

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

June - July 2006

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Meeting June 27 –

No Meetings in July or August

Please join us at 8 PM on Tuesday, June 27th at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda, Maryland.

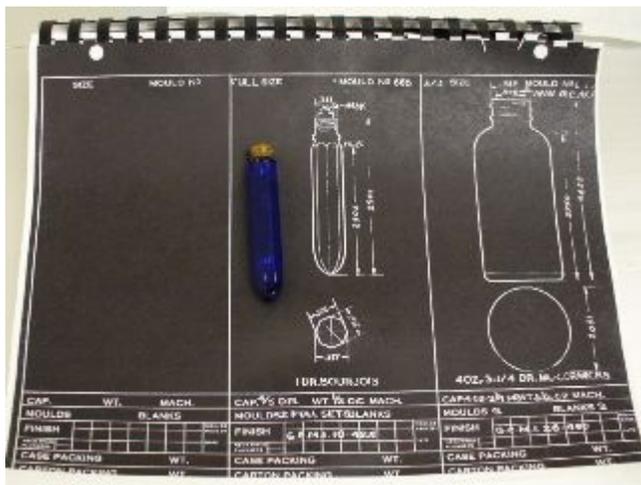
Announcements

Planning has begun for our annual **Club Picnic**. We are tentatively planning the picnic for September 30th. The picnic will take place at the same Fort Hunt Park site we used last year unless club members decide otherwise at the June meeting. Final information will be provided in the next *Pontil*.



Some show & tell bottles at our May 2006 meeting

Lee Shipman reports that the club now owns a \$1000 CD that will mature in a year yielding 5.1 percent interest. This is likely the first time that our club treasury has ever supported this sort of investment.



Jim Sears has a new address and phone number: 8008 Eastern Drive, Apt. 101, Silver Spring, MD 20910, (301) 588-2174. Please use this address for club newsletter exchanges and any hard copy submissions to the *Pontil*.

Our club is still considering alternatives for a 2007 show. **Andy Goldfrank** reports that the Northern Virginia Relic Hunters would be willing to give us a reduced price on a block of tables for their April show. This show is an extremely well-attended Friday-Saturday event at the Dulles Expo Center in Chantilly, Virginia. **Lee Shipman** proposes that the club consider the Kensington, Maryland site described in last month's *Pontil* for Labor Day weekend.

The pepper sauce shown above at left was brought to our May meeting by Bob Ford. Club members have seen many similar bottles in aqua, but none of us has heard of another cobalt example.

These unusual drawings seen at our May meeting are photocopies of blue prints from the Maryland Glass Company. They are extremely useful in identifying types of bottles produced in Baltimore.

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: 301/588-2174) & Andy Goldfrank (email: amg_sticky@yahoo.com, PH: 202/588-0543)
Web Site: www.potomacbottlecollectors.org Maintained by Peter Rydquist: pehraug@aol.com

New York City & Diggin' in Virginia Digathon: March 2006 by Andy Goldfrank

Where do I start? If you are reading this, you probably already know that I am addicted to digging for bottles and relics. Frankly, digging ranks up there in importance with only two other things in my life – my family and food – and it has been that way since I was less than four feet tall. As long as I can remember, when other people would daydream about venturing to the beach or mountains for a week of vacation, my vision of a rest and relaxation was to spend every waking hour digging holes in the ground in search of historic relics and the tales they told. As I passed from my teenage years into my early adult years, my family (and others) wondered if I would grow tired of this digging obsession. Well, all I did was make the transition from daily metal detecting sessions to intense weekend or weeklong privy digging ventures.

As my wife Joan always says, it is apparent that: *the more I dig, the more I want to dig*. Over the past few years, I have managed to find a few other like-minded companions (and it seems with every passing year more and more digging fools come out of hiding) who relax by going on digging trips. As follows is my latest weeklong digathon, which my wife encouraged me to go on even as we tended to our newborn daughter Samantha Elsa, with my regular privy digging buddies from New York and Colorado along with my newly-found Diggin' in Virginia brethren.

