

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Serving the National Capital



June-July 2001

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June 23rd Show

Please join us on Saturday, June 23rd at the Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda, MD between 9 AM and 3 PM for an antique bottle show and sale. Dealer set-up starts at 7 AM. **Thank you very much to all the club members who are helping with the show!**

June 26th Meeting

Visitors are always welcome at club meetings. Please join us at 7:30 PM at the Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda, MD.

Michael Gaines will speak on the life and bottles of Robert Portner. Most of us have encountered at least a few beer bottles that bear Portner's name, and this meeting should give us an opportunity to compare the various Portner bottles in local collections.

Show & Tell: Please bring any variations of Portner bottles you may have as well as any pictures, advertisements, or other materials relating to Robert Portner.

Club Officers: We should be voting on club officers, but we still need to find people who are willing to take the positions of president and vice president. At our May meeting **Matt Knapp** hinted that he might be persuaded to serve in one of these offices, but we still need at least one other club member who is willing to serve.



July 31st Meeting

Dave Matthews has tentatively agreed to speak on bottle digging. He has previously spoken at the Baltimore antique bottle club, and we look forward to having him bring his show on the road.

Show & Tell: Please bring recently dug bottles and other summer finds.



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

President: Phil Godwin Vice President: Allan Einseln Secretary: Jim Sears Treasurer: Ken Anderson

Pontil: Jim Sears (email: searsjim@usa.net, PH: 703/243-2409) & Andy Goldfrank (email: amg_sticky@yahoo.com, PH: 202/588-0543)

Web Site <http://members.aol.com/potomacbtl/bottle2.htm> Maintained by Peter Rydquist: pehraag@aol.com

Around the Swamp . . .

Bottles from our Nation's Capital

by Andy Goldfrank



My instructions were specific: tell my bosses that I needed to leave early at 3 p.m. on June 6th, be waiting outside my office building on Pennsylvania Avenue, and be ready for a good time. And there I was, standing streetside on Wednesday afternoon, anticipating that my wife Joan was going to whisk me off to eat some crabs on the Eastern Shore of Maryland or to enjoy the spring weather streamside at some old country inn. Wetting my lips, I watched the steady activity of well-fed politicians and lobbyists unloading from cabs and limousines and ambling into the Capital Grille, all the while thinking about the food that I was going to eat (minus the stuffy and nonsensical atmosphere).

It was then that Joan pulled up in front of me, bearing a smile and a baseball cap. Hopping into the car, I noticed she was wearing old jeans and spotted a bag of my clothes in the backseat. Confused, I asked, "Where are we going?" Joan responded, "When I thought about what to do today, I thought about what you enjoy more than almost anything in this world . . ." I interrupted, "Digging?!?" Nodding her head, Joan sped off to the entrance to Interstate 395 heading into northern Virginia. Apparently, Joan had stocked up on food and drinks and was prepared to take me to an old Washington, D.C. hotel dump that I had discovered along with Peter Rydquist earlier in the year after my trip to England. Let me tell you the story of how I came to dig at this dump . . .

My adventures in Britain, which were detailed in the April 2001 issue of *The Potomac Pontil*, had left me with the desire to find a Washington area dump and the knowledge to pinpoint some likely spots. There was a pattern to the dumps or "tips" in the London area that I thought could be applied to the Washington region; specifically, dumps were located near railroad lines and waterways where the garbage could be brought in by train or barge. For a couple of years, I had heard rumors that folks occasionally found bottles at dump sites in the Potomac River close to the Virginia shore. One time a construction worker told me about how as kids they used to find bottles after the spring floods along the banks of the Potomac just below Alexandria. A fellow club member, who is also an avid shallow-water treasure hunter, showed me dozens of 1/4 pint milk bottles from the 1920s-30s he had pulled out of the water while metal detecting in the Potomac. Yet another club member shared his memory of 15 years ago when he used to metal detect along the shores of the Potomac approximately 30 miles from the city looking for sterling utensils, coins and other relics from Washington, D.C. Learning from my trip to England, I surmised that dumping also must have occurred inland in these areas in Virginia because the pattern was virtually identical -- all were located in the water, near railroad tracks, far enough away from Alexandria, Washington and other little towns so as not to stink too much, and in areas that had extensive mud flats.

Peter and I followed up on these rumors and accumulated a list of potential sites to investigate. Not only were we armed with these leads and the knowledge I had acquired in England, but we also had both experienced digging in the water dumps that surround Baltimore. Baltimore, for centuries, vigorously cleaned out its outhouses and transported all waste to sites along the mudflats surrounding the Harbor. At these dumps, one has to wait until the tide recedes and then create a pit with a mini-seawall to find bottles. Peter and I had both enjoyed digging at these sites; however, the majority of discoveries were from Baltimore and we were in pursuit of Washington bottles.

