

# The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Serving the National Capital



## December 2003

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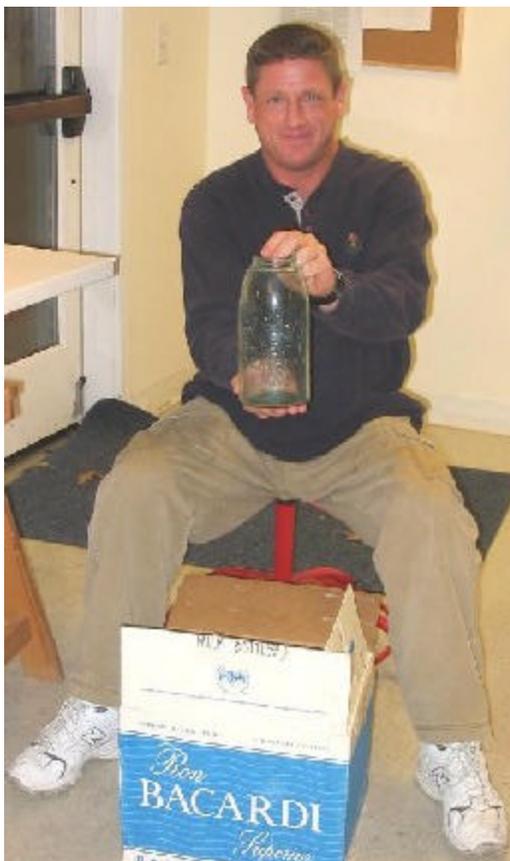
### December Meeting Cancelled

Since so many of our members will be travelling for the holidays, the December meeting is cancelled. Our January meeting will feature our contest for best items collected during 2003.

### November Meeting

Thank you to **Matt Knapp** for donating an unusual glass mouse trap for our free raffle. The trap is shown with its lucky new owner at right.

**Randy Hoffman** (below) visited our club during the November meeting and showed some of his fruit jars. Randy was on his way south for the winter, but he hopes to see us again at the Baltimore Antique Bottle Show in March.



The rusty metal item shown below at right is a recent digging find that was brought to the November meeting for identification. We agreed that it was probably part of an old masher or juicer. Matt Knapp found the Ebay photo below showing a complete example.



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 pehraub@aol.com

## Ben Holladay, His D.C. Big Cats and His Whiskey

(Special to The Potomac Pontil)

By Jack Sullivan

The two huge bronze lions guarding the entrance to Washington's Corcoran Gallery on 17th Street near the White House – District of Columbia landmarks – have an intriguing link to a range of common ceramic whiskey jugs. The link is a larger-than-life character from the pages of the Old West named Ben Holladay, whose claim to fame was as a stagecoach king and sponsor of the Pony Express. Holladay also is credited with founding the Overland Trail.

Holladay was born in 1824 in the hills of Kentucky in – what else? – a log cabin. Early on he was exposed to the ways of managing a wagon train, accompanying his father in leading settlers westward through the Cumberland Gap. Soon the young hostler relocated to Weston, Missouri, already a “jumping off point” for thousands of pioneer settlers. It was there by dint of an acute and unscrupulous business sense he created a transportation empire that eventually included the outfitting of wagon trains, a stagecoach monopoly, steamship lines and eventually the Oregon Central Railroad. By 1864 Ben Holladay was accounted the largest individual employer in the entire United States.



Ben Holladay

In time, Holladay, a large man with a spreading black beard, owned three mansions, one in New York City, a two-hundred room palace near White Plains, N. Y., and a long-disappeared stately residence at 1311 K Street, N.W., in downtown Washington. Full of crystal chandeliers, fancy carpets and leather-bound (but apparently seldom read) books, the D.C. mansion was used mainly as a place for Holladay to entertain Members of Congress in an effort to win their agreement to increase subsidies for carrying the mail. At one point his company was being paid \$1 million annually by the U.S. Post Office.

In the 1860s Holladay bought two large bronze lions to grace the spacious entrance to his K Street mansion. They are not originals but excellent copies of lions cast by the famous Italian sculptor Antonio Canova for the tomb of Pope Clement XIII in Rome. While one lion is depicted sleeping, the other is awake and on guard against anyone who might wish to trouble the Pope's resting place. It was common in those days for the American super-rich to covet such statues. They suggested a heritage of culture and classical interest that was otherwise lacking in free-booting millionaires like Ben Holladay.



