

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

April 2009

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Meeting April 28th

Cure bottles will be the theme of our April meeting. Please bring in your favorite cures for show & tell.

March Meeting



Our March theme was spring water bottle. In the photo above at left Dodd Delph shows one of his spring water bottles. Mark Benbow (at right) collects tin cans and brought in some unusual water cans. These held drinking water in 1950's fallout shelters.

Lee Shipman was so impressed that all of our club officers showed up for the March meeting that she insisted we get the photo at right of Andy Goldfrank (president), Lee Shipman (treasurer), Jim Sears (secretary), and Al Miller (vice president). Now that we have been duly photographed, our officers would be happy to let other members take over.

Our March meeting also featured a great presentation of bottles from Digging in Virginia XI. Andy Goldfrank promises to write a great article on this subject for a future *Pontil*.

Congratulations to our annual club contest winners: collector of the year – Mike Cianciosi, digger of the year and go-with of the year – Peter Rydquist, and shard of the year – Lee Shipman.



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: 609/472-5473) & Andy Goldfrank (email: amg_sticky@yahoo.com, PH: 202/588-0543)
Web Site: www.potomacbottlecollectors.org Maintained by Al Miller: www.potomacbottlecollectors.org/contact.php

Those Bad, Bad Buchu Boys

By Jack Sullivan

Special to the Potomac Pontil

Buchu is a South American plant (Fig. 1) with reputed medicinal qualities that spawned generations of quack remedies sold to a gullible public by a tribe of unscrupulous hucksters – bad boys all. Reputable pharmacies prescribed buchu for a series of stomach and bladder ailments where it seemed to have a palliative effect. As shown here in a label from the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary in Alexandria (Fig. 2), no extravagant claims were made for its efficacy.



Fig. 1: The buchu plant

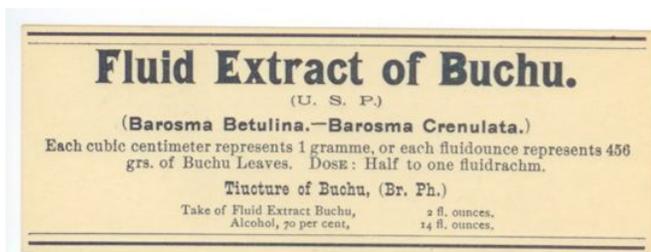


Fig. 2: Extract of buchu label

Contrast that restraint with the claims on the District of Columbia bottle, shown here front and back (Figs. 3,4). The Monarch Buchu Gin label states that the product is for the kidneys and bladder and makes the bogus guarantee to be in compliance with the Food and Drug Act of 1906. The labeled distributor of this product was the Garrick Co. of Washington. The manufacturer was a well-known to the Federal food and drug people as a “bad boy” outfit from Cincinnati, Ohio, named the Buttman-Johnson Company.



Fig. 3: Monarch Buchu Gin - front



Fig. 4: Monarch Buchu Gin - back

The Rise and Rapid Fall of Buttman-Johnson

The company was created in 1908 with principal officers Morris Buttman and Ignatius Kugel. They operated a factory located on Sycamore Street in Cincinnati, producing a variety of phony remedies that quickly brought trouble to their door. About 1909 Buttman-Johnson Co. shipped from Ohio to Oregon a product called "Pepsin Magen Bitters." The label boasted that these bitters ranked "among the best means for preservation of the digestive organs." It further stated that "weakness of the stomach is mainly due to scanty secretion of pepsin" and that Pepsin Magen Bitters would bring a turbulent tummy back to harmony.

