

# The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

## March 2007

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### Meeting March 27th at 8:00 PM

We will watch a brief video on bottle digging from the Travel Channel's Cash & Treasure show. This program is controversial with bottle collectors, many of whom do not view themselves as treasure hunters.

**Future Meetings:** We will meet at 8 PM on the last Tuesday of the month unless otherwise announced. Upcoming meetings will be **April 24<sup>th</sup>** and **May 29<sup>th</sup>**. Please contact Andy Goldfrank or Al Miller with ideas for programs or themes for our future meetings. Thank you to Peter Rydquist for obtaining the video for the March program.

### Annual Contest Winners

Congratulations to **Dodd Delph**, who won our digger of the year contest with a label under glass 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hair Tonic Bottle. Dodd also won our shard contest with pieces of a Soldier-Ballerina flask from Baltimore. **Mike Cianciosi** was named collector of the year with a stoneware Superior Root Beer from Arny & Shinn. **Jim Sears** won the go-with contest with a solid piece of glass formed in a Mason jar mold.

### Northern Virginia Relic Hunters Show

The Northern Virginia Relic Hunters will have their annual show April 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> at the Dulles Expo Center in Chantilly, VA. Andy Goldfrank will represent our club and assess the potential for greater club involvement at next year's show. See <http://www.nvrha.com/show.HTM> for more information.



Dodd Delph (at left) receives an award from Al Miller



Club members and guests enjoy our annual club dinner at the February meeting.

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](http://www.potomacbottlecollectors.org)      Maintained by Peter Rydquist: pehraug@aol.com

# A Brooklyn Birthday Present

By Andy Goldfrank

This past June, as a birthday present, Scott Jordan and Jack Fortmeyer from New York invited me to dig the privy and the cistern of an 1850s row house in the Boerum Hill section of Brooklyn. They had gotten permission to start digging on Thursday morning but my busy work schedule would make it nearly impossible for me to take any time off. I worked long hours all week but Thursday came and went. By Friday morning, however, there was no holding me back. Well before dawn, I kissed Joan and Samantha goodbye and trekked to Union Station to ride the rails from Washington, D.C., to Penn Station in New York. Upon arriving in Manhattan, I hopped onto a New York City subway car and got to the Brooklyn address Scott told me by 10 in the morning. Staring at the row house, I saw no activity from the outside but was soon greeted by the hum of power tools – this had to be the right place. Winding my way through the house, where contractors were pulling floor boards to assess renovation costs, I walked out into a backyard jungle of massive, bright green weeds under an equally vibrant tree canopy.



Contractors remove floor boards from 1850's row house

Following a path carved through the weeds, I came upon Jack and Scott who were muttering nasty things about their digging partner being a day late. Apparently, the boys had spent the entire previous day opening up the privy but had only been able to excavate down about four feet because a couple of 1860s iron beds had been used to prevent the cap from sinking. The removal of the metal frames and headboards required painstaking digging along with bolt cutters to remove pieces as they were uncovered. In the 90 plus degree temperatures and humidity Scott and Jack had done some tough digging. Once I showed up, the guys quickly put me to work hoping my new energy would speed the dig along. However, it was another hot, humid day, and despite my best efforts it was slow going through the dense clay cap of the outhouse.



Jack and Scott (above) look down on Andy (below) in pit



The cap was void of artifacts but after removing at least another 5 feet of clay cap, we finally uncovered the first decent bottle. This bottle was against the stone wall, in some darker colored soil indicating that we were punching through the cap

and into the night soil layer. At first, I thought the bottle was a black glass Patent whiskey after uncovering the shoulder, but then I exposed a short neck and double collared lip. Extracting it from the top of the night soil layer, I pushed aside the dirt to reveal a D.A. Knowlton, Saratoga, New York mineral water in a wonderfully, bubbly rich olive color. The next sign that we were in the night soil layer (rather than an isolated pocket that had hung to the walls when the privy was dipped) was an elegant white pitcher. It was evident to us that, back in the late 1860s, this pitcher had been floating on the top of the outhouse muck when the workers tossed in the clay cap to seal off the privy and prevent the stench from rising into the yard. Of course, 140 years later this muck had decomposed into a light-weight, dark-colored, seed-laden loam. A close inspection of the pitcher's contents revealed thousands of delicate roots and seeds in the night soil.



