

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

April 2005

Meeting April 26th

Please join us at 8 PM at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda. We look forward to a "Digging for Gold" video and discussion of our June 26 show.

Photo at right shows artifacts from "Digging in Virginia III." See Andy Goldfrank's article starting on page 2.



Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

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 2-4 - GRANTVILLE (HERSHEY), PENNSYLVANIA

The National Association of Milk Bottle Collectors 25th Annual Convention (Thurs. - Sat.) at the Holiday Inn, 604 Station Road (Exit 80 off I-81), Grantville, Pennsylvania. INFO: **Ralph S. Rivo**, 686 Franklin St., Alburtis, PA 18011-9578; PH: (610) 966-2536, Fax: (610) 966-0368; E-mail: thepurplecow@erols.com; Website: <http://www.milkroute.org>.

JUNE 3-4 - LUMBERTON, NORTH CAROLINA

The Robeson Antique Bottle Club Annual Show & Sale (Fri. 3 PM - 9 PM, Sat. 9 AM - 3 PM) at the Farmer's Market & Expo Center, Exit 14 off I-95, Lumberton, North Carolina. INFO: **Richard Stephens**, 1830 Riverside Blvd., Lumberton, NC 28358, PH: (910) 738-6075, E-mail: rhstep@nc.rr.com or **Paul Veleni**, PH: (910) 738-3074, E-mail: cbxley@nc.rr.com.

JUNE 12 - MILLVILLE, NEW JERSEY

Wheaton Village Antique Bottle Show (10 AM - 4 PM) at Wheaton Village, 1501 Glasstown Rd. (Rt. 55 South exit 26), Millville, NJ. INFO: **DORIS ABELING**, PH: (856) 825-6800 Ext. 104, E-mail: dabeling@wheatonvillage.org, Website: www.wheatonvillage.org.

JUNE 26 - CHEVERLY, MARYLAND

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Annual Show & Sale (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.

“All Aboard, Next Stop is Stoneman’s Switch:” Traveling Back in Time to a Civil War Supply Station and Winter Camp

by Andy Goldfrank

One crisp, early morning in March with the ground covered with a thick layer of frost, I stood and looked across a large open field near Fredericksburg, Virginia abutting an old farmhouse and a couple of narrow roads. This was not your typical privy digger’s location, yet there I was perched on the edge of a dirt hole in the midst of this farm field. As always, a probe and shovel accompanied me on this adventure. Looking down into my pit that was already carved into the earth below the plow line, bits of charcoal and brick were speckled throughout the native yellow clay. It was then that a smile crept onto my face – and not due to the clues in the ground leading to historic artifacts – but rather because I had looked up and wherever I gazed there were people digging holes and swinging metal detectors. It had dawned on me that each and every one of these folks was interested in the same thing: recovering relics from a Civil War Union Army encampment before they were lost to the never-ending spread of suburban sprawl.

My invitation to this spot had been extended by John Kendrick, who along with his wonderful wife Rose and a number of other well-know Civil War relic hunters, runs the Diggin’ in Virginia Invationals. These well-organized invitational relic hunts, known by the acronym DIV, are dedicated to friendship and fun along with the proper recovery, identification and preservation of historical artifacts. A website run by Donnie Smith called www.mytreasurespot.com hosts a hunt forum, aptly called Diggin’, where folks can learn about and sign-up for DIV hunts, discuss the history of the sites selected, post pictures of recoveries, inquire about relics, and make other DIV-related posts. The locations of the hunts are historic ground that are slated for development now or in the future, much like other land in Virginia where the bulk of the Civil War was waged in the 1860s, and were placed off-limits to relic hunters by the landowners in the past.

Relying on his over 30 years of relic hunting experience and knowledge about the Civil War in Virginia, John along with a number of others DIV Committee members (including John Craig, Ernest Bowers, Ron Meadows and Ed Simmers), will identify these landowners previously reluctant to allow relic hunting and obtain permission. The premise is simple in concept but hard to accomplish. The DIV Committee gets this access by providing a significant fee (much like a game-hunting lease) to relic hunt the property for a fixed number of days before the bulldozers and scrapers destroy these sites for housing developments and big-box retail stores. Incorporated into the agreement with the landowner is the promise to properly excavate, record, preserve and produce a report about the recoveries made.

