

Newsletter of the Pilchuck Treasure Hunting Club

**THE  
DIRTY  
DIGGER**

JULY 2020

**Local Detectorist  
Finds a Rare  
“Phoenix Button”**

» story on page 8



Photo by Phil Massie

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# Events

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## PTHC Events > July, August, September

No club events have been planned. Club president, David Label, is hopeful we can return to regular monthly meetings this fall. He's also working on a modified Second Saturday Hunt... stay tuned!

## Other Clubs & Orgs

The **Cascade Treasure Club** made the difficult decision to cancel this year's Silver Shoot, which usually takes place in July.

# Members' Corner

## PTHC Lost a Member

John Shape passed away late this May. We learned about his passing from his wife, Donna, who emailed the club with the news.

Long-time PTHC member, Stan Schumacher, had this to say:

☺ John was an active member years ago. I remember him as a good member. HE SUPPORTED OUR ANNUAL HUNTS EVERY YEAR. HE lived IN RENTON and RARELY ATTENDED OUR MEETINGS. BECAUSE OF THE DISTANCE.”

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# Board News

May 18, 2020

TO: Pilchuck Treasure Hunting Club Members.

**Letter from  
the President  
(reprinted)**

I thought it was time to reconnect with our members to discuss continued club activities.

With Covid-19 lockdowns we have been unable to have our monthly meeting, Second Saturday Hunt, and Spring Hunt.

In discussions with the club board we feel it is not time to startup activities yet, but plan to in the near future.

Club meetings which are held at the Everett Firefighter's Hall will be cancelled until the Governor gives the ok for such meeting to be held. The City of Everett has closed the hall until further notice, so we will not resume meetings until the hall is open.

I think we might be able to start up a modified Second Saturday Hunt starting in July or August depending on government recommendations. A modified hunt would involve a predetermined location and all hunters meeting at that location. No meeting at Denny's. We will let you know directly by e-mail when this planned hunt will resume.

The club newsletter will resume in June so check the club website.

The spring hunt has been cancelled and I am hopeful we can go ahead with the fall hunt as usual.

My understanding is that State Parks are now open along with some parks in Snohomish County; I'm not sure about King County.

I, along with many other members, are at great risk from getting Covid-19, so be safe. I encourage everyone to get outside this spring and summer and do some hunting. I am looking forward to getting together as a club this coming fall.

Sincerely,

David Label  
Club President

# Copper Cache:

## New Clue!

Scott J. issued a new clue for the Copper Cache:

Half way to 99, looking toward the North Star, you can find Venus playing on your left, trying to win her way out of love.



These are the other clues:

Somewhere on this map from 1909 is the challenge token you seek, and where you will find. (Map to the right.)

Hidden between two caches of WWII nickels and Copper wheat, to the finder goes the prize of a silver Thaler and a copper that's neat!

Good luck to everyone and stay very safe, detecting in social isolation helps you concentrate.

Editor's note: the 'WWII nickels' and 'Copper wheat' are hidden separately, though reasonably close to the Copper Cache Token. The Finder of those items will be awarded the Thaler and 1oz copper round.

Please note: this contest is open only to active PTHC members.  
If you'd like to become a member, you'll find membership info here:  
<https://thepthc.wixsite.com/pthc/members-corner>



# Coins to be Found 6



Email [pthc.news@gmail.com](mailto:pthc.news@gmail.com) if you find any of these coins to claim your prize at the next regular monthly meeting.

## Presidential Dollars

*No new issues of Presidential Dollars until a former president of the U.S. dies.*

Grant P / Hayes P / Garfield P / Arthur PD / Cleveland PD / Wilson PD / Taft PD / T. Roosevelt PD / McKinley PD / Harding PD / Coolidge PD / Hoover P / FDR PD / Truman PD / Eisenhower D / Kennedy PD / Johnson PD / Nixon PD / Ford PD / Reagan PD

## Sacagawea Dollars



2011 P / 2012 P / 2013 PD / 2014 PD / 2015 PD / 2016 PD / 2017 PD / 2018 PD / 2019 PD

## National Parks Quarters

*These are in the America's National Park quarters series (2010-2021)*

American Samoa P / Virgin Island P / Mount Hood P / Hawaii Volcanoes P / Grand Canyon P / Acadia P / / International Peace Memorial P / White Mountain P / Great Smokey Mountains P / Voyageurs P / New York Fort Sumter National Monument Site P / Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore P / Cumberland Island National Seashore P



## New 2019 Quarters

Lowell National Historical Park in Massachusetts PDW / American Memorial Park in Northern Mariana Islands PW / War in the Pacific National Historical Park in Guam PW / San Antonio Missions National Historical Park in Texas PW / Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho PDW

Be the first club member to find, with your metal detector, one of the New 2019 quarters with the mint mark "W", and claim a special prize of a silver half dollar. Keep an eye on your finds pouch!

