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# A Tale of Two Hobbies.

## Stamp Collecting and Metal Detecting Similarities.

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The question just had to be asked: What could these two hobbies possibly have in common?

The first part of this presentation is about how these two hobbies overlap and at times even run parallel. The similarities are really quite surprising.

The second part of the presentation is just about metal detecting itself.

I will gladly entertain all of your questions after the presentation.

All of us share a basic trait: Human curiosity. Many of us share an innate desire to find and to collect things. Humans arose from hunter gatherer societies. It's in our DNA. We hunt, we gather, we collect, and we share for the benefit of the whole. It's what people do.

The thing that kept coming to mind when I was thinking about writing this presentation, about these two seemingly different hobbies, was the "Fun of the Hunt". Why did I enjoy stamp collecting as a kid and as an adult and even as a stamp dealer? Why do I enjoy metal detecting so much? It's always been the fun of the hunt... Finding something elusive, something rare perhaps, something different, something new that you haven't seen before and satisfying that human curiosity.

So, first on the list of similarities, we have the Fun of the Hunt.

People can get rich with either hobby or maybe make some money with sales of rare finds but most of us never will. For most of us, these are hobbies, not careers. Although one day, I do hope to find the mother of all gold rings at a beach somewhere.

Both hobbies have clubs and organized group activities. Winnipeg has maybe three or four stamp clubs, the Winnipeg Philatelic Society being the biggest and oldest club. Brandon has a well-organized club too.

For metal detectorists, there are a couple of larger groups. Unfortunately the two larger ones are Facebook Forums and extend beyond Manitoba. Of the approximate 1500 members in both forums, maybe 100 or so are the real hard core detectorists. And there is the Manitoba Metal Detecting Group that has an online presence.

Back in the day, there was the Bronx Park Metal Detecting Club. Now that was a real club with monthly meetings, embroidered patches and the club logo on coffee mugs. They held a variety of presentations etc. Unfortunately the club is now long gone.

The group activities that go with clubs are by far much more prevalent in Europe than they are in North America. Not a bad thing, it's just the way it is. In the UK for example, group hunts of 5 to 20 or more people, all at once, all in one field is not uncommon. Here, well, not so much.

Many of us enjoy Quiet Personal Time, just being by oneself. Both stamp collecting and metal detecting tend to be solitary activities. There's nothing like a Saturday afternoon spent sorting through an old album or a box of stamps or a Saturday afternoon spent outdoors walking and swinging a coil over a farm field or an empty school yard.

Both hobbies are seasonal. Stamp collectors traditionally are more active from late fall to early spring. Metal detectorists are active from spring to late fall. Our Canadian weather tends to influence our indoor and outdoor activities. In theory, these two hobbies could keep you busy all year long.

Then there's the similar use of water and washing. Philatelists wash used stamps off paper. Detectorists wash the soil and sand off their finds. Then you sort, catalogue, classify and research the finds. Some of us even like to display or exhibit our little treasures. With both hobbies, you run into similar problems such as how to display or store and preserve your finds.

Displaying your finds can be a problem with either hobby. Stamps generally go into preprinted albums or into stock books. However, how do you display an album? Vario Pages and 3 ring binders work well for bigger pieces like covers. To display the more interesting coins that I have found, I have borrowed an idea from our numismatic friends. Its coin flips, plastic holders and a 3 ring binder. Smaller, flat items like rings and dog tags and medallions fit nicely in a jewelers display tray. Any bigger pieces, well that can be difficult to display or store.

Research is key to both endeavors. Maps, catalogues, historical accounts, archives, history. However far in-depth that you want to take your hobby. History... Both of these hobbies are very much about history.

The imagination runs wild with thought of who owned these items before me. Where did this come from? What were the lives like of the people who made use of these items? Can I locate any living relatives? Actual contacts have been made with long lost relatives in Europe via a return address on a postcard bought at a stamp auction. Contact has been made with the family of a WWII pilot from Scotland who lost his military bracelet in the water in Gimli. He had been training at the Royal Air Base in Gimli.

Then there's public involvement. Your friends or family ask... and we all get asked this at some point in time: "What is your most expensive or valuable item"? Or, "What is the most unusual or unique find that you've come across"?