Much has been made about the alleged destruction upon the archaeological record caused by relic hunters and privy diggers; however, this perspective ignores the noble work of many to document their recoveries and the associated history,

and mis-directs anger more properly aimed at rampant, uncontrolled development. Ivor Noel Hume, who is considered the founding father of historical archaeology, often laments the lack of cooperation between collectors, relic diggers and archaeologists. In a recent essay entitled “Writings on the Archaeological Wall,” published in a volume called *In Search of This & That: Tales from an Archaeologist’s Quest*, the venerable and renowned Mr. Hume addressed how best to salvage the archaeological record in the path of the “bulldozer’s relentless rumble.”

The days of the richly funded, pros-only archaeological project are over. It is time to do the best we can with what and who we have – remembering always that the past belongs not to archaeologists but to everyone who cares to enjoy it, take pride in it, and learn from it. With more people involved who care about the nation’s buried past, it follows that greater efforts must and will be made to ensure that its legacy survives.

Many relic hunters and bottle diggers contribute to our understanding of history in a thoughtful and articulate manner on a daily basis stemming from a passion for the past – collectors and diggers share information about the relics recovered in conversations, through the articles and books they write, via donations to local historical societies and museums, and many other ways. One need look no further than the participants in the DIV hunts to see a living testament of those non-professional diggers and collectors who have dedicated their lives to studying, preserving and telling us about the past through recovered relics – D.P. Newton, Ed Fedory, Michael O’Donnell, Steve Sylvia, Amy Maruso, Howard Crouch and others.

There is no doubt that these DIV hunts will likewise greatly contribute to our society’s understanding of the soldiers and civilians that walked and lived in these fields over 140 years ago. Ernest Bowers, who not only has extensive training and experience in archaeology but also is a specialist in American military material culture, is preparing a written report based upon historical research and the archaeological record from the DIV hunts. All of the participants of a DIV hunt are required to list the relics recovered and to diagram and measure these finds in the context of the huts, trash pits, latrines, firepits and any other features that are excavated. Moreover, these features are mapped (including demarcation by GPS coordinates) and the pattern and placement of excavations and features are captured in an aerial image generated by an airplane flown over the site during the relic hunt. It is the stated goal of DIV to present to the local and state archives a report that attempts to capture the lives (and deaths) of the occupants of the encampment at each historic location. Simply stated, if these Virginia relic hunters did not organize these DIV hunts to help collect this archaeological record, then no one would before the bulldozers altered this historic ground for all time.

As a prelude to the first day of digging (of this 3-day hunt), we all had gathered the night before at a local fire and rescue station to go over the ground rules for digging and

recording plus to learn the history of the DIV III site. It was reiterated that this hunt was oriented toward excavating “dug in” winter huts as opposed to surface metal detecting because it was known that some surface hunting had been done on this site over the previous 30 years but that few huts had actually been excavated. All eyes and ears were in attention as historic images and modern aerials were displayed. Over the previous six months, I had spent extensive amounts of time delving into the history of the Fredericksburg Campaign and the winter camps of 1862-63, and kept a keen eye on all the information shared on mytreasurespot.com’s Diggin’ forum.

This site was on Potomac Creek, and the railroad that ran out of Fredericksburg was located just a handful of miles away. During the Civil War, with the arrival of the Union forces to this area, the army created a station and an extra track for a switch was laid, to transfer supplies and munitions – this was named Stoneman’s Switch. In December 1862, the Union Army’s First Division of the Fifth Corps, in particular, units from New York, Maine, Michigan and Pennsylvania, were ordered to encamp at Stoneman’s Switch. This army was under the command of General Ambrose Burnside, who had arrived outside of Fredericksburg with a plan to camp for a short span and then push on to Richmond, Virginia – with the hope of capturing the capital of the Confederacy – some 50 miles away. The Union Army was rebuffed with significant losses at the Battle of Fredericksburg and pushed back across the Rappahannock River. One sergeant, Henry S. Seage, serving in the 4th Michigan Infantry recounted the consequence of this horrific battle:

So we remain in the city [of Fredericksburg] during the 14th and 15th and on the night of the 15th our Corps, the last to leave, was withdrawn and re-crossed the River and into its old camps it went, but with only a little over half the men that moved out of these camps on the morning of the 11th of December. The next day (December 16th) the Rebels again occupied the town and thenceforth the Pickets fired across the stream with as business-like an air as though the Rappahannock had always been the boundary line of two hostile empires over which no armed force had ever ventured.

