

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

May 2006

In this issue:

- A Bitters Bottle, the “Sylph,” and a President
by Jack Sullivan.....page 2
Best Since 1843 by Mike Cianciosi.....page 4
Walking in Old Town Alexandria
by Richard Lilienthal.....page 5
Upcoming Area Bottle Shows.....page 6

Meeting May 30

Please join us at 8 PM on Tuesday, May 30th at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda, Maryland.

Announcements

The Historical Bottle Diggers of Virginia has provided over 400 Harrisonburg and Rockingham County, Virginia bottles and go-withs to the Harrisonburg - Rockingham Historical Society for a display which will run through August 31. A dozen or so are rare one-known bottles which will be available for public viewing for the first time.



Scott Gordon displays our club book at the “International Day of the Book” in Kensington, Maryland on April 23rd.



Lee Shipman and **Scott Gordon** explored a possible show location in Kensington, Maryland. The area offers an affordable church site. Scott suggested that the club could join a Kensington area antique extravaganza that takes place on Labor Day weekend. Other club members expressed reservations due to family obligations for that weekend. Lee Shipman remains enthusiastic about the possibility for a Kensington show even if we do not choose the Labor Day period. Other club members who are interested in pursuing this idea may contact Lee at plannerlee@earthlink.net or (301) 229-2005.

Andy Goldfrank attended the Northern Virginia Relic Hunters annual show at the Dulles Expo Center in Chantilly, Virginia on the weekend of April 8 and 9. This is a large and well-attended show, and our club might be able to join it by reserving a block of tables in future years. Andy will investigate how much this might cost.

At left Lee Shipman poses with a bottle buyer in Kensington, Maryland. Lee also sold some figural bottles in Kensington and is optimistic about our prospects for a show in this area.

A Bitters Bottle, the “Sylph,” and a President

Special to the Potomac Pontil
by Jack Sullivan

The exposure of the Great Whiskey Ring of 1875 rocked Washington D.C. and indeed the entire country like few national scandals before or since. On May 10, 1875, Federal agents stormed into the offices of nine St. Louis distilleries, seized illicit whiskey and box loads of records, and arrested their proprietors. Simultaneous arrests occurred in Cincinnati, Milwaukee and Chicago. Ultimately, indictments were issued against 240 whiskey-makers, government officials and others; 110 were found guilty. Most of them went to jail. Thus ended a massive scheme to defraud the U.S. of excise taxes on distilled spirits.

At this time when politically related scandals seem to proliferate – Abramoff, DeLay, “Duke” Cunningham, “Scooter” Libbey, etc. – we are reminded of such historical incidents. Indeed, three elements illustrate the multiple dimensions of the The Great Whiskey Ring: Kelly’s Old Cabin Bitters, Louise Hawkins, a.k.a. “The Sylph,” and President Ulysses S. Grant.

Kelly’s Old Cabin Bitters

Shown at left is a bottle shaped to look like a two story log cabin with a peaked roof. It is a Kelly’s Old Cabin Bitters. Examples have sold to bottle collectors in recent months at prices approaching \$2,000. Kelly was James B. Kelly of New York, a distiller, who is shown below on a self-produced “proprietary” revenue stamp. This is an ironic touch since it was an attempt to evade federal revenues on alcohol that lay at the heart of the Great Whiskey Ring.



Garnhart was one of those arrested. His company disappeared forever from city directories. For one year, Adler, Furst & Co. was listed in St. Louis directories as “successor to J. H. Garnhart & Co.”, then it too disappeared.

My research has failed to determine the fate of Kelly but his Cabin Bitters brand vanishes about the same time. Through years the figural log cabin bottle has engendered fakes and repros, including one in milk glass shown at right.



