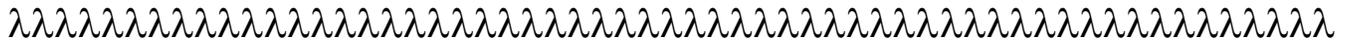


# The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Serving the National Capital



## February 2001

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## February 27<sup>th</sup> Meeting

**Program:** Chris Kocius will discuss blown glass light bulbs.

**Show & Tell:** If you have any hand-blown light bulbs, please bring them in. Otherwise, we would like to see the recent additions to your collections.

**Meeting Location:** We will be at our regular meeting location, the basement of the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda, MD. There will be a **Shrove Tuesday** pancake supper at the church, and **we will be meeting in one of the classrooms**. People are welcome to come early and enjoy some pancakes before the meeting. We are not planning refreshments other than the pancakes.

## June 23<sup>rd</sup> Show

Our club bottle show will take place on June 23<sup>rd</sup> from 9 AM to 3PM at the Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda, MD. This is our regular meeting location, and it is located inside the Washington, DC beltway as shown on the map below. Six foot dealer tables are available for \$20 each. For more information please contact Jim Sears at (703) 243-2409 or [searsjim@usa.net](mailto:searsjim@usa.net).



Meetings: 7:30 PM on the last Tuesday of each month in the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, 6201 Dunrobbin Dr., Bethesda, MD 20816.

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## Bottle Show Report

The Ohio Antique Bottle Show in Columbus is popular with dealers for the buffet it provides them on Saturday night. Show chair Adam Koch can be counted on to serve of plenty of steamed shrimp and drinks, which may explain why no tables remain unsold. The show opens to dealers and early buyers at 7:00 AM on Sunday February 18<sup>th</sup>. Because they can get in as soon as the dealers, quite a few members of the public are willing to pay the \$20 early admission. Most of the buying by both dealers and collectors appears to take place before the regular 9 AM opening.

From a fruit jar collector's perspective, the offerings at Columbus are a bit disappointing. Most of the jars are recognizable as leftovers from the Muncie, Indiana show in January. Some of these jars, including a \$3,500 olive green, iron-pontiled beauty, leave Columbus with new owners. However, one jar dealer, who has added nothing to his stock since Muncie, fails to sell a single jar in Columbus.

The bottle collectors do appear to have a good selection of newly offered items. We admire a freshly dug, deep green scroll flask, which later sells for \$2,500. Less expensive dug bottles sell so quickly that we don't have an opportunity to examine many of them. All in all, the show offers many good buying opportunities for those willing to pay the \$20 early admission.



## Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

**March 3 (9 AM to 3 PM) Maryland Line, Maryland:** The Chesapeake Bay Insulator Club 13th annual Insulator Show & Sale at the Maryland Line Volunteer Fire Department Hall. INFO: Larry Novak - Phone (301) 680-8910 email: [cbic@clubs.insulators.com](mailto:cbic@clubs.insulators.com)

**March 4 (8 AM to 3 PM) Baltimore, Maryland:** The Baltimore Antique Bottle Club presents its 21st annual show at the Essex Community College, 7201 Rossville Blvd., Baltimore, Maryland. (off I-95 exit 34) Admission \$3.00. INFO: Bob Ford - Phone (410) 531-9459 or email: [antiquebottles@home.com](mailto:antiquebottles@home.com)

**March 25 (9 AM to 3 PM) South Keyser, West Virginia:** The Potomac Highlands Antique Bottle & Glass Collector's Club, 3rd Annual Show & Sale, to held from 9am to 3pm at the Keyser Fire Hall INFO: Dale Murschell , Phone (304) 492-5563. email: [mountainmonster@mountain.net](mailto:mountainmonster@mountain.net)

**April 22 (9 AM to 3 PM) Harrisonburg, Virginia, Sunday:** Historical Bottle Diggers of Virginia's 30th Annual Show & Sale at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds, Route 11 South (I-81 exit 243), Harrisonburg, Virginia. INFO: Sonny Smiley, Phone (540) 434-1129 or Casey Billhimer, Phone (540) 289-9866 email: [historyed@webtv.net](mailto:historyed@webtv.net)



All 310 dealer tables have been sold for the March 4<sup>th</sup> Baltimore show. At least half a dozen Potomac Bottle Collectors members will be selling at the show. Please join us for a good time and some great bottles.

## My Attempt to Escape from the Cold:

### Mississippi Privy Digging

by Andy Goldfrank



Since I started bottle digging back in the late 1970s, it has been a mission of mine to find a bottle every time I ventured off on a trip with family, friends, my wife or by myself whether for work, family or pleasure. There is a special display of these bottles from around the United States and the globe in my home. Each bottle memorializes a trip: the 1860s stoneware ink found in the midst of broken, pontiled black glass on Victoria's Peak in Hong Kong while accompanying my father on business, the 1870s Leadville, Colorado pharmaceutical excavated from a privy in that historic mining town while on my honeymoon, the puce 1880s Patras beer found in an olive grove in Greece while exploring the ancient sites. These bottles are not particularly valuable or rare, but each reminds me and others of our adventures and the places traveled.