NYC Digging: March 17-21, 2006

The Denver boys, Marty Homola and Mike Saindon, arrived via airplane on Friday afternoon in Washington, D.C. They collected some digging equipment and headed to New York to meet Scott Jordan and located some privies. (I was scheduled to join them the following evening after some family duties.) Our first stop was the site of an old tavern or bar located on the Bowery near Cooper Union that one of our digging buddies, Adam Woodward, had obtained permission for all of us to dig. These first images are from an 1852 map published by Matthew Dripps and an 1864 watercolor of the location. The buildings we dug inside of are on the left side (or East side of Bowery) next to the five-story white structure seen in the watercolor and labeled the Bowery Hotel on the map. The exact buildings are hard to see but they are the

shorter ones with the sidewalk canopies in the middle of the block. The photograph, showing this same location, is from 1905; in this image the old hotel is clearly labeled with large lettering on the side of the building.

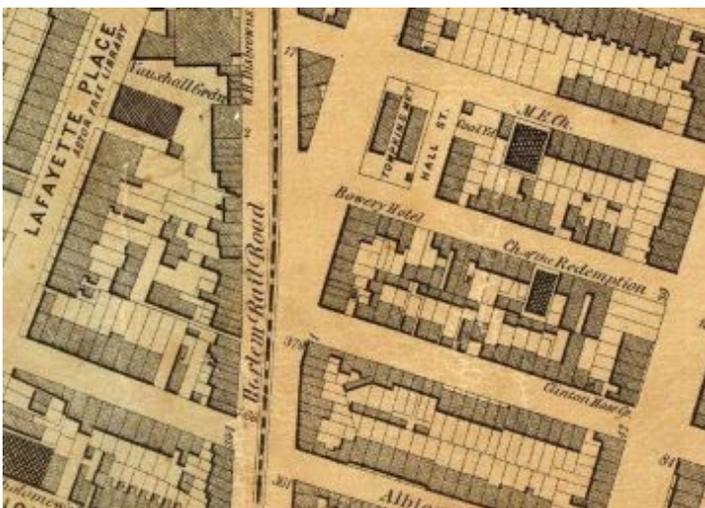


Looking south from Cooper Union (1864)



Looking south from Cooper Union (1905)

Not only was our dig site located on old New York's economic and entertainment boulevard of good and bad, but these (now rotting) structures were infamous themselves as the site of houses of ill repute and roughneck bars (as highlighted in Caleb Carr's best selling historical novel *Angel of Darkness* and Luc Sante's pop culture icon *Low Life*). It all began at about the time that Peter Stuyvesant, who was the Governor of the New Netherlands in the mid 1600s, established his 62-acre farm at the end of the Bowery. There is much to tell about this area but, for the most part, I will leave that for others and invite you to checkout <http://www.forgotten-ny.com/STREET%20SCENES/bowery/bowery.html> and <http://www.thing.net/~lina/bowery.html>. What should be said, in short, is that the modern-day view of the Bowery solely as a sour place for folks down on their luck, sodden with liquor and drugs, is but a small part of the Bowery's legacy. Its history is rich because for the better part of the 19th Century, the mile long Bowery served as a the life and soul of New Yorkers from



Bowery Site – 1852 Dripps Map

aristocrats to the lowbrow with its theaters and operas, saloons and bars, hotels and flophouses, circuses and museums, concert halls and boxing rings, along with the houses of prostitution and the religious missions.

This next image shows the street as it looked in 1935, with the elevated tracks running just a few feet from the front of the buildings. We had permission to dig any of the buildings starting with the hipped roof structure at the end of the block and going five lots north. **1935 Image of 5-6th Streets and Bowery**



We entered these now boarded-up, decrepit buildings, slated to come down for a hotel this summer, with the hopes of locating the privies. The problem is that over time, structures had been built over the entirety of every lot meaning that we had to punch through thick layers of poured concrete to start test holes. This was a daunting task but, as it turned out, we got lucky and instead stumbled upon a massive trash pit, in the basement below the concrete slab, dating back to the 1860s. We had never before found a trash pit of this size inside a building. The trash pit was at least 10 feet by 25 feet long and about 5 feet deep; it was stone & brick lined. As follows is an image of Marty and Mike on one end with Scott on the other end – as you can see we had to rig work lights in order to dig in the basement – and another of me in the pit with the side stonewall exposed.



