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Inside: **Fall Festivals**
Festive Events for Bright Weekends

Buckle Rings and Button Hooks
Yields From The Vegetable Garden

Multimedia
Staying Ahead of the Cresting Wave



Garden Yields

Piece After Piece of History

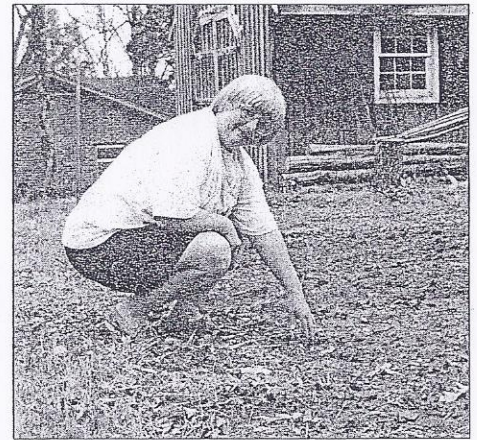
By Michele Linck

When Carroll Strickland talks about yields from her garden, you won't hear about Better Boy tomatoes or Blue Lake green beans—not a word about the zucchini this year, either. Words like hame ratchet, trace chain, Frozen Charlotte doll, and button hook will surface, though, sprinkled liberally with references to the Civil War and the Spanish-American War. You see, Carroll has a "history garden."

It's a whole patch of rich soil in her northeast Huntsville backyard that does in fact produce vegetables, herbs, and flowers. But every time Carroll's husband, Mark, rototills or it rains, historic artifacts surface. Sometimes just an old horseshoe or muleshoe. Sometimes a hand-cut nail or

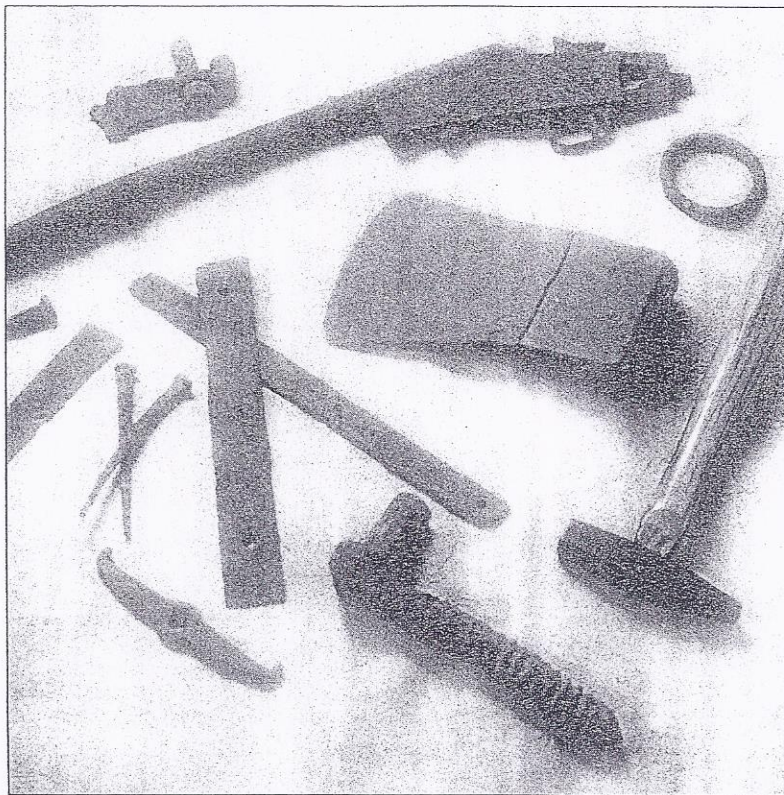
on hair. They were popular during the last half of the 19th Century. Old foundation stones—perhaps from the home of an Alabama Governor's home circa 1830—were a common find at one time. (They have kept just one, shaped like the state of Nevada, as a boot scraper.)

A few of the Stricklands' garden treasures even pre-date people. They have found several chunks of fossilized corallites which date back about 345 million years to the Mississippian Period, according to reference books.



Michelle Linck

Carroll Strickland found an 1892 Indian head penny right about here in her history garden.



Photography by Jennifer

History Garden Artifacts

two, probably pre-dating this century. Other times she has "picked" an 1892 Indian head penny or a button whose inscription of "Tennessee Volunteers" identified it as lost from a Civil War soldier's uniform.

