

# The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Serving the National Capital



April 2003

In this issue:

**A Tale of Two Digs** by Andy Goldfrank

**Dig 1: Baltimore County Line**.....page 2

**Dig 2: The Monster Pit**.....page 3

**Ebay Scammers Target Bottle Collectors**....page 5

**Upcoming Area Bottle Shows** .....page 6



## Meeting April 29th

**Program:** Al Steidel will speak on salt-glazed stoneware. Please bring in your stoneware for show and tell. Note: Al is shown in the photo above with his brother Billy at last month's Baltimore show.

**Refreshments:** Andy Goldfrank will bring refreshments if his wife lets him attend the meeting.



Club Member Lee Shipman displayed some of her favorite cobalt glass at the Baltimore's April bottle club meeting.

**Meetings:** 8:00 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:** Henry Fuchs

**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/potomacbt/bottle2.htm>

**Maintained by:** Peter Rydquist      pehraug@aol.com

## A Tale of Two Digs by Andy Goldfrank

### Dig 1: Baltimore County Line



Peter Rydquist (shown above), Phil Edmonds and I obtained permission to dig behind a detached brick rowhouse just across the Baltimore County line. Although the building dated back to the early 19th century, we were only able to find half a dozen outhouse pits dating from the early 1890s to the 1920s. Further research indicated that a larger parcel was divided into a number of smaller lots in 1891; in turn, all of the pits we dug were confined to within these new property lines. We returned a number of times, after I received permission from the neighbors, to probe the adjacent properties in the hopes of finding a pre-1891 pit; however, we were unable to find any older privies. (We did manage to find a turn of the century ash dump that yielded some nice blown poisons and a Baltimore hair restorer but it also was not the age that we desired). It appears that the construction of two houses in the mid-1890s and in the 1940s along with the disturbance from leveling of the land for a pool stymied our efforts.



The pits we dug were loaded with bottles but most of them were unembossed or uninteresting (e.g., crown-top Baltimore beers, warranted flasks, Ritter catsups, Bromo-Seltzers, O.K. Davis & Rumford's baking sodas, etc.). Among the post-1900 bottles were a couple of local pharmacy bottles and a neat slug-plate, crown-top soda that says "Manufacturer of Ice Cream and Soda" from Ellicott City, Maryland. In the oldest pit dating from the early 1890s, we found three unlisted cobalt master inks embossed "RANDALL'S INK / NEW YORK, U.S.A." -- just enough for each digger to get one.

## Dig 2: The Monster Pit

Last fall, Phil Edmonds and I went on digging trip to Philadelphia over a long weekend. The first day we were pounding holes in a lot on Second Street off of Market Street when we were approached by a guy named Sheldon and his girlfriend June. Although proficient metal detectorists primarily interested in looking for Revolutionary War relics and early colonial and American coinage in South Jersey, they had never dug in an outhouse in the Philly city limits and were fascinated with our efforts. We talked for a while and offered to show them the next day how we find and dig these deep brickliners. Despite pouring rain, Sheldon and June showed up for what turned out to be an uneventful dig in which we dug a dipped 18-foot brickliner that had lots of bottles but not the older ones that Phil and I had trekked 2 hours from Washington to find. At the end of the day, we exchanged phone numbers and I told him not to hesitate to call me if he needed help on any pits that he uncovered but, frankly, after that discouraging dig it was doubtful that Sheldon would ever call.

Over the next few months, Joan and I bought a house and focused our energies on making it livable. After New Year's I kept lamenting to Joan about my desperate need to do some digging after spending countless hours wiring, plastering, painting, and laying in molding -- my bottle digging addiction was calling like crazy after a 4-month layoff from privy exploration. She gave me the go-ahead but by that time the ground was frozen a foot thick and there were no construction sites I knew of in Baltimore to explore. I was resigned to my fate. Less than a week later, while I was walking home, my cell phone rang and the phone's screen said: "Caller ID unavailable." I was tempted to not answer the phone but thought that perhaps Joan was changing our evening plans so I answered. Initially I was clueless as to who was on the other end of the line but then I recognized the Philly/ South Jersey accent. It was Sheldon and he was desperate; all week he had been digging a privy at a construction site in the Northern Liberties part of Philly. He wanted to know if I would be willing to help him finish the pit because his digging buddies were giving up -- the pit was simply too big. I could not believe what I was hearing for two reasons: (1) how could anyone start a hole and not finish and (2) there was no way the pit was as wide as and deep as he was describing. After canceling my plans to watch football the next day, I called Sheldon back and told him to expect me at the site early the next morning.

The weather forecast called for clear skies with a chance of flurries and temperatures in the high teens.



