

# The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

## October 2010

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## Meeting October 26th

Please join us at 8 PM on Tuesday, October 26<sup>th</sup> at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda. Please bring in bottles you have acquired over the summer.

## Views from Our September Picnic



Top: Dodd Delph shows off recent finds. Dodd dug the very early stoneware jug in pieces.

Middle Left: Show & tell items at the picnic.

Middle Right: Bocci ball

Bottom: Andy Goldfrank, Herbert Goldfrank, and Lee Shipman

# P.D. Fahrney: The Preacher and His Potions

By Jack Sullivan  
[Special to the Potomac Pontil]

From the perspective of the 21st Century it might seem a paradox that a minister of the Gospel would also be the purveyor of quack medicines claiming to cure cholera, tuberculosis and other diseases, potions that contained opium, chloroform, cannabis and alcohol. For Peter Dennis Fahrney (Fig. 1) of Frederick, Maryland, however, it was all in a day's work.



Fig. 1: Picture of P.D. Fahrney

Better known as "P.D." Fahrney, he advertised himself as a medical doctor but there is little evidence of his earning a medical degree. Instead, he was a member of a large Maryland family that for several generations had concocted a variety of nostrums and had gotten rich selling them to a gullible public. At the same time family members were leading lights in the German Baptist Church, often known as "Dunkards" for their baptizing techniques.

Born in Boonesboro Maryland in 1843, P.D. was the nephew of Elder Daniel Fahrney, proprietor of the Drs. D. Fahrney & Son Company, a successful quack cure outfit. He studied with his uncle for a number of years and for a short time

was active in that business. In 1884, for reasons unknown, the nephew broke his family ties, moved to Frederick, and bought a patent medicine company there.

That operation had been founded in Frederick in the late 1870s by Victor Koontz. Koontz gave his name to a series of nostrums, including Victor Pain Balm, Victor Infant Relief and Victor Bone and Nerve Liniment (Fig. 2). Apparently seeking to distance his company and products from the other Fahrneys, P.D. kept the Victor name and began building sales and revenue.

**VICTOR REMEDIES!**

**Household Preparations**

**Koontz & Co.,**  
MANUFACTURERS & PROPRIETORS,  
FREDRICK CITY, MD.

**VICTOR No. 9, or Pain Balm,**  
As an Internal and External Relief has no equal in the history of medicine for all painful nervous affections, Neuralgia, Headache, Toothache, Cramps, Colic, Cholera Morbus, Diarrhœa, Rheumatism, &c  
**Price 50-cts. Per Bottle**

**Victor Infant Relief.**  
The great remedy for Colic, Diarrhœa, Dysentery, Griping and Spasms of the bowels, and Teething in Children. Contains no poisonous drugs to stupify the patient or rack the system of the child. Give it a trial.  
**Price 25 cts. Per Bottle.**

**Victor Bone & Nerve Liniment,**  
Will recommend itself upon a single application. As an external application it cannot be excelled for Aches, Pains, Lumps, and Bruises for Man or Beast.  
**Price 25 cts. Per Bottle.**

*Full Directions on Each Bottle.*

✶The above remedies are for sale by J. M. HUBER, Gettysburg, and by druggists and store keepers throughout the county.  
Aug. 10-3m

Fig. 2: Pre-1884 Victor Remedies ad

His Victor Remedies Co., incorporated in 1902, blossomed with new products, among them were Brawntawn Pills, a “digestive tonic,” and Victor Liver Pills for biliousness. Fahrney’s flagship brand was Victor Lung Syrup. He advertised it as derived from an old Fahrney recipe, a product the family had sold as a “blood cleanser and purge.” P.D. touted it, among other things, as a cure for consumption (tuberculosis). His lung syrup ingredients included opium and copious amounts of alcohol (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Victor Lung Syrup labeled



Selling from 25 cents to \$1 a bottle, Victor Lung Remedy came in several sizes, both in clear and amber containers (Fig. 4). Fahrney’s Victor Liver Syrup, which he claimed as a remedy for malaria (Fig. 5), also came in several sizes (Fig. 6) as did his Infants Relief which he claimed cured “all bowel diseases.” (Fig. 7) It contained cannabis and chloroform. Fahrney recommended it for babies as young as two days.



Fig. 4: Victor Lung Syrup bottle

Fig. 5: Victor Liver Syrup labeled and box



Fig. 6: Three sizes Victor Liver Syrup



Like other quack medicine peddlers, P.D. advertised his products widely by signs in drug stores (**Fig. 8**) and giveaway items like almanacs (**Fig. 9**). The latter contained basic information on weather, weights and measures and lots of hyperbole about Victor remedies.