## Coins found to date

Other recent finds:

- San Antonio Missions National Historical Park in Texas "D" (found by Lloyd M., February, 2020)
- Frederick Douglas National Historic Site in the District of Columbia "P" (found by Kari D. Sept. 30, 2019)
- War in the Pacific National Historical Park in Guam "D" 2019 quarter (found by Mike K. Sept. 30, 2019)
- American Memorial Park in Northern Mariana Islands "D" 2019 quarter (found by Mike K.)

# 7 Scavenger Hunt

Ron A. compiled this scavenger hunt exclusively for PTHC. This hunt's end date has changed from April 15 to the day of the next regular monthly club meeting.

Pilchuck Treasure Hunting Club 2020

Scavenger Hunt 1 January 16 - ~~April 15~~

Three highest point totals receive silver prizes as well as all the participants. Please bring Bonus point items to the April club meeting.

Any questions contact Ron Aldridge at 206-818-2197 or [ron.aldridge@comcast.net](mailto:ron.aldridge@comcast.net)

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|--|---|---|
| <p><b>Eyeball / Scooping Finds</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. feather</li> <li>2. clam or oyster shell</li> <li>3. marble</li> <li>4. button (any material)</li> <li>5. tree nut (chestnut, acorn, etc)</li> <li>6. wad of foil</li> <li>7. pavement penny</li> <li>8. pavement dime</li> <li>9. pottery shard</li> <li>10. bead (any material)</li> <li>11. bobby pin</li> <li>12. bubble gum wad</li> <li>13. old bottle (pre 1960)</li> <li>14. U.S. paper money</li> <li>15. pull tabs (3 different colors)</li> <li>16. rubber band</li> <li>17. glove or mitten</li> <li>18. sock</li> <li>19. glasses (sun or regular)</li> <li>20. plastic toy</li> </ol> | <p><b>Coins &amp; Tokens</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. birth year coin</li> <li>2. Buffalo nickel (no date)</li> <li>3. Canadian coin</li> <li>4. tax token</li> <li>5. 1976 Bicentennial quarter</li> <li>6. \$4.00 in dug U.S. coins (accumulated)</li> <li>7. V Nickel</li> <li>8. silver Washington quarter</li> <li>9. 15 Wheaties</li> <li>10. no date Wheatie</li> <li>11. transit token</li> <li>12. "Good For" token</li> <li>13. Mercury dime</li> <li>14. silver Roosevelt dime</li> <li>15. silver war nickel (1943 thru 1945)</li> <li>16. 1919 Wheat penny</li> <li>17. 2 foreign coins (non Canadian)</li> <li>18. 1909-S thru 1915-S Wheatie (one only)</li> <li>19. 1940 thru 1959 Wheatie (one only)</li> <li>20. Barber coin (one only) (1892-1916 10c, 25c or 50c)</li> </ol> | <p><b>Misc. Finds</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. safety pin</li> <li>2. junk jewelry</li> <li>3. hinge</li> <li>4. tooth paste type squeeze tube</li> <li>5. hair barrette</li> <li>6. 5 toy cars &amp; trucks</li> <li>7. gear wheel from watch or toy</li> <li>8. suspender piece</li> <li>9. metal toy wheel</li> <li>10. blue jeans button</li> <li>11. military button</li> <li>12. copper tubing</li> <li>13. whistle</li> <li>14. bell</li> <li>15. harmonica part</li> <li>16. pencil eraser</li> <li>17. shell casing</li> <li>18. bullet head</li> <li>19. key</li> <li>20. fishing weight</li> <li>21. spoon</li> <li>22. lead soldier piece</li> <li>23. fork</li> <li>24. silver ring</li> <li>26. copper wire</li> <li>27. ace bandage clip</li> <li>28. tire weight</li> <li>29. thimble</li> <li>30. old fuse</li> </ol> |
| <p><b>Bonus Items (3 pts)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. exhibition or worlds fair item</li> <li>2. ring with inscription</li> <li>3. auto key (maker marked Ford, GM, etc.)</li> <li>4. item w/ patent date between 1895 -1919</li> <li>5. gold ring (10k+)</li> </ol>   | <p><b>Detecting /Scooping</b></p>   | <p><b>Detecting /Scooping</b></p>   |

