

American Digger

Vol. 1 Magazine for Collectors and Diggers of America's Heritage Issue 4

**Losing Unrecovered
Metal Artifacts to
Natural Corrosion**

**The Legal Fight
to Save Our Hobby
Continues**

**Soldier's Hut Sites
Tell the Story of
Stoneman's Switch**

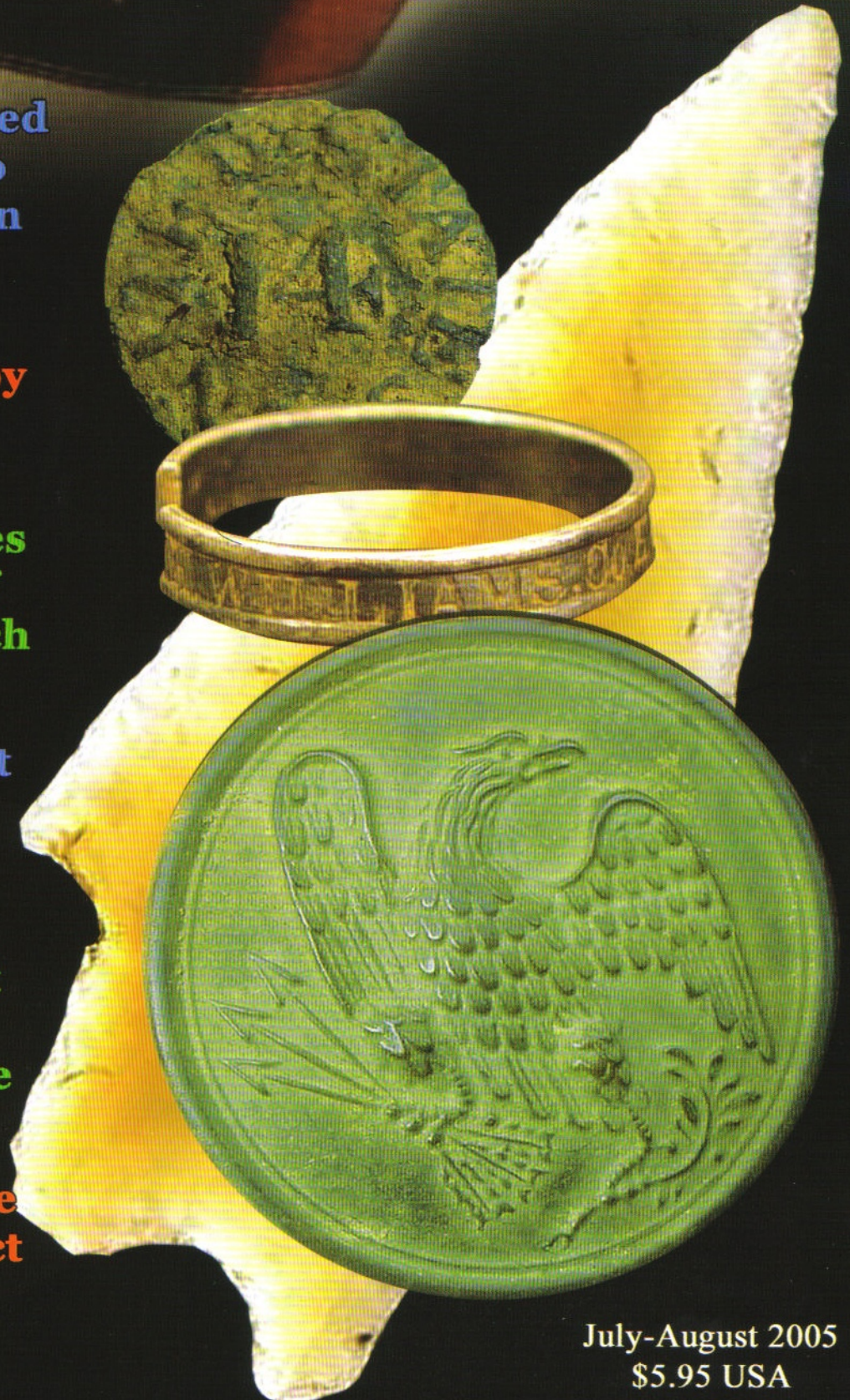
**James River Fort
Yields Artifacts
From the Ages**

**An Archaeologist
Who's Trying to
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Story One Artifact
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Collector Survey Form

Number: _____
 Counties: _____

Name: _____
 Address: _____
 Telephone (daytime): _____
 Telephone (evening): _____
 Email: _____

I have collections and/or information on sites in the following counties: _____

Comments: _____

vt 10-00-04

The Flint River Basin Archaeological Survey:

An interview with an archaeologist who's trying to make a difference

by Teresa Harris

photos by Charles Harris

Recently the coordinator of the Flint River Archaeological Survey project contacted the staff at *American Digger Magazine* requesting assistance from relic hunters and collectors. Could this prospect develop into an opportunity to successfully unite professional archaeologists with amateur diggers? We certainly hope that it will, as history is best served when all parties are represented.