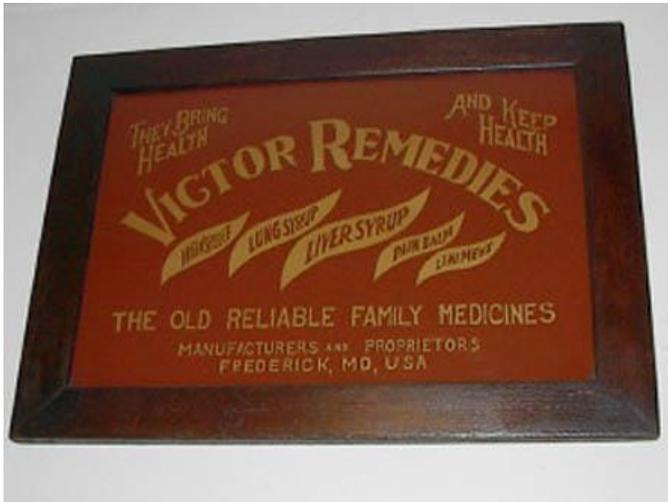


Fig. 8: Victor drug store sign

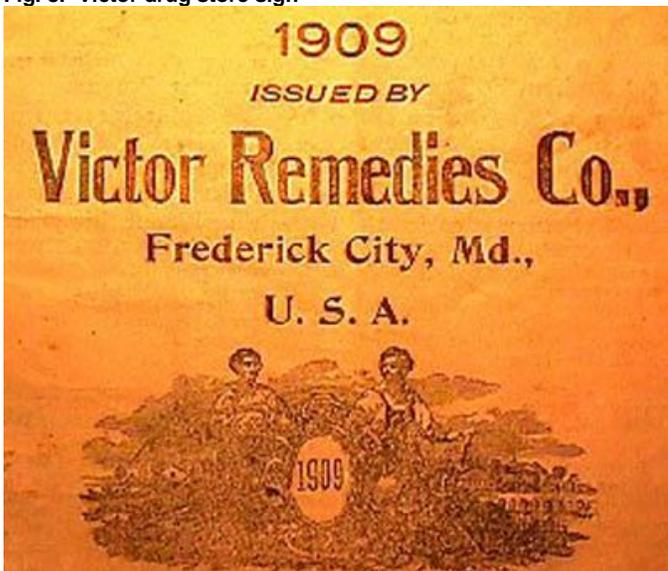


Fig. 9: Victor almanac 1909

As “Doc” Fahrney gained in prosperity, he also was rising in the eyes of his fellow German Baptists. In 1883 a Dunkard writing in the denomination’s newsletter recounted a visit to Fahrney’s medical office where P.D. advertised himself as a “uruscopian,” that is, providing all diagnoses simply by examining a sick person’s urine. After he had rendered some medical advice to a “pale and weary” patient, Fahrney suggested the man think about “spiritual cleansing” and ask him to prepare for eternity. Whatever the patient’s reaction, the visitor/writer went away very impressed.

During a reorganization of the church in 1886, Fahrney, despite no evident theological training, was selected as deacon. When the presiding elder died, he was called to the full ministry in 1888 and ordained in what subsequently became known as the Church of the Brethren.

As a way of earning money for the church, Fahrney bought a stock of clothing worn by adherents and kept it at one of his locations in Frederick. Five percent of the sales, he declared, went into the congregation treasury for church purposes. From 1897 until at least 1901 Fahrney also was a sponsor of the annual regional German Baptist Conference and issued souvenir dose glasses. Advertising on the back featured Victor Lung Syrup (**Figs.10-12**).

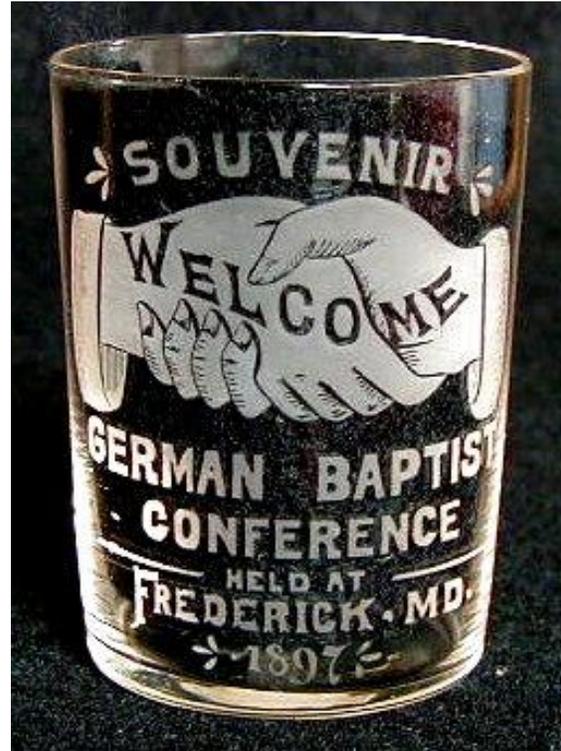


Fig. 10: Dose glass - Frederick



Fig. 11: Dose glass - Roanoke



Fig. 12: Dose glass - Bristol

In 1867 P.D. married Roenna Good, the daughter of a Hagerstown Brethren family. With her fathered six children, four boys and two girls. Among the boys was Henry P. "Harry" Fahrney, who followed his father both in the nostrum business and the ministry. The girls both died in infancy and Roenna succumbed in 1879. Three years later Fahrney married again to Catherine Eavey. With the new wife Fahrney fathered two more children.