Among Holladay's many ventures was whiskey-making. During their explorations of the American West in the early 1800s, Lewis and Clark had discovered natural limestone springs in the rolling hills of northwest Missouri near Holladay's adopted home town of Weston. By 1830 these springs were supplying water to wagon trains preparing for the long and frequently arid trip west across prairie and mountain. Holladay understood that the same tasty limestone-based water would be an ideal ingredient to make very good whiskey. A man with a hearty appetite for both food and drink, he established the distillery business in 1849 and put his brother David in charge. Later, David's daughter married a man named Barton and the firm became Barton and Holladay.

Everything seemed to be going right for this self-made man until the coming of the railroads followed by the Black Friday stock exchange panic of 1873. Ben Holladay was ruined. He lost his businesses to creditors and was forced to sell off many of his holdings. But perhaps because of strong attachments, he held on to his D.C. mansion with its lions and to the Weston distillery. During the ensuing years Holladay struggled hard to make a financial recovery but died in Portland, Oregon, in 1887 without having succeeded in regaining his lost wealth.

One year later after his death the K Street mansion and the lions were sold at auction. For \$1,900 – a considerable sum in those days – the Corcoran Gallery bought the resting felines, each of which has its own personality. The lions are larger than life with outsized paws and tails nearly seven feet long. At first they resided on Pennsylvania Avenue across from the White House, outside the museum's first location, which now is the site of the Renwick Museum. In 1897 they were moved down 17th Street to the present Corcoran site.

The distillery stayed in the Holladay family. Despite an 1880 explosion during the processing of applejack that killed three workers and injured six others severely, the business flourished under the direction of Holladay's heirs. In 1895, the family sold out. Subsequent owners also prospered. During Prohibition the Weston distilling facility was closed but the company continued the farm operations that had been started as a way to use spent mash for animal fodder.

After Repeal, the distillery was bought by Isadore Singer and his brothers. They began making Old Holladay Bourbon at the site in Weston – something that would have delighted Ben. About 1939 the Singers bought the name "McCormick" from a nearby distillery founded years before by

E.R. McCormick. By legend Mrs. McCormick had "gotten religion" during Prohibition and would not let her husband reopen when whiskey became legal again.



The Distillery

Under the McCormick Distillery name, the Singers later sold out to Cloud L. Cray who used the facilities to make industrial alcohol during World II. After the war Cray's sons began a small bourbon-making operation that sold its product regionally. The Cray boys later joined Jim Beam and others in the craze for figural ceramic bottles, producing decanters of everyone from Abe Lincoln and Wyatt Earp to Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley. Among them, appropriately, was a 1978 ceramic commemorating the Pony Express.

After a change of management in 1980, the McCormick Distilling Co. began marketing its products nationwide, selling blended whiskey, gin, vodka and grain alcohol. The old plant has been placed on the National Register of Historical Sites and – with the demise of the Michter operation in Pennsylvania – it is now, at 154 years, the oldest active distillery in the U.S. Following another change in ownership in 1993, the company ceased giving tours of the facility and moved its country store operation – tee shirts, hats, mugs, etc. – into an 1886 building in downtown Weston, population 1,528. McCormick remains a leading tourist attraction in the town and a place where its colorful founder is well remembered. In fact, the company still issues a "B.J. Holladay Kentucky" brand whiskey.

McCormick has continued to market its products nationally in stoneware containers, the only American whiskey-maker to do so on a regular basis. Their jugs, large and small, have become staple items on Internet auctions. Two of them are pictured on the next page. While these stoneware jugs all are post-Prohibition and cannot be considered "old," we can look at them, as well as at those two big cats outside the Corcoran Gallery, and think of the rich history that lies behind them.

Material for this article was obtained from a wide range of sources including Internet web sites for Weston, Missouri, and the *Washington Post*. Information on McCormick in recent times is from William L. Downard, *Dictionary of the History of the American Brewing and Distilling Industries*.



Above are two post-Prohibition McCormick Whiskey jugs. The Youatt's Gargling Oil at right is not related to the preceding article but was displayed by Matt Knapp at our November meeting.

### Glen Echo Dump digging

by Richard Cook

In 1967 my friend Larry and I took a trip to visit his family in western Kansas. All his relatives, it turned out, were bottle collectors and veteran dump diggers. We caught the bug and determined to locate some local dumps when we returned to Maryland.



