

# The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Serving the National Capital



## October 2000

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## OCTOBER MEETING CANCELLED

**Our October meeting had been scheduled for Halloween, but several of our members and all our potential speakers have other holiday commitments. We have decided to cancel this meeting. Our next meeting will be November 28<sup>th</sup>.**

### September Meeting

Thanks to **George Griffenhagen** for an excellent presentation on drug bottles. Mr. Griffenhagen volunteers with the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum at 105-107 South Fairfax Street in Alexandria. The description below comes from Griffenhagen's *Guide to Pharmacy Museums and Historical Collections in the United States and Canada*.

The apothecary shop was founded by Edward Stabler in 1792: his son-in-law John Leadbeater assumed proprietorship in 1852 and the pharmacy remained in the same family until it closed in 1933. All hand-blown glass tincture and salt-mouth bottles with either gold-leaf or glass labels are from the original pharmacy, which opened as a museum in 1939. Tools of the apothecary include mortars and pestles, pill machines, powder paper folders, and suppository molds. Other supplies that were sold in the pharmacy include eyeglasses, nursing bottles, lancets for bleeding, medicine chests, and medicines. Show globes are displayed in the front windows, and the second floor of the shop includes hundreds of wooden drawers filled with original botanicals and chemicals, and the thousands of product labels for the medicinals that the firm produced in the late nineteenth century. Also on the second floor are the archives, consisting of pharmacy records from 1792 until 1933.



## Bottle Show Reports



**Greater Washington Antiques Expo:** Five Potomac Bottle Club members participated in this Manassas, VA flea market. Thanks to **Phil Godwin** for organizing this club activity and for bringing the tables. Heritage Promotions apparently did very little to publicize this show, and there were few customers. Those few people who did find the show actually bought quite a few inexpensive bottles.

**Bedford:** The October 15<sup>th</sup> Bedford show consisted of about 40 tables of moderately priced glass. Despite lovely fall weather for the “Bedford Days” celebration, the turn-out at the bottle show appeared low. The largest deal we saw take place involved several fruit jars, most of which reappeared on Ebay the next day.

**Richmond:** (Taken from Richmond Area Bottle Collectors Association newsletter *The Digger*, Ed Faulkner, editor)

The Richmond Bottle Show & Sale has gotten bigger and better every year now for several years, and this year continued the trend. Due in part to much greater radio and TV coverage by chairman Judy Folkes, paid attendance was up to 319, including 18 of our first ever early buyers. There were 62 dealers from all over the east coast selling at 92 tables filled with merchandise.



The selling got off to a good start with the early buyers at 7:30 and got another boost when the show opened at 9:00 and continued steadily pretty much all day. I still had people standing around buying at my table after some dealers had cleared their tables at the end of the show. The overall consensus seemed to be that sales were up this year, with many people bringing in bottles for assessment staying to look and buy. Sgt. Santa added to the festive occasion as usual. Mike King won the 50/50 raffle to the tune of \$271.

We had four displays on nine tables, with Tom Cox’s massive six table display of Marilyn Monroe plates and other memorabilia filling the whole front of the hall. Susie Witbeck seemed to have more fun than anyone else, augmenting her display of ceramic hands by wearing a tuxedo with tails and switching hats from her display to her head. Ed and Lucy Faulkner’s display about 19<sup>th</sup> century ink companies took first place in the judging and the People’s Choice award. Sterling Mann’s display on throwaway Cokes took second place and Tom Cox’s Marilyn Monroe display took third.

## The Bottle Collector: 1975 and 2000 A.D.

by Jim Sears

The September 1975 issue of *Antique Bottle World* featured an article by Bob Kauffman titled "The Collector: Year 2000 A.D." Mr. Kauffman wondered what bottle collecting would be like 25 years in the future. He expressed concerns that reproduction bottles and unscrupulous dealers could damage our hobby, and he also identified some "safe" bottles for future collectors. Wherever Mr. Kauffman is today, I hope he will not mind some comments on the extent to which his hopes and fears have been realized.

One of the bottles featured in the 1975 article is a Wild Turkey decanter. The base is embossed **AUSTIN NICHOLS, WILD TURKEY, 101 PROOF 8 YEARS OLD, LIQUOR BOTTLE NO. 185, LIMITED EDITION CERAMIC, NO. 3.** Mr. Kauffman recommended this bottle as something that would remain clearly identifiable even to beginning collectors. In the year 2000, I am happy to report that I can indeed identify the Wild Turkey decanter. I have no difficulty searching one out on Ebay. There it sits, **LIMITED EDITION CERAMIC, NO. 3.** Yep, it's a turkey, all right. Uh, huh. Yawn. No one has bid on it, but at least its identity is clear.



Mr. Kauffman next turned to a slightly more challenging item: a **1965 Cameo Blue** Jim Beam bottle. He predicted that future collectors would have no trouble finding it in "figural and Limited Edition books" even if its labels were missing. I ignore the books and do another year 2000 Ebay search. This bottle is indeed more challenging to find. I have to scroll through dozens of listings for Beam bottle before coming across the desired one. The lot actually has a \$10 bid, but that may be due to the other bottle being sold along with it. Kauffman warned that "the picture does not do this bottle justice as it is a lovely blue with a milk-white stopper." He added that "without the stopper, it is a beautiful bud vase, if you prefer." Unfortunately, in the year 2000 it looks really ugly.