A few weeks ago, I was surfing the internet trying to figure out how to get out of the cold of Washington, D.C. when I stumbled across some cheap fares to Jackson, Mississippi. Shortly thereafter I was on the phone with a digging buddy of mine, who (conveniently) lives in Jackson, Mississippi, attempting to take him up on some Southern hospitality. Professing to have granted me an open invitation to dig in his home state, he planned out a weekend digging with me in Mississippi. My only goal was to catch a little warmth and to recover a bottle or two from Mississippi that could stand next to my other "trip" bottles.

My flight landed on a Friday evening in Jackson, where my buddy was waiting to pick me up at the airport. After devouring an awesome steak dinner, we ventured back to his home where we spent hours drinking bourbon and examining the bottles and jugs he had recovered from around the state. Our original plan was to explore the Jackson area; however, another friend of his was renovating an ante-bellum house in Vicksburg, Mississippi and had acquired permission for us to dig the privies. My friend was not too excited, albeit Vicksburg is a historic city, because the oldest area had been demolished and "rehabilitated" for a steamboat casino. Moreover, Vicksburg is a well-dug city that has been explored by virtually every treasure hunter in the region. Much like the Leadville, Colorado dump, at one time folks used to come from all over the country to dig in the old Vicksburg dump by the levee.

During our drive to Vicksburg the next day, my friend told me the saga of Vicksburg, Mississippi. Today populated by less than 30,000 people, Vicksburg is a small Southern port city nestled in the hilly terrain along the east bank of the Mississippi River 44 miles west of the state's capital in Jackson. Frenchmen settled there in 1718 and built Fort-Saint-Pierre on the high bluffs, but the settlement was wiped out by native Indians a decade later. In 1790, a military outpost was re-established on the site by Spaniards and a community developed, which was incorporated in 1825 and named for the Reverend Newitt Vick, a Methodist minister. The settlement prospered as a shipping point because of its strategic location on Scott's Point that jutted into the Mississippi. This quality led to Vicksburg being besieged for 47 days during General Ulysses S. Grant's campaign for control of the Mississippi River in the American Civil War, before surrendering on July 4, 1863.

The city was also the location of a small but significant event some 30 years later -- it is the first place where Coca-Cola was bottled. One summer day in 1894, Joseph Augustus Biedenharn, a candy retailer in Vicksburg, Mississippi, had an idea. Locals flocked to his brick-fronted candy store to escape the heat and drink a glass of Coca-Cola. At that time the drink was less than a decade old. Biedenharn already delivered stoppered bottles of soda water throughout the Vicksburg vicinity and "Mr. Joe," as he was to be called, decided to add some Coca-Cola syrup to the carbonated water. Thus was born the first Coca-Cola bottler. The name of this internationally famous soft drink and business empire and the name Biedenharn Candy Co. are inseparably linked. Joe Biedenharn's simple act of putting Coca-Cola into bottles enabled that trademark to become a symbol universally recognized and the beverage which it represents to become a product readily available around the globe.

After hearing these historic tales, all I could think about was bring home a blown Biedenharn Candy Co. bottle. Twenty minutes later we were pulling into the driveway of the house we were set to dig. Hopping out of the truck, I noticed a number of depressions in the yard next door which was not a good sign as they were clear evidence that we were following in the footsteps of other diggers. Not giving up that quickly, we started probing the house lot. To our surprise it appeared that this yard had not been dug.

The next two days were filled with a lot of probing and digging. In the end we probed at least four, maybe five privies, in the yard. The only problem is that we did not have enough time to dig them all. Ultimately we elected the two that seemed full of "crunchies." It is not my normal practice to dig such a privy because so many "crunchies" is a sure sign coal was used instead of wood for heating, which in turn indicates a newer age. However, since my goal was to find anything that was embossed with Mississippi, or perhaps even find a relic from those early Coca-Cola bottling days, we elected to excavate the outhouses that clearly had glass in them.

We were not disappointed, as we both uncovered holes that were full of bottles. My pit started out a mixture of machine-made and blown, while my buddy's hole was primarily machine-made although not later than 1920. It was evident that we were digging the two newest privies on the lot but we elected to persevere in the hopes of finding some early Coca-Cola bottles or some blown Mississippi pharmaceuticals. Darkness soon fell with some encouraging signs. My friend had pulled out a couple of local druggists that were in mint condition and embossed with a rose, and another druggist that had an owl with the phrase "Wide Awake" below. In turn, my recoveries were more limited because of the extensive overburden but there clearly was a thick layer of goodies below. We could only imagine what awaited us for the next day of digging.