This project, still in its first phase, is located in Georgia's Flint River Watershed, which covers an area of 8,460 square mile. It is sponsored by the Historic Preservation Division, Georgia Department of Natural Resources and the LAMAR Institute.

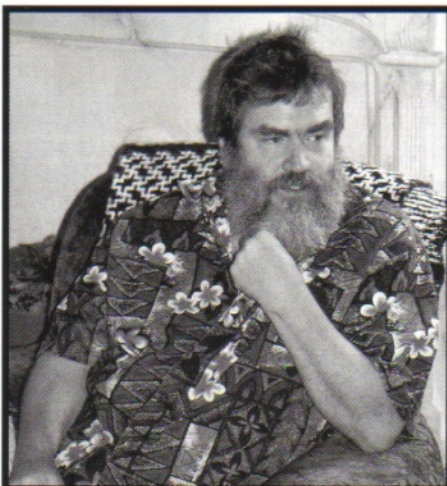
The organizers of this undertaking are seeking information from the public on sites and photos of artifacts from the area dating from 10,000 BC to the late 1950's. These sites include: rock quarries, fish weirs and dams, stone tool and pottery scatters, house sites, villages and towns, mounds, mills, old dams, bridges, piers, pilings and docks, dumps, ferry crossings, shipwrecks, forts, and battlefields.

With no desire to confiscate any of the objects, the group only seeks information of noteworthy relic sites that may or may not still exist. Part of their goal is to document these areas *before* they are destroyed, part of an effort to

preserve Georgia's rich history.

Another exciting aspect of this project is that you don't have to be an active collector to participate in this archaeological survey. If you have found Civil War bullets or Indian arrowheads in the area, even during your childhood, you can contribute valuable information. Even if you no longer have the artifacts, it's the information that's important.

This is an excellent opportunity to work together for the common goal of recording history and educating others. Their website even includes forms, which allow you to submit your information online: www.flintriversurvey.org



Professional archaeologist Dan Elliott is seeking information from relic hunters to help decipher the history of Georgia's Flint River Basin area. American Digger applauds this effort, and hopes that his endeavors will benefit both professional archaeologists and amateur relic hunters in their common goal of discovering the past.

As the chief archaeologist for the Flint River Basin Archaeological Survey, Dan Elliott has recognized that relic hunters who share their knowledge can be a boon to the overall knowledge of an area's history. With this in mind, I asked him how he became involved with the project.

Teresa: Give us a little background on yourself, including what led you to becoming an archaeologist.

Dan: My parents always had a picture of my Great Grandfather, John Seaborn Plemmons, 2nd Lt., 11th GA, hanging in the house, so I had a sense of my own history. My mother collected arrowheads

"My mother collected arrowheads...leading me to further my cultural knowledge."

around Springplace and Holly Creek leading me to further my cultural knowledge. Then once in school I found I loved archaeology. I haven't looked back.

Teresa: Give us a brief historical rundown on the Flint River area, and the geographical boundaries of your study. Is much of the area in danger of being destroyed by development?

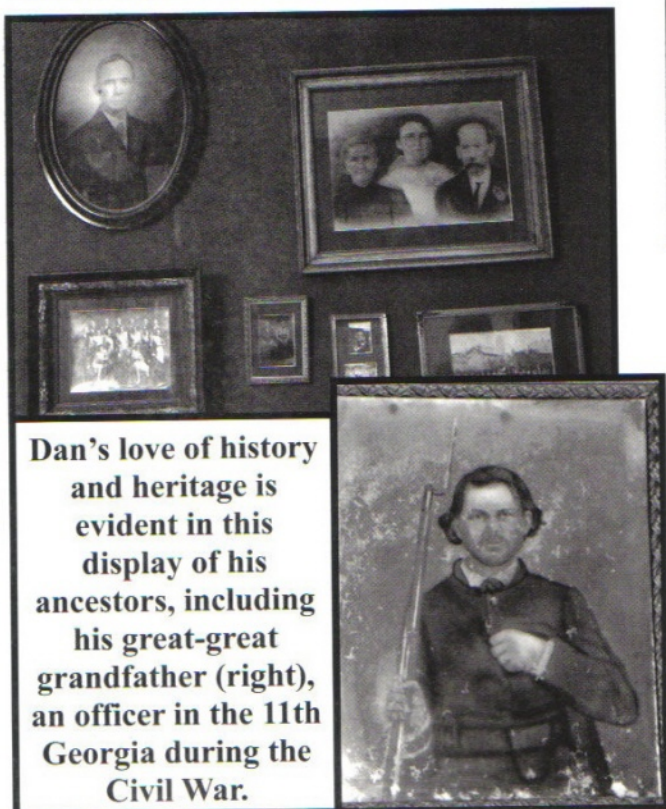
Dan: There are 42 counties included in the Flint River Basin, and yes, development is rampant and history is being lost as we speak. It is a race against time with urban sprawl, trying to decide which sites need to be protected. Ninety-five percent of the building in this area has been done without any archaeological involvement whatsoever.