Digging by Bowery Basement Wall (above)

stoneware bottles – leaving as many for the owner while discarding the same amount again in the hole. We got loads of dated sodas and early hutchinsons, neat whiskeys from lady’s legs to those with glass seals, Saratoga mineral waters, stamped stoneware beers and mineral waters, a number of different embossed bitters, and much more.



Mike with Carboy (right) Part of Basement Haul (below)



Marty, Mike, and Scott in Bowery Basement

There were so many bottles it was amazing. We only kept the ones in perfect shape, and that was after we had eliminated all of the plain wines and champagnes by tossing them in our backfill dirt because we knew that we could not carry everything out of the building. Plus we had promised to leave some bottles for the developers to put on display in the hotel when it is constructed. In the end, over two days, we took for ourselves about 125 glass and



There were some additional cool artifacts that we uncovered including a *Coates & Co's Plymouth* advertising match striker in excellent condition and a cobalt-decorated *Steinhardt Bros.*

Bowery jug in pieces. (Scott is in the process of restoring the stoneware piece.) As we were cleaning the loads of finds that evening, we concluded that we were digging in the remains of old



foundation from a prior structure or perhaps an old storage area in the basement of the existing building. Our research indicated that structures had been on this site since the early 1800s and much had changed over the decades.

Match Striker (left)



Shards of Steinhardt Bros Jug

During this period, we also managed to dig quite a few privies in Brooklyn. The first set was a couple of wood liners at a house renovation in Greenpoint behind an old Captain's house; the second bunch of wood liners was on a construction site in Red Hook. These holes had some real heartbreakers in them including a half a dozen broken *Drake's Plantation Bitters*, a puce *Lyon's Powder* without a neck, and an unusual colored, pontiled

Lancaster Glass Works soda missing half the blob. Nonetheless, come Monday evening, we had managed to amass a nice collection of 1850s to 1870s colored, pontiled, and even a couple of rare finds. The picture of "privy pit and basement finds" shows a green *Lyon's Powder* and a rare *Metzger's Roach Powder*, a handful of neat ice blue and green foods, a green umbrella, mixed in with a typical *Udolpho Wolfe's*, dated sodas, and pontiled ales and aqua medicines.

On the last full day in New York we had the honor of digging a cistern with Fireman Jack Fortmeyer near Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn. Scott and Jack had previously dug the privy (where they found "11 crappy bottles") and were not expecting much out of the cistern. We got there relatively early and, in short order, had cleared debris from the area of the cistern. Cisterns in Brooklyn are usually made of brick and located a few paces from the back of a building and, more importantly, were filled with trash when plumbing came about in the 1860s since they were no longer needed. Marty, who was running a fever, worked the small opening in the top of the dome and tossed a mix of bricks, dirt and ash onto the tarpaulins.



Cistern Digging Crew

Eventually we worked deep enough into the cistern to start using the tripod. Soon enough, a thick layer of ash with trash was revealed and the artifacts started to come out. Although it was never a torrent of bottles, we did manage to get a steady number throughout the course of the day. Marty even found a 1858 *Mason's Patent* with a mold number on the face; after conferring by cell phone with Jim Sears, we tossed it back in the hole at the end of the day as it was badly damaged. Doll parts, interesting pottery, and even some excellent bottles managed to come to the surface.



Privy Pit and Basement Finds



Marty Starting Cistern



Marty with Fever (above)



Scott in Cistern (top right)

Fireman Jack with Bucket and Finds (right)



Cistern Dig with the Landowner Charlie

After offering to split the bottles with the landowner Charlie (who despite standing in the cold all day long did not want a single thing!), we headed back to Jack's split up the finds. In the mix of usual aqua pontils (*Ayer's*, *Barry's Tricopherous for the Hair*, *Lyon's Kathairon for the Hair*, etc.) there were a couple of rarer ones including a *Dr. E. Bleecker's Tonic Mixture for Chills & Fever* and a *Winant's Indian Liniment*. (As an aside, when we were digging Marty, who was running quite a fever, found the *Tonic Mixture for Chills & Fever* and seemed to be disappointed that nothing remained of the contents.)