When analyzed by government chemists, Pepsin Magen Bitters was found to contain water, 30 percent alcohol, 5 percent sugar, and less than 0.0001 gram of pepsin in each cubic centimeter of the preparation. It was declared misbranded and the company was fined \$25. Ignoring that light rap on its corporate knuckles, Buttman-Johnson in 1910 shipped to Texas a remedy it called "Pale Orange Bitters" with the claim that it was: "*A Wholesome Tonic. Superior Quality...These Bitters are guaranteed to be made under the most approved process of the best materials.*"

This time the Bureau of Chemistry reported that Pale Orange Bitters was water, 33 percent alcohol, and a little caramel coloring. This patent medicine also was declared misbranded by the Feds. Buttman-Johnson again was fined \$25 with an added \$14.23 in court costs. Subsequently sued by clients and creditors for other shady business practices, after only five years in business the company filed for bankruptcy and disappeared. Like many bad boys of their kind, the partners found new lucrative pursuits. Morris Buttman crossed the Ohio River to Covington, Kentucky, where he founded the Liberty Cherry & Fruit Company, a cannery that prospered for almost a half century.

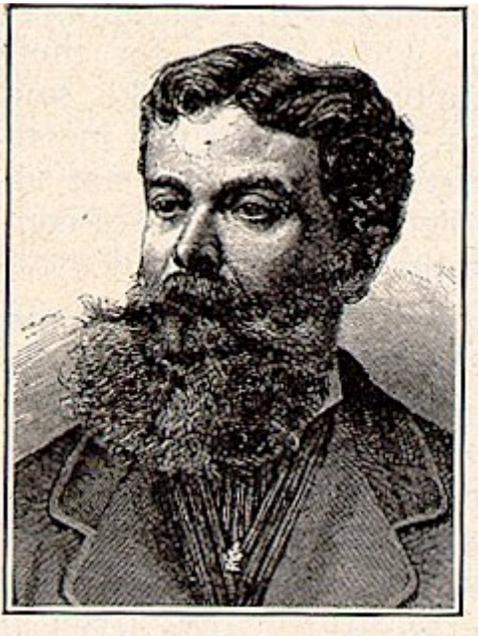


Fig. 5: Henry T. Helmbold portrait

Henry Helmbold: Godfather of Buchu

The makers of Monarch Buchu Gin were following in the footsteps of Henry T. Helmbold (Fig. 5), the first scoundrel to hitch his wagon to the leaves of the buchu plant. Born in Philadelphia in 1826, Helmbold, who stood barely five feet tall, liked to call himself "Doctor." He was in reality a druggist who at various time operated stores in his home town and in New York City. Along the way, Helmbold decided selling quack medicines was much more lucrative than running a legitimate pharmacy.

Not content with watering down the normal buchu dose, he greatly expanded the number of ailments and diseases that Helmbold's Extract of Buchu would cure or prevent. As shown here in an 1857 ad (Fig. 6), he advertised his nostrum widely in national publications like the Saturday Evening Post. In addition, he launched a vast surreptitious ad campaign at hotels and public toilets with a pink pamphlet that described the horrors of venereal disease brought on by "excesses in married life, early indiscretion, and self abuse." Helmbold claimed his Extract of Buchu was a sure remedy.

HELMBOLD'S EXTRACT OF BUCHU!!!
 HELMBOLD'S Extract of Buchu cures Gravel.
 HELMBOLD'S Extract of Buchu cures Diseases of the Bladder.
 HELMBOLD'S Extract of Buchu cures Diseases of the Kidneys.
 HELMBOLD'S Extract of Buchu cures Dropsy.
 HELMBOLD'S Extract of Buchu for general Weakness.
 HELMBOLD'S Extract of Buchu for all diseases arising from exposure.
 HELMBOLD'S Extract of Buchu is taken by male and female.

JOY TO THE AFFLICTED!

HELMBOLD'S EXTRACT OF BUCHU,
 For Nervous and Debilitated Sufferers, and removes all the symptoms, viz:—Loss of power, loss of memory, general weakness, dimness of vision, languor and universal lassitude of the muscular system, temporary suffusion, loss of sight, &c.

If these symptoms are allowed to go on, (which this medicine invariably removes,) soon follow fatuity and epileptic fits. Who can say that these excesses are not frequently followed by these direful diseases, Insanity and Consumption.

The records of Insane Asylums and the melancholy deaths by Consumption, bear ample witness of the truth of this assertion.