## Metal Detecting in the News

*While recently listening to local radio station, KIRO-FM, I heard a story about an interesting find by a local metal detectorist. I contacted the story's author, local historian Feliks Banel, and he granted me permission to reprint the story as written on the MyNorthwest.com web site.*

*- Vaughan*

### Mysterious Haitian 'Phoenix Button' found along Puget Sound

BY FELIKS BANEL

A mysterious "Phoenix Button" found along Puget Sound by Phil Massie was likely brought to the Pacific Northwest in the 1830s by Nathaniel Wyeth. (Phil Massie) Even in these disturbingly historic times, there are people whose hobbies involve seeking out tiny buried objects from the past.

Phil Massie does a lot of searching around here with his metal detector. He's in his forties, and works on a tugboat. He's found all kinds of old coins, jewelry and other bits of metal over the years that he's been actively treasure hunting.

But until recently, he'd never found a Phoenix Button.

"And I'm swinging the metal detector on our way out, because we're like, 'There's nothing here, let's call it a day, just try another spot,'" Massie said, describing the denouement of what began as a typical outing with a group of his metal-detecting friends to a public beach along Puget Sound.

"[Then, on] my last like five feet before the dirt walking off of a beach area, I got a really good signal," Massie said. "And I pulled it

out. And I told the guys, 'Hey, come here and take a look at this, I found a button and I've

never seen anything like this before.'"

What Massie had found buried about six inches down was made of brass, and was less than an inch in diameter. Rubbing away the dirt clinging to the object revealed an intricate design of a bird, and what turned out to be a phrase written in French. Within a few days, Phil Massie figured out that other examples of this tiny object have been found around the West for more than a hundred years.

And he also figured out that their origins were a mystery for decades.

Massie shared a photo of the button with KIRO Radio, and a copy was forwarded to Doug Wilson. Wilson is an archaeologist with the National Park Service at the Fort Vancouver National Historic Site. In his work and studies of the Pacific Northwest, he's seen several of these "Phoenix Buttons" over the years.

"They usually have the phoenix on the front, the phoenix bird, and a motto in French, which would have been appropriate for Haiti at the time, and that motto is 'I am reborn from my ashes,' which is, of course, perfect for a phoenix," said Wilson. "And then there's always a number. And the button [in the photograph] has a number one underneath it, and that was probably the regimental number. So [that means] it

would be for the First Regiment of the Haitian military of King Christophe."

Estimates by academics and other researchers indicated that somewhere around a thousand Phoenix Buttons have turned up in the West over the past 150 years or so, especially along the Columbia River. In earlier times, it was not uncommon — and it wasn't yet illegal — for treasure hunters to plunder Native American graves. There are documented instances of such plundering describing Phoenix Buttons found by the dozen, with the brass sometimes still shiny, even after decades underground.

But how did buttons intended for King Christophe of Haiti get to the Pacific Northwest? And who was King Christophe of Haiti?

A handful of treasure hunters and authors in the Pacific Northwest were focused on the origins of the buttons as long as a hundred years ago, as theories swirled about possible connections to Napoleon. Books published in Portland in the 1940s and 1950s, and occasional newspaper stories, first brought their existence to the attention of the general public.

Emory Strong and, later, Roderick Sprague are credited with compiling the most information about individual finds and with clarifying theories about the origins of the button and how they came to what's now Oregon and Washington.

Doug Wilson says the buttons are believed to have been made in London by a company called Bushby, and that they were originally meant to be used on uniforms worn by soldiers in the army of King Christophe of Haiti.

Christophe was a former enslaved person who led a revolt against the French, who

had colonized the island nation, in the early 1800s. After taking power, Christophe served first as president and then later declared himself king.

Fearing a coup, he ultimately died by his own hand in 1820. At least one source — Encyclopedia Britannica — says that Christophe spent time in the United States in the late 18th century, and in 1780 "may have fought in a French unit at Savannah, Georgia, either as an enlistee or as the property of a French naval officer."

In the 1940s or 1950s, a theory developed that after King Christophe died, somehow or other, some quantity of the buttons that had been made for his army were instead sold to an American named Nathaniel Wyeth.

Doug Wilson says that Nathaniel Wyeth came to the Old Oregon Country nearly 190 years ago, looking to trade the buttons and other items with indigenous people in exchange for furs.