D.A. Knowlton, Saratoga, New York bottle emerges from night soil



White ceramic pitcher full of night soil

Soon enough the bottles started to flow. Jack, who collects cream sodas, was next in the hole and he promptly pulled out a sweet, clean, local cream soda variant embossed "R, B & G, 146 Jay Street, Brooklyn, N.Y." Cream sodas look like smaller versions of regular short blob sodas from the 1850s-70s. I would like to think it was more than a mere coincidence that Jack's son, Eric, had just found a neat newspaper clipping from the July 8, 1867, issue of the *Brooklyn Eagle* that said:

*BURGLARY.*— At about three o'clock yesterday morning an entrance was effected into the mineral water factory of Russell, Brother & Goodwin, No. 146 Jay Street, and \$6 in money, three dozen cream soda and some clothing, in all valued at \$35, carried off. There is no clue to the perpetrators.

Perhaps the very cream soda we uncovered was involved in that burglary.



Jack Fortmeyer holds up R, B & G cream soda

As each bucket of dirt came out of the hole, Scott and I screened it in the hopes of recovering some neat smalls (and the shards to any pottery we wanted to restore). In terms of sifting, this pit was a slight disappointment (especially since in recent prior digs we had found rare buckles and buttons, a slave trader's token, and even gold rings) but we still managed some clay marbles, an 1868 shield nickel, and some cool 1850s Goodyear Patent hard rubber items. The first vulcanized rubber item was a key or tool tag, marked D.G & Co. on one side and a 21 inside a shield on the other; the second group was a number of long hard rubber strips which were artificial whale boning used for ladies' corsets, hoops, and other garments requiring support. These pieces of undergarment were stamped Goodyear 1852 and Popenhausen.

Eventually, we finished the 11-foot deep privy late that afternoon. In fact, Jack and Scott left me alone to get food and while just flipping the bottom hard clay, I stumbled across a large, green, open pontiled, Hover's master ink. This was a pleasant surprise since the bottom usually is void or produces the odd black glass ale. Once done, the filling process was tackled, which is quite a task to do correctly because careful filling and



**Dirt is screened to recover small artifacts**

tamping insures that we will get invited into many a neighbor's yard once they see how we respect a landowner's property. This focused time, nonetheless, allows us time to contemplate the finds and think about the prior owners of the row house. All told, we managed to find enough to indicate that the folks who had lived in the house were in pretty good health (by the lack of medicines), ate a ton of shellfish (from all the oyster and clam shells), smoked frugally (from the few well-used clay pipes), brushed their teeth (from the bone handled toothbrushes), had few or no children (from the lack of toys and only a few items like cod liver oil), were well-educated writers or artists (from the number of ink bottles in small and large sizes), and were interested in smelling sweet (from the large number of perfumes). This pattern was to continue in the cistern.

Shortly after finishing the privy, we decided to get a jump on the cistern because of the rain we heard was coming our way on Saturday. As a bit of background, in most places the cisterns are usually close to the house as they were intended to catch rainwater off the roof and to be used by the house occupants for bathing and cleaning. Cisterns are made of brick and coated with mortar to retain water, and had a small opening at the top through which a bucket could be dipped or hand pump set up. In most places that I have dug, and Brooklyn is no exception, cisterns generally were filled in at the time when privies stopped being used. Specifically this occurred when plumbing was introduced to a neighborhood removing the need for privies and cisterns because Brooklyn's Sanitary Code required that all drainage be directed to the sewer system. This usually happened in the 1860s-70s in the neighborhoods of Brooklyn. We often find, in Brooklyn, that the cisterns were filled with coal ash and trash – and thus bottles too. In this particular yard, the cistern was located within 10 feet of the back of the house and abutting an old aluminum-clad porch addition.

The next day, Saturday, we returned early to work the cistern. Jack showed up a bit after Scott and me, sharing with us the news that the rain was coming sooner than anticipated and that he thought we should wait to dig the cistern. Scott and I had anticipated this concern; in fact, it was the reason we got to the site early to open up the cistern and plan our tarping system should rains arrive sooner than desired. Jack told us that his wife, Delores, said (again) that we were crazy for digging on such a hot day but that if we dug in the rain we were certifiably



**Cistern abutted aluminum-clad porch**

crazy. Frankly, I have heard this many a time before and no doubt will hear it for years to come. More importantly, I was not going to cut short my birthday dig as that would be just rude!

