

# The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Serving the National Capital



*June–July 2002*

## June 30<sup>th</sup> Show

Our show is almost here! Dealer set-up begins at 7:30 AM, and we open to the public at 10 AM. Club members will be setting up the tables Saturday night. This newsletter is the only show reminder we are sending to those dealers who are also club members, so don't hesitate to contact Jim Sears ([searsjim@usa.net](mailto:searsjim@usa.net) 703/243-2409) with any questions. Requests for dealer or display tables are still welcome. Lee Shipman notes that she would enjoy seeing a display of bottle digging tools (hint, hint).



Peter Rydquist – on the left at the 2001 show above – will discuss bottle makers' marks at the June meeting.

## June 25<sup>th</sup> Meeting

**Peter Rydquist** will speak about makers marks' associated with various glass houses. Peter's talk will focus on pre-Prohibition beverage bottles.

**Show & Tell:** Please bring in bottles with unusual makers' marks. If you have any beverage bottles with unknown initials or symbols on the bases, this would be a good time to bring them in for identification.

**Meeting Location:** We will meet in our usual location – the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda, Maryland. Please enter through the main door on the lower level. The front section that we used for our May meeting should be used by an AA group this time.

**Club Business:** Do you want to have a club picnic this year? We will discuss picnic ideas at the June meeting. Please think about whether and when you would like to have a picnic.

## July 30<sup>th</sup> Meeting

**We will meet in July.** There will not be a July newsletter because Jim Sears will be away on vacation. However, we will send out an email reminder before the meeting to announce the topic. Please send a message to [searsjim@usa.net](mailto:searsjim@usa.net) if you want to be added to the club email list.

**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:** Matt Knapp

**Vice President:** Needed

**Secretary:** Jim Sears

**Treasurer:** Ken Anderson

**Pontil:** Jim Sears (email: [searsjim@usa.net](mailto:searsjim@usa.net), PH: 703/243-2409) & Andy Goldfrank (email: [amg\\_sticky@yahoo.com](mailto:amg_sticky@yahoo.com), PH: 202/588-0643)

**Web Site:** <http://members.aol.com/potomacbt/bottle2.htm>

**Maintained by Peter Rydquist:** [pehruag@aol.com](mailto:pehruag@aol.com)

## Road Trip: Philadelphia Digging by Andy Goldfrank

This past winter my digging buddy Marty Homola from Denver, Colorado told me that he, his son Jason and two other guys were coming to Virginia for the North-South Hunt in mid-April. This is an annual Civil War metal detecting event held on allegedly untapped Union and Confederate camp sites and skirmish lines. After the North-South Hunt they were hoping to meet up with me and my digging partner Scott Jordan from New York for some hardcore privy digging. Scott, Marty and I exchanged a number of telephone calls and developed a plan of action to achieve our goals of ensuring these guys dug some older pits and sending them home with some pontiled or Civil War era bottles. We eventually decided that the odds of finding a good honey hole in Washington or Baltimore were slim, and that traveling to New York City without a permission dig already obtained would be daunting. Therefore, we elected to meet in the middle, with Scott coming down from New York and us traveling up from Washington, in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia was not a random selection. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, I lived in the City of Brotherly Love, as it is called, and roamed throughout with my metal detector in search of old coins and relics. During that period of time, I focused almost exclusively on metal detecting and neglected my bottle digging interests. This was despite the fact that over the years I had heard tales about the deep and rich brick-lined privies of Philadelphia. In fact, my first digging teacher or guru, Mike Cerbone, often regaled me with tales of digging in "Philly's monster brick privies" and had shelves of bottles to back up his stories. A return trip was certainly in order. Over the next month, I reserved motel for six diggers, organized time off from work, found a way to get Scott to Philadelphia without too much hassle, and exchanged emails with some area diggers (who kindly provided some significant clues).

Come April 14<sup>th</sup>, it seemed as though the Denver boys were never going to arrive but finally they did. Stepping into my house after a long drive from Fredericksburg, Virginia, they unloaded equipment and bags that were not needed, told me about the dismal results of the North-South Hunt, examined some of my latest finds, and talked about wanting to dig some bottles.

We then hopped into vehicles for 2 ½ hour trek to Philadelphia; it was early evening when we checked into our motel rooms. Immediately after unloading and making plans for dinner, Marty and me along with Mike Sandion and Doug Sagrillo jumped back into one car to scout Philadelphia for some likely digging spots. We spent the better part of Sunday night touring the streets so that we could be ready to land some permission digs early on Monday morning. Later that evening we picked up Scott when he arrived in town and then went to grab a late dinner. It was well past midnight when we fell asleep dreaming of a pit loaded with Philadelphia sodas.

First thing Monday morning, we split up with three of us working on getting permissions on Chadwick Alley and the other three taking our chances near Fitzwater and Christian near 10<sup>th</sup> Street. The houses near Chadwick Alley definitely looked pontiled-age and there were signs that many good holes in that area had been dug by diggers. As it turned out, Scott, Doug and Mike hit a dud on Chadwick Alley that was over 18 feet deep and totally dipped; it was filled with ash and contained only a few hutches. This privy started out as a brick box at the top in the corner of the yard which was positioned halfway over a round brickliner. This placement was intentional as it was a shared privy with the neighboring yard having a matching box over the outhouse. In the end, the hutches were interesting as they had local addresses and one was even multi-sided but we were in search of pre-1880 bottles.

