

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Serving the National Capital



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November 2001

In this issue:
Chris Vaught, Phil Edmonds, and Andy Goldfrank (right) dig a Baltimore Brickliner. See *The Picture Book Curse* on page 2.

Jim Sears goes crazy for an early Mason jar (below). See *The Emerald Crowleytown* on page 6.



November 27th Meeting

Annual Contest: We will hold our annual bottle contest at the November meeting. Categories are collector, junior collector, digger, shard, and go-with. Entries may be anything acquired since last year's contest except that the digger of the year award is limited to bottles actually dug by club members. Shards may include "tear jerkers" broken during shipment, cleaning, or accident as well as dug items.

December Meeting

We need to select a date if we want to have a December meeting and holiday party. We will not be meeting on December 25th even though it is the last Tuesday. Please check your calendars and be ready to help choose a more convenient date during our November meeting. You can also provide your input to Matt Knapp mknapp@erols.com (301) 698-5925.

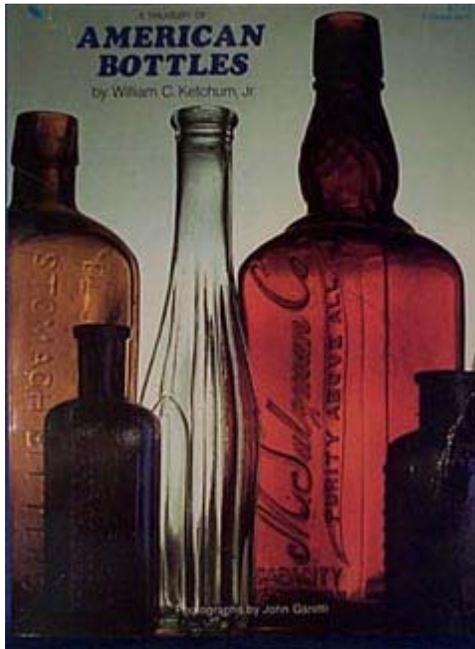
Vice President Needed

We still need someone to take over for the late Allan Einseln as vice president of our club. Please contact Matt Knapp or any of the other club officers if you would be willing to serve.

The Picture Book Curse

by Andy Goldfrank

There is a picture book of antique bottles that sits on my bookcase. In fact, that well-worn book has occupied a space on my shelf wherever I have lived since the 1970s. My parents gave me that picture book, titled *A Treasury of American Bottles* and written by William C. Ketchum, Jr, as a Christmas present in the winter of 1978. It is a gorgeous book with bright, colorful pictures of every bottle imaginable from bitters to poisons to fruit jars to



medicines (and everything in between). Twenty-three years ago, when my parents left that wrapped picture book under the glittering evergreen that graced our living room, I had just started digging for antique bottles. At the time, my sparse collection comprised a Dr. S.B.H.'s Peruna, which had been discarded under the porch of our 1860s Victorian farmhouse, along with some patent medicines such as a Dr. King's New Discovery, round bottomed sodas, and local milks excavated from the town dump. After receiving that picture book, I now knew what to look for, or rather, what I was hoping to find in every crumbling barn or exposed dump.

One photo spread intrigued me in particular. Captured in full glory were three bottles from the H.H. Warner Safe Remedies Company of Rochester, New York: a Warner's Safe Diabetes Cure, a Tippecanoe, and a Log Cabin Sarsaparilla. After looking at that picture book, it became my goal to find the tall bottle with the intricately carved embossing of a safe. Now to most bottle collectors that might not seem like a big deal, but to a 12 year old boy who had just gotten into the hobby, digging a Warner's Safe Cure was a mighty reach. Over the next couple



years, I did find some pieces of Warner's but never a whole one; instead, slowly I started to find other bottles contained within the pages of my picture book. At first it was a Dr. Hostetter's Stomach Bitters, then a pontiled Hunt's Liniment (from my home town of Sing Sing), and then, by the time high school rolled around, a teal Vichy Water and a Schenk's Pulmonic Syrup. Since then, with more digging experience under my belt, the list of bottles depicted in the picture book that I found grew in leaps and bounds: purple Mrs. S. A. Allen's World's Hair Restorers; colored iron-pontiled sodas including Luke Beards, Knickerbockers, Boardmans and Coon & Spencers; cobalt skull & cross-bone and quilted poisons; eagle, cornucopia, and historical flasks; and many other bottles. Nonetheless, after digging dozens of trashpits, scores of dumps and hundreds of privies, an intact Warner's Safe Cure eluded me.