In terms of the actual finds, the top layer of the cistern was composed of crunch, ash fill that had a bunch of 1860s vials and cylinders mixed in with a few, unusual circa 1830s pontiled flint glass squares and rectangles. This first foot also contained a sweet, green Lyon's Powder meant for killing roaches. After the initial layer, the next few feet contained sterile ash. At the same time, the sky started to drip a bit of rain. We decided to stop digging in order to put up a large tarpaulin that we "knew" (because we are so smart!) would keep us dry while we finished the cistern. And then the sky opened and dumped buckets of rain upon us. Not to worry we thought (since we were so brilliant to put a cover over our heads) until Scott, who was in the hole, said that water was running into the cistern at an alarming rate. We put a couple of buckets into the cistern to catch this water without avail. Up to that point, we had thought this incoming water was just surface runoff until we noticed the original ceramic feeder pipe was still draining water from the roof gutters into the cistern – this was not a good sign. As the deluge continued, the cistern literally filled with water.

What were we going to do? Jack reiterated his wife's warnings about sending all of us to a mental institution while Scott and I laughed about our predicament. Unwilling to quit at that moment and trapped by the storm, we proceed to eat a makeshift lunch of cashews, ice tea, and chocolate bars. The three of us debated whether we should continue digging or leave the hole for a sunny day. In front of us sat a cistern seemingly



**Cistern filling up with water**

full of water and, at this point, turning into void ash without the usual relics and bottles. Frankly, we had become discouraged even before the rain because for a few feet there had been no sign of any trash. The boys were ready to call it a day but then I noticed that in the last bucket of dirt we had dumped there were seeds, bits of rusted metal, and even pieces of eggshell. (Yes, oftentimes eggshells remain in a night soil layer along with other hardier organic substances.) I then talked Scott and Jack into trying a bit more especially since I would not be there to help them if they decided to come back on a sunny day. Once the rain stopped being a downpour, we removed at least 20 buckets of standing water before Scott went back into the hole. Pushing around the heavy ash, he promptly popped out a green, pontiled umbrella ink from off the wall and then a few minutes later pulled out a yellow, pontiled umbrella ink! In those last few wet and muddy feet of the cistern, we found a nice assortment of inks, dated aqua sodas, cosmetics, medicines, and more. It was hard going, as we kept bucketing out the rainwater and wading through the muck. At the very bottom, I pulled out a couple of aqua 1860s soda and a pontiled English medicine for Camphor Fluid.



**Scott excavates cistern**



**Scott holds up yellow and green pontiled umbrella inks**



**Close-up of umbrella inks from cistern and privy**

After finishing the cistern, with Jack emphasizing the entire time about how crazy we all were, we enjoyed a visit from the landlady. She was tremendous in her support of our dig, even snapping a few photos to capture the spirit of our efforts (and sanity), as Scott and I stood in our clothes covered with mud from head to toe. We explained the different kinds of bottles and about the outhouse and the cistern; eventually with some encouragement from us, after some initial reluctance because of all the work we had done, she picked out a few bottles. We then took the entire haul, including the landowner's so that we could get a decent group shot of what was recovered from her yard, for the big split at Jack's house around the corner. Ultimately, we found a nice assortment of glass: flint glass, pontiled inks (*i.e.*, amber, yellow, green and aqua umbrellas, square and small traveling inks, and even a green master ink), black glass whiskeys and ales, clear and aqua utilities, embossed aqua medicines, dated 1860s aqua sodas and a Bridgeton, New Jersey squat, perfumes and such. The crier of the dig was a large, open pontiled, olive amber Udolpho Wolfe's with some chunks missing from the lip. Overall there was not a huge quantity of bottles but there were a good number of quality bottles. More importantly, I was able to do all of this foolish nonsense with two good buddies. As crazy as this sounds, the two days I spent in

the heat and the rain, plus the clay, ash and mud, were an absolutely terrific way to celebrate my birthday. Thank you to Jack and Scott for a wonderful two days of digging! And yes, maybe we are certifiable, but at least we are harmless ...



A nice assortment of glass awaits the split at Jack's house



Jack and Scott show off some finds



Some of Scott and Andy's bottles after washing

The next day, Scott and I cleaned our bottles and took a group shot of some of the bottles we had the honor of taking home. You can see, on the right, the dark mineral water bottle which was the first decent bottle extracted from the hole – it is a D.A. Knowlton, Saratoga, New York in a wonderfully, bubbly rich olive color. You can also clearly see the cream soda to the left next to the green Lyon's Powder and the open pontiled teal green Hover's Phila master ink. The pontiled inks are in front with amber and green umbrellas plus an aqua cube ink. The open pontiled aqua cylinder is a medicine embossed Fosgate's Anodyne Cordial – quite a pretty group of bottles, and yet only part of the finds.

## Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

### APRIL 1 - MILLVILLE, NEW JERSEY

South Jersey Bottle & Glass Club's Annual Show & Sale (9 AM - 3 PM) at the Elks Lodge of Millville, 1815 East Broad Street, Millville, New Jersey. INFO: **MERRIE KERNAN**, PH: (856) 451-8904 or **BOB TOMPKINS**, PH: (856) 691-5170.

### APRIL 29 - HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

The Historical Bottle-Diggers of Virginia's 36th Annual Antique Bottle & Collectible Show & Sale (9 AM - 3 PM) at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds, (US Rt. 11 South, Exit 243 off I-81), Harrisonburg, Virginia. INFO: **SONNY SMILEY**, PH: (540) 434-1129 or E-mail: [lithiaman1@yahoo.com](mailto:lithiaman1@yahoo.com).

### MAY 4-5 - GRAY, TENNESSEE

The State of Franklin Antique Bottle & Collectibles Association's 9th Annual Show & Sale (Sat. 8 AM - 2 PM, Free Adm.; Early Buyers & Set-up, Fri. 9 AM - 6 PM, Adm. \$10 ) at the Appalachian Fairgrounds in Gray, Tennessee (Johnson City - Bristol, Tennessee area). 150 Tables Available. INFO: **MELISSA MILNER**, PH: (423) 928-4445 or E-mail: [mmilner12@chartertn.net](mailto:mmilner12@chartertn.net).

### MAY 20 - BRICK, NEW JERSEY

The Jersey Shore Bottle Club's 35th Annual Antique Bottle & Post Card Show (Sun. 9 AM - 2 PM) at the Brick Elks, 2491 Hooper Ave., Brick, New Jersey. Limited amount of tables. INFO: **RICHARD PEAL**, PH: (732) 267-2528 or E-mail: [manodirt@msn.com](mailto:manodirt@msn.com).

### JUNE 1- 2 - LUMBERTON, NORTH CAROLINA

The Robeson Antique Bottle Club Annual Bottle, Coin & Collectible Show & Sale (Fri. 3 - 9 PM; Sat. 9 AM - 1 PM) at the Expo and Farmer's Market, 1027 US 74 East, Lumberton North Carolina. INFO: **MITCHELL McCORMICK**, PH: (910) 628-6245 or **BRET LEE**, E-mail: [dex@intrstar.net](mailto:dex@intrstar.net)



# The Arlington Brewing Company

By Mike Cianciosi

One of the largest Washington DC breweries wasn't in Washington – it was across the Potomac in Rosslyn Virginia. It was the Arlington Brewing Company.

The brewery got its start as the Consumers Brewing Company, incorporated in August of 1895. The company purchased a 5 acre site just across the Aqueduct Bridge (replaced in 1923 by Key Bridge) and contracted Charles Kaestner & Co to construct a brewery. The brewery was to be a 4 story high brick building with a clock tower and with a capacity of 100,000 barrels per year. Figure 1 is a picture of the brewery building from the Consumers Brewing Company letterhead.

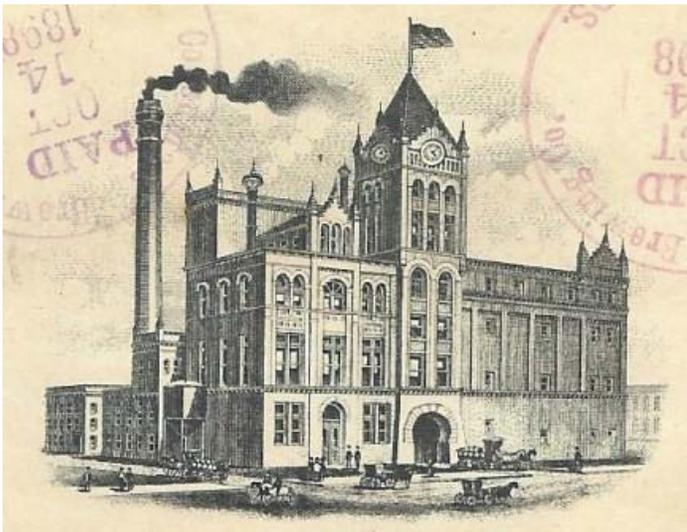


Figure 1 - Brewery Building (photo courtesy of Rayner Johnson)

*American Breweries II* lists over 50 breweries named “Consumers” in 18 different states. It’s unlikely that these companies were all connected, but there is evidence that it was a common name for breweries that were owned by a group of saloon owners. From the point of view of the breweries, the saloon owners were indeed the consumers of their product. In the case of the Consumers Brewing Company in Rosslyn, there is evidence that at least 5 of the original 7 men who started the company were indeed saloon owners or liquor dealers.