Sheldon at the top of a 20 foot ladder

Nevertheless, I showed up (after driving the 2 hours from my house) at 8:30 a.m. the Northern Liberties section of town to find a hole that was already 20 feet deep and at least 8 feet across. It is without a doubt the biggest privy I ever stumbled across; both words and the picture in this article fail to capture the massive scale of this outhouse. Sheldon sent me into the hole from the time I got there and that is where I stayed the rest of the day until we finished up at 26-27 feet. The last 18 inches could not be dug effectively despite our bucketing efforts because we were below the water line. From the information that Sheldon told me, the pit seemed to have been filled in just before the turn of the century. It was partly dipped and filled with coal ash and cinders for about 18 feet. Then the layers of use showed up and that was about 1880 or earlier. Then there was another layer of white ash after which the hole quickly got earlier from the 1870s to the 1840s. The top of the use layer below the white ash contained two Pine Tree Cordials (large and small size), a couple dozen smooth based aqua sodas, and about 100 other odd bluing, utility and medicine bottles. Then we hit mixed pontiled and smooth based colored sodas, some odd pontiled utilities and medicines, and loads of pottery. There were at least four intact tobacco and redware pieces including a pouring cup, a pitcher, a



Chamber pots galore: Andy, Sheldon, and John show off yellow-ware and redware pots

couple of chamber pots; there were also some good restorable redware spittoons, slipglazed plates and bowls, and banded porcelain. The bad news is that all told there were over a 100 colored sodas that were damaged simply from hitting the back wall of the privy. I repeatedly found the bases and smashed/chipped neck resting against the wall of the pit. For every whole soda there were at least 10 broken ones. Most of the intact iron-pontiled sodas are listed on Tod von Mechow's Philadelphia Sodas & Beers web site (e.g., Dyottville Glass Works, Flanagens, Diehls, McFarlands & Kanes) but we also found some unlisted iron pontiled sodas including a Francis X. Obert and a Caspar Heileman. There were some embossed pontiled medicines such as Dr. Jayne's and even an Anodyne from Bridgeton, New Jersey. As for dating the privy, there were some holdover bottles such as colognes, vials and utilities that appeared to date even earlier than 1840 but the bulk of material evidently was after that date even at the bottom of the hole.

Sheldon kept all of the good bottles and the intact pottery since he had put so many days into the pit; however, he graciously gave me a couple of colored sodas and some pottery I could restore. I also took home a fair number of broken sodas that were from the early 1840s for

collages and the bulk of the junkers for giveaways. All told, even though my take of quality bottles was insignificant in comparison to what Sheldon got, I was delighted to just have the opportunity to dig in such this massive pit. A few weeks later, my map research indicated that the site was where a factory stood as early as the late 1850s, which could possible explain the size of the outhouse. And yes ... there will be more Philadelphia digging stories to come.



The Monster Pit Haul with June, Sheldon, and John

## Ebay Scammers Target Bottle Collectors

Fraud attempts are nothing new to Ebay. Most of us have heard of a few ridiculous Ebay hoaxes, and I even found some of them quite amusing. For anyone not familiar with such stories, I recommend a *Maine Antique Digest* story that is available at [www.maineantiquesdigest.com/buzz/buzz168.htm](http://www.maineantiquesdigest.com/buzz/buzz168.htm). This article by David Hewett tells of such items as a unique crystal grandfather clock at the Waterford factory. The seller even described it as being at the factory, despite the fact that this factory is in Ireland while he was trying to sell it in Indonesia.

I no longer find Ebay scams amusing. The would-be thieves are not only becoming more sophisticated; they have also begun targeting bottle collectors. On April 11, 2003, Ebay seller [brianhudson45@aol.com](mailto:brianhudson45@aol.com) offered three rare historical flasks with attractive buy-it-now prices of \$2500 to \$3600. The seller had a good feedback record, and the listings included excellent photos with appropriate descriptions. Within hours, David Beadle, Matt Warne, and Tom Whipple had agreed to buy the flasks. David reports that they became suspicious when the seller demanded that they immediately send cash Western Union style to Dublin, Ireland. The bidders emailed



This flask was item #21 in Heckler Auction 59, where it had a presale estimate of \$3000 to \$6000. [Brianhudson@aol.com](mailto:Brianhudson@aol.com) used this same photo to offer it on Ebay for \$2500.

one another to share their concerns and quickly figured out that the photos and descriptions were straight out of Norman Heckler's auction #59. In fact the seller had not even posted his own photos but linked directly to the Heckler web site. Fortunately, the bidders were astute enough that none of them sent money to Ireland.