With woful measures, wan Despair,
 Low, sullen sounds his grief beguiled.

HELMBOLD'S EXTRACT OF BUCHU gives
 Health and vigor to the frame,
 And bloom to the pallid cheek.

If you are suffering with any of the above distressing ailments, procure the remedy at once.
 Evidence, of the most reliable and responsible character, open to the inspection of all.
 Price, \$1 per bottle, or six for \$5, deliverable to any address.

Address Letters to H. T. HELMBOLD, No. 52 South 10th St., Assembly Buildings, Philadelphia. Sold by Druggists everywhere. Beware of counterfeits. Ask for HELMBOLD'S. Take No Other. aug8-ew6t

Fig.6: Helmbold buchu ad

As a result of vigorous marketing, Helmbold became incredibly rich in a very short time and launched upon a lavish life style. Moving from Philadelphia to New York City, he constructed a spectacular "Temple of Pharmacy" on Broadway. There he sold buchu to the rich and famous New Yorkers of his day. The "house that buchu built" was a tourist attraction for Gotham visitors and Helmbold became a celebrity. Shown here is the frontispiece of a Civil War era song composed in his honor (Fig. 7).

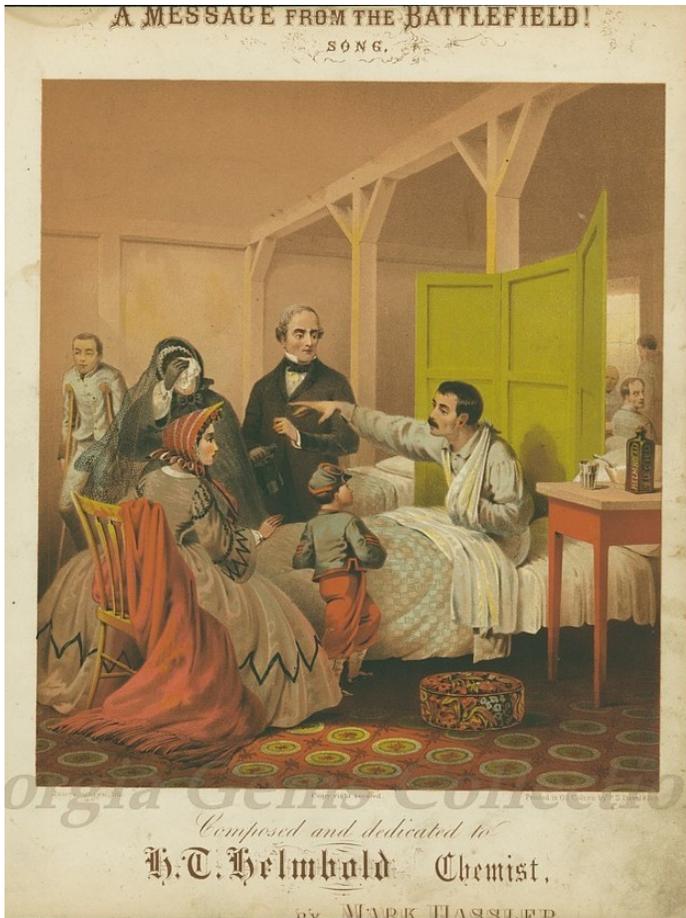


Fig. 7: Civil War song sheet

Helmbold soon proliferated his medicinal products. He produced a line of buchu pills, shown here as packaged by a Butte, Montana, druggist (Fig. 8). He also produced a Fluid Extract of Sarsaparilla, which he described in ads as “a great blood purifier and beautifier of the complexion” (Fig. 9). With the ill-gotten gains from these nostrums, Helmbold bought a sprawling summer home in Long Branch on the New Jersey shore, where he entertained such luminaries as President Ulysses S. Grant.