Louise Hawkins, The Sylph

The “femme fatal” of the Great Whiskey Ring was a St. Louis woman of easy virtue named Louise “Lu” Hawkins, who ultimately would become known to millions of Americans simply as “The Sylph.” This was the name given to her by one of the conspirators, General Orville E. Babcock, who also happened to be a White House aide, personal secretary to President Ulysses S. Grant



General Orville E. Babcock (right)
Louise Hawkins, the Sylph (below)



Kelly also had a St. Louis address and a partnership there with a man named John H. Garnhart (sometimes spelled “Garnhard”). Garnhart began in a wholesale liquor business in about 1854. He was a “rectifier” who took raw spirits, added other ingredients and sold them. Among the spirituous products he apparently concocted with Kelly’s collaboration was Old Cabin Bitters. When the May 10 raid occurred,



A contemporary writer described Ms. Hawkins this way: “Her form was petit and yet withal, a plumpness and development which made her a being whose tempting luscious deliciousness was irresistible....She was the essence of grace, distilled from the buds of perfection, and with a tongue on which the oil of vivacity and seduction never ceased running; she was indeed a sylph and a siren, whose presence was like the flavor of the poppy mixed with the perfumes of Araby.” While she might not have lived up to this extravagant description, one of her few extant likenesses (at left) indicates a certain appeal.

Certainly General Babcock found her enchanting. In St. Louis to collect a share of kickbacks from local whiskey men, he met her through a friend and the two almost immediately began an affair which eventually all America knew about. Babcock’s visits to St. Louis to pick up graft payments for himself and, some have alleged, the Republican Party, became more frequent. Back in Washington, he repeatedly referred to “The Sylph” in messages to cohorts that eventually became public through court records and titillated a Nation.

Because Babcock was a close colleague of Ulysses S. Grant, the press and public began to ask: “What did the President know and when did he know it?” – the same questions that later would fuel speculation about Richard Nixon in the Watergate scandal.

Grant Testifies



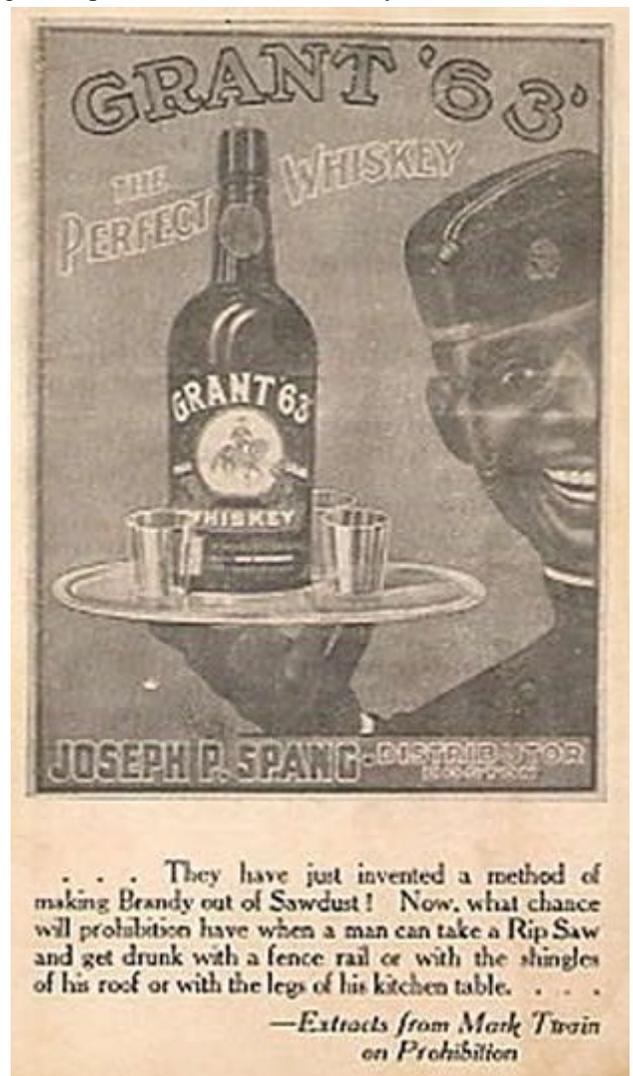
Leader of the victorious Northern armies in the Civil War and a fascinating figure of American history, Grant was in his second term as President when the scandal broke. His Secretary of the Treasury, Benjamin H. Bristow discovered that in St. Louis alone at least \$1.2 million in tax revenues annually were not accounted for. The total cost of the scam to

the U.S. approached \$3 million a year at a time when fifty cents would buy a hefty meal. Knowing that the corruption involved Republic political appointees, Bristow discussed the investigation with Grant who told him to proceed with vigor without regard to party labels or government positions.