These are the stories that we share. Be it at a club meeting like this one or in casual conversation. Everyone knows someone, be it an uncle or a cousin or maybe it was themselves as kids who collected stamps. Equally true, everyone knows something or someone that has to do with metal detecting. Stories abound.

There's the use of Language. All groups and organizations make up and or use specialized words specific to their trade. This might be stretching the similarity discussion but this is fun nonetheless.

Words like Philatelist or Detectorist doesn't exactly just roll of the tongue. What on earth is a Coinball? Well it is roundish clump or ball of dirt that forms around some coins overtime. In fact one can sometimes see the reverse image of the coin on the opened clump. Anyone wish to guess as to what Canslaw is?

How about Winnipeg Center Bar Tagging. Is that a kids' game of tag or a drinking establishment somewhere downtown?

Coin shooter, auction sniper, the word list goes on.

The cost of either hobby can be as little or as much as you're comfortable with. The choice of albums or stock sheets and all of the possible accessories that come with collecting stamps. The choice of detector and pin pointer and all of the possible accessories that come with metal detecting right down to the type of knee pads to buy are all part of variable costs. And I strongly recommend knee pads.

I mentioned earlier about making money through your hobby. If you're eager and ambitious and confident enough and if you have the desire to; some money can be made. I used to appraise people's stamp collections for money.

Now I'm asked to find lost rings, jewelry, keys, and even locate backyard lawn sprinkler pipes for money.

In the end, I think that the best part of these hobbies and as it probably is with any hobby, are the long term and sometimes lifelong friendships that you make. I've made short term friends with beachgoers that stop to ask you what you're finding or the young kids that follow you around as your detecting. I'm thinking of a 12 or 13 year old Filipino kid named "Alex" that followed me for over an hour at a beach a few years ago. I just couldn't shake him. Nice kid but like "Where's your family"?

Then there are the many clients that I had as a stamp dealer that I still enjoy interacting with. Some like to show me their latest finds, others seek advice or guidance, others just like to hang out. Now, I get the odd email or two from total strangers inquiring about metal detecting. I am no expert in either field but I will help out where I can.

Stamp collecting and metal detecting what could these two hobbies possibly have in common? In part, it's people reaching out. It's the making of new friends, the sharing of information, the learning of new things and it's scratching that itch called human curiosity.

So many similarities indeed! Thanks you.

Roger

So this was **Part One** of the presentation.

**Part Two** is about how I've come to be a metal detectorist and a talk about the equipment that I use and about some of my finds and about metal detecting in general. Any questions will follow at the end.

In all fairness, I haven't been metal detecting for a long time. Its 3 years now. Truth be told, it all started while house bound because of Covid 19. I latched on to a TV program called "The Curse of Oak Island" where metal detecting plays a big part. I happened to express to my wife that I'd always had a fascination with the idea of metal detecting, even way back when I was a kid growing up on a farm near Letellier in southern Manitoba. I also latched on to YouTube and used YouTube videos to learn about metal detecting. What are the best 10 detectors for 2020, Beginner mistakes to avoid, Minelab vs. Garrett's AT Pro, etc. Well imagine my surprise when Tess walks in through the door with a Bounty Treasure Hunter metal detector; my first detector. It's a very good unit and it got me off on a roll. The following year, after much careful study, I purchased my second unit, the Minelab Equinox 800 along with three different coil heads for maximum flexibility and application. I bought a Garrett Pin Pointer, a must have item and yes, a good pair of knee pads.

How does a metal detector work? At the most basic level, think of it as two way radio. The detector broadcasts a signal on a given frequency and in turn, it receives this same signal when it bounces off of something metallic. Metal is metal, not just iron but gold, aluminum, lead, tin, zinc, copper, silver etc. I've found lots of lead fishing weights, brass shell casings, and aluminum pop can pull tabs... a scourge in the metal detecting world.

Your depth is limited by the size of your coil. A bigger coil will detect deeper. Think of the coil as a ball, that is the range of your broadcast. It is a completely different type of machine that Manitoba Hydro for example, uses to detect water pipes and power lines six feet deep. This is not ground penetrating radar.

