

Lost Knife Returned to Family

After decades in Bear Creek an old treasure finds its way home

By Scott Laird

Living in an area like Vernonia, with all the history contained here, often leads to the uncovering of many interesting objects and artifacts. It's not all that often those found items can be traced back to their original owners. The recent discovery of a lost relic concluded in an unusual, and even happy, ending.

Susan Ely and her family have spent years walking Beaver Creek, looking for treasures among the rocks and algae behind their farm. Their property is located on Highway 47, south of Vernonia at the Timber Road split, an area formerly known as Treharne.

"We got in the habit of walking the creek when we first moved in," says Susan. "On warm summer days the kids liked to go there, and they would bring back pieces of pottery, canning jars, pieces of metal, and pieces of any number of things that were interesting and unique."

Susan says the creek gets enough high water every year that new things are always being uncovered upstream and washing down to their property.

"The kids started a collection of things they found and we continued doing our 'creek walks,' hunting for more interesting things," she says. "We were



always finding things that weren't there before, including carnelian and jasper, rocks you would find in the Nehalem."

Susan says on a recent creek walk she happened to find something a little bit different in the creek bed. "It was a mother-of-pearl handled pocket knife that was engraved with a name."

After cleaning the knife up, Ely says they were able to make out the name of "Patrick D. Sauer" engraved on the handle. "It's not very often that you get to pick up a piece of history and find someone's name on it," said Susan. "You don't find things that are unique to an individual very often and that's what made this pretty special."

The name didn't mean anything to Susan, but she got some help from Tobie Finzel, a volunteer at the Vernonia Pioneer Museum. "Right away Tobie told me to get in touch with the Gwins."

Kathleen Gwin, a long time Vernonia resident, is the younger sister of Patrick Sauer. Kathleen says her family moved to Vernonia in 1939 from North

Dakota. She was three years old when the family moved west. "We settled in Treharne and lived across the highway and Timber Road from where Susan lives now," says Kathleen.

Kathleen says she doesn't remember her brother, who was three years older than her, owning the pearl handled knife, but it obviously belonged to him at one time. "There were some older boys that lived nearby, and it sort of surprises me that my mother would have let Patrick cross the highway to play with those boys in the creek, because she was very protective. She had to have bought him the knife for his ninth or tenth birthday."

Kathleen says the family only lived in Treharne for about three or four years, so that means Patrick most likely lost his knife in the creek around 1942 or 43, about 75 years ago.

Unfortunately Patrick passed away several years ago.

"I can't believe you found it and it had his name on it," Kathleen told Susan. "I'm so pleased to see it and I thank



Kathleen Sauer Gwin with Susan Ely.

you so much for finding it and giving it to me."

Kathleen says she plans to pass the knife on to Patrick's son Chris.

"I grew up reading books like *Where the Red Fern Grows* and *Gentle Ben*," says Susan. "I know in one of those stories there was a boy that had a pearl handled pocket knife, so that's something that I think of when I think about adventurous young boys. I can envision Patrick walking the creek the same way we do, and his knife falling out of his pocket and him not knowing it. This really feels like a piece of nostalgia that was really special and unique to that young person."

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