Last spring while excavating a Washington, D.C. hotel dump I came across the shards of a Warner's Safe Cure. The complex, detailed embossing of the safe was bold and sharp, and pulled an emotional chord inside of me that harkened back to my childhood desire to find an intact specimen. This same chord has been plucked a number of times during my current four-year tenure in Washington. At two virgin bottle digging sites in Georgetown, D.C. that I discovered and then informed others about so that they might share in the finds (before the bulldozers and dump trucks carted off the site) my digging acquaintances uncovered Warner's Safe Cures while I was not there. Each time this occurred, I would again tell my digging partners (all of whom had previously found Warner's Safe Cures) that it was my ardent desire to dig a whole example. And each time, they would look at me with mocking incredulity and say "after all these years of digging so many great pits and thousands of bottles how could you not have found a Warner's Safe Cure!"

Now my digging companions have good reason to tease me because Hubert Harrington Warner was one of the most prolific patent and proprietary medicine bottlers of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Warner established his medicine business in 1878, having acquired the formula to a Craig's Kidney & Liver Cure. Warner quickly dropped the reference to Craig and reestablished the medicine as Warner's Safe Kidney & Liver Cure by 1879, with the other products in his line of remedies, cures, bitters and sarsaparillas introduced in the decade that followed. In those ensuing years, Warner made millions of dollars promoting and selling his uniquely shaped and embossed patent medicine products. Warner's enterprise was an international success with offices spanning the globe: Toronto, Ontario; London, England; Melbourne, Australia; Frankfurt, Germany; Kreuzlingen, Switzerland; Dunedin, New Zealand; and, Pressburg, Austro-Hungary. In 1893, following a collapse of the American stock market, however, Warner's quack medicine empire likewise crashed when his American holdings could not make payment upon a bank loan and the British stockholders froze Warner out by denying him assets from abroad to repay the note. Warner and his company went into bankruptcy, and he was banished from the business. The Warner Safe Remedies Company was reincorporated and managed to prosper, although primarily as a British entity, selling Warner's Safe Cures around the world into the beginning of the twentieth century.

Over a century later, at 6:30 on a crisp Sunday morning earlier this month, I sat outside my apartment waiting for Phil Edmonds to pick me up so that we could venture up to Baltimore and tackle another deep, round brick-lined privy. Chris Vaught had lined up a site which was actually a second attempt on a privy that his digging crew had given up on a few years earlier after managing to get 8 or 9 feet into the hole. The top 7 to 8 feet had consisted of an ashy fill laden with bottles dating after 1910, and then they had hit a thick, heavy clay plug which Chris' crew had penetrated in one area only to discover the privy was wet below. Chris recalled that the wet layer did contain blown bottles, including a fair number of common cobalt medicines from the early 1900s, but a quick depth check resulted in the sinking of a 5 foot probe to the handle. He also remembered that dark was fast approaching and they elected to fill in the hole. This was not a surprise to hear because it is common practice in Baltimore stop excavating these deep brickliners at the 9 or 10 foot level unless pontil-era bottles are coming to light. To dig deeper is back-breaking work, special equipment is needed (e.g., tripods, chains, block and tackle, buckets, and ladders), and the time commitment may be 20 or more hours of digging a hole without much

of a reward. Nevertheless, a group of us have committed to digging at least ten of these mammoth holes to see if the conventional wisdom --that Baltimore's deep brickliners are not worth excavating -- holds true. It is for this reason that we elected to go deeper in a hole others bottle diggers considered not worthy of a return effort.

