

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

January 2006

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Meeting January 31

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 the past year. We will vote on our favorites, and winners will be announced at our February meeting.

Collector of the Year will be awarded for the most impressive bottle entered.

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

Shard of the Year is traditionally awarded for the best broken bottle dug during the 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.



Jim Sears and Steve House examine Steve's flasks at the November meeting

Future Meetings

The February 28 meeting will be our annual club banquet. The following meetings will take place on March 28 and April 25. Please contact Jim Sears with ideas for speakers or other themes for these upcoming meetings.

The flasks shown here were inherited by new member Steve House. Club members were particularly impressed with the iron pontiled Traveler's Companion, the swirled amethyst flask, and the emerald GIII-14 urn. The white patches on the base of the amethyst bottle are putty to keep it from falling off the shelf in case of earthquake.



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
Pontil: Jim Sears (email: searsjim@usa.net, PH: 703/243-2409) & Andy Goldfrank (email: amg_sticky@yahoo.com, PH: 202/588-0543)
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Yes, Virginia, There was a P.C.A.™

by Jack Sullivan
Special to the *Potomac Pontil*

Hundreds of souvenir items abound that advertise “Virginia” and its considerable attractions. Many bear a P.C.A. mark on the bottom. The initials are those of Paden City Artware, a West Virginia pottery operation. The firm was in business for about 45 years and produced assorted specialty stoneware items including jugs, ashtrays, bells, vases, salt and pepper shakers, and mini pitchers. These items frequently show up at flea markets and antique malls throughout our region.



The pottery was located in Paden City, a town of about 2,800 established on bottom land along the east bank of the Ohio River in Wetzel County WV, just up river from Marietta, Ohio. The town is named for Obediah Paden who founded it. This region of West Virginia for almost a century was a favored site for pottery and glass works, now mostly defunct. Their location was determined by the rich supply of raw materials – clay and sand – to be found in the vicinity of the river.

Paden City Artware was started in 1940 by William Ford and Lyle Mitchell, two local businessmen and entrepreneurs. They saw a market for ceramic souvenirs and knickknacks as Americans increasingly took to the road for vacation trips around the United States. The WWII period was a period of struggle for the small business as travel for everyone was sharply curtailed by gasoline rationing.

After the war, however, a boom occurred in auto travel. Motor hotels, later termed “motels,” sprang up all along major U.S. routes. In the late 1940s, President Eisenhower set the interstate system in motion and new, high speed highways began to crisscross the country. Increasingly Americans were taking to the road for their vacations. Wherever they went, they looked for items to buy and take back home to display as tokens of their travels or as gifts to Uncle George and Aunt Gert, who might proudly put them on display.

Ford and Mitchell understood this trade. At first they called the company “F and M Artware,” using their initials, but in 1956 changed its name to Paden City Artware. The change may have been motivated by commercial advantage. There already was a Paden City Pottery, founded in 1914 at nearby Sistrerville, West Virginia. That firm was a successful producer of high quality dinnerware and enjoyed a national reputation as a brand sold through Sears stores. Undoubtedly some confusion resulted from two potteries with Paden City in their name. But that may have been what the owners had in mind.

Whatever the rationale, under its new name P.C.A. appears to have been successful for almost three decades. (It outlived Paden City Pottery by some 22 years.) A small handicraft operation with about 15 employees, the firm produced reasonable quality, if simply designed, stoneware. Most P.C.A. products sold for less than two dollars and thus were priced right for the mass of American tourists. A family could afford to buy a dozen or more salt and peppers or “pencil parkers” with “Virginia” emblazoned on them for distribution to friends and relatives.

P.C.A. was unusual among potteries of the time in that it almost always identified its wares with a mark on the bottom. Two variations of its mark are shown here. It also specialized in ceramic items that could be used around the house – pencil and toothpick holders, salt and peppers, cream pitchers. Its least utilitarian items were corked jugs that purported to hold some kind of whiskey or moonshine, but in fact were empty.

