

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

July - September 2014

In this issue:

S.T. Suit and the “Alabama Claims” by Jack Sullivanpage 2
Upcoming Area Bottle Shows.....page 4

Picnic – September 27th **(Picnic Takes the Place of Regular September Meeting)**

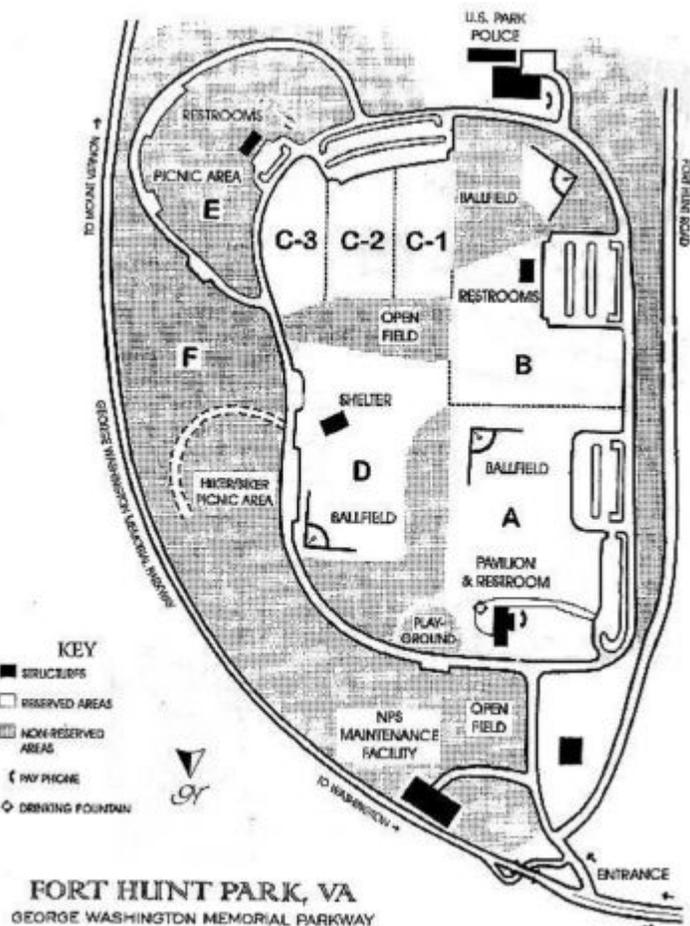
Please join us at 1 PM on Saturday, September 27th for our club picnic at Hunt Park in Alexandria, Virginia. We will meet in the picnic area marked E on the map at right. Please note that this map is a bit unusual in that north is at the bottom. The club will provide hamburgers, hotdogs, and soft drinks. Members are encouraged to bring a dish to pass, but everyone is welcome regardless of whether you have food to contribute. We would enjoy seeing any visitors and guests who wish to join us.

We do want to see bottles at the picnic. Members are particularly encouraged to bring along summer finds for show & tell.

Directions: Fort Hunt Park is located 5 miles south of Old Town Alexandria along the George Washington Memorial Parkway (parts of which are also called Mount Vernon Highway and Washington Street) in Fairfax County, Virginia. To reach this road from Washington, DC, cross the 14th Street Bridge south toward Virginia, and take the exit for Mount Vernon/National Airport. To reach it from the Beltway in Maryland, take the very first exit after the Wilson Bridge. To reach it from the Beltway in Virginia take exit 1 North, go to the first traffic light and take a right on Franklin Street; go about 3 blocks and take a right on South Washington Street.



Show & tell items at our June meeting featured summer dates.



Meetings: 8:00 PM on the last Tuesday of each month January-June, October-November; picnic in September.

President: Andy Goldfrank

Vice President: Al Miller

Secretary: Jim Sears

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 Mike Cianciosi (chosi@cox.net)

S.T. Suit and “The Alabama Claims”

By Jack Sullivan

[Special to the Potomac Pontil]

Whiskey baron Samuel Taylor (S. T.) Suit (Fig. 1), whose distillery and mansion sat in what is now Suitland, Maryland, was an early example of a “Washington insider,” winning and dining Presidents, members of Congress, and high Executive Branch officials. Although a past Pontil article described Suit’s life and works, one event in which he played a pivotal role was omitted. Suit was responsible for the venue of negotiations that settled a major prolonged crisis between the United States and England.



Fig. 1: Samuel Taylor Suit

Throughout his career Suit was a man with a keen eye for political clout and ingratiating himself with the power brokers of his time. Colorful trade cards for his whiskey reeked of Washington, D.C. One shown here speaks of “fine Kentucky whiskey,” but shows the U.S. Capitol, including the back of a toga clad George Washington statue that once stood there (Fig. 2). Suit matched that with an equally colorful trade card of the U.S. Senate looking much as it did at his time (Fig. 3). It may be imagined that Suit himself frequently was in the gallery or off the floor in the lobbies.