At the first site on our list, Peter and I crossed a set of railroad tracks and parked near a crab fisherman's dock. We decided that the best course of action was to walk along the shoreline for a couple of miles looking for clues of an old dump site. Once we reached the Potomac, we headed south and started scanning the rubble and sand along the shore. Scrambling over the rocks and broken concrete laid for shore protection, we started around a bend and noticed there were thousands of bricks along the shore. Shortly thereafter the bricks stopped and bits of broken bottles were scattered where the waves were splashing the shore. Both of our heads were down scanning the ground for any sign of a dump, when I looked up and noticed a large tree that had flipped over in a storm. The base of a tree spanning almost 15 feet across lay exposed -- and dozens of bottles sticking out of the roots! From that time on until just before dark, Peter and I pulled bottles from the tree and excavated along the wet shoreline, finding a nice assortment of c.1900-10 Washington, D.C. blob and crown-top beers, local druggists and food bottles. We did not find anything exceptional but did uncover almost 60 bottles that were a nice cross-section of bottles from the area. After we were done digging for the day, we surveyed the location and it was readily apparent that a few decades ago someone had dug into the banks of the river and up on land looking for bottles. Before departing, Peter and I placed a small test hole further inland, along the edge of the prior digger's trench, where we extracted indications of untouched dump. Moreover, this part of the dump was dry which would make for easier digging.



Less than a week later I was back at the site, not with Peter because he had to work, but instead with Joan. Joan is not a frequent participant on my digs; however, when the two of us go looking for bottles she always seems to come up with a great find. On this particular day, we had a limited amount of time therefor we decided to open up a small 3 feet by 5 feet rectangle along the edge of the prior digger's trench right where Peter and I had tested on our first visit. The first foot was a tangle of roots and rich earth, the next 18 inches was a compact layer of beige-orange colored ash, followed by a thin 2-4 inch layer of dump, then another 8-10 inch layer of black and grey ash. Shortly thereafter, Joan's shovel flipped over a rich, brown layer almost like privy dirt. It was laden with small roots, seeds, pottery and glass shards. This was the dump layer, which was about 2 feet thick, less than four feet from the surface and chock full of bottles and pottery. Over the next few hours, Joan and I found literally hundreds of area bottles.

Amongst the beers and sodas we found: aqua blob top "Arlington Bottling Co." bottles with script writing and with the anchor pattern; aqua and amber "Schlitz / Washington Branch" crown-tops; "Anheuser-Busch Brewing Assn. / Washington, D.C." crown-tops; amber and aqua "Washington Brewery Company" with an embossed picture of George Washington and an eagle; and aqua "F.H. Finley & Son / 1894-1902 Bottlers / 208-10-12 Mass Ave NE / Washington, DC" crowntops. We also uncovered a number of medicines and cures, such as "Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup," a 7-Up green "Piso's Cure for Consumption," a "Dr. Jayne's Tonic Vermifuge," a "Blood Wine Sample," an aqua "Harper's Cephalgine for Headache / Washington, D.C.," and an amber "Wier's Lemon-Seltzer / Ogram Chem Co. / Wash DC." There was also a host of other bottles such as cone and barrel Carter's inks, cobalt Bromo-Seltzers in all sizes, a "Swindell's & Son / 391 to 393 Market Street / Washington, DC" slope-shouldered food jar, odd-shaped pickles and capers in clear and green, some neat sample whiskeys in different colors and many others keepers.



In general, there was a lack of household garbage indicated by a dearth of local embossed pharmacy bottles and lack of local whiskey flasks (although we were finding plenty of the unembossed kind in both amber and clear). Moreover, the vast majority of dishes were heavy-duty restaurant wear or fancy designs with local hotel names such as the Normandie and Shoreham, and the other artifacts such as spoons had engraved names of commercial establishments such as

People's and Woodward & Lothrop. The current theory is that the garbage in this dump originated at commercial establishments near Pennsylvania Avenue in downtown D.C. sometime after 1904 but before 1910. These dates are selected because a large number of bottle uncovered at this site are embossed 1902-04, however, there are no bottles recovered that are embossed with later years. This lack of later dated bottles would normally not be significant but for the fact that one prolific bottler, the Northwestern Bottling Co., embossed their bottles with "1907" (at the same time when the company dropped "Works" and "J.H. Schlueter" from its name).