Likewise nice to find were two beautiful colored, albeit smooth-based, bottles: a *Dr. Tebbett's Physiological Hair Regenerator* in puce and a large purple cologne. After the split, we headed out with Jack to the Brooklyn Ale house for a nice meal and good beer.



Beautiful Color

After putting away enough beer to soothe our muscles, Scott, Marty, Mike and I returned to Scott's apartment to do our final split. We spent a couple of hours sorting, cleaning, and putting out the bottles from the NYC part of this digathon. Also, all of the bottles we had gotten from the split with Jack were put back into the fray. Over the next hour or so, although exhausted, we

managed to split up the take and even put aside a few for Scott's flea market sales and to donate as raffle prizes at the DIV hunt we were attending next in Virginia. We were off early the next morning to Virginia to finish the last leg of our digathon.



The Split at Jack's



The Final haul

Diggin' in Virginia V: March 22-26, 2006

In prior issues of the newsletter, I have written about the fantastic Civil War era digs that I have had the honor to participate in, learn from, and where I have met wonderful people likewise passionate about history and preserving the past. John Kendrick, who along with his warm and energetic wife Rose and a number of other well-know Civil War relic hunters, runs the Diggin' in Virginia invitationals (known by the acronym DIV). (See *The Potomac Pontil*, April 2005 and June-July 2005). These well-organized and productive relic hunts are dedicated to friendship and fun along with the proper recovery, identification and preservation of historical artifacts relating to the Civil War. A website at www.mytreasurespot.com, run by Donnie Smith, hosts a "Diggin'" forum 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. My first invitation to a DIV hunt had been secured after much encouragement from Marty to sign up, and now I have the distinct pleasure of calling even more folks digging buddies.

Marty, Mike and I were all granted the honor to be a part of DIV V, that was to be held on Brandy Rock Farm near Brandy Station, Virginia. This site is the well-documented location of the 1863-64 winter camps for the Union Army's VI Corps during the Civil War. These landowners had previously been reluctant to allow relic hunting; however, they needed an infusion of cash in order to

sustain the farm and prevent it from being sold to developers. The DIV Committee obtained access by providing a significant leasing fee to relic hunt the property for a fixed number of days. Incorporated into the agreement with the landowner is the promise to properly excavate, record, preserve and produce a report about the recoveries made. DIV V was to be primarily a surface metal detecting hunt as opposed to a dug-in encampment stemming from the fact that this site was a late-war military camp rather than from earlier in the Civil War when the camps were more likely to be dug-in huts. The following image shows a typical large-scale winter of 1863-64 camp from the Brandy Station, Virginia Area – this particular image allegedly is part of the 6th New York Calvary that had limited assignment to the VI Corps – and shows how the tents are on the surface rather than dug into the earth.