Grant’s response likely occurred before he was aware of Babcock’s involvement in the Great Whiskey Ring. Always loyal to his staff, Grant later agreed to be deposed in the Babcock’s case. He was willing to go to St. Louis to testify but was persuaded by his advisers to answer questions from prosecution and defense lawyers only in the White House. Even so, it was the first and only time in American history that a sitting President has testified in a criminal case.

Grant’s usually good memory seemed to fail him at times during the examination but he was strong in his defense of General Babcock’s character and conduct. The President’s testimony clearly influenced the St. Louis jury which ultimately acquitted Babcock and then adjourned to a nearby saloon to celebrate. Grant subsequently appointed his erstwhile secretary to the post of inspector of lighthouses in the South. Babcock later drowned while on an inspection tour in Florida.

Grant himself never admitted any involvement in the Great Whiskey Ring – but faced many nasty accusations. Perhaps indirectly the flap resulted in only one whiskey being named after the North’s premier Civil War hero (by contrast, Gen. Sheridan was named on three brands). In 1892 the Joseph Spang distillery, located in Boston, issued its Grant ‘63 brand in his honor (Fig. 7). Unfortunately, Grant – who was known to be fond of whiskey – never got to sip his brand. He died seven years earlier.



Grant '63 ad on an ink blotter

NOTES: Material for this article has been gathered from a number of sources. The quotes about “The Sylph” are from *Secrets of the Great Whiskey Ring*, written by Gen. John McDonald, one of the conspirators who served time, and published in 1880. The picture of the shady lady is from McDonald’s book.

Best Since 1843

by Mike Cianciosi

I've been collecting DC beer and soda bottles for a few years now. Lately I've been making trips to the library to search through old Washington DC directories on microfilm, looking for bottlers. The information I'm gathering should help me to determine the dates of my bottles. For example, if I have a bottle that says "Henry Otto, 8th St NE Washington DC," I can say that the bottle must be from between 1887 and 1889, as those are the years that the directories list Henry Otto at that address. I've put a lot of the information I gathered on my web site (<http://members.cox.net/chosi/bottles/>).

I ran across something that didn't seem to add up. The bottle shown in figure 1 is a pyroglazed soda bottle from the Samuel C. Palmer soda company, probably from the 1930s. Highlighted is the trademark, which says "Best since 1843". But my directory searches seem to indicate that Palmer didn't get into the soda bottling business until sometime between the 1871 directory (where he was listed as a bookkeeper) and the 1872 directory (where he was listed with Robert M. Green as a bottler at 57 Greene Street in Georgetown).



Figure 1 – Pyroglaze Palmer bottle with logo

In fact, Samuel Claxton Palmer wasn't born until 1839, so it seems unlikely that he started a bottling business when he was only 4 years old. I couldn't find any evidence that his father William Henry Palmer or his older brothers John Morris Palmer and William Henry Palmer were in the bottling business.

My best guess is that the 1843 date refers to the bottling company that Palmer & Green bought from Riley Shinn in 1871. My directory searches show the following history for the bottling establishment at 57 Greene Street in Georgetown:

Arny & Shinn	1855-1862
Riley A. Shinn	1863-1871
Palmer & Green	1872-1874
Samuel C. Palmer	1875-1892

There are only a handful of DC directories before 1855, and many of them don't include Georgetown. It's quite possible that the bottling establishment at 57 Greene Street started in 1843. In fact, it may have started as "Maack & Arny", as there is a pontiled bottle with that name listed in our club book. Figure 2 shows a bottle from each of the companies at 57 Greene street (except Maack & Arny – does anybody have one of them they want to sell?).