At the same time, Marty, Jason and I obtained permission for a lot that backed onto an alley at





Fitzwater and 10th Streets behind a slant roof that appeared to date from the late 1850s. The woman who owned the house was initially skeptical about our purpose but eventually became our ally -- she told her neighbors off when they were getting antsy thinking their yards were going to collapse into the hole. The top of the pit contained 1890s garbage which quickly changed into a heavy, yellow-clay cap with intermittent



layers of garbage from the 1890s. This cap lasted almost 10 feet, when we broke into wet and black nightsoil layer. Right below this cap there were some more hutches including a few with Italian names which was apt considering our proximity to the historic South Street/Little Italy area. One hutch was embossed with an American flag below the proprietor's name -- "Esposito." Pulling up a couple more buckets, followed by Marty tunneling to see what he could uncover, it appeared the hole was getting much older when he pulled out from 4 feet below our level an 1870s aqua soda. This was a good sign but the

only problem was that we were out of light and our tripod was not rigged. We decided to cover the hole for the evening and come back in the morning refreshed and better equipped.



Upon returning with the whole crew, we setup the tripod, chain and bucket and proceeded to extract the black gold. The first few bottle that came out were 1880s blob beers that were embossed with the crisp and large image of a Revolutionary War soldier under the heading Continental Brewing. Thereafter, there was a bottle in every bucket and with each foot down we went the hole got progressively older. Over the next four hours we dug a couple hundred bottles of which a large number were keepers including large numbers of squats, ponys and short blobs. Metal detecting the nightsoil produced a slew of artifacts such as military buttons, costume jewelry, furniture hardware and some Seated Dimes and Indian Head pennies. The only problem is that we never really broke into the 1860s or older other than some pontiled sided utilities on the bottom and the odd holdover bottle. To say we were disappointed is not accurate because there was lots of variety with sided beers, colored squats, patent medicines, pictorial blobs, drug stores and such. Heck, from my perspective, there was nothing wrong with digging fifteen feet of nothing but bottles that went from the 1880s to the 1860s -- I will dig those sort of privies anytime. Imagine if there were more patent medicines or bitters or ... you get my drift!

All told we found about 45-50 smooth based squats, ponys & short blobs with only a few from the 1860s and only two that were green. The majority were aqua cylinder sodas/beers -- there were some larger ones that



did say White Beer that were unusual from our perspective but of course we are ignorant about Philly bottles. Out of all the sodas the ones we thought were the neatest were three aqua paneled Weiss Beers (two McKinneys and a Connor & Moroney) and the six Continental Brewing blobs with the image of the soldier sporting a tri-corner hat. The other keepers were a couple of earlier amber Montgomery's Hair

Restorers, half a dozen 1870s local clear pharmaceuticals, a couple dozen hutchs some with interesting details like flags or embossed in cursive writing, and 25 or so 1860s-70s crude shades of amber flasks with applied lips.

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](mailto:amg_sticky@yahoo.com). Good luck searching, Andy.



## Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

**June 30** (10 AM to 3PM) **Bethesda, Maryland:** Potomac Bottle Collectors' Annual Show & Sale at the Washington Waldorf School, 4800 Langamore Rd. (off Massachusetts Ave. inside the Washington Beltway), Bethesda, Maryland. Info: **Jim Sears**, PH: (703) 243-2409, email: [searsjim@usa.net](mailto:searsjim@usa.net)

**July 19-21** (5 PM Thursday to whenever) **Adamstown, Pennsylvania:** Shupp's Grove Bottle Festival (formerly York Bottle Festival) at Shupp's Grove. Info: **Steve Guion**, PH: (717) 560-9480, email: [affinityinsurance@dejazzd.com](mailto:affinityinsurance@dejazzd.com) or **Jere Hambleton**, PH: (717) 393-5175, email: [jshdetector@wbvt.net](mailto:jshdetector@wbvt.net)

**September 15** (9 AM to 3PM, early entry 7 AM) **Winchester, Virginia:** The Apple Valley Bottle Collectors Club 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Show and Sale at the War Memorial Building, East Cork Street and Purcell Avenue. Info: **Frank Kowalski**, 3015 Northwestern Pike, Winchester, VA 22603, PH: (540) 877-1093.

**September 22** (9 AM to 3 PM) **Lewes, Delaware:** Delmarva Antique Bottle Club 10th Annual Show & Sale at the Cape Henlopen High School. Info: **Ferd Meyer**, PH: (302) 945-7072, email: [jfmeyer4@cs.com](mailto:jfmeyer4@cs.com) or **Alan Wesche**, PH: (410) 352-5975, email: [wishman@beachin.net](mailto:wishman@beachin.net)

**October 5** (9 AM to 3 PM, early buyers 7:30 AM) **Richmond, Virginia:** The Richmond Area Bottle Collectors Assoc. 31st Annual Show & Sale at the Showplace Annex, 3002 Mechanicsville Turnpike. Info: **Judy Foles**, 12275 Cedar Lane, Ashland, VA. 23005. PH: (804) 798-7502, email: [judyfoles@mail.com](mailto:judyfoles@mail.com)