

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Serving the National Capital



July-August 2003

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Meeting August 26th

Our next meeting will begin at 8 PM on Tuesday, August 26, at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda, Maryland.

Visitors are welcome, and the dues for joining the club are only \$10 per year. The map at right should be sufficient to reveal the meeting location to anyone who has already managed to find our nearby show site.



Richard Lilienthal sent in the passage below on the production of glass in

Alexandria, Virginia. This excerpt from the Alexandria Archaeology web site provides additional information about the Bell Pre Glass Company, which Richard mentioned in the June *Pontil*.

Major production of glass began in the early 1890s by the Virginia Glass Company, located on the south side of the 1800 block of Duke Street in West End. A large percentage of the firm's business was the manufacture of bottles for the Portner brewery on St. Asaph Street. On February 18, 1905 tragedy befell the company when its plant was entirely destroyed by fire. In January 1901 German-American entrepreneurs and local glassblowers announced they would soon erect a new glass works on the river front along the old Alexandria canal locks on the 800 and 900 blocks of North Fairfax Street near Montgomery Street. Known as the Old Dominion Glass Company, it had scarcely been in operation a year when it too was ravaged by fire. Soon reconstructed, however, the plant manufactured an assortment of beer and soda bottles, flasks, and medicine and food bottles for the Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company, McCormick and Company and others. The Belle Pre Bottle Company, situated on the west side of Henry Street between Madison and Montgomery Streets, was organized in 1902 by a group of Washington businessmen. It owned a patent on a type of milk bottle and was one of the largest producers of such bottles in the U.S. Beset by financial setbacks in 1912, Belle Pre declared bankruptcy and subsequently auctioned off its equipment. Finally, the Alexandria Glass Company, begun about 1900, was located on the northwest corner of Henry and Montgomery Streets. Purchased by the Old Dominion Glass Company in 1916, fire completely devastated the glass works despite the vigorous efforts of the firemen. As a result of this blaze, 175 men and boys lost their jobs, and company officials estimated the damage at \$75,000 [Alexandria Gazette 2/8/1917].

<http://oha.ci.alexandria.va.us/archaeology/>

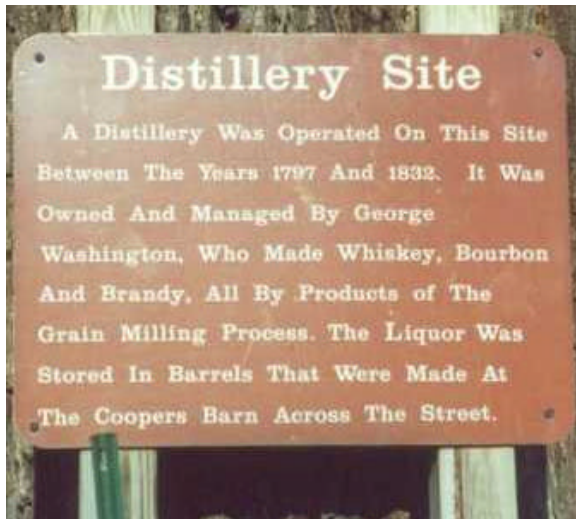
Meetings: 8:00 PM on the last Tuesday of each month in the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, 6201 Dunrobbin Dr., Bethesda, MD 20816.
President: Matt Knapp Vice President: Henry Fuchs Secretary: Jim Sears Treasurer: Ken Anderson
Pontil: Jim Sears (email: searsjim@usa.net, PH: 703/243-2409) & Andy Goldfrank (email: amg_sticky@yahoo.com, PH: 202/588-0543)
Web Site: <http://members.aol.com/potomacbt/bottle2.htm> Maintained by Peter Rydquist: pshraug@aol.com

Where's George? Out Back Working At the Still

by Jack Sullivan

After George Washington's death a myth was spread by Prohibitionists that our first President drank nothing stronger than tea. Horse feathers! Even as a teenager he had recorded with evident satisfaction that there had been "wine and rum punch in plenty" at a dinner. During the Revolution Washington considered liquor "essential to the health of the men." Now the myth is taking an even bigger setback: Washington, it turns out, was one of the earliest and most successful distillers in the newly fledged America.

If the folks at the Mount Vernon Ladies Association, the foundation that operates Washington's home just south of Alexandria, Virginia, realize their plans, future generations will know a lot more about George Washington as a whiskey-maker. With a \$1.2 million grant from the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DICUS), the Association is working to recreate the distillery exactly as conceived and operated by the Founding Father. The facility is on Route 235, one quarter mile south of U.S. 1, and co-located with the newly completed Washington's grist mill, three miles from the plantation house. The distillery is to be completed and opened to the public in 2005.