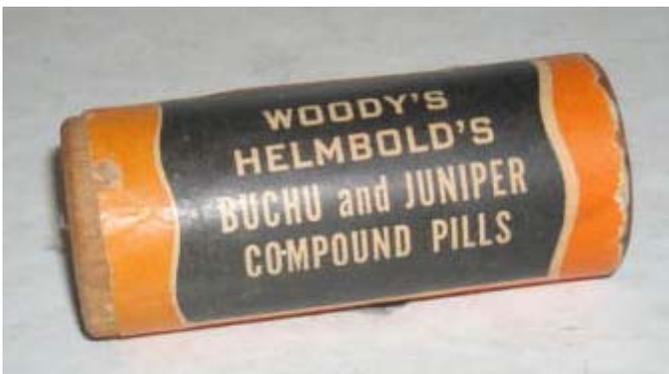


Fig. 8: Helmbold buchu pills roll



Fig. 9: Helmbold Sarsaparilla bottles

But as the money rolled in, the “Doctor” himself began to lose control. He drank heavily and seven times had to be confined in a mental hospital. There were lawsuits, one between Helmbold and his own brother, over the right to make Extract of Buchu. Business suffered, the Temple of Pharmacy was closed, and in 1892 at his Long Branch home, Helmbold died.

The Elusive Dr. Bouvier

Buchu, however, was far from dead. Any number of quack medicine floggers were quick to pick up the nostrum. Among them was the mysterious, and possibly fictional, Dr. C. Bouvier of Louisville, Kentucky. His buchu gin bottles are dug or found in shops all over America. Some come in interesting colors (Fig. 10, 11). Others have interesting shapes (Fig. 12). Still others, like the pint flask shown here, are relatively plain (Fig. 13).



Fig. 10: Bouvier colored bottle #1



Fig. 11: Bouvier colored bottle #2



Fig. 15: Bouvier toothpick - front



Fig. 12: Bouvier plain bottle (left)



Fig. 13: Bouvier pint flask (right)



Fig. 16: Bouvier toothpick - back

All contained "buchu gin," a concoction made by percolating gin liquor through buchu leaves, presumably taking along their essence and health-giving properties. Then distilled water and syrup were added. Dr. C. Bouvier's advertising claimed that the nostrum was a tonic for the kidneys and bladder. The firm was noted for giveaway items with that message, including a shot glass (Fig. 14) and a toothpick, seen here front and back (Fig. 15, 16). Bouvier also produced an advertising watch fob (Fig. 17).

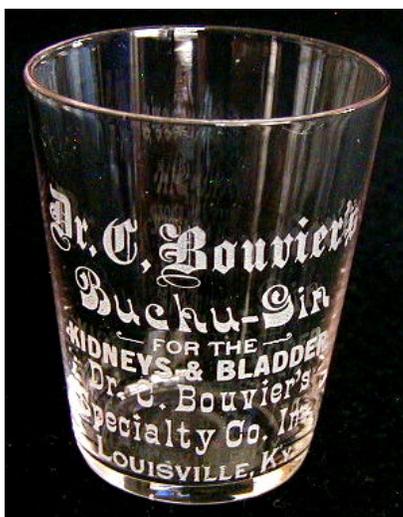


Fig. 14: Bouvier shot glass



Fig. 17: Bouvier watch fob

But who was Dr. C. Bouvier? A factory building existed in Louisville with his name prominently attached to buchu gin as one product of Dr. C. Bouvier's Specialty Company (Fig. 18). A search of city and other records, however, fails to find anyone with that name. One clue may be a shot glass (Fig. 19). It cites the Rosenbaum Brothers who were whiskey dealers in Louisville, listed in directories from 1886 to 1905, selling liquor brands such as "Glee Club" and "Kentucky Home." They owned the Bouvier brand. Did they concoct the doctor for merchandising purposes?



Fig. 18: Photo: Bouvier Specialty Co.