An hour later we were in the Poppleton area, located on the West side of the City of Baltimore, which according to the Historic American Buildings Survey report from the 1950s was architecturally significant for its unusually large concentration of early and mid-nineteenth century buildings. These structures once were a continuum of brick rowhouses, two and three story in height, with examples from every period after 1830 or so. Like much of historic Baltimore in the 19th century, Poppleton had occupants spanning a variety of socio-economic and racial groups, and living in close proximity. One famous area resident was the writer and poet Edgar Allen Poe. Larger houses on the main streets such as Lexington were generally occupied by middle class whites; in turn, alley housing was home to working class whites and blacks. Many residents of the area were employed by the Mount Clare Yards of the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad. This was a fully-developed and thriving neighborhood by the Civil War. It was not until the twentieth century, when a racially segregated housing pattern developed in Baltimore, that the Poppleton area become a predominantly poor, black community. Although there are pockets of new construction in this neighborhood, the last few decades have not been kind to the historic fabric of the area. Many of the older structures are gone, replaced only by empty lots, and those remaining are decaying or abandoned.

It was against this backdrop that we pulled up to the site in two vehicles laden with our equipment. Chris hopped out with his spring-steel probe, walked over to where he recalled the location of the pit was, and sank the metal shaft into the ground until it tapped the brick walls of the privy. Church-going folk strolled past us as we started to toss dirt out of the hole and slowly descend into the pit. An hour later we had all taken turns in the hole and were now deep enough to set up the tripod for hauling buckets of dirt out of the privy. The tripod is relatively simple mechanical operation: three strong poles are spread over the hole much like a tepee frame from which a block and tackle (or pulley) is suspended at the junction of the three poles. Running through the pulley is a length of chain which has a clip at the end for attaching a five-gallon bucket. This is tiring work that requires, at a minimum, three or four people -- one person in the hole, one pulling, and the others for switching buckets, dumping dirt or sifting the soil for artifacts. Slowly, Phil and I got into

a pattern of hauling and dumping above ground as Chris excavated deeper into the privy.

Before noon, Chris had removed all of the previously dug soil to about 8 or 9 feet exposing a dense, orange-yellow clay plug that was intact except for a pie-shaped quarter of the hole where Chris' digging crew had penetrated into the underlying layer. The only difference was that the previously "wet" layer below the clay plug was now dry – certainly a welcome sight. During his time in the hole, Chris removed a blown beer from the Northwestern Bottling Company of Washington, D.C. dated 1907, along with a host of common machine-made beers of the same era from Baltimore, which suggested that the clay plug dated after 1910. The underlying layer, which was grey and not as heavy, contained a number of turn of the century bottles from Reed & Carnrick of New Jersey, including three cobalt Peptenzymes, a cobalt Lactopeptine, and two sizes of amber Protonuclien. There were also a number of clear pharmaceuticals, an amber bottle embossed "Physician's Sample / Not to Be Sold," doll parts and marbles. Thus, as we entered the night soil layers, it was apparent to us that the folks who lived here 100 years ago were willing to spend some money in their attempts to "cure" whatever ailed them.

Phil was next into the privy; over the next hour he worked on removing the heavy 3-foot layer of clay. At that point in the day, we were working vigorously in an effort to finish the privy because we thought it would be about 25 feet and we wanted to be out of the neighborhood before dark. Phil would rapidly fill a bucket, Chris or I would haul it out of the hole, and the other would sift it – all in a seamless rhythm with few breaks. Phil quickly broke past the 1900s threshold as he delved into an older layer laden with tooled and applied top amber flasks ranging in size from half pints to quarts. One tearjerker with just the lip knocked off was primitive, slug-plate pint embossed "L. Greenbaum / Crescent Club / Whiskey / 1300 W. Baltimore St." We started to recover tooled-top patent medicines such as an aqua Piso's Cure for Consumption,



a crude Lydia Pinkham's Blood Purifier, a full-quart Pond's Extract. A pint ground-lip Mason's 1858 jar that was embossed on the base "MOORE BRO'S / 3 / CLAYTON / NJ / GLASS CO." was also recovered. Every fifth or sixth bucket we brought to light was filled with bottles and artifacts.

