

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Serving the National Capital



January 2005

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Meeting January 25th

Our January meeting will feature the club's annual contest. Members are encouraged to bring in their favorite dug bottle, shard, go-with, and bottle collected during 2004. Winners will be announced at our February meeting.

Collector of the Year will be awarded for the most impressive bottle collected during 2004.

Junior Collector of the Year is limited to club members under age 18.

Digger of the Year will be awarded for the best bottle dug by a club member during 2004.

Shard of the Year is traditionally awarded for the best broken bottle dug during the past year. Please do not break one of your favorites in the hope of winning this contest.

Go-with of the Year entries are collectibles that complement a bottle collection. Most go-withs are advertising materials for bottled products. If you have the bottle that your entry goes with, please bring it along as well.

We would appreciate getting some photos of the entries for this newsletter. If someone would bring along a digital camera, this would be greatly appreciated.

A Note from Scott Gordon

Here is a story that I wish you would share with other members of the Club. In November I was visited by friends of mine from NYC, who unlike your friend Scott Jordan, never venture into the wilds beyond central park. Deborah and Tom adopted a son straight out of the hell hole of some Balkan war and the kid is rather high strung. I promised them a "hike in the woods," so Tom and son Luke arrived on my door step with brand new hiking boots ready to travel into the great outdoors.

After viewing my bottle collection it was agreed that we would go to visit my digging grounds. After several hours of kicking around the dump we had acquired a small horde of ordinary round bottom water bottles with crown tops, 40's era soda's and one common milk bottle. However, I couldn't get this kid to leave, "the woods." Just as I was about to call it quits, I spied the tell-tale bottom corner of a beer bottle peeking out of a layer of clay, known to produce embossed bottles in excellent condition. I pointed it out to Luke and armed him with a pointed wooden digging stick, a trick learned from Digger Andy on our Jersey dig. The stick would not damage the find but I warned Luke that he had to proceed carefully. The kid carefully started to excavate the layer of clay, but it did not yield up it's treasure easily. Then father Tom took a turn, after Luke got tired. I warned them that often there was a broken neck or chipped and cracked bottle at the end of such a dig. Furthermore without embossing an old beer bottle would be impossible to trace. Finally I wet the area down with water from a nearby creek and the clay gave up it's hold. What emerged was an aqua beer bottle with applied crown top and lots of embossing. It read "The Northwestern Bottling Works, Washington DC, 1601 5th Street, NW - J.H. Schlueter." I told Luke that the bottle was his and he almost jumped out of his skin.

What Tom lacks in woodsmanship he more than makes up in computer savvy. A day after he returned to the big apple he found lots of links about this bottle, including the one below. I'm sure that they would love to visit Scott Jordan's mini-museum, as would I the next time I'm in New York. I won't be able to attend the Jan. meeting but my entry would be my previously unrecorded Wardman Park Pharmacy Bottle, which is pretty special to me.

Regards - to all the members.

Scott Gordon

P.S. Read about the "house of bottles" at www.infomi.com/city/kaleva/

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: Andy Goldfrank

Vice President: Al Miller

Secretary: Jim Sears

Treasurer: Lee Shipman

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

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**Another Tale from Around the Swamp:
Sometimes Things Just Appear
When You Least Expect Them . . .**

By Andy Goldfrank

Last week, I was rummaging through my desk drawers in search of an envelope and came across a dirty ziplock bag filled with something heavy. Picking up the bag, I racked my brain as to its contents but despite my best efforts I could not remember a thing. Parting the seal, I flipped the bag over and out poured a small pile of marbles, coins, buttons, and other odds and ends. It reminded me of the scene in *To Kill a Mockingbird* when Scout examines an old cigar box of childhood treasures she and her brother find in the tree near Boo Radley's dilapidated house. And then it dawned on me: these relics were from an impromptu dig down in Southeast Washington, D.C. near the Navy Yard.

As I recall, Phil Edmonds and I were out scouting sites (after digging and getting skunked that morning in Baltimore) down by the old Washington Navy Yard. We had always talked about looking for places to dig in that area because the Navy facility opened in 1799 and has been drawing people ever since. The Washington Navy Yard evolved from a shipbuilding center to an ordnance plant and then to the ceremonial and administrative center for the Navy. During the Civil War, the Navy Yard was an integral part of the defense of the Capital. The ironclad *Monitor* was repaired at the Yard after her historic battle with CSS *Virginia*. In addition, the Lincoln assassination conspirators were brought to the Navy Yard following their capture and John Wilkes Booth's body was examined on a boat moored at the docks. During World War II, when the facility was at its peak, the Yard consisted of 188 buildings and employed nearly 25,000 people. Today, the yard is home to the Chief of Naval Operations and is headquarters for the Naval Historical Center, the Marine Corps Historical Center, and numerous naval commands. It is composed of 85 buildings and employs close to 10,000 military and civilian personnel.