We would love to have the public input on items they have found on public or private lands in areas, such as rock quarries, old house sites, villages and towns, piers, pilings, docks, dumps, ferry crossings, shipwrecks, forts, and battlefields.

Teresa: Are there any surprises or new information ever brought forth by the public (including relic hunters) in your work here or elsewhere?



The silver baby bottle nipple on the left was excavated by Dan Elliott from an 1830's trash pit in Savannah, Georgia. This artifact was used by the children of the Reverend Abram Harmon family, and now resides in the Savannah Visitor's Center. On the right is a nearly identical non-dug silver nipple owned by the author.



Dan's love of history and heritage is evident in this display of his ancestors, including his great-great grandfather (right), an officer in the 11th Georgia during the Civil War.

Dan: We recently set up at a Georgia State Fair, and on a voluntary basis, the public came and filled out survey forms. We are looking for people that have collections from Indian or Civil War sites in the area, and are willing to share where objects were found. We need to add research value, to create stories where history happened in the past. History is disappearing before our eyes and not even getting on the maps. Yes, we are looking for people to come forward with photos and artifacts from this area.

Teresa: What information are you asking from relic hunters for this study, and how can they contact you?

Dan: We need the public to share where they have found their artifacts. We would like to look at collections, trenches, campsites, landscapes, and



Metal detected near Jonesboro, Georgia, these relics of Kilpatrick's US cavalry may help fill in the gaps in our understanding the history of the area.

places that may eventually even become public parks. Our Internet site has a great map, including Georgia Archaeological Information Submittal Form, along with our goals. We even hope that this could be the start of your own inventory sheet. If you presently are not keeping good records on your finds how will your family, or historians of the future, know where you found the artifacts? Our mailing address is The LAMAR Institute, P.O. Box 317, Box Springs, GA 31801.

Teresa: How do the archaeologists in Georgia view relic hunters, especially the metal detectorists?

Dan: I realize that between 1977 and the 1990's, archaeologists had a stigma against metal detectors, and the users of such. Archaeologists usually dug areas that were going to be obliterated anyway, carefully logging in the finds. We felt like our digs' integrity was being destroyed by salvage Archaeology and we had to fill in the gaps as best as we could.

The archaeologists at the Lamar Institute realized

the importance of sharing with the public. Perhaps it was the Smithsonian suggesting we could all work together that made an impression. I think the LAMAR Institute was sent in as peacemakers.

Teresa: How do you feel that the relic hunters view the archaeologists? Can these views by both groups be changed and how?

Dan: I know that there was an air of secrecy, and this was not helping our rapport. However, our funds are very limited as far as the publishing of our finds. So now we are trying to make this information available, as much as possible, to everyone through the Internet, exhibits, presentations, and CDs. Often we are limited by the state and federal laws that actually prohibit the sharing of facts.

Teresa: New laws in Georgia were passed, supposedly to protect the Indian mounds from non-professional digging, but the wording was such that the biggest detrimental result has been towards the metal detectorists. Although many property owners and developers will give verbal permission, most balk at signing their name on such a request (as the law now requires), thus meaning that many sites will be bulldozed and paved over with none of the artifacts being saved. Would you favor a change in the wording of those laws, especially as they affect metal detectorists?

Dan: Laws were written so that even the archaeologists could not get permits to dig in some areas. There needs to be a certain safeguard for sure, but the legislative process doesn't always create the best laws. We, as archaeologists, have intervened in helping to rewrite some of those laws, but we are spread very thin, and always under-budgeted. We simply have our hands full in the Southeast, hey in North America! Developments are being built and lands are being destroyed as we speak. There are over 40,000-recorded sites in Georgia alone.

The state has an educational brochure entitled, "*Artifact Collecting and the Law in Georgia: What's Legal and What's Not.*" It's from the Council of American Indian Concerns, and actually explains the laws and why these laws exist, at the same time explaining how you can legally do archaeology. There are many archaeological projects that use amateurs. The US Forest Service often has "digs" open to the public, usually in the summer.

Teresa: In some other states, relic hunters were asked to help the archaeologists, only to later be treated as complete outsiders concerning the very



One of the last surviving Civil War earthworks in Lovejoy, GA, part of the area being studied. The Union bullets and uniform buttons were found nearby by relic hunter Michael Groover.