Up top, glazed pipes and marbles were showing up in the sifter along with a bottle every now and again. Phil was scooping dirt so fast into the buckets that sometimes he was tossing in bottles without even knowing it. These showed up on the sifting screen: an ink bottle molded in the shape of shoe or slipper; a Turlington's Balsam in the



familiar violin shape loaded with embossing on all sides; and a number of Baltimore perfumes (embossed "Vogeler Son & Co / Perfumers / Baltimore, MD / USA") with matching stoppers emblazoned with a shield. It was then that Chris suggested to Phil that "slowing down a touch" might be in order just as he dumped another load on the screen for me to sift. Immediately I started shaking the sifter when out popped a 6 inch amber bottle. Picking it up, I yelled into the hole "You are sending up decent whole bottles in the bucket . . . be careful" and turned to show Chris. At that moment, we both realized this was a neat and rare find. Crisply embossed on this tooled-top bottle were the following unusual combination of words: "TREMAINE'S / CURE / FOR / INEBRIETY / OPIUM / AND / MORPHINE / F.A. TREMAINE." A precise embossed design in the middle turned out to be the letters "A," "M" and "O" connected together with a chain and padlock; evidently the "A" was for alcohol, the "M" for



morphine and the “O” for opium! As of this writing, we cannot find this cure or the proprietor listed in any book, but certainly appreciate this bottle whether previously known or not.

The pit was still going down, and we continued to find bottles such as Baltimore blob top beers, pharmaceuticals, and perfumes from the late 1880s to the early 1890s. There were a number of cracked amber Udolpho Wolfe’s Aromatic Schnapps, a second albeit broken “Tremaine’s Cure for Inebriety, Opium and Morphine,” and even a slightly-damaged milk glass crucifix candle-holder. Another whole cure came to light in the form of a yellow-amber “Dr. Geo. W. Fisher’s Catarrh Cure” from Baltimore, Maryland and an unusual patent medicine embossed “Chomel’s Rheumatic Antidote.” This was turning out to be a fun pit indeed. Less than twenty minutes later, I heard Phil yell my name. Leaning over the hole, he looked up at me and Chris, smiled, and softly uttered one magical word: “Warner’s.” Phil gently placed the bottle into the bucket, Chris tugged on the chain, and when the 10 inch amber bottle got to the surface it was apparent to all that this was a richly embossed Warner’s Safe Kidney and Liver Cure. Phil later relayed to me how he had uncovered the unembossed

backside of the bottle, remembered that in my 23 years of bottle digging I had never been on a dig when a Warner’s Safe Cure was found, and hoped that it was embossed with the trademark safe of H.H. Warner. Flipping it over to reveal the striking image of the safe, it was then that he had called out from deep in the privy for our attention. At last, the picture book curse was broken.



Shortly after finding the Warner’s Safe Cure the hole bottomed out. This round brickliner was not as deep as originally thought (or hoped for); in the end it measured about 18 to 20 feet deep. The folks who used the privy from the 1880s to the early 1900s were evidently drinkers, most likely of the female persuasion, who attempted to cover the smell of alcohol with perfumes and to cure their addiction or suffering with patent medicines. It was also our hypothesis that the privy had been cleaned-out or dipped almost to the bottom some time in the late 1870s, and then reused without being dipped until just after the turn of the century. There were tell-tale signs of a prior dipping in the form of pieces of 1860s and 1870s artifacts that had stuck to the walls or remained near the bottom of the privy including a pontiled medicine, a cobalt squat soda from Richmond, two or three yellow-green crude Udolpho Wolfe’s, and half a seaweed pattern, yellow-ware bowl. A few whole 1870s artifacts did survive, including a corn-flower blue “Japanese Blacking” bottle, and some unusual finds like a hard-rubber douche, a women’s derringier and a lady’s fancy hairpin. Maybe next time we will dig a deep brick liner that has not been dipped.

Lastly, in case you were wondering, with the first pick I took the Warner’s Safe Kidney and Liver Cure and left it to the Chris and Phil to battle it out over the neat cure –

seems stupid to many no doubt, but, now that the Warner's curse is broken, perhaps in the next deep brickliner we will find another cool bottle like a Warner's Log Cabin Hops and Buchu Remedy. Until then . . . 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.



The Emerald Crowleytown

by Jim Sears



I included the above photo in the September Pontil along with the note that I planned to make a "ridiculous" bid on the green Mason jar in the middle. Now that the Ebay auctions are over, I am rather shocked to find myself the poor but proud owner of the most expensive jar in the line-up. Before the nice men in white coats show up to take me away, I would like say a little more about this jar and what possessed me to buy it.