Across the street from the Navy Yard, starting in the early 1800s, a community developed that both served and housed many of the Navy's employees and their families. During the Civil War, many of the existing structures and much of the open space was dedicated to housing for troops and civilian employees. By the early 1920s, the area developed into a dense mix of low-rise industrial buildings and residential structures. Starting in the 1960s, with the closing of industrial facilities at the Navy Yard and in the surrounding areas, many inhabitants left for employment elsewhere, century old housing stock already decaying became inhabitable, and eventually large expanses of the neighborhood were leveled for public housing. However, even in the midst of this massive destruction much of the old neighborhood survived – 1860s row houses and turn of the 19th Century corner stores co-existed with a variety of modern public housing and schools. Since the mid-1990s, and the primary reason that Phil and I were wandering in that part of town, there has been a concerted effort to again attempt “urban renewal” with the

difference that this “revival” will include public and private housing combined with office and other commercial development in conjunction with the Washington Navy Yard and the Southeast Federal Center. As every bottle digger knows, demolition and excavation precede such rehabilitation efforts and allow ample opportunity for salvaging some old bottles and other artifacts.



This is an aerial view of the Washington Navy Yard and the surrounding area from December 18, 1918. The house in this article is not captured in the picture.



This is another aerial view of the Washington Navy Yard and the surrounding community from the early 1960s. The house in this story is visible but sits one block from the Yard on the diagonal street, which is New Jersey Avenue, just off the northeast corner.

Phil and I had been driving back and forth along the streets near the Navy Yard (and drawing suspicious glances from the drug dealers but also waves from church go-ers) when we spotted a boarded-up but well-preserved 1850s or 1860s, Italianate row house. The large, three-story brick structure with elegant trimmings was set back from the street, New

Jersey Avenue, and even in its current state of disarray appeared elegant and grand. There was no doubt in our minds that this house had seen a lot of history within its walls and saunter past on the street out front – soldiers and sailors from many wars, craftsmen who built the locks for the Panama Canal, master ordnance handlers, and many others who worked at the Navy Yard or served the United States in some capacity.



This September 2000 image, provided by Jacqueline "JD" Dupree, shows the boarded up brick row house partly hidden by the massive tree one lot off the corner of the intersection of New Jersey Avenue and L Street, SE. JD's web site, "Near Southeast" DC Redevelopment, has more images of this location showing the aftermath of the demolition of this grand structure.

We had wandered up to the front door to read the eviction and demolition notices, when I noticed that the front stoop was gone. From the tire tracks in the yard, it was clear that a salvager had carted off the marble or slate steps and part of a slate walk. All that remained was a pile of dirt and the brick upon which the stones had rested. Kicking some of the dirt aside where the stoop had been, I popped out a plain clay marble. At that point, Phil came around the corner – he had been checking without success to see if there was anywhere to dig for bottles in the back yard – and I called him over to show him my find. He then took a swipe with his foot and out popped two more marbles. We both looked at each other in amazement and wondered what else lay in the ground below the old stoop.

As I started moving more dirt, Phil told me to wait and then immediately walked back around the corner out of sight. I continued to poke at the ground with my boot and exposed some modern coins. By then I was fretting because I knew that for every object we found by kicking in the dirt we probably were missing twice as much. But not to worry because two minutes later Phil was back with a gnarly piece of half-inch chicken wire he had found tacked over the window of a (soon to be demolished) shed. We folded over the edges so as not to cut our hands and we were in business.

Over the next thirty minutes, Phil and I sifted from the dirt under the old stoop a small cache of relics that spanned the life of the building. It was apparent that children and adults had sat on that stoop for there were close to 30 clay marbles, a couple of pontiled swirls, and four more older glass marbles, all likely used for playing ring taw or gambling. Also, some child had lost the wheel off a wagon and another a white-glazed miniature pitcher. In the midst of these toys, there were a number of bone, metal and ceramic buttons along with a glass bead – no doubt lost from a sewing basket while someone was repairing clothing – and articles of vanity in the form of a decorative pin and carved piece of glass jewelry. Two pocket knives were uncovered – one intricately carved bone and the other silver plated – that could have been used to clean ones fingernails, cut a button thread or sharpen the slate pencil we found. Different folks over the years lost a number of copper coins including a large cent from the 1840s and some Indian Head Pennies dated 1862, 1882, 1889, and 1902. As expected due to the fine old house's proximity to the Navy Yard, there was also a military presence as evidenced by the two round lead bullets and the percussion cap we recovered.