Towards the end of our dig, Joan was finishing a corner of the hole with the digging stick when she pulled out another clear strap-sided flask and said "this one has writing on it." Not terribly impressed, because all the previous recoveries also had writing in the form of "Honest Measure" or "Full ½ Pint," I reached out to put the bottle in our discard pile when Joan read: "M.O'Hanlon, 1325 7th St NW, Washington, DC!" All I could think about was that I had to give Joan credit, she has a knack for finding good bottles when she does get out and go digging. And then just a few minutes later, Joan read the embossing off another bottle "Harper's Cephalgine for Headache / Washington, D.C." My response was "hmmm . . . I think we have 2 of those already." She piped up, "I know, but this one is in a nice light amber." "What?!?" I practically shouted, "Do you know that I have never even heard of an amber one of those existing?" Later, after much inspection and a number of phone calls, it turned out the Harper's was a beautiful yellow-amber and was actually the first one known in that color.

Many digs have occurred at this site since Peter and I discovered it, resulting in a large number of common bottles but few flasks, local pharmacists, or other rarer bottles such as colored inks or bitters. No doubt, this stems from the fact that the garbage came from commercial establishments thereby limiting the variety of bottles and the lack of "holdovers."

"Holdovers" are artifacts or bottles people "hold" onto longer than the normal life span of that object such as the medicine or whiskey one keeps in the cabinet for 15 years or when a basement is cleaned out or a privy dipped that would be an accumulation for years of garbage. For example, up at a dump in Frederick, Maryland, Peter found a pontiled historical flask in the midst of 1895-1910 artifacts. Another time, my New York digging buddies and I were digging a dump in Poughkeepsie which was loaded with bottles from 1910 to 1915, when we pulled out a number of blue-glazed "Post" pottery beers and other crockery that dated to the 1860s. In contrast, this Washington, D.C. hotel dump is virtually void of these holdover treasures.

However, when Joan picked me up outside my office and informed me we were going digging at the D.C. hotel dump, I knew our luck was bound to change. We arrived at the site with the threat of rain in the air pushing the humidity to the limit and the bugs deciding we were tasty treats. In addition, the dump looked like a landmine had hit it especially since Joan was last there because of the number of diggers who had since visited the site after our discovery of it. Picking a spot in the shade, we again opened up a 3 foot by 5 foot rectangle. After plowing through the first few layers, we soon discovered to our dismay that the dump layer in this area had been burned. All of the bottles were melted and distorted. We unearthed some heart breakers including a short blob Arlington Bottling Co., a number of amber George Washingtons, and a fancy New York City pharmacy. It was apparent that my premonition of good luck was inaccurate. Then, Joan had been using the digging stick in one area, when she jumped out to let me clean off the fluff. Scrapping back the burnt soil, out popped a kaolin clay pipe. I said to Joan, "At least something survived in this burnt zone." But this was not ordinary clay pipe: it has 4 inches of stem covered with writing in french and projecting from the bowl is an incredibly detailed cupid!

A few minutes later, Joan was back in the hole to finish off the last wall when she did her "lady luck" bottle trick. She had pushed aside some dirt and was excavating down in an effort to get below the burnt area when up flipped another clear strap-sided flask. Picking it up, Joan said "there's writing on this one: J.B. Buckley, 1836 T Street NW, Washington, DC." "Unbelievable," I said to her, "I have come down here a half a dozen times since we went digging last and have not found a whole embossed D.C. flask! Not only do you find one last time, but you find one again, and it is from a place that was right down the street from our house!" Joan just smiled at me. We spent the next hour or so finding a few more bottles including a couple of neat green capers in odd sizes and a J.F. Herrman blob. As we walked to the car well past dark, covered in sweat and insect repellent, exhausted from our efforts, and wet from the rainstorm that swept through, Joan asked whether this had been a good time. Without hesitation I replied, "Absolutely! This was my best birthday ever."

Hope you enjoyed this column. Any comments, suggestions, or questions, please let me know either by calling me at 202/588-0543 or by emailing me at amg_sticky@yahoo.com. Good luck searching, Andy.



Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

June 23 (9 AM to 3 PM) Bethesda, MD: **Our Show is Back!!** Potomac Bottle Collectors Antique Bottle Show and Sale at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, 6201 Dunrobbin Drive, Bethesda, MD 20816, near Glen Echo and the Clara Barton National Historic Site. Info: Jim Sears, (703) 243-2409, email: searsjm@usa.net

July 21 (8 AM to 4 PM) Dallas, PA: Many Mountains Bottle Club's 1st Annual Show & Sale at Traver's Auction Barn, Dallas, Pennsylvania. Info: **Richard Kern**, R.R. #1, Box 101, Noxen, PA 18636, PH: (570) 298-2493, E-mail: kern00@epiz.net.