The Frozen Charlotte doll was made of stark white porcelain with black, painted-

The first clues that this garden contained more than good soil came in 1975. The family had bought the wooded lot behind their home and were clearing part of it for cultivation. They had all the neighborhood children picking rocks and hauling them off. Carroll thinks probably a horseshoe was the first thing they found, but no one remembers.

"At first we didn't think that much about it," she recalls. "Then we kept finding things, so we started keeping them." Today the yield from the garden fills a big square of plywood, a medium-sized box, and a small bowl which contains fragments of pottery and glass. Using old catalogues and other resources, the Stricklands have identified a lot of the miscellaneous hardware, such as harness parts, the but-

ton hook and the bent barrel of a rifle, a Remington No. 6, first available in 1902.

Although they scour the garden for artifacts, especially after hard rains, they don't dig holes looking for them. They do dig for information, however. A stack of various reference books and two turn-of-the-century Sears Roebuck catalogues come out when a visitor asks questions.

Carroll is by training, a musician and home economist who collects children's books. By occupation she sells animal feed and fertilizer by the ton in the family business, Section Gin and Grain Company, Inc. Deep in her heart however, she is clearly a history buff. "I love history, I just soak it in," she testifies. She exudes it, too.

Some of Carroll's digging has been into the deed abstract on the property. It shows that the land was part of the Cherokee territory ceded to the United States in 1806. The land's next owner, Lemuel Meed, was one of Madison County's delegates to Alabama's Constitutional Convention in 1819. He then sold the tract to financier and attorney, Reuben Chapman, who went on to serve as a state senator, then Congressman. Chapman became Alabama's

13th governor in 1847, then served again in Congress in 1855. He was an elector for Jefferson Davis and served as the Confederacy's emissary to France in 1863.

Soon Union soldiers occupied Huntsville, confiscated Chapman's land and stationed African-American troops on it. It became a Freedman's home camp for hundreds of former slaves on their way to permanent settlement in Nashville. The refugees built massive barracks covering nearly 10 acres, and they cultivated their own food. The commanding officer of this Barracks Place, Chaplain George Stokes of Wisconsin's 18th Infantry, established a school on the land, providing the first formal education of African-American children in the area.

Although the Chapman family eventually regained possession of their land, the departing Union troops had burned their elegant house to the ground upon leaving in November, 1864. Carroll Strickland believes some of the foundation stones which have turned up in her garden may have been from the house or, most certainly, from the barracks. Except for the school which operated until 1872, the Freedman's



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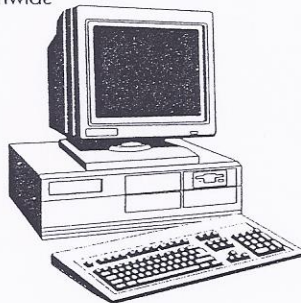
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Camp was abandoned in 1869.

Abandoned until 1898 that is, when Huntsville officials offered the Barracks Place as a resting spot to tired and sick soldiers returning from the Spanish-American War. "All of the men enjoyed the comforts of piped water and floored tents," Carroll reports. The resting regiments included the Seventh and Eighth Cavalry regulars, which may explain the abundance of horseshoes found in her backyard history garden.

"We had thought this was the Chapman home, and thought we must have the stable," Carroll says waving her arm toward the garden. "When we discovered all the other things that had taken place here, I thought maybe (the artifacts) were from the Spanish-American War."

Other "fruits" of the history garden include some antique barbed wire, scissors, a trace chain (from a harness), half of a skidding tongs for hauling logs, an ax head iron, a rasp file, ornate cast iron, handmade bricks, a snap fastener for a buggy harness, harness buckles and buckle rings, a wagon pin, a knife blade, a heart-shaped lock (from a saddle bag?) and a small riveting hammer head, which Mark Strickland has fitted with a new handle and uses.

One of the mysteries of the garden, no more than 50x50 feet, is that no artifacts have been found elsewhere on the property, perhaps an acre in all. Digging for two additions to the house, a small barn foundation, a retaining wall, and clearing for a sport court continues to produce piece after piece of the past.

"It's a spot of its own," Carroll confirms as she surveys her harvest, "There are so many things I could look into here." And she is. *Carroll Strickland's research on the artifacts and garden first appeared in an Alabama History Day Essay sponsored by the Huntsville Chapter of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution.* ■