Closeup of the large cent, Indian Head Pennies, silver-plated pocket knife and the lead Civil War era bullets.

It seemed that our dig was over almost as soon as it had started. Phil and I never split up the finds because I wanted to take pictures and write an article capturing our chance recoveries. By the time I went back to the site with a camera, the row house that had unexpectedly given up a ziplock bag of treasures, which told a story about the former occupants and visitors, was a pile of rubble. Shortly thereafter, my work moved offices and the bag was out of my sight. Finding that dirty ziplock some four years later was almost as much fun as when Phil and I first dug its contents from in front of that historic house. Even better is the opportunity to tell this tale about our impromptu dig and to share the ephemeral tales tied to the small pieces of history we recovered. Now all that remains is for me and Phil to (finally) split up our treasures from Southeast Washington D.C.

Our pile of small treasures



eastern edge of the Navy Yard to South Capital Street) and a ton of projects (from the new baseball stadium to Canal Park to the new Marine Barracks). No stone is left unturned. Check it out.

Postscript: All of the modern photos are courtesy of Jacqueline "JD" Dupree. As I was doing a little research, in hopes of turning up some historic aerials of the area or perhaps even an image of the grand old row house, I stumbled upon an awesome web site: "Near Southeast" DC Redevelopment. It is available at <http://www.Jdland.com/dc/index.html>, run by Jacqueline "JD" Dupree, and loaded with fantastic information, images and links, the web site is all about the transformation of the Washington Navy Yard and the surrounding areas. In fact, that sells her efforts short because the web site is continually updated plus covers a massive expanse of area (ranging from the Southeast Freeway to the Anacostia River and from the

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

MARCH 6, 2005 - BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Baltimore Antique Bottle Club
25th Annual Show & Sale (8 AM to 3 PM) at the Physical Education Center, Essex Campus of the Community College of Baltimore County, 7201 Rossville Blvd., Baltimore, Maryland. INFO: **Bob Ford**, PH: (410) 531-9459, Email: bottles@comcast.net

MARCH 19 - RALEIGH, NORTH CAROLINA

The Raleigh Bottle Club's 5th Annual Antique Bottles & Collectibles Show & Sale (Sat. 9 AM - 3 PM, \$2 Adm.; Dealer set-up, 6 - 7:30 AM, Earlybirds, \$10, 7:30 - 9 AM) at the North Carolina State Fairgrounds, Holshouser Bldg., Raleigh, North Carolina. INFO: **David Tingen**, P.O. Box 18083, Raleigh, NC 27619-8083; Email: RBC@antiquebottles.com; Website: www.antiquebottles.com/raleigh



APRIL 24 - WASHINGTON, PENNSYLVANIA

The Washington County Antique Bottle Club's 31st Antique Bottle Show (Sun. 9 AM - 3 PM, donation \$3) at the Alpine Star Lodge, 735 Jefferson Ave., Washington, Pennsylvania. (From I-70, exit 17) INFO: **Nigel Dunmore**, 121 Highland Ave., Avella, PA 15312; PH: (724) 587-5217; Email: legin1247@msn.com

APRIL 24 HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

The Historical Bottle-Diggers of Virginia 24th Annual Antique Bottle and Collectible Show & Sale, (9 AM to 3 PM), at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds, (US Rt. 11 South, Exit 243 off I-81) Info: **Sonny Smiley**, PH: (540) 434-1129 or Email: lithiaman1@yahoo.com

MAY 22 BRICK, NEW JERSEY

Jersey Shore Bottle Club's 33rd Annual Show & Sale, (9 AM to 2 PM), at the Brick Elks, 2491 Hooper Ave., Brick, NJ. Info: **Richard Peal**, 720 Eastern Lane, Brick, NJ 08723, PH: (732) 267-2528, Email: boxcar1@worldnet.att.net

JUNE 26 - CHEVERLY, MARYLAND

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Annual Show & Sale (Sunday 9 AM to 3 PM) at the American Legion Post 108, 3608 Legion Drive, Cheverly, MD 20785. Info: **Jim Sears**, 4211 N. 2nd Rd., Apt. 1, Arlington, VA 22203 PH:(703) 243-2409, Email: searsjim@usa.net or **Andy Goldfrank**, PH:(202) 258-2389, Email: amg_sticky@yahoo.com