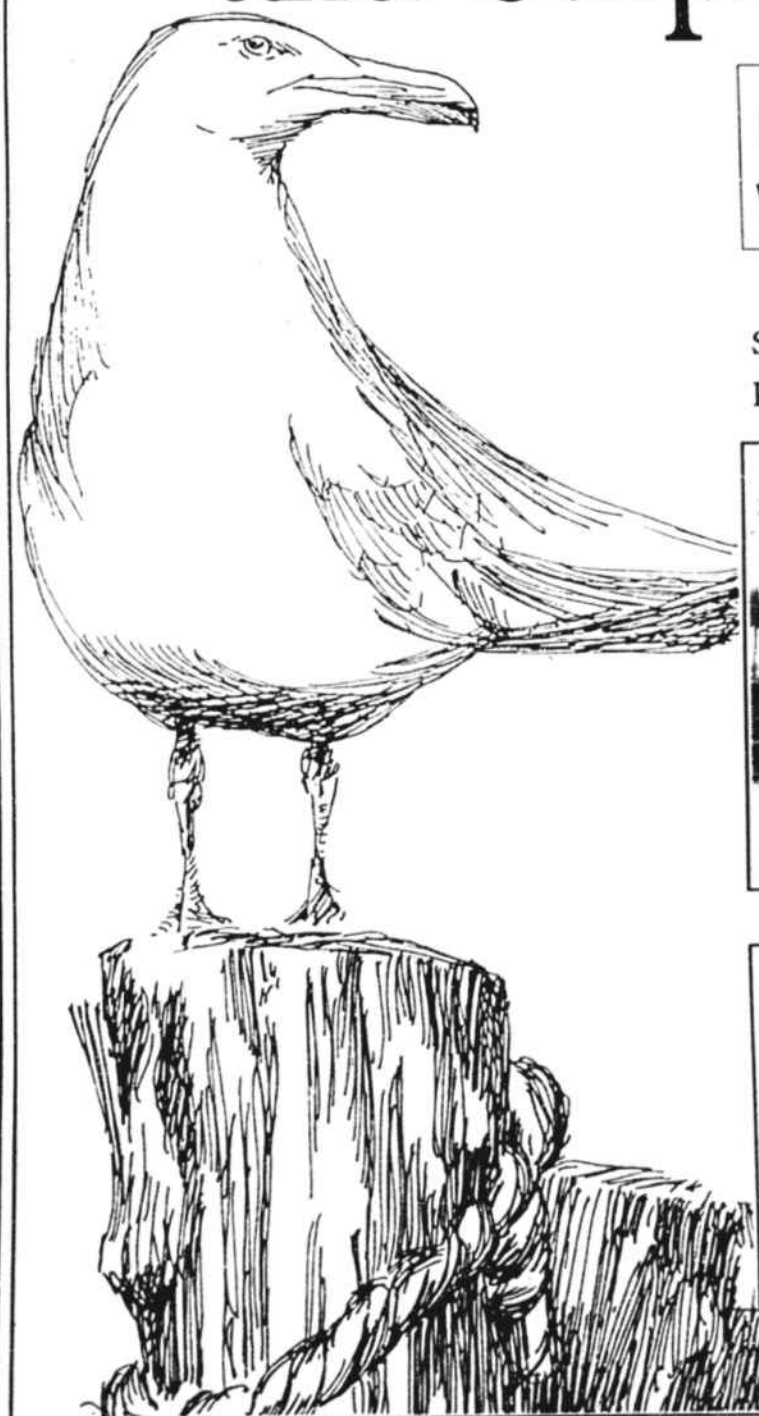
question all over the world. In his 21-year career in the U.S. Army, he served in Germany, Okinawa, Korea and Vietnam and often used his metal detector to search for coins overseas.

Samek retired from the Shallotte Police Department in 1989. So nowadays, he spends most of every day roaming the county with his metal detector. He sends the kids off to school, heads off for a day of adventure, and gets home in time to see his children get off the bus.

It's become a family affair, Samek said. His 67-year-old mother occasionally joins him on his hunts. His wife Kelly bought him a new metal detector for Christmas. Their son B.J., age 8, already has his own metal detector while Johnny Lee, 4, likes to follow along behind and fill in daddy's holes. Right now, daughter Danyelle, a practical young lady of 11, cares more about the treasure than the hunting.

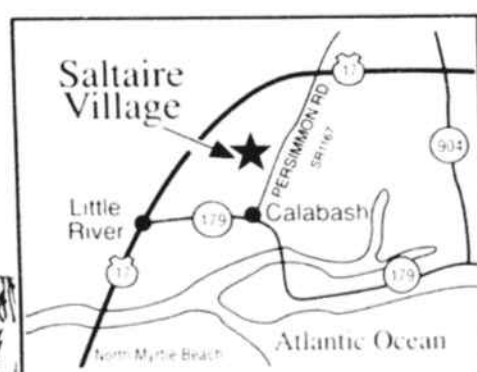
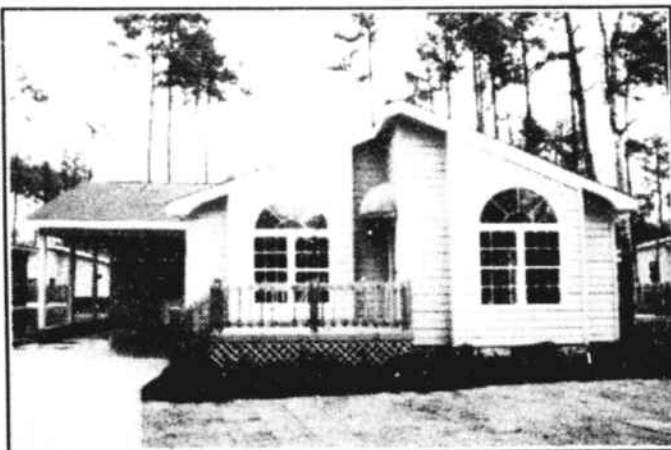
"Children are amazed to see me taking money out of the ground. It's an activity they can enjoy for a lifetime," Samek said. "I'd much rather have my kids wrapped up in metal detecting than drugs. And some day they can tell their kids about how they used to go treasure hunting with daddy."

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