Another account of the Civil War, as crafted in John Pullen’s *The Twentieth Maine*, captures the return to Stoneman’s Switch by Maine troops and the construction of their huts for the winter encampment of 1862-63, which were similar (if not the same) camps that we were to excavate at DIV III:

Marching back to Stoneman's Switch after the defeat at Fredericksburg, the Maine men received welcome instructions to build permanent winter quarters. Putting a man into winter quarters was a simple and inexpensive matter at that time. The government simply gave him an axe and located his camp in or near a stand of timber. The soldier had everything else he needed, including mud for chinking log walls and mortaring a chimney. In the 20th Maine, four men teamed up to make a hut, in most cases. There were plenty of good axemen in the regiment, so getting the logs was easy . . . In constructing the hut, the Maine men usually made an enclosure of log walls about eight feet square. The height of the walls was about three feet, added head room being obtained by excavation. A ridgepole was then put up, and the men buttoned together the



Men of the 12th New York Among Abandoned Winter Huts (above)
Station and Commissary at Stoneman’s Switch (below)



four halves of their pup tents, or “dog tents” as they were then called, to make a cloth roof.

The fireplace was made of stones, bricks, sods, or even of wood. If made of wood, it had to be lined with a thick layer of the clayey mud. The chimney was often made of short lengths of logs and was chinked and lined with mud. A barrel might be placed on top of the structure to extend the height of the chimney and provide a better draft.

Apparently the huge pine forests at Stoneman’s Switch disappeared, first as construction material for these winter huts and, eventually, for fuel to feed the cook and heating fires for the thousands of troops encamped in permanent winter quarters. It was this information in my mind along with a number of the historic images and aerials in my hand, that I approached the first day of DIV III. Over the last 25 years, I have dug plenty of Civil War era bullets, buttons, buckles, guns, and bottles, yet this was the first time that I specifically ventured to dig artifacts that were in a historical and narrowly-dated context – specifically, an actual hut from 1862-63 (as opposed to a privy or cistern which might span 10 or 20 years). Moreover, I must admit, I was a tad worried that finding a hut in the middle of farm field would be a difficult task. However, my Colorado digging buddy, Marty Homola, who is an experienced relic hunter and privy digger, reassured me that when I used my trusty bottle digging tools (a probe and a shovel) along with my privy digger’s instinct (an unknown mix of historical knowledge and plain luck) that I would not be able to dig all the huts I would locate. Little did I know just how right he would be ... but then again Marty has only been digging forts and camps for 30 years or so.

After seeing the historic images of the station at Stoneman’s Switch and the nearby camps, I knew this was where I wanted to start in order try and make that connection to the past so visible in those pictures from the 1860s. Although a previous hunt, DIV II, had focused on this part of the farm, it was apparent to me (and, on the first day, only one other digger named Randy Ivey) that there was still potential for some missed features and winter huts. My thinking also was that because I have been a hardcore (my wife says obsessed) privy digger for the last ten years and have gathered a bit of experience with a probe, I thought it would be possible for me to probe out a pit that was too deep for all the guys looking with metal detectors for deep iron signals. Holding printouts of the Civil War era images next to the modern aerials, I noticed a number of gaps where huts should have been discovered and also that the portion of the site closest to the road (located precisely where the railroad was in the 1860s) was untouched. Ernest Bowers previously had speculated based upon his assessment of the historical and physical record that:

there were several rows of huts running directly perpendicular (North/South) to the railroad (modern day road), then at least two rows of huts running parallel (East/West) to the railroad. . . . [T]here may be more rows of huts located north of the parallel rows but . . .

those huts may be oriented perpendicular (North/South) like the ones closest to the road. . . . [T]his camp may have served at times as a regimental camp, workers camp and/or hospital area. There was a wide assortment of artifacts recovered here [at DIV II] including several Confederate items.

Many units were in the Stoneman's Switch area during [the winter of] 1862-63 & [in] 1864. The main camp time period is 1862-63, that is when most of the “dug in” camps were built but some were occupied for short periods later on [during the war]. There may be some overlapping of the camps at this location but unfortunately it is difficult to determine that from the information we have right now. I would not be surprised if [this area,] close to the Station, may have housed regular soldiers, civilian railroad workers, sick soldiers and prisoners at different times during 1862-64. If any of the hut camps would have been reused later, it would have been the ones closest to the railroad and station . . .