Bottle Show Report: **Kutztown – No,** **Millville – Yes.**

The Coal Crackers Bottle Club scheduled its third annual show for June 3 in Kutztown, PA. Last year's show at the covered outdoor Renningers Antique Market site had suffered from rainy weather, but the idea of holding an antique bottle show in conjunction with the well-known Renninger's market still seemed to have great potential. However, only 13 dealers signed up for the 2001 show, and it was cancelled with little advance warning. Those collectors who had not heard the news were confused as well as disappointed because there was no sign at the Renningers site to tell what had become of the show. After this fiasco, we fear it will be impossible for the Coal Crackers club to put on another show in the future.

The June 17th Millville, NJ show did take place in an excellent new facility at Wheaton Village. The new building offers convenient parking, good lighting, room for the show to grow, and some of the best refreshments ever encountered at a bottle show. This show is strongly supported by the Federation of Historic Bottle Collectors, and the offerings included high quality bottles of all types. The \$8 admission price included a museum tour and a glass-blowing demonstration. This year's special exhibit at the museum has a hunting and fishing theme and includes target balls, minnow traps, and gun-shaped bottles. In keeping with this theme, the glass-blowing demonstration produced a glass gun. The only disappointing aspect of this show was its timing. Taking place on the same day as the National Bottle Museum's Saratoga Springs, NY show, this event seemed to emphasize the schism between the Federation and the National Bottle Museum.



The Museum of American Glass at Wheaton Village is the largest museum in the country dedicated to preserving the history of glass made in the United States.

Outhouse Digging in Northern Michigan

by Peter Rydquist



In May, while on vacation visiting my family in Cadillac, Michigan, I had the opportunity to go digging in my pursuit of bottles from my home town and state. Cadillac, located in Wexford County, is in a part of the state that once was covered with virgin pine timber until rampant logging started in the 1870s. In fact, Michigan produced more timber than any other state from the 1870s until the 1890s when the pine forests started to run out and virtually disappear. After the timber was cut, the land was sold to settlers as a farm land. However, this land was often worthless because the thin top soil that had been forest bed could not support crops and was rapidly depleted in many parts down to the sandy subsoil. The settlers would try to make a go of it but many farms were eventually abandoned. The landscape of Northern Michigan is dotted with the remains of these old farm sites and the lumber camps that preceded them. In the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps planted on the timber wastelands and abandoned farms thousands of acres of trees in neat rows. Today, many of these sites are disappearing due to the current building and population boom coupled with the timbering companies returning to harvest these second-growth forests.

About half a mile from my Dad's farm, lives a neighbor and his son Gary that like to metal detect these old farm sites and lumber camps. My Dad and I have accompanied them a couple of times to these spots in the hopes of finding local bottles. On this trip, I went with Gary to check out some likely sites at the other end of Wexford County. Gary told me about the times that he had found outhouses while metal detecting but had never really dug them out completely.

At one particular location, an 1889 Wexford County Plat Book show this particular section of land as being owned by a timber company. It appears that the site we had decided to investigate was occupied shortly after 1889, because the 1908 and the 1914 editions of the Wexford County Plat Book identified an 80 acre section as having a house. We arrived at the location and noticed that the land was covered with tall red pines planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps during the Depression. The only apparent clue of the abandoned farm was a old lilac bush that was visible from the road.

We walked into the forest less than 50 yards and stumbled across the farm site. We had spotted a hollow depression where the house once stood and a porous pre-1900 concrete foundation of the barn. About 15 feet off to the side of the barn foundation there was a large depression. I probed it and hit glass immediately. We had found the privy within 10 minutes after arriving at the site! This was remarkable considering that I have been to many house and farm sites in this part of Michigan and it is difficult to locate outhouses because of the size of acreage to investigate. In addition, many times there is little in them because there were plenty of other places to dispose of trash and they were not occupied for long periods of time.

This outhouse proved to be different. Strangely, it was about 6' x 6' for the first two feet and then under that it was a 2' x 5' rectangle with total depth of about 5 feet. Right from the start, after the first few shovelfuls I hit glass and lots of it. Gary and I took turns digging, all told finding about 20 bottles from the 1890s to early 1900. Almost every bottle was blown with the majority of the trash was in the first two feet. Here are some of the keepers:

- Chas H. Daniels Brewery, Manistee Michigan large amber Baltimore loop beer
- 2 Grand Rapids Brewing Company, amber & crown-top
- aqua medicine Prescribed by R.V. Pierce, MD
- small cobalt Bromo Seltzer
- amber Bixby Ink with 1883 patent date
- cobalt granite ware coffee pot missing the handle and top but otherwise in very good shape with only a little rust
- Dr Jaynes Expectorant
- neat shoofly whiskey



A red pine tree (no doubt planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s) was next to the pit and the roots had grown down into the outhouse. It was clear that the tree must have gotten plenty of nutrients from the old privy as this pine was the biggest one in the area. Next time I trek about the woods of my home county, I certainly will be looking for the big trees as this might be a clue to the location of the privies.