Glen Echo Amusement Park

The Glen Echo Amusement Park was still in operation; so digging on the park property was difficult. Anyway the logical location for the park's main dumping would have been on the side of the steep hills leading down to the canal. These hills had been re-graded in 1959 when the Clara Barton Parkway (the George Washington Parkway at that time) was built so they were likely long gone. There was another possibility, there were several quarries near the present intersection of MacArthur Boulevard

and the Parkway near the town of Glen Echo, these were filled in years ago to keep down the mosquito population, dumping would have been likely there as well. We assumed that the main dump for the park was long gone or deeply buried, so we decided to try and locate the town's dump for Glen Echo.

We acquired old maps and began to look for logical locations. At the turn of the century, Glen Echo had a reservoir along Goldsboro Road and we decided that a location downstream from the reservoir would be likely. We found several separate dumping areas along Goldsboro in the summer of 1968. The first is the dump referred to by Henry Fuchs in the May, 2003 edition of the *Potomac Pontil*.

We dug this dump for nearly six months, going 6" at a time so we could have some idea of aging vs. depth. We found a lot of bottles! The dump appeared to have been in use from around 1890 until the early 1920's. The top foot primarily contained the 1900-1920 material with lots of screw-top jars and beer bottles. The 12"-18" layer was primarily 1890-1900 with a lot of nice finds.

In the 1890-1900 layer we found: Mellins Baby food jars, two Warner's Safe Cure bottles, several small glass toys (prizes from the amusement park?), a Dr. Kilmers Swamp Root bottle, a number of McCormick extract bottles and bottles from several local department stores including Woodward and Lothrop. Also found were assorted medicine bottles, cobalt colored poison bottles, White House Vinegar bottles and many others.

We never completed digging this main dump, which is around 30' by 40' in area. We were chased off after being forced to replace the excavated dirt, so anyone digging this dump in future is unlikely to find much intact in the top 12"-18".

We found three more dumps along the creek on the other side of Goldsboro Road. One of these extends under Goldsboro road and as such it is inaccessible at present. Two of them have since been washed away as the creek has eroded the slope leading to the Tulip Hill community. One of these appeared to have been a still. We found the corroded copper tubing, twisted and crushed in the dirt along with the smashed main kettle from the still. Around the wreckage of the still were dozens of shattered crockery jugs about 5-6" tall. Searching the surrounding area turned up 4 unbroken jugs. There are other small "pocket dumps" all along the first 1/4 mile of Goldsboro starting from MacArthur Boulevard, but they are sporadic in content.

We found two small dumps within the town of Glen Echo on private property. Larry and I negotiated these digs and refilled when we were done, We were able to complete these excavations down to untouched earth. They were both household dumps and thus had many food containers, along with a nice deep green Palmer's Perfume bottle with stopper, and a 24K gold cufflink.

The Amusement Park closed at the end of the 1968 season, making a search of the park easier. We found several small dumping areas from the park, but they dated no earlier than 1950. We did find tens of thousands of Pepsi bottle caps. These had been brought to the park by teenagers in the 50's and 60's and redeemed for tickets. A search of toppling structures at the park turned up two beer bottles from the Heurich brewery in DC with perfect intact labels. I still believe the "real" park dump went with the parkway grading.

In search for other Glen Echo dumps we investigated old house sites along MacArthur Boulevard with no luck. We looked for dumps for the old stone houses in Glen Echo Heights/Mohician Hills but we found out that the dump was located where later homes were built.

In our three years of Glen Echo digging we found some real nice items that still decorate the walls of my home office.

*Editor's Note: The Potomac Pontil prints articles of interest to our members without endorsing the activities described. The Potomac Bottle Collectors encourage diggers to seek permission from property owners prior to any exploration for bottles. Glen Echo Park is of interest to our club due to new glass as well as old glass. Rick Sherbert (below) is the resident artist at Glen Echo.*



## Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

### FEBRUARY 1 - SOUTH RIVER, NEW JERSEY

New Jersey Antique Bottle Club's (NJABC) 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM – 2 PM) at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 88 Jackson St., South River, New Jersey. INFO: NJABC, 24 Charles St., South River, NJ 08882-1603 or **JOE BUTEWICZ**, PH: (732) 238-3238, E-mail: [botlman@aol.com](mailto:botlman@aol.com)

### MARCH 7 - BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

The Baltimore Bottle Club 24th Annual Show and Sale (Sun. 8 AM - 3 PM, Admission \$3) at the Physical Education Center, Essex Campus of the Community College of Baltimore County, 7201 Rossville Blvd. (Exit 34, off I-695), Baltimore, Maryland 21237. INFO: **BOB FORD**, PH: (410) 531-9459, E-mail: [bottles@comcast.net](mailto:bottles@comcast.net), Website: [www.baltimorebottleclub.org](http://www.baltimorebottleclub.org).