Located about three miles from Washington's home site, the distillery site currently is part of a Virginia state park but is being ceded to the non-profit group that runs Mount Vernon. The information about the distillery operating until 1832 is incorrect, according to Mount Vernon anthropologists.

Accompanied by Mount Vernon officials who are in charge of the project (one of them my neighbor), I have had a guided tour of the site. Right now there is not much to see of the original 30 by 75 foot, one-story stone building. More than



George Washington: here he is depicted following his victory in the Revolutionary War and before becoming President. Mount Vernon is seen in the background.

three years of work by professionals and volunteers to excavate the foundation have uncovered the original drains and a brick floor. The archeological work is expected to last into the fall of 2003 before actual construction begins in 2004. No glass or stoneware containers have turned up in the excavation. In those days customers brought their own jugs to be filled from whiskey stored in wooden barrels. The barrels for Washington's brew were made at his adjacent cooperage.



Covered in a blanket of blue plastic for the winter, the distillery excavation awaits Spring and the return of dozens of volunteers who with small trowel and brushes, under the supervision of archeologists, painstakingly remove years of accumulated dirt in order to uncover the floor.

According to historians, Washington got into the whiskey business when he returned to Mount Vernon after eight years as President. His plantation overseer, James Anderson, had learned distilling in his native Scotland. Anderson convinced George to invest in five large copper kettles, 50 mash tubs, five worm tubes and a boiler. While Washington's was not the first or biggest distilling operation of his time, it was an impressive effort. It also turned out to be very lucrative. Between 1798 and 1799, he produced 11,000 gallons of rye and corn whiskey, valued in that day at more than \$7,000 (equivalent today to several hundred

thousand dollars). The distillery also made brandy using locally grown apples, peaches and persimmons.

Washington's wrote friends to describe a steady market for his liquor in nearby Alexandria but he worried about neighbors pilfering it. Some product clearly was kept for home use. Marquis de Lafayette, on a visit to Mount Vernon from Paris, wrote of the "swift authority" of the plantation's spirits. Achille Murat, a Frenchman who married Washington's great-grand niece, remarked: "Whiskey is the best part of the American government."

The success of Washington's distillery was short-lived. Several years after the First President died suddenly in 1799, the facility was closed and within a decade the building had fallen into disrepair. His heirs removed many of the stones from the structure for other building projects on the plantation. For a while Mount Vernon archeologists thought they might have a sample of the original whiskey on hand. A bottle in the plantation's museum bears a label that purports that the contents were from a larger supply found on the property in 1918, having been undiscovered since Washington's time. The 18th Century whiskey then was decanted into bottles. A recent test of the liquid contents reveal that it is indeed whiskey, but the spirits probably date from the 1920s not the 1790s. The bottle is still on display at the Mount Vernon museum but no claims are made for its contents.

Moreover, for a long time it was believed that one of the original stills from the Washington distillery resided in the Smithsonian Institution. The copper kettle had been confiscated in 1939 from a moonshine operation, allegedly run by a Virginia family descended from Washington's servants. Eventually the Federal Bureau for Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms turned the copper kettle over to the Smithsonian Institution, which earlier this year agreed to put it on permanent display at Mount Vernon. While almost certainly not one of Washington's, the item dates from 1787 and England, and is similar to the ones George purchased. It will be used as a model for the five stills to be recreated and installed in the restored distillery.

Although Washington's restored distillery will be an operational facility, no decision has yet been made about what beverage will emerge from the five copper kettles. The Bureau of Alcohol and Fire Arms has taken an interest. While the brew may be alcoholic it is unlikely to be rye or corn whiskey. Another issue is whether the Mount Vernon beverage will be bottled and sold to visitors. The gift shop already sells bottles of Mount Vernon cider and wines with colorful paper labels. The contents, however, are not made on the premises. For up to date information on this project check out www.mountvernon.org/archeology.



The label on this bottle claims that the contents were part of 29 gallons of Washington's original whiskey that was found at the distillery site in 1918 and put into bottles. The container has been part of a display at the Mount Vernon museum for several years. Recent testing has determined that the liquor inside probably dates to the 1920s.