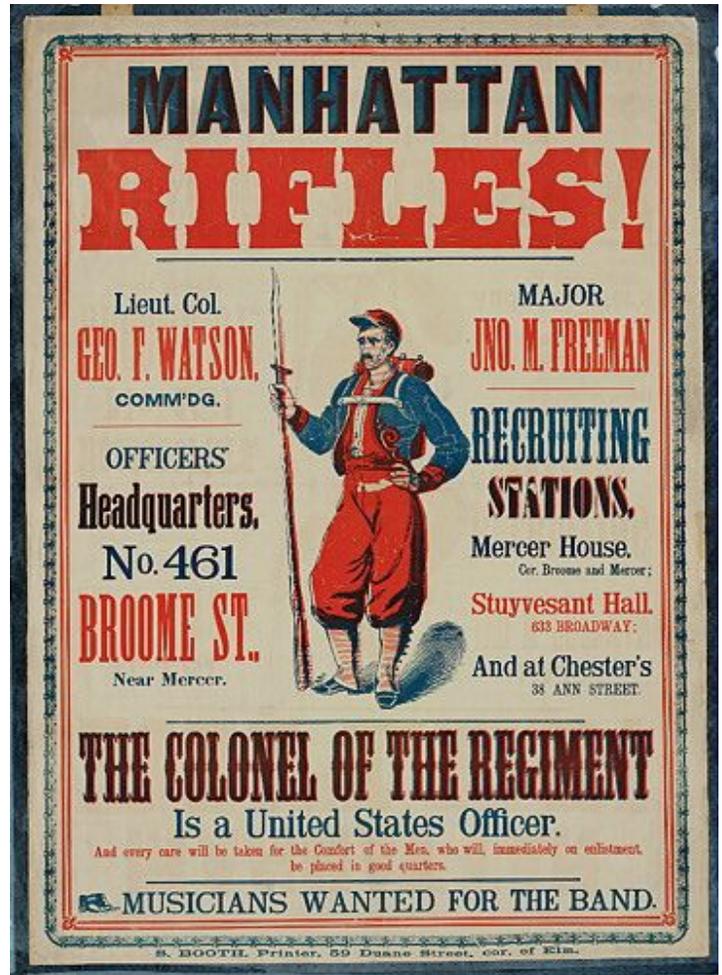


6th New York Camp in Brandy Station

One of the wonderful things about the DIV hunts is the camaraderie and the generosity of those participating. The way that the Colorado boys and I decided to give back to this group was to bring almost 100 of the bottles that we dug in New York to be given away as raffle prizes at the pre-hunt meeting. Now you might think, “Why the heck would we bring these bottles to DIV since they have no connection to the Civil War?” The answer is simple, because the bulk of the bottles that we brought as donations were found in an area where many of New York’s troops for the Civil War were recruited. As you can see in the poster below, the Manhattan Rifles that were part of the VI Corps had recruiting stations two blocks away from where we dug on the Bowery in New York! Also, this site was visible from Cooper Union where Abraham Lincoln gave a speech, in February 1860, that pushed him into contention as the Republican Party’s Presidential candidate (over William Seward the New Yorker). Frankly, we hypothesized that it is more likely than not that someone that served in the VI Corps drank from one of those vessels due this site’s proximity to all of this Civil War activity, the demographics of the area, and the simple fact that this was a bar.



Raffle Bottles (above)
Mike’s Finds (right)



Manhattan Recruiting Poster

Brandy Rock Farm was a tough place to metal detect because of the nature of the rocky soil that turned bad signals into good, and good ones would just disappear. For example, more than just a few times I would get a lousy signal indicating iron, dig a plug and pull out a knapsack part made of brass or a bullet made of lead. However, if I put the bullet or knapsack hook on the excavated dirt the signal would literally disappear. It took all of us a couple of days to figure out the peculiarity of the soil and, in the end, we all managed to come home with some real historical artifacts from these Civil War camps.

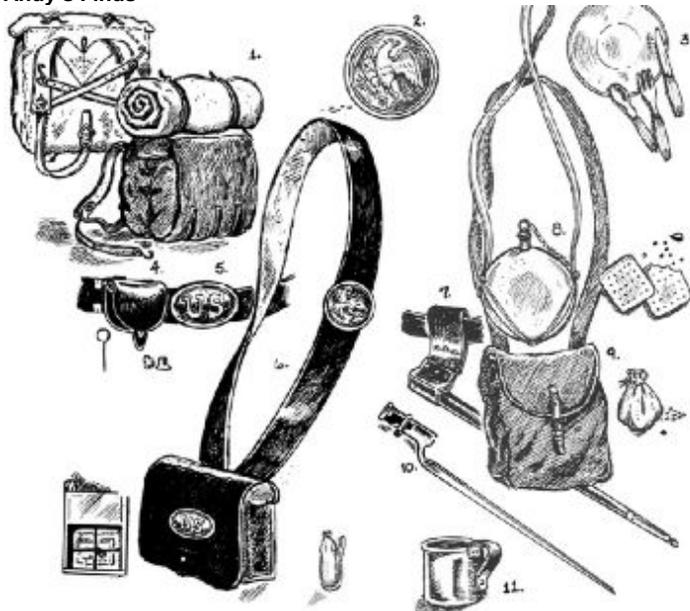




Marty's Finds



Andy's Finds



Accoutrements of Union Soldier's Uniform

As you can see, we all found a number of readily identifiable parts of a Union soldier's uniform including breast plates, buttons, knapsack parts, scabbard tips, epaulettes, and other items visible in this drawing. The number of artifacts recovered was remarkable. Equally significant was everybody's diligence in recording the information so as to contribute to our understanding of the troops and units that camped at the location the DIV hunt was held.