Winter Camp at Stoneman’s Switch

Eyeing up and avoiding the previously excavated huts (visible as dirt patches) nearest to the road, I spent the first 30 minutes or so probing the soil and digging test holes in an effort to find signs of disturbance below the typical farm field plow depth. “Disturbance” may see a strange term but, in other words, I was checking for signs of human occupation that would be in contrast to undisturbed or sterile soil. This involves literally “reading the soil” as you dig into the ground. Specifically, on this site, I was looking for bits of charcoal, brick, and rusted iron along with a hardpan or occupation layer caused by foot action in a dirt-floored building.

As I worked closer to the old railroad, now the location of the road, I probed out a relatively large area at least 15 feet by 20 feet that seemed to be the floor of a building. This apparent occupation layer was almost 4 feet below the surface and seemed unusually large for a typical hut; however, both John Craig and John Kendrick told me that images and the written record indicate there were larger structures such as barracks or warehouses in this area of the site which sat close to the railroad tracks. Although digging such a large building at such a depth is a significant undertaking, I decided to cut a 5 foot square down and see what lay below. In a couple of hours, I had excavated the hole down and found nothing other than some iron sitting on what was a dark, foot-tamped occupation layer. Getting frustrated, I pulled out my probe and worked the perimeter of my hole; in the far corner, I tipped ash, charcoal and rock which indicated to me the location of a fire pit.



Andy Goldfrank digging his first pits at Diggin in Virginia.

Expanding my hole a few feet over, I soon exposed a rectangular area composed of stacked rocks, surrounded by darkened clay caused by when the soil was exposed to high temperatures. I also extracted a number of Union Eagle buttons and 3-ringer bullets. But then the firepit seemed to go beyond the walls of the building that I had located – first it was a foot past, then two past, then it was almost four feet in length without stopping. At that point, John Kendrick came over to invite me to take a look at some bottles and a trash pit that had been found; along the way to this trash pit, I looked at a number of other huts being dug and noticed that my firepit was abnormally large. Upon returning to my hole (after checking out a number of impressive embossed whiskey), I decided to probe next to my hole and see if perhaps this was a firepit that was shared with an adjacent structure. Within a couple of minutes, I confirmed that my suspicions were right and I elected to start another (large) hole parallel to my first effort to get into this other structure since the only artifacts I had found to that point came from the shared firepit.

During the course of the first afternoon and the next morning, I exposed this other structure that, thankfully, was much smaller and well-defined with the stain of wood boards showing up in the dirt floor of the building. The firepit ended up being over 5 feet long and 1.5 feet wide; it contained a couple dozen buttons (many of which disintegrated upon exposure to the

air) and an equal number of bullets. Otherwise not much of significance came out of the this hut (or building) until the end. As I was working the last wall, the soil was much softer and not tamped as was the main floor of the building; this was likely where there had been a bed or a desk or supplies were stacked that did not allow for foot traffic. Tucked against the wall, I exposed a large piece of rusted iron. Now iron is common in these holes but this piece seemed unusual and, as I exposed it lying smack against the wall at the corner of this building, there was no doubt that before me was a gun barrel. Finally the (huge) mounds of dirt that I had moved was paying dividends.



An excavated Sharps Carbine with the barrel and works.

And then that adrenaline rush every digger has experienced kicked in, with good reason, because as the many experts at the dig confirmed, this recovery was most likely an almost intact Sharps carbine with the barrel and works. This is a breech loading weapon that was popular with troops because of its reliability and resistance to fouling and jamming. Later that afternoon, after I finished digging this building and as I was making lists, notes and drawings on the provided excavation survey forms, I started to speculate how this weapon came to rest. The carbine could have been broken and tossed in the corner of the building after the site was abandoned. Another thought was that perhaps the carbine was placed underneath someone's desk or bed and never retrieved because the owner left unexpectedly as a result of a sudden call to duty, illness, or perhaps even death. All of these were possible and, for me, made the history that transpired at Stoneman's Switch and even the entire Civil War much more real and alive.