The third picture in the 1975 article shows something described as a Spanish wine-drinking bottle. This is a weird free-blown vessel with a sort of spout on the side. Mr. Kauffman's example kind of looks like a bong from the 1970s. Due to very smooth glass and rough pontil, he believed it to be a reproduction. (That is, he believes it to be a reproduction bottle; as a bong it could still be an original.) The closest wine bottle I find on Ebay to Mr. Kauffman's picture is the dug version shown here. The seller believes that this one is antique but Mexican. I try searching for bongs too, but the Ebay Gestapo have removed the only listing titled "Blown Glass Bong." Mr. Kauffman apparently never imagined the Ebay Gestapo, but he still exclaimed, "Collectors in the year 2000, be warned!"



The fourth item Mr. Kauffman pictured is a round-bottomed wine bottle. Such bottles were originally encased in wicker. With the wicker removed, they can appear quite exotic. One 1970s dealer attempted to pass them off as target balls, and Kauffman feared they might also be sold as floats for fishing nets. Collectors in 1975 forcibly discouraged such dealer behavior. "But," Mr. Kauffman asks, "What about twenty-five years from now?" In the year 2000 dealers are attempting to sell these bottles as... (drum roll, please)

...nautical ballast bottles.

The "ballast bottles," do not seem to excite either collectors or the Ebay Gestapo. The one shown here sits peacefully on Ebay with no bids and an opening price of \$10.



Mr. Kauffman contrasted the confusing round-bottomed wine with a genuine fishing float. This float is pontiled and rolling pin shaped, and Kauffman expected it to be quite rare by 2000. This strikes me as a fairly accurate prediction. After all, I have managed to survive through most of Y2K without tripping over any rolling pin floats. I am, therefore, surprised when a quick search of current Ebay auctions uncovers eleven lots containing such

floats. Only a couple of the largest and most unusual examples actually have bids. The one pictured here is offered as an insulator, but even this marketing twist has failed to elicit a bid. From one lot of five rolling pin floats, I learn that such floats were found along Japanese beaches. Due to continuing imports, the floats are more common in America now than they would have been 25 years ago.

The final bottle featured in the 1975 article is an amethyst Stiegel-type flask. Mr. Kauffman's example came with a small sticker identifying it as a reproduction, but he wonders whether future collectors will still recognize it as an \$8 copy. He urges manufacturers to avoid confusion by permanently marking new blown glass with monograms or initials. The one shown here bears the Clevenger Brothers initials and is being offered on Ebay as a \$10 reproduction. While other Ebay specimens are being listed without markings or disclaimers, all are at low prices. Novices appear to be taking their cues from more experienced collectors and are bidding conservatively if at all.



None of the items discussed here seems to be causing much confusion today. But none of them is generating much interest or excitement, either. I believe the unscrupulous dealers and reproduction bottles have hurt our hobby in a slightly different way than Mr. Kauffman predicted. Collectors have become so skeptical that we have lost much of our enthusiasm for old glass. Many beginners seem to be avoiding free blown pieces entirely because the reproductions are so difficult to identify. The skepticism takes a different toll on more experienced collectors. Those who display their rarest and most valuable bottles must repeatedly field the question, "Now, is that a reproduction?"

I do not mean to imply that demand for good bottles has been low during 2000. On the contrary, rare, undamaged, authenticated bottles have set plenty of new price records during the past year. The cobalt Millville fruit jar pictured here recently brought \$29,300 on Ebay. Judging by catalog values, it would also have been an extremely desirable jar back in 1975. In fact, the most popular bottles in 1975 generally remain the greatest favorites today. While the year 2000 has no bottle collecting event to compare with the Gardner sale of 1975, Charles Gardner's magnificent bottles continue to be treasured.

Based on changes in the Consumer Price Index, \$1 in 1975 would be worth \$3.20 in 2000. Yet rare and unusually colored antique bottles can easily command 10 times their 1975 prices. As measured by dollars, then, appreciation for great glass has grown during the last quarter century. Our knowledge has also grown. We now realize that some of the pieces attributed to Stiegel and Amelung in 1975 were actually European imports, and we have a better grasp of which bottles are truly rare. Bottle cleaning techniques have also advanced, improving the appearance of collections. Despite all this evidence of progress, I cannot help thinking our hobby was better off 25 years ago. I do not care whether bottles continue to become more valuable over then next 25 years, but I hope the fun and excitement that collectors find in the hobby increases.

## Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

**November 5 (9AM to 3PM) Elkton, Maryland:** The Tri-State Bottle Collectors and Diggers Club, Inc. 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Antique Bottle & Collectibles Show and Sale at the Singlerly Fire Hall in Elkton, MD (I-95, Exit 109A).

**November 12 (9AM to 2PM) Oakland, New Jersey:** South Jersey Antique Bottle Collectors Association's 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Antique Show & Sale at Valley Middle School on Route 202.

**November 19 (9AM to 3PM) Baltimore, Maryland:** The 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Great Mid-Atlantic Bottle Show & Sale at the Maryland State Fairgrounds in Timonium.

**November 19 (9 AM to 2 PM) Fayette City, Pennsylvania:** Pittsburgh Antique Bottle Club's Annual Show & Sale at the Washington Twp. Firehall, Route 70 exit 20.