There were tremendous relics found both from a historians' and a collectors' view including ID tags for soldiers, rare belt buckles, Corps insignia, and – perhaps my favorite – a pair of bugles. It was remarkable to think that these bugles had been buried for over 140 years, and one even seemed as though with a little work it could still awaken the entire VI Corps. Frankly, it is recoveries like these bugles that sound loudly about the vitality and importance of relic hunter's retrieving our past and sharing it with others. Diggers, such as those at the DIV hunt and my privy digging buddies from around the country, regularly bring to the light of day artifacts of the past that would otherwise be destroyed by time and bulldozers. In turn, these amateur historians through their sharing of finds along with presenting the related historical tales, inspire the passion of many others in learning more about history and the world that we all share. These thoughts inspire me to dig and also to communicate, both orally and in writing, about the artifacts I salvage from the ground. And that is the reason for these weeklong digathons and, frankly, my digging addiction.



Bugles

Hope you enjoyed this article. Any comments, suggestions, or questions, please let me know either by calling me at 202/588-0543 or by emailing me at amg_sticky@yahoo.com. Good luck searching, Andy.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

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 10 – Lewes Delaware

Delmarva Antique Bottle Club 14th Annual Show & Sale, (9 AM to 3 PM, early buyers 7:30 AM), at the Cape Henlopen High School, Lewes, DE. Info: **Peter Beaman**, 28947 Lewes Georgetown Hwy., Lewes, DE 19958, PH: (302) 684-5055, email: oldngnu@comcast.net

September 15-20 – Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

The 9th Annual All-Dairy Bottles & Collectibles Show & Sale, (Fri. Sept 15, 2 to 7 PM, all other days 8 AM to 5 PM), at the Farm Show Complex, 2300 North Cameron Street Harrisburgh, PA Info: **Charles A. Itle**, PH: (717) 423-6789 or **Lolly Leshner**, PH: (717) 787-2905.

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.

October 15 – Bedford, Pennsylvania

Bedford County Antique Bottle Club 29th Annual Show & Sale, (9 AM to 1 PM, early buyers 7 AM), at the Bedford County Fairgrounds, 4H Building, Bedford, PA. Info: **LEO MCKENZIE**, PH: (814) 623-8019 or **CHARLES HAZLETT**, PH: (814) 695-0128.

November 12 – Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The Pittsburgh Antique Bottle Club's Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM - 2 PM, Early buyers 7 AM) at The Ice Garden, Rostraver, Twp. (Exit 46B off I-70 to Rt. 51 North), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Info: **Bob DeCroo**, 694 Fayette City Rd., Fayette City, PA 15438, PH: (724) 326-8741 or **Jay Hawkins**, 1280 Mt. Pleasant Rd., West Newton, PA 15089, PH: (724) 872-6013.

November 19 – Greensboro, North Carolina

The Southeast Bottle Club's 4th Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM to 3 PM, Early buyers 7:30 AM) at 501 Yanceyville Street, Greensboro, North Carolina. Info: **Reggie Lynch**, PO Box 13736, Durham, NC 27709, PH: (919) 789-4545.

November 26 – Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

The Forks of the Delaware Bottle Collectors Association's 33rd Annual Bottle & Antique Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM - 3 PM, Adm. \$1; Dealer & Display set-up 6 - 9 AM, Early buyers 7:30 AM) at the Bethlehem Catholic High School, Madison & Dewberry Ave. (2 miles South of Rt. 22, Center Street, Rt. 512), Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Info: **Bill Hegedus**, 20 Cambridge Pl., Catasauqua, PA 18032, PH: (610) 264-5945.