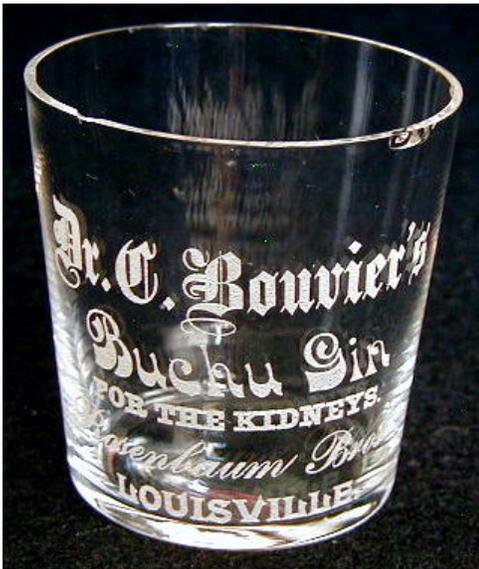


Fig. 19: Rosenbaum Bros. Bouvier shot glass

Other evidence arises from a 1909 case in which the Bouvier company argued that its buchu gin was a medicine and should not be taxed as liquor. The court disagreed, noting that gin was "notoriously strong alcoholic spirits," and that the amount of buchu was negligible. In short, buchu gin was an alcoholic beverage and should be taxed as such. During these proceedings no Dr. Bouvier ever appeared to argue the medicinal properties of his medicine, as was common in such cases. My surmise is that the Rosenbaums were the perpetrators of Bouvier's Buchu Gin, joining Buttman, Kugel and Helmbold in profitable quackery.

By 1940 buchu had been removed from most international pharmacologies. Today we have only bottles, shot

glasses and other advertising items to remind us of a time when a lowly Latin American leaf generated millions of greenback dollars for a fraternity of Bad Bad Buchu Boys.

Notes: The information for this article was gathered from a range of internet and printed sources. Primary among sources on Henry Helmbold was the 1962 book, *Toadstool Millionaires*, by James Harvey Young. The photos of the Monarch Buchu Gin are through the courtesy of Richard Lillienthal. Special thanks to Amanda Warner of the Alexandria museums staff for the Stabler-Leadbeater label. The University of Louisville library was the source of the photo of the Dr. C. Bouvier Specialty Company.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

MAY 3 – BRICK, NEW JERSEY

The Jersey Shore Bottle Club's 37th Annual Antique Bottles & Post Card Show & Sale (Sun. 8:30 AM - 2 PM, Donation \$3) at the Brick Elks, 2491 Hooper Ave., Brick, New Jersey. Info: **RICH PEAL**, PH: (732) 267-2528 or E-mail: manodirt@msn.com.



MAY 17 WASHINGTON, PENNSYLVANIA

Washington County Antique Bottle Club 35th Annual Show & Sale, (9 AM to 2 PM), at the Alpine Star Lodge, 735 Jefferson Ave., Washington, PA. Info: **RUSS CRUPE**, 52 Cherry Road, Avella, PA 15312, PH: (724) 345-3653 or (412) 298-7831, email: heidirus@gmail.com

JUNE 4-7 – GRANTVILLE (HERSHEY), PENNSYLVANIA

The National Association of Milk Bottle Collectors' 29th Annual Convention at the Holiday Inn in Grantville (Hershey), Pennsylvania. INFO: **PENNY GOTTLIEB**, 18 Pond Rd., Cos Cob, CT 06807, PH: (203) 869-8411, E-mail: gottmilk@msn.com. Website: www.milkbottlecollectors.com.

JULY 18 & 19 ADAMSTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

Shupp's Grove Bottle Festival, (Sat. & Sun 6 AM to dark, early buyers Fri. 5 PM), at Shupp's Grove in Adamstown. Info: **STEVE GUION**, (717) 626-5557 or **JERE HAMBLETON**, PH: (717) 393) 5175, email: jshdetector@webtv.net

OCTOBER 3 - RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Richmond Virginia Antique Bottle Show & Sale (Sat. 9 AM - 3 PM, \$3, Early Adm. 7:30 AM \$10) **NEW LOCATION** -at the Chesterfield County Fairgrounds, 10300 Courthouse Rd., Chesterfield, VA 23832, INFO: **MARVIN CROKER**, PH: (804) 275-1101, E-mail: RichBottleClub@comcast.net or **ED FAULKNER**, PH: (804) 739-2951