At the same time, P.D. was becoming an established figure in the community. As an investor he was elected to the board of the Frederick Telephone and Telegraph Company. In a 1888 newspaper photograph, prominent in his dark beard, he is shown sitting among a group of local businessmen witnessing the first known electric light illumination in the city. By that time he had bought American Standard Ink from the Frederick Manufacturing Co. and was running the manufacturing operation (Fig. 13). P.D. Fahrney was riding high.



Fig. 13: American Standard Ink bottle

Early in the 20th Century, however, the picture changed. The passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906 helped spell the end to phony cures such as Victor Lung Syrup.

Although the Act did not forbid ingredients such as opium, cannabis and chloroform, it required that they be listed on the label. Moreover, in subsequent testimony before Congress the law's chief enforcement officer singled out Victor Lung Syrup as the "poster boy" for fraudulent promises because of its claims to cure consumption.

Was "Doctor"/Elder Fahrney an out-and-out charlatan? Was he recklessly foisting dangerous ingredients on new-born babies and seriously sick adult just in order to get rich? There is no clear evidence to prove him guilty. Some observers suggest he actually believed that his potions were doing good.

By the time of P.D.'s death in 1917, the heyday of quack patent medicines had passed as Congress progressively stiffen laws against both ingredients and claims. As a bizarre postscript to the Fahrney story, a family history indicates that P.D.'s son and successor, Henry P., was shot to death in 1923 during an attempted robbery of the Horsey Distillery in Burkittsville, Maryland. (See my Pontil article on Horsey, May 2009.) Further research has failed to reveal additional information on that strange incident.

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**Notes:** The information for this article came from a variety of Internet sources. The majority of the illustrations shown here are through the courtesy of Matt Knapp of Matt's Collectibles website. The image of the American Standard Ink is courtesy of Reggie Lynch.

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## Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

### NOVEMBER 7 - ELKTON, MARYLAND

Tri-State Bottle Collectors and Diggers Club's 38th Annual Show & Sale (9am - 2pm), at the Singery Fire Hall, Routes 279-213, Elkton, MD.

Info: **Dave Brown**, ph: (302) 738-9960, email: dbrown3942@comcast.net.

### NOVEMBER 21 GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

The Greensboro Antique Bottle, Pottery & Collectibles 9th Annual Show & Sale, (9 AM to 3 PM) at the Farmer's Curb Market, 501 Yanceyville St., Greensboro, NC. Info: **REGGIE LYNCH**, PH: (704) 221-6489. [www.antiquebottles.com](http://www.antiquebottles.com)

### NOVEMBER 28 - BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA

Forks of the Delaware Bottle Collectors Association's 37th Annual Show & Sale (9am - 3pm with early buyers 7:30am) at the Bethlehem Catholic High School, Madison & Dewberry Avenues, Bethlehem, PA. Info: **Bill Hegedus**, 20 Cambridge Pl, Catasauqua, PA 18032, ph: (610) 264-5945.



# Richard Lilienthal Buys a Good Bottle

By Jim Sears

Notorious penny pincher Richard Lilienthal shocked his fellow Potomac Bottle Club members by paying real money for a good bottle at the Richmond Area Antique Bottle Collectors Association show on October 2<sup>nd</sup>. Eye witnesses claim that Lilienthal voluntarily paid a nearly fair price for a lovely deep teal torpedo soda. Any rumors suggesting that club member Rohrs Keith actually hit Richard over the head with the bottle and took his wallet are gross exaggerations.

The bottle in question is embossed Henke & Maack. According to Mike Cianciosi's web site <http://chosi.org/bottles>, the Henke-Maack partnership dates to about 1850. The deep color, torpedo shape, and early date of manufacture combine to make this one of the most desirable Washington, DC bottles, and anyone wishing to acquire one can expect to pay thousands of dollars. The example shown here is actually from a 2007 Glass Works Auction, where it brought only twice what Richard paid – unless you count the Glass Works buyer's premium.

The Richmond show offered a good selection of bottles from the Washington, DC area, but Lilienthal was dismayed to find that he already owned examples of all the more mundane offerings. After double checking the sizes of several unexciting clear drug store bottles, Richard ultimately concluded that he would have to return home empty handed or buy something good. In the next photo Mike Cianciosi looks on as Richard agonizes over whether to give Rohrs his bottle back or to hand over his wallet. Mike was content to watch Richard squirm rather than grabbing the Henke & Maack for himself because he already owns a more expensive example of the torpedo.



In the last photo, Rohrs poses proudly with Richard's wallet before realizing that its contents are woefully insufficient. Rohrs later prevailed on Richard to write a large check.



Richard stresses that this one respectable purchase does not indicate a change to his overall collecting strategy. His passion for colorless drug store bottles and pathetic milks remains undiminished.

Richard is normally very prompt about placing his new acquisitions in his purpling box, but, at the time of publication, he had not yet attempted to purple the Henke & Maack.