The previous night, while talking with some of the participants at DIV III, Kevin Ambrose and Rick Stahovec, I had offered to show them how to probe and learn the signals that a probe can convey. After finishing digging and recording my double (or triple-wide) firepit and the accompanying buildings, darkness was only about an hour away and I was wondering what to do next (since finishing the massive first building I had located seemed like a daunting task without much reward) when Kevin and Rick showed up for their probing "tutorial." We decided to join forces to find and dig a hut or two on the last day remaining of DIV III; however, we still needed to find an un-dug spot. To this end we were pulling out the historical images, sizing up where other folks were finding new huts in addition to those found previously at DIV II and indicated on the modern aerial images, tossing out a bunch of different theories, and probing and test digging the likely spots. We had found a couple of questionable spots and popped test holes without any good results, when I wandered back closer to the road (and near to where the railroad track was located in the 1860s).

Shoving my 5-foot probe into the ground to the handle, I pulled it out to reveal charcoal on the tip. Kevin and Rick were both near me, so I walked over and told them that I had definitely

probed a place for us to dig the next day. Being a bit too cocky, I also said that we need not bother doing a test hole but rather we should pack it in for the night and come back tomorrow. Rick asked how I could be sure by only probing once; Kevin in turn just had a look of doubt. I then probed again and pulled another sample out that also had charcoal. Kevin ran his metal detector over the area I had found, and said that he was not picking up any signals. He noted that this included no deep iron signals, which are usually an indicator of trash in a feature or hut, and Kevin said he was uncertain this would be a productive spot to dig. The sun had now hit the horizon, so we elected to dig a quick test hold to prove or disprove the worth of digging where I had probed.

Fifteen minutes later, we were through the turf and below the plow zone and saw some evidence of disturbed ground. Kevin put his machine into our hole and said that he still was not getting any reading; I rebutted by saying “the probe does not lie.” We dug more and then at about 3 feet deep, Rick picked up a signal with the metal detector and pulled out a bullet. Kevin also used the metal detector to confirm that there were some deep iron signals in the hole as well. I then probed out what I thought were the dimensions of our structure, which appeared rather large and ran almost to the road some 15 feet away. As darkness was on us, the three of us expanded our hole a bit and marked it with a number empty water bottles indicating that we intended to return to our spot.

The next morning, I returned to our test hole first but this was a bit later (after having a few too many beers and a late dinner the previous night) than most other of the hunt participants. As you might imagine, I was somewhat surprised (yet honored too), to find a number of folks hovering over our hole in anticipation that we were not returning to finish the our efforts from the previous day. After convincing these potential claim-jumpers that Rick, Kevin and I were indeed ready for another day of excessive digging, and with the arrival of the rest of my crew in short order, we set about expanding the hole to the extent of my probing.

My probing had told me that the hole was at least 12 feet long and 6 feet wide, and we opened up the hole to this size. About two-thirds of the way across the hole, there was a phone line running through the pit under which we left dirt as support. Rick and I worked the larger part of the hole, which forced Kevin to fling dirt on the part closest to the road. It was then that Kevin hit really hard, compact gray soil. It almost looked like base clay that might exist deep down. Kevin and I both thought that this might be soil extracted by a mechanical trencher from deep down when a line was put in – yet we were not certain. Kevin persisted digging and then he got a deep iron signal through this funky, wet clay at the side of the hole. Tunneling into the side of our hole, Kevin went through this apparently sterile, wet clay and extracted a large barrel hoop and a preserved piece of leather knapsack strap. It was awkward digging as the clay was not only wet but also compact, yet Kevin persisted and soon found little bits of glass and wood from the time period of the Civil War. During this entire time, Rick and I were tossing a ton of dirt and regularly finding bullets, buttons and bottle parts. Soon enough

it was lunch on Saturday, so we went up to enjoy the festivities and see what other folks had found.



Kevin and Rick in the Hole



Andy digging the gray, wet artifact layer.

By the time we came back from lunch (after drooling over the many and spectacular recoveries made at DIV III by others), I had persuaded Kevin that we needed to stop tunneling and focus on this part of our pit by significantly expanding the hole from the top. However, all the while that Kevin was agreeing to open a bigger hole, he was still digging sideways and this was when he popped out an intact, preserved leather percussion cap box. Remarkably, the relic came out in perfect condition except for being covered in gray sand and clay. After showing it to a few folks, I wrapped the cap box in wet paper towel and then placed it into a ziplock bag. (My experience from working on archaeological excavations and from digging wet privies and cisterns had taught me that this is the best way to handle water-preserved field recoveries.) This was truly an extraordinary find and made us excited about the possibilities of what else lay in this Civil War time capsule.