Four days later legitimate bottle dealers foiled a similar scam. Seller [jamescoba@aol.com](mailto:jamescoba@aol.com) appeared with an excellent feedback rating, offering great jars and bottles at attractive prices. The trouble was that his items were linked to photos on other people's web sites. Greg Spurgeon, who owned several of the offered jars, quickly modified his photos to include a warning message. Another owner, Jeff Noordsy, not only followed suit but also sent a warning email message to all the collectors he knew. Within a few hours, [jamescoba@aol.com](mailto:jamescoba@aol.com) was listed on Ebay as "Not a Registered User."

Responsible dealers and cautious collectors can take much of the credit for stopping the recent scams, but the thieves were also defeated by their own laziness. If they had posted their own photos and modified the descriptions slightly, several collectors might have lost substantial amounts of money. We cannot assume that all crooks will be as lazy and foolish as the current batch. Collectors must be very careful in evaluating Ebay offers that appear too good to be true. I offer several tips below, and I would appreciate additional advice from other Ebay users.

**Beware of sunglasses.** Scammers gain access to Ebay accounts by sending email messages that purport to be from Ebay. The messages contain links to web sites where unsuspecting users enter their Ebay IDs and passwords for bogus Ebay contests or account updates. Once crooks have the ID and password, they can change the ID and email address. This process leaves thieves running accounts with good feedback. The most obvious clue is the sunglasses icon that Ebay displays next to any user name that has been changed within the past 30 days.

Both [brianhudson45@aol.com](mailto:brianhudson45@aol.com) and [jamescoba@aol.com](mailto:jamescoba@aol.com) had sunglasses next to their user names.

**Check for selling feedback.** The users naive enough to allow their passwords to be stolen are usually not experienced sellers. Both [brianhudson45@aol.com](mailto:brianhudson45@aol.com) and [jamescoba@aol.com](mailto:jamescoba@aol.com) each had at least 83 positive feedback as buyers, but they did not have previous feedback as sellers.

**Beware of short auctions.** Most legitimate sellers want to give buyers at least a week to find and bid on expensive items. Crooks are more concerned with completing transactions quickly before they are

discovered. The recent scams described here were limited to three days.

**Beware of attractive buy-it-now prices.** Legitimate dealers use buy-it-now when they know exactly how much they want for an item or to give well-heeled collectors the chance to avoid bidding wars by paying a premium.



The flasks [brianhudson45@aol.com](mailto:brianhudson45@aol.com) listed combined buy-it-now with fire-sale prices, which would be a lousy business tactic for a real seller.

**Check links on photos.** If Ebay pictures look familiar, check where they are hosted by right clicking on a photo and choosing the "properties" option. You may find that the picture is on a web site of an auction house or dealer other than the supposed seller.

**Never send payment out of the country for domestic items.** [Brianhudson45@aol.com](mailto:brianhudson45@aol.com) claimed to be in Louisiana when he listed the flasks, but he wanted payment sent to Ireland.

**Never send cash out of the country period.** Most legitimate Ebay sellers who ship expensive items from abroad recognize that buyers will not be comfortable wiring money abroad or sending international money orders. They typically accept credit card payments through a service such as PayPal. In the extremely rare cases where credit cards cannot be used with large foreign purchases, bidders should consider bearing the extra cost of an escrow service.

Greg Spurgeon modified his photo at right to include the warning message about bogus seller [jamescoba@aol.com](mailto:jamescoba@aol.com). Greg still has the jar available for sale at \$4000.

The Following Image Has Been STOLEN , BY ME, From A Private Website as well as the Entire Description of this Auction. I, the seller " jamescoba@aol.com" do not own these items and am not authorized to sell them. Bid at your own risk!!!



## Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

### May 18 (9 AM to 3 PM) Washington, Pennsylvania:

Washington County Antique Bottle & Insulator Club's 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Show & Sale at the Alpine Star Lodge, 735 Jefferson Ave. (I-70 exit 17), Washington, Pennsylvania. Info: **Russ Crupe**, 52 Cherry Rd., Avella, PA 15312, PH: (724) 345-3653, E-mail: [heidirus@mlynk.com](mailto:heidirus@mlynk.com)

### June 6 & 7 (Fri.: 3 PM to 9 PM, Sat.: 9 AM to 3PM) Lumberton, North Carolina:

Robeson Antique Bottle Club Annual Show & Sale at the Expo and Farmer's Market, 1027 US HWY 74 East, Exit 14 of I-95. Info: **Richard Stephens**, 1830 Riverside Blvd., Lumberton, NC 28358, PH: (910) 738-6075, E-mail: [rhstep@nc.rr.com](mailto:rhstep@nc.rr.com) or **Pat Valenti & Carla Baxley**, PH: (910) 738-3074, E-mail: [cbaxley@nc.rr.com](mailto:cbaxley@nc.rr.com)

**August 10 (9 AM to 3PM) Bethesda, Maryland:** Potomac Bottle Collector's 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, E-mail: [searsjim@usa.net](mailto:searsjim@usa.net)