Let me start by admitting that this jar is a complete misfit. John L. Mason was a tin smith, and (as shown in the patent drawing at right) he apparently tried to create a jar shaped like a tin can. Its sharp corner and flat base are a particularly fragile design. The deep color is likely accidental and would have made the contents appear spoiled (if, indeed, they really weren't spoiled). The brass lid was not only expensive to produce but also had the potential to ruin the taste of anything stored in it. In short, this jar looks like a complete failure.

*J.L. Mason,
Glass Jar
No. 22,186.
Patented Nov. 30, 1868.*



*Inventor:
J.L. Mason*

*Witness:
John L. Mason*

Plenty of early ideas for canning jars did fail. Surviving examples of these odd jars are prized by collectors, but their designs typically have little historical significance. The Dalbey jar, which was patented during the same month as the Mason jar, is a good example. The specimen pictured here came from the same collection as the jars previously pictured, and it brought \$8600 on Ebay.



Unlike most other early canning jars, the Mason jar succeeded despite its problems. In fact, it evolved into the most successful canning jar on the market. Although the number of Mason jars produced eventually reached into the billions, the earliest style of Mason jar is quite scarce today. The story of these earliest jars is related in the 1971 book *The Glass Gaffers of New Jersey*.

“If you were to picnic on the edge of a creek at Crowley’s Landing, which fronts the Mullica River in Wharton State Forest and is about a mile east of Batsto on Route 542, you would be at the site where the first Mason fruit jar was blown. The blower of the experimental jar at Crowleytown’s Atlantic Glass Works was Clayton Parker, an expert glass man from Bridgeton.”

“One of Mason’s early jars was found nearly intact at Crowleytown by J.E. Pfeiffer of Pittman. Like many others, this jar is embossed MASON’S / PATENT / NOV. 30TH / 1858, but unlike others has two dots under the “TH.” Toulouse reports this jar also has sharp shoulders and markedly square angles at the base, very much like Mason’s patent drawings.”

“A one-of-a-kind emerald-green quart jar matching the square shoulders and sharp bottom angle of the above jar, has a unique brass cap, unlined, with the early date of June 2, 1857, below the word MASON’S. In the center of the oval of lettering is the numeral 2. This rarity, owned by a leading New Jersey collector, George G. McConnell, has the glass itself embossed on the side with MASON’S / PATENT / NOV. 30TH / 1858.”





Many early jars have been discovered in the 30 years since *The Glass Gaffers of New Jersey* was published. Now at least four Crowleytown-style jars are known in shades of green or teal, and perhaps a dozen brass lids have been reported. Still, the color and condition of George McConnell's prized jar remain exceptional. George, himself, continued collecting for many years. I remember standing with Roland Longerbeam and admiring Mr. McConnell's display at a Baltimore show around 1990. I recall that Roland was most impressed by a cobalt blue jar (quite possibly the one pictured at the start of this article), but my favorite was the emerald-green Crowleytown.

I will stop and visit the second half of the collection, which will be sold on Ebay by Greg Spurgeon. I want to see the many odd jars once more before they are dispersed, and I will remain thankful for the one great jar that I now own.

By the time I actually met George McConnell, he was in his 80's. I don't think he ever knew my name. He just called me "son" and offered me (and all other jar collectors) friendly advice and pieces of candy. I always appreciated the information he shared even when it wasn't what I wanted to hear. He usually told me that the items I was hunting were very rare, and he was still hunting for some of them himself.



Before he died, Mr. McConnell sold his jar collection to Al Vignon. Al built a great collection and created some extremely impressive displays. The one shown above was photographed by Roland Longerbeam at the January 2000 show in Muncie, Indiana. The emerald Crowleytown is visible in the back row.

The jar above from Al Vignon's collection recently sold to Darrell Plank for \$17,500. Those below remain to be sold in the second half of the auction.

I was extremely surprised when Al Vignon decided to sell his collection through Ebay. He had many, many jars that I would like to own. However, I had to prioritize, and, in the first half of the collection, I emerged as high bidder in exactly one auction. As I return to my home town and family this Thanksgiving,