Figure 2 – Bottles from 57 Greene Street, from left to right: Teal short-blob Arny & Shinn, teal squat R.A. Shinn, aqua short-blob Palmer & Green, amber gravitating stopper S.C. Palmer.

As I was researching what happened to the bottling works at 57 Greene Street, I first thought that Palmer moved out in 1880, as his address changed in 1881 to 1224 29th Street NW. Then I discovered that 1880 was the year that the street names in Georgetown were changed to match the rest of the city of Washington (i.e., east-west streets got letter names and north-south streets got number names). Since Greene Street got renamed to 29th Street, it appears that Palmer's building simply got a new address. It's kind of interesting that 2 blocks away at 40 Greene Street, the Dentz Brewery kept its Greene Street address in the 1881 directory and didn't switch over to the new 29th Street designation until 1882. I wonder if that was some resistance to the new street names, or just a publisher's mistake. I don't know what became of the bottling establishment at 57 Greene / 1224 29th after 1892. Today there is a row of townhouses there.

Palmer went on to run a bottling factory at 615 D street SW from 1888 to 1898, where he was an agent for the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company. He then opened a bottling factory at 1066 32nd street. Apparently in 1907 there was another street name change, and that section of 32nd street became Wisconsin Avenue. Palmer's company stayed at 1066 Wisconsin Avenue until 1940. Palmer died in 1914, and his children took over the company. The 1935 directory lists his daughter Mary Helen Palmer as the president, his son Roy M. Palmer as the vice president, and his daughter Rose Amelia Palmer as the treasurer. The 1940 directory listed Walter C. English as the president, G. Norden Hanover as the treasurer, and Dorothy L Hanover as the secretary – nobody named Palmer was left by that time.

One more thing I found interesting. I “googled” the address 1066 Wisconsin Avenue, and found that the Papa Razzi restaurant is there today, but the building that was there before (and presumably the building that housed the Palmer bottling factory) was originally the Vigilant Firehouse, which was apparently built in 1844. I wonder if they started building it in 1843....

Sources:

1. Various Washington DC directories on microfilm (from the Washingtoniana section of the Martin Luther King Jr. Library in DC)
2. *Antique Bottles from the Washington DC Area* by Potomac Bottle Collectors, 4th edition
3. The U.S. Census for various years (from ancestry.com)
4. *Chronicles of Georgetown Life 1865-1900* by Mary Mitchell

Walking in Old Town Alexandria

by Richard Lilienthal

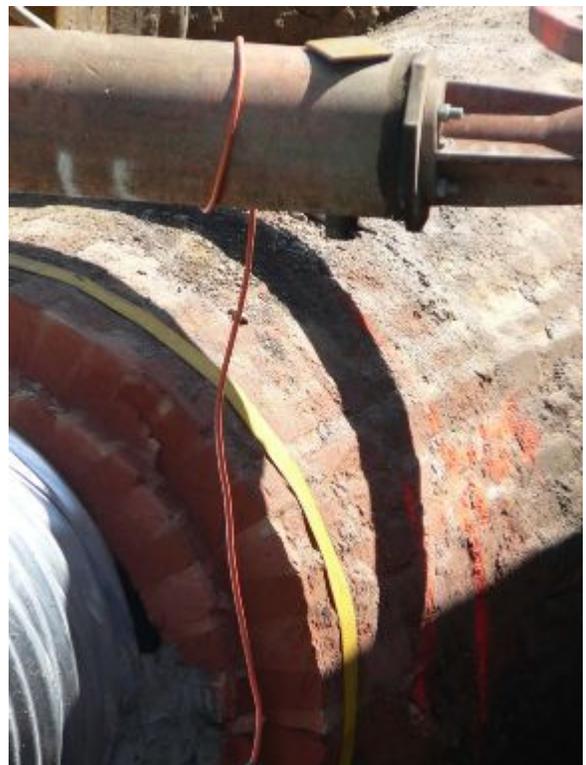
I noted construction at two old areas. Unfortunately, neither area showed signs of glass. That's my luck. If Andy Goldfrank were with me, he would have kicked some earth and a couple of blob sodas would have fallen at his feet. Anyway, I think the old brick wall and pipe make interesting pictures.