Most P.C.A. “faux” liquor jugs are heavy stoneware with cream bodies and brown or green tops. Their special distinction is gold lettering and other gilded decoration. Some boast on the base: “Hand Decorated – 22 K Gold.” P.C.A. jugs from resort towns located nowhere near the Appalachian and Ozark Mountains advertised “mountain dew” and “pure corn,” like one from Rehoboth Beach shown here. In fact, many such souvenirs were from towns on the seacoast,



where a hidden still was as unlikely as an avalanche. Nevertheless, the identification of souvenir jugs with hillbilly "likker" apparently helped sales regardless of the point of origin.

Clients for P.C.A. ceramic souvenirs were nationwide. Las Vegas, Nevada, and less known, Walsenburg, Colorado, both have been memorialized on P.C.A. items, as has John Brown's Cave in Nebraska and the Navy vessel, the U.S.S. Alabama, anchored as a tourist attraction in Mobile. Many P.C.A. souvenirs were made for travelers to Virginia. Shown here are small salt and peppers for Mount Vernon, a miniature creamer from Jamestown VA, and a toothpick holder and a "pencil parking" ceramic labeled Virginia and two other locations.



Whether the cause was cheaper foreign imports or the increasing sophistication of the touring public, P.C.A.'s stoneware jugs and other souvenirs eventually lost favor. The firm closed its doors about 21 years ago, in 1985. Nothing more will ever be added to its product line. Company products still sell for a few dollars at antique stores today but in a hundred years, who knows, they may be prized as clever examples of 20th Century American kitsch.

Certainly the people of Paden City think they have value. P.C.A. items are among those on display at the City Museum at 108 W. Main Street, a 230 mile ride from Washington, D.C.

When finished browsing there, you also can head over to the Glass and Pottery Museum housed in Pat's Hairstyling and Barbershop at 202 S. 3rd Avenue. After reviewing the collection there, you might even get a haircut.

The material here has been obtained from multiple sources. The photos are of items collected by the author.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

February 5 - South River, New Jersey

The New Jersey Antique Bottle Club's 10th Annual Antique Bottle Show & Sale (Sun, 9 AM - 2 PM, \$3 adm.) at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 88 Jackson Street, South River, New Jersey. Info: **Joe Butewicz**, NJABC, 24 Charles St., South River, NJ 08882, PH: (732) 238-3238 or E-mail: botlman@msn.com.



March 5 - Baltimore, Maryland

Baltimore Antique Bottle Club 26th Annual Show & Sale, (8 AM to 3 PM), at the Physical Education Center, Essex Campus Community College, 7201 Rossville Blvd, Baltimore, MD. Info: **Bob Ford**, PH: (410) 531-9459, email: bottles@comcast.net

March 12 - Tylersport, Pennsylvania

The 12th Annual Buck-Mont Antique Bottle Show & Sale, (9 AM to 3 PM), at the Tylersport Fire Co., Route 563, Tylersport, PA. Info: **Claude A. Wambold**, 1837 Perkiomenville Rd., Perkiomenville, PA 18074, PH: (215) 234-8413, or **Greg Gifford**, PH: (215) 699-5216, or **Dave Buck**, (215) 723-4048.

April 2 - Millville, New Jersey

South Jersey Bottle and Glass Club Show & Sale, (9 AM to 3 PM), at the Elks Lodge of Millville, 1815 East Broad St., Millville, NJ. Info: **Bob Tompkins**, 1731 Hubbard La., Vineland, NJ 08360, PH: (856) 691-5170, or **Merrie Kernan**, PH: (856) 451-8904.

April 23 Harrisonburg, Virginia

The Historical Bottle-Diggers of Virginia 35th 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 21 - Brick, New Jersey

Jersey Shore Bottle Club's 34th Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM - 2 PM) at the Brick Elks Lodge, 2491 Hooper Ave., Brick, New Jersey. Info: **R. Peal**, 720 Eastern La., Brick, NJ 09723, PH: (732) 267-2528, Email: manodirt@msn.com, Website: <http://www.geocities.com/dtripet2000/jsbc/jsbc.html>.