The Consumers Brewing Company in Rosslyn had stiff competition from the other major DC breweries. It had financial problems, and the banks tried to send it into receivership starting in 1898. In September of 1901 the banks succeeded, with the president of the company James Richardson named as the receiver. In May of 1902 the brewery was sold at auction to Mr. Barnett Katz, who had previously been a major investor in the brewery. The company was renamed the Arlington Brewing Company later that year. Figure 2 is an ad from November 1902 for beer from the new Arlington Brewery Company.

As Wholesome as Expert Hands and Pure Materials Can Make It.

Delivered to Any Part of the City in Unlettered Wagons.

SAY, I'm the ad. man for the ARLINGTON BREWING COMPANY, who're making that scientifically pure BEER, ALE, and PORTER. Ever try 'em? A Washington Brew for Washington People. Sparkling, exhilarating, refreshing, strengthening, and delicious; that's just my way of expressing some of the goodness contained in every bottle or glass of Arlington goods. Satisfying and benefiting. Gee! I'm getting thirsty—are you?—call up West 129.

Yours,  
ROSS-LYN.

Stock Porter (Keg.)	Sparkling Ale (Bottled.)	Columbia Beer (Light.)	Augustina Beer (Dark.)	Stock Porter (Bottled.)
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**Arlington Brewing Company,**  
ROSSLYN, VA.

Figure 2 - Arlington Brewing Company Ad from 1902

Just how much was changed at the brewery is not known, but Figure 3 shows that the bottles changed very little. These bottles are nearly identical except for the one word “Consumers” vs. “Arlington”.



Figure 3 - Consumers/Arlington Brewing Co Bottles

The Arlington Brewing Co was helped in 1904 by the Great Falls and Old Dominion Railroad, later named the Great Falls Division of the Washington and Old Dominion (W&OD) Railroad, which ran right past the brewery. The railroad started in Georgetown, ran by the brewery in Rosslyn, then split to either take passengers to Great Falls or to connect with the main rail that went from Alexandria to Purcellville.

The Arlington Brewing Co had some legal problems in 1910 and 1911 because Rosslyn was part of Alexandria County (modern day Arlington County), which was a dry county at the time. They had to fight legal battles just to be able to transport their beer through the county.

In 1918 the brewery closed for good due to Prohibition. The building was then owned by the Thomas Cusack Company until February of 1920, when it was bought by John E. Fowler. Fowler owned the Cherry Smash soda company, and moved his operation from Richmond Virginia to the former brewery in Rosslyn. At the time Cherry Smash was the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest company of its kind in the East, second only to the Coca-Cola Company. The Parker-Browner Lithographing Company also occupied one of the buildings that made up the former brewery.

Based on the bottles, it would seem that the Cherry Smash soda was primarily sold in concentrated syrup form. Figure 4 shows two 1 gallon jugs that mention Rosslyn VA on the labels. They have instructions to mix one part Cherry Smash Syrup to 5 parts carbonated water to make soda, or to add the syrup directly to an ice cream sundae. Some of these bottles have their labels upside-down, as they were sometimes placed upside down into soda dispensers (similar to a modern water cooler). Bright red Cherry Smash soda fountains are popular items on eBay.



Figure 4 - Cherry Smash Jugs from Rosslyn VA

Cherry Smash made John Fowler a very rich man, but in 1933, with Prohibition about to be lifted, he decided to convert his soda factory back into a brewery. In January the Dixie Brewing Corporation purchased the facility with John Fowler as its president. A stock offer notice in February estimated that the brewery would have a capacity in excess of 3 million cases a year, with an expected profit of 25 cents per case. There's no evidence that the Dixie Brewing Company ever produced any beer though, as the company folded in 1934.

In its last years, the brewery building acted as a warehouse. Figure 5 shows what the brewery building looked like in the 1950's. It was torn down in 1958 to make way for the Key Bridge Motor hotel and a Hot Shoppes restaurant. Over time the Hot Shoppes was torn down, and the hotel expanded to become the current Key Bridge Marriott hotel at 1401 Lee Highway.



Figure 5 - Brewery Building c1955

#### Sources:

1. Various Washington DC directories on microfilm (from the Washingtoniana section of the Martin Luther King Jr. Library in DC)
2. *American Breweries II* by Dale P. Van Wieren
3. Various articles from the *Washington Post* newspaper
4. Various articles from the *Washington Star* newspaper
5. *From Alexandria to the Blue Ridge: The Story of the Washington & Old Dominion Railroad*, The Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority

At our February meeting Scott Jordan displays a collage made from shards and other artifacts that he has dug