Iron is the ranked the 4th most common element by mass on the planet's crust. It has been mined and manufactured for a very long time. It is everywhere. Most

metal detectors provide you with a feature that allows you to tune out or “Discriminate” or “Notch Out” the iron signal. Many detectors will emit a variety of sounds that helps you, the detectorist to determine what the target might be, and thus whether to dig or not. Low base sounds are usually iron. A midrange sound might be a nickel or a pull tab, and a higher pitch sound might be silver. But you never really know until you dig. Most detectors come with a gauge and number system of some sort. Much like the sound you hear, low numbers equal iron, mid numbers nickel, higher numbers, possibly silver. Over time, as a detectorist, you learn to read your machine and to a large degree use its functions to your advantage. Looking for coins at a bus stop is quite different than looking for gold and silver rings in the water at a beach. You learn and you adapt.

When I go out detecting, my days often consist of one hour driving out and one hour returning home. It’s sort of my comfort range. I will often detect between 4 to 6 hours at a time and by then, my shoulders are hurting and I’m pretty well played out. The next day, I clean my finds, take pictures and then write a story to post on my website that go along with pictures from the trip. These very posts and pictures later became an invaluable record and tool in of its self. I try to go out about once a week with the ambient temperature and the weather playing a big part as to exactly where and when I go.

I’ve quite enjoyed going out detecting with friends but I also enjoy some of my alone time. It was the perfect hobby during Covid. Social distancing works well when you’re the only person out for miles around in a farm field somewhere.

I have learned so much through this hobby. I have developed a true appreciation for our own Manitoba history and I discovered that I enjoy researching. I’ve been blessed with access and permission to detect on several areas of land in the Red River Valley that have a lot of history to offer and the finds reflect that.

If metal detecting interests you, I recommend that you go out once or twice with a detectorist and try your own hand at it. Or, if you’re thinking of buying a metal detector for yourself, don’t go cheap. The \$99.00 unit is more of a toy than a dependable detector and you’ll cheat yourself out of a real good go at the hobby. Look for a detector with a rechargeable battery vs one that uses 9 volt batteries. You’ll quickly spend more money replacing batteries than the extra cost of a rechargeable unit. \$250.00 to \$300.00 will get you a good and dependable metal

detector. A few more dollars and you can detect on multiple frequencies at the same time. More frequencies, more possible hits.

The detector used by Garry Drayton on “The Curse of Oak Island”, the Minelab CTX 3030, will set you back by about \$3000.00. It’s a fantastic machine but what you’re buying is better technology, not better depth. It can map out on Google Earth where you searched so that when you return days or months later, you know exactly where to pick up from and not duplicate your search efforts. Personally, I take location pictures with my phone. I don’t mind a little duplication because I may well have missed something the last time out.

Finally, that universal question: What is your best find? Or what is your strangest find? In the best find category and this is by personal preference, is the 1797 British “Cartwheel” penny. It’s in horrible condition as it was under water for maybe 150 to 200 years. It’s as old as anything we can ever find here. Now with that being said, a fellow detectorist has found a British coin from the early 1320’s, in the Emerson area. It would have been a keep-sake from the old country, lost by an early pioneer. Now that’s an exciting find.

My strangest find had to have been the strong signal that I kept getting from an 18 inch deep hole I dug in sticky, wet, yellowy clay, right next to the Red River. Turns out that it’s the clay itself that must have had high metallic values. I’m guessing aluminum and possibly iron oxide. I felt like the guy on the Humor page on my website, the one that dug himself into a deep hole because his metal detector kept hitting on his steel capped work boots. And Yes, I’ve done that, detected on my work boots and more than once too. It’s pin pointing on something in a hand full of soil only to realize that I forgot to take my gold wedding ring off before going out metal detecting. It’s called learning.

Metal detecting for me has been a lot of fun, excitement and learning. It’s helped me stay active both physically and mentally. You’re never too old to learn new things and it’s been great applying past knowledge and experience to a new hobby.

I hope you’ve enjoyed this presentation and I will now field any questions that you may have. Thanks for listening.

Roger Fontaine