Pictures 1-2 are of a construction site on South Washington St, between Gibbon and Franklin Sts (near the Chicken Out, for those familiar with the area). The asphalt on what I assume was the parking lot next to the Roberts Memorial United Methodist Church has been removed and one section has been excavated. The picture shows a wall of old brick extending the depth of the dig. Since the digging has not progressed for at least the past week, I assume that the owner's are waiting on Alexandria archeologists. Unfortunately, there is a “No Trespassing” sign on the fence in front of the lot.



Pictures 3-4 are of construction/repairs around a pipe at Gibbon and South Royal Streets (near the Safeway, for those familiar with the area). Note that the main pipe is made of bricks.





Picture 5 shows a drain pipe/down spout at 305 Prince Street. The age is shown by the embossed "Alexandria DC" (the maker's name, TW & RC Smith, is also embossed). Nearby pipes say "Alexandria VA."



We retired folks walk a lot.

McCormick; PH: (910) 628-6245 or **Bret Lee**, E-mail: dex@intrestar.net.

July 15-16 - Adamstown, Pennsylvania

The 5th Annual Shupp's Grove Bottle Festival (Sat. & Sun. 6 AM - dark, Early Buyers Fri. 5 PM) at Shupp's Grove in Adamstown, Pennsylvania. Info: **Steve Guion**, PH: (717) 560-9480 E-mail: affinityinsurance@dejazzd.com or **Jere Hambleton**, (717) 393-5175, E-mail: jshdetector@webtv.net.



September 17 - Winchester, Virginia

The Apple Valley Bottle Collectors Club, Inc.'s 32rd Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM - 3 PM, Adm. \$3 Donation; Early Adm. 7:30 - 9 AM, Adm. \$10, Seniors 65+ Free) at the Hampton Inn, 1204 Berryville Ave. (I-81 Exit 313), Winchester, Virginia. Over 40 dealers in antique bottles, milks, Coca-Cola, White House vinegar, postcards & table top collectibles. Info: **Richard M. Venskoske**, 4496 Martinsburg Pike, Clear Brook, VA 22624, PH: (540) 247-4429.

October 7 - Richmond, Virginia

The Richmond Area Bottle Collectors 35th Annual Show & Sale (9 AM to 3 PM, Early Buyers 7:30 AM) at the Showplace Annex, 2003 Mechanicsville Turnpike, Richmond Virginia. Info: **Ed Faulkner** E-mail: faulkner@antiquebottles.com, PH. 804-739-2951 or **Marvin Croker** 4718 Twila Lane, Richmond, VA 23234, PH: 804-275-1101.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

June 1-3 - Grantville (Hershey), Pennsylvania

The National Association of Milk Bottle Collectors 26th Annual Convention (Fri. Hope Acres Farm trip 8:30 AM \$40 fee includes buffet lunch; Displays 9 AM, Awards Banquet 6:30 PM; Sat. Seminars beginning at 10 AM, PA Dairy Princess Ice Cream Social 3 PM; Auction 6:30 PM, Fee \$10 for members & \$12 for non-members) at the Holiday in Grantville, Pennsylvania. Info: NAMBC, The Milkroute, 18 Pond Place, Cos Cob, CT 06807. PH: (203) 869-8411; Website: www.milkroute.org.

June 2-3 - 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, Exit 14 off I-95, Lumberton, North Carolina. Info: **Paul Valenti**, 456 Boone Road, Lumberton, NC 28360; PH: (910) 738-3074 or **Mitchell**



Lee Shipman meets a "firelady" in Kensington, Maryland.