After dreaming of Mississippi bottles that night, we returned to the site the next day to finish up the holes. At that point, I started to pull out dozens of pint and quart flasks (square, pumpkin, and coffin) that were plain or with Cincinnati, Ohio embossing. The occupants had clearly been drinkers yet there were no local bottles. My buddy told me that

Mississippi went dry in 1908, and it was evident that we were not yet to that age in the hole. As if cued, at that point I pulled out a large clear fifth, embossed in a crisp slugplate, "Brennan / Dealer in Wines and Liquors / Vicksburg, Mississippi!" You should have seen the look of joy on my friend's face.

Minutes later, I recovered a broken blown crown-top that had Coca-Cola in script along with the name Biedenharn, Vicksburg, Mississippi. "What a shame," I thought to myself. This was compounded when I dug another broken blown crown-top that had Biedenharn in script at the base. The next couple of hours, I continued to pull out local embossed bottles including another slugplate whiskey fifth, druggists, and even a blown milk. My concern was that my hole was running out, and perhaps even getting too old for a Coca-Cola bottle. Looking back, I now recognize that these thoughts are somewhat strange considering that I had uncovered whiskey fifths of which there are at best a dozen known, an extremely rare milk, a neat amber New Orleans medicine, and even scarce local pharmaceuticals with images on them.

In any event, time was running out as my flight was scheduled to leave in a few hours, and I had only the corners remaining to square off before the hole was done. The decayed night soil was light and full of seeds making my last efforts easy. Scraping down the last corner with my digging stick, I heard a squeak and saw another aqua bottle. Prying it out, I discovered that it was another unembossed beer from Milwaukee. "Oh well, that was my last chance . . . this hole is done" bounced around in my head -- perhaps not quite that politely. Stepping back, I realized that there was one little pocket left in the top of the privy where we had tunneled a foot from our hole's opening in order to explore the entire outhouse. Pushing my digging stick up into this upper corner of privy dirt out popped a bottle into my hand. Wiping the soil off, to my delight I discovered that it was a blown crown-top Biedenharn Candy Co. from Vicksburg. A smile on my face, I turned to my buddy and said "something for my 'trip' shelf . . . thank you."



## Reproduction Bottle Alert:

### U.S. Navy Mustard

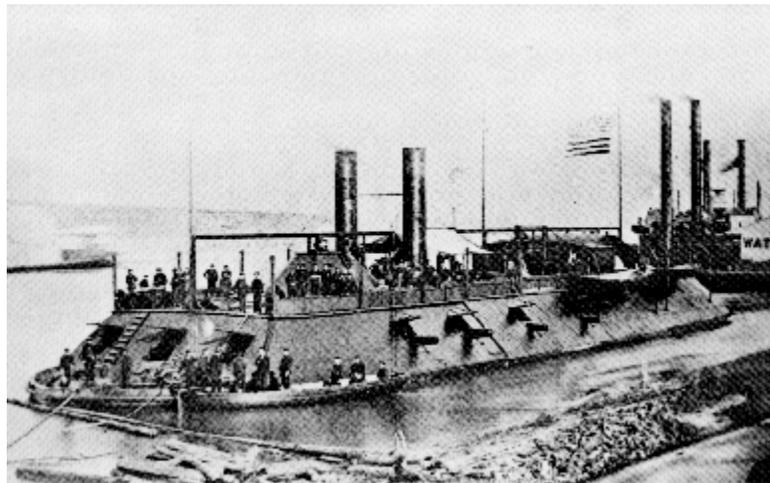


One of our club members (who shall remain nameless) recently became very excited to see a U.S. Navy mustard bottle offered on Ebay. Not only was this mint condition bottle pontiled, but it was a highly unusual yellow-green color. Even though his winning bid was over \$450, the club member felt he was getting a great bargain. Fortunately, other collectors were able to identify the bottle as a reproduction before the transaction took place, but we would like to take this opportunity to identify the bottle to other collectors.



The U.S. Navy mustard bottle does exist as a genuine Civil War collectible. Aqua examples of this bottle were among the relics recovered from the USS Cairo when it was excavated in 1964. The Cairo was an 1862 ironclad Union gunboat, which had the dubious honor of being the first armored vessel ever sunk by electrically detonated torpedoes (now called mines). Although the entire crew escaped the sinking ship, they left behind a treasure trove of objects of everyday Navy life. More than 300 U.S. NAVY / MUSTARD and U.S. NAVY / PEPPER bottles were found in the wreck, including some with original contents.

Since 1984, the Cairo has been on exhibit at the Vicksburg National Military Park. According to an article in the 1992 issue of *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector*, the U.S. Park Service had reproduction mustard and pepper bottles blown at Jamestown, Virginia. To avoid confusion with the original aqua bottles, the reproductions were made in a light yellowish green color. They were offered for sale at the park gift shop for \$9 each.



USS Cairo in 1862 (at right)