The Percussion Cap Box, still covered with dirt (above) and Cleaned (below and right)



readings. And we noticed that these signals were the entire length and width of the hole – to say we were eager to uncover what was beneath is an understatement.

Since we were a little over 4 feet from the surface, and we wanted to dig the hole efficiently and in a manner to remove safely any fragile artifacts, I scrapped off the top of the gray layer across the entire pit before going down. We took a picture to document this layer and then started to work the hole down. As we went down, with Kevin and me alternating, the sterile quality of the dirt rapidly changed to tiger-striped layers alternating in dark grey and light grey bands of color. Mixed in were pieces of glass, wood chips off logs, sticks, and more leather. Nothing we recovered thereafter topped the intact percussion cap box but the finds were still extraordinary – as was reinforced by the large crowd including the landowners that gathered to see what the next well-preserved relic from Stoneman's Switch would come into the light of day after 140 or more years. There were at least 8 bullets and a couple of buttons (cuff and coat) that were pristine without corrosion because of the lack of oxidation. Literally, when one wiped the dirt out of the bases of the 3-ringings, shiny lead was visible as if those bullets were made that day. Also in the mix there were a number of mess cups, cooking tins, part of a pan and other metal such as ration cans. The intact glass found was an open-pontiled aqua umbrella ink, an iron-pontiled green umbrella ink, and a champagne bottle. Also amazing was the remarkable condition of the two Civil War government issue brogans or shoes that we recovered from the pit.

Originally, I thought that this hole was a latrine or a privy. Since the dig, and after talking with John Kendrick (who also conferred with D.P. Newton of the White Oak Museum), it is now apparent that we were digging in an area abutting the

Over the next two hours, Kevin and I exerted our energy cutting a 6 foot by 4 foot hole alongside our previous hole. Frankly, we were guessing about the size of the hole we needed to dig because there were few clues as to what lay below other than the 2-foot long tunnel that Kevin had made in the side of our pit. We kept commenting as we went down that this would have been impossible to metal detect or probe from the top because there was an almost 2-foot hard-packed yellow and light-amber natural clay surface below the plowzone. To get through this compact layer, we literally had to jump on our shovels. The dirt did not look like anything other than virgin, undisturbed soil; however, we knew that there was something down there and we persevered. We then broke into the wet, gray clay that also looked undisturbed yet we knew from Kevin's tunnel that we were less than a foot above the artifact layers. It was at this point, finally, that the metal detector started to pick up deep iron



Bullets (above) and Iron Pontiled Green Umbrella Ink (below)

railroad tracks. The hole we dug was wet, which despite my initial inclination (to label the hole a privy) means it could also have been a ditch or where water collected. As I recall the hole, there was a distinct curved contour in the clay much like a ditch. Moreover, the reason it is believed that our hole was abutting the old tracks is because above the artifact layer where the dark gray clay was located, Kevin and I exposed the ends of large pieces of wood that were resting perpendicular to our hole and spaced as if ties for a railroad track. A closer examination of the Civil War images that show the buildings and tracks at Stoneman's Switch likewise supports the theory as to where we were digging.

Even now as I hold my pristine bullets and look at the roughhewn wood ties in that historic image, I can readily imagine the early months of 1863 when winter was coming to a close and the troops prepared for the campaign ahead. Picture in your mind the site as the soldiers were breaking down their



Civil War Brogans or Shoes

winter huts, the snow melting and the water accumulating in low-lying areas. Now think about what was scattered in the wet ditch alongside the railroad tracks: dropped rounds now worthless because they were wet, a percussion cap box lost by a member of an infantry unit as he jumped aboard a moving train, a number of shoes discarded because replacements had been allotted to troops for the coming march to battle, a couple of inkwells now empty after the ink were used to draft a diary entry or note the receipt of fresh supplies, ration cans relieved of their contents by soldiers on picket duty by the tracks, and mess cups and a plate kicked aside when a hasty (and proper) salute was required. Perhaps now you can even hear, as I do, the station master saying "All aboard! Last train out of Stoneman's Switch . . ."



Scabbard Tip, Button, Rivets, Percussion Caps, and Knapsack Gear