"He came up to the Columbia River and was actively trying to trade against the Hudson's Bay Company ... [which] ... virtually controlled all the trade on the Columbia River and throughout most of the Pacific Northwest," Wilson said.

"Wyeth came out in 1832 and then came back in 1834 and he actually set up a little fort across the river from Fort Vancouver, but he was woefully unprepared to compete against this massive British trading firm," Wilson said. "And so he very rapidly went out of business. But we think that one of his legacies was these Phoenix Buttons," Wilson said.

Based on Wyeth's attempts to trade near Fort Vancouver, it makes sense that so many Phoenix Buttons have been found along the Columbia River. They've also been found in

California, and in other parts of the United States. But it's unusual that Phil Massie found one near Puget Sound. As far as anyone can tell, that hasn't been documented before.

Massie wasn't searching for a Phoenix Button, but he wasn't just randomly wandering around, either. He says it's all about the research.

"There's a lot of information online," Massie said. "Your local libraries have a lot of information. I'm always looking for where history was. Where did people walk? Where did they live? So, when I see those types of places, I'll spend hours reading and researching and looking at maps. I just got lucky. I went to the spot and decided to check it out."

Like many metal detectorists, Massie says he loves the thrill of discovery, of finding an object of historical significance that's been lost or discarded and become hidden away.

"It's about what people are walking over and they have no idea what's below their feet, you know?" Massie said. "It could be in your yard. It could be in a what's a modern-day park that was once a farm field."

"But the history that's there is just incredible," he added.

Rules and regulations vary in different jurisdictions around Washington state, and some public agencies forbid metal detecting or require purchase of metal detector permits before searching, and ask to be notified of any potentially significant finds. Phil Massie says he always gets permits when he searches on public land, or gets permission from private landowners.

Doug Wilson of the National Park Service says that in ideal circumstances, an object like the Phoenix Button found by Massie

would be left in place for professional archaeologists to study and recover. An official with the Washington State Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation (DAHP) said by email Tuesday that DAHP staff "only record sites that have been identified by a professional archaeologist."

Given that countless amateurs are routinely searching public and private lands, it seems that it would be ideal if there was some way for the potential historic significance of artifacts like Phil Massie's Phoenix Button to make its way to the right academic or other researcher. Unfortunately, it's not clear how that would happen.

With their similar interests in hidden history but their very different operational realities, it's perhaps understandable that there seems to be tension between professional archaeologists who work for tribes, universities and public agencies and the amateur metal detectorists – sometimes pejoratively called "treasure hunters" – like Phil Massie.

A search for online information about rules and regulations found no easy to understand statewide policy for Washington, and no single place for Massie or anyone like him to report a similar find.

You can hear Feliks Banel every Wednesday and Friday morning on Seattle's Morning News (KIRO 97.3 FM).

**Read more from Feliks here:**

<https://mynorthwest.com/author/feliks-banel/>

If you have a story idea, please email Feliks here: [fbanel@bonneville.com](mailto:fbanel@bonneville.com)

**Full story:**

<https://mynorthwest.com/1976707/mysterious-phoenix-button-found-puget-sound/> (this includes the audio version)

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# This Month's **By-Law**

## ARTICLE VIII

### MEETINGS & QUORUM

#### Section 1.

Regular meetings shall be held once a month with the exception of July. Date and time shall be outlined in the Special Rules of Order. Guests may attend two meetings of the club.

#### Section 2.

Special meetings may be called by the President, the Executive Board, or upon the written request of ten (10) active members of the club. Notice shall be presented to the secretary of the club.

#### Section 3.

The Executive Board shall be in charge of the annual meeting held in December.

#### Section 4.

Due recognition shall be given any person making a free contribution of money or material to the club.

#### Section 5.

Quorum - Ten percent of the active members shall constitute a quorum.

The Board makes a copy of the PTHC By-Laws available at each meeting.

## Contact Info

### PTHC Executive Committee

For now, email all inquiries to [pthc.news@gmail.com](mailto:pthc.news@gmail.com)

**President** > Dave Label

**Vice-President** > Randy Ruoslata

**Treasurer** > Ray Desy

**Secretary** > Vacant

### PTHC Executive Board

**Sergeant-at-Arms** > Ben Trower

**Program Chairman** > Dave Label (acting)

### PTHC Officers

**Newsletter Editor** > Vaughan Douglas > [pthc.news@gmail.com](mailto:pthc.news@gmail.com)

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