Fig. 2. Trade Card #1- Capitol



Fig. 3: Trade Card #2 - Senate

The Maryland distiller did not come empty handed to the Congress and Suit’s brown jugs in their numerous formats were said to be a frequent sight in the hallowed halls (Figs. 4 & 5). For those special friends in high places, he presented a decanter that noted the date of his establishing his distillery (Fig. 6). He also made sure his whiskey was sold in the finest Washington D.C. hotels, like the Grand Central (Fig. 7).



Fig. 4: Suit jug #1



Fig. 5. Suit jug #2



Fig. 6: Suit decanter



Fig. 7: Flask for Grand Central Hotel

Suit's push for influence in the Nation's Capital paid off in several ways. One trade card provided testimonials for the strength and purity of his whiskey from two District of Columbia officials, the president of the DC Board of Health and an Health Department medical officer. The latter asserted: *"Physicians will appreciate how important it is to their success in the treatment of diseases, as well as to the patient, that the stimulants they prescribe should be of a standard and unvarying quality, which desideratum Col. Suit's liquors appear to fill."* The canny distiller also used his influence to convince federal officials to build a road from the District to his estate, known today as Suitland Parkway, and obtained a U.S. post office for Suitland when it had few inhabitants.

Suit's lavish entertainment of top government officials, including President Ulysses S. Grant, frequently was noted in the Washington newspapers. Likely it was this hospitality that caused Suit's mansion to be chosen for the conduct of the most sensitive negotiations with England since the War of 1812. The dispute concerned warships built in Britain and sold to the Confederacy during the Civil War. The most famous of these was the CSS Alabama, shown here as it is being sunk in battle by the USS Kearsarge (Fig. 8). Before its end, however, the Alabama had done significant damage to the American merchant marine fleet.



Fig. 8: Sinking of the Alabama

Powerful forces in Washington howled for retribution in what became known as “The Alabama Claims.” Senator Charles Sumner, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, wanted \$2 billion in damages (\$50 billion in today’s dollar), or alternatively, the ceding of Canada to the United States. Secretary of State Seward sought to take British Columbia. Other important figures coveted Nova Scotia as compensation. As the British stalled, fervor over annexing parts of Canada gradually ebbed in the U.S. and in 1870 President Grant sought to end the dispute through international arbitration.

To save face, the final agreement had to be made on U.S. soil. But where? Grant apparently remembered Suit’s ample food and drink, including his excellent whiskey, and decided that the Suitland estate in nearby Maryland was just the place for American and British diplomats to hammer out final details in 1871. Suit himself apparently was delighted with the choice and played genial host throughout the deliberations. The result became known as the Treaty of Washington. In the end the U.S. received neither \$2 billion nor chunks of Canada but only a paltry \$15.5 million. The British, knowing a good deal when they saw it, quickly paid up.

Suit, the Washington insider, had etched his name in the history books, but sadly his mansion burned to the ground several years later. The Treaty of Washington, it should be noted, has been cited as establishing the principle of international arbitration, for fostering international law and as a precursor to the Hague Convention, the League of Nations, the World Court and even the United Nations.



This C.J.W. Summers bottle from Alexandria, VA fit the summer theme of our June meeting. The other bottles and jars shown at right were also part of our June show & tell.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows



- Sept. 7 Pekin, IL
- Sept. 13 Downieville, CA
- Sept. 13 Salt Lake City, UT
- Sept. 19-20 Aurora, OR
- Sept. 20 Santa Ana, CA
- Sept. 20 Indianapolis, IN
- Sept. 21 Westford, MA
- Sept. 28 Richfield, OH
- Sept. 28 Millsboro, DE
- October 4 Canyonville, OR
- October 5 Chelsea, MI
- October 11 Fayette, AL
- October 18 Richmond, RI
- October 26 Matteson, IL
- November 2 Milwaukee, WI
- November 8 Jacksonville, FL
- November 9 Pittsburgh, PA
- November 9 Oakland, NJ

- Sept. 28 Depew, NY
- Sept. 28 Batsto, NJ
- October 4 Richmond, VA
- October 4 Pt. Pleasant, WV
- October 11 Coventry, CT
- October 12 Keene, NH
- October 19 Scriba, NY
- October 26 Findlay, OH
- November 2 Elkton, MD
- November 8 Belleville, IL
- November 9 York, PA
- November 9 Greensboro, NC