Photos by Michael Groover.

digs that they had worked on. Many of these volunteers also felt used as these same archaeologists later helped write laws that all but banned metal detecting. Can this outcome be expected in Georgia?

Dan: We seem to be working together, but we are short on money with no permits, so things are poorly documented. On one project that I worked on, we called the news media, and even CNN showed up on the site. We told of the soap stone Indian Bowls we had found, we gave a site and location, trying to let the public in on our progress, and what happened? We were looted! I had worked so hard on that project and then we were robbed. We did recover some of our things, someone got scared and dumped most of the finds in a dumpster

and later called the authorities. Our site had been ruined and vital information lost forever.

Teresa: How do you feel about the system used in England, where relic hunting is encouraged, as long as the finds are reported and the museums are given the first choice to buy the artifacts at a fair market value?

Dan: The public has incredibly valuable information. We just want them to document their finds. If you are dead you are lost history, unless somewhere your finds are documented.

Teresa: To my knowledge, all of the resource and identification books published and available to the public were by amateur archaeologists and relic hunters. What are your feelings on that fact?

Dan: Our literature is not public, because we do not have the funds to produce a coffee table book. Our file cabinets hold multiple reports on a project because of limited monies. As professionals, we are trying to improve that problem.

Teresa: Up until the 1960's, amateurs and professionals worked closely together and respected each other. Many of the significant sites were originally found by the amateurs and turned over to the professional archaeologists because of the suspected significance of the sites. What, in your opinion, is the cause of the rift that has developed between the amateurs and the professionals since then?

Dan: I think that is a misconception really; we all just want to document these sites before they are gone.

Teresa: Why have the archaeological resources and results of the surveys been denied to the public? And do you feel that this denial is justified?

Dan: Again, sometimes state laws and rules prohibit dissemination of some of this information. Personally, I would love to put everything I've ever written online.

Teresa: What are your feelings on such situations, as a father and son walking the shoreline of a government reservoir and his 6-year-old son digging up an arrowhead that he saw glinting in the sunlight? Should the father and son be cited for this offense?

Dan: It's public wealth, so there should be some action to work together. Public property should be public, but it is necessary to have permits because some people would come in with backhoes. It is legal to collect artifacts, with some restrictions.

Teresa: In Bridgeport, Alabama, a diver found and retrieved a bullet from where Civil War warehouses once stood, but was liable and later arrested. But, a

The LAMAR Institute was incorporated in the state of Georgia as a non-profit organization for the purpose of conducting archaeological research in the southeastern United States and educating the public about archaeology. For more information visit their web site: <http://shapiro.anthro.uga.edu/Lamar/>



big Gypsum plant was recently built on that same site, and the builders were allowed to dredge approximately one-half mile of river bottom down to bedrock, destroying the site. What is your opinion of travesties like this?

Dan: The dredging should have had some sort of mitigation. Two sins don't make a right. However, I know that in Georgia everything that is on a river bottom belongs to the State. That's the law.

Teresa: What are your plans in creating and publishing related educational materials on the Flint River Watershed that will be made available to the public?

Dan: Most of what we find will get published, although the names of people coming forward with information will be protected. We have several very nice brochures on the survey already, encouraging people to get involved in the research.

Teresa: Anything that you'd like to add?

Dan: If you collect artifacts, do it responsibly – submit completed site forms to the University of Georgia, or your state's archaeologists, keep artifacts together by location, respect property rights, and observe all applicable protection laws.

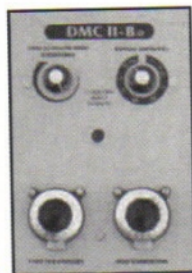
Here is an archaeologist who's doing his part in sharing knowledge with the public. The Flint River Basin Archaeological Survey project hopes that you will help them discover Georgia's

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past. At a bottle show this year, I was discussing the fact that archaeologists and relic hunters are beginning to work together again. A young teacher commented he, too, is working in conjunction with a professor in his state of Illinois, digging out old privies. Through cooperation, just imagine what can be accomplished.

The Flint River group is also seeking to preserve archaeological sites, such as Swann's Mill, Rocky Face Ridge, and Fort Hawkins, as greenspace. As these places have been relic hunted for the past hundred years (yes, there were diggers even *before* there were metal detectors), it will be imperative that people who have relic hunted these sites share their information. Amateurs and professionals alike should have one goal: To learn from the artifacts, and assemble that information into a tangible form *for all* to learn from.



About The Author

Teresa Harris has been involved in collecting historical artifacts for over two decades. Her personal specialty is antique baby bottles, and she has amassed a collection of several hundred, some dating back to the 1700's.