Still marked "R. Bush & Co Bristol 1787"

Roadtrip March 2003: Treasure from the Black Muck of a Philadelphia Bricklined Privy

by Andy Goldfrank



A few years ago my bottle digging buddies from Colorado and New York joined forces for the first time for a week of privy digging in some East Coast city. Since then, this crew has pounded through concrete and rubble in Baltimore, New York and Philadelphia in search of those elusive pontil-laden pits. (See June-July 2002 *Potomac Pontil*). The results have been mixed with no spectacular finds but the Colorado boys (Mike Sandion and Marty Homola) always manage to take home a couple of bottles not often found out West – which keeps them coming back for more. In turn, Scott Jordan from New York City and I enjoy exploring new places to dig and the company of the Colorado boys.

This past March, after one last big snow, the Colorado contingent arrived at National Airport in Washington, D.C. just prior to the Baltimore, Maryland bottle show for our annual roadtrip. The guys from New York – Scott plus new privy trekkers Dave Cutler and Winston Kreiger – would come down for the bottle show and then we would all head to Philadelphia for a week of moving dirt. Marty and I organized the trip well in advance and discussed equipment issues we had experienced on prior trips.

Marty solved one problem by welding together a flexible but sturdy tripod head that connects to detachable legs for easy storage and takes less than 5 minutes to set up. Imagine my joy (and my wife's quizzical looks) when UPS delivered the tripod – it was like Christmas all over again! On my end, I obtained a serious chain ladder, some headlamps, extra shovels and plenty of compound buckets.

After the Colorado boys arrived in D.C., we prepped further by purchasing and machining the legs for the tripod, building a couple of sifters, and talking bottles. Their hunger for a good pit was fed by the colored squat sodas and slip-glazed redware that grace virtually every shelf and window ledge in my home, along with my talk of the monster pit I dug over the winter in Philadelphia. (See April 2003 *Potomac Pontil*). I assured them that there would be plenty of privies waiting for us in Philadelphia as I had lined up a few on previous scouting trips. The entire next day was spent at the Baltimore bottle show where we admired the treasures of over 300 dealers. We made a mental note of all of the bottles we hoped to find over the next week. Late in the afternoon, we caravanned our way to Philly and checked into our motel a little after dark. After a quick bite, I headed out to examine the sites selected on my prior scouting trips. To my distress, it turned out that a number of the pits I located previously were hit by local diggers (without permission) or destroyed by construction. (In fact, I later learned from the owner of one site on Market Street that he had the diggers escorted off by police). Later that evening and early the next morning, we hustled through the streets of Philly looking for new places to dig and by late afternoon we obtained permission at a row house just north of Callowhill Street.

The row house predated 1850 as indicated by the thin mortar joints between smooth facing brick, a shallow slant roof, and crisp federal-style trim. It stood three stories high over a full basement and was part of a row of homes speculatively built for resale to the burgeoning middle class of Philadelphia in the first half of the nineteenth century. The extension on the structure went to about 15 feet from the rear lot line. Most of the yard was concrete except for the last few feet. We quickly went to work locating the pit and found that it was a brickliner shared with the adjacent owner which sat midway across the lot line. This shared system was common in Philadelphia, Baltimore and other places as it was more economical for builders to dig one deep privy for two houses instead of two separate pits. We managed to secure permission from the contractor next door only to discover the pit was capped with a massive slab of stone approximately six feet across, two feet wide and about a foot thick. (According to Scott, this was our figurative “monster” over the pit that we needed to overcome to get bottles out of the ground.) A half hour or so was

wasted pounding on the slab to no avail. At that point, Marty and I went off to knock on the neighbors' doors because we knew it would be impossible to dig the honey hole we had uncovered. Over the next 20 minutes, as we rapped knuckles on a bunch of doors, in the background we could hear the pick and sledge bouncing off of the slab. We then noticed that the noise stopped and we figured the guys had finally given up. When we made our way back, we discovered that they had in fact decided to abandon the hole; however, when Mike went to step out of the pit he placed his foot on the stone and it broke in half! Just like that our frustrations dissipated and we were setting up our shiny new tripod.



We spent the next few hours pulling buckets of fill from the hole. In comparison to other pits, this one was an average-size brickliner with a width of about four and a half feet across. We were somewhat distressed because the fill was comprised of coal cinders appearing to date from after the turn of the century; this date was supported by the fact that the few bottles unearthed were milks and machine made beers. Quitting time came before we could make it through the fill thanks to our late start and the incessant cold (did I mention the 8 inches of snow that was on the ground?). When we broke for the night we were 7 feet down. Upon our return early the next morning, we found our hole filled with water. Consequently, we spent the next hour bucketing water before we could even get back to extracting the cinders. We pulled out another 5 feet of fill before we saw a change; we then started to extract a red clay layer which was apparently the cap. After a couple of feet, we broke through into a lime layer directly atop classic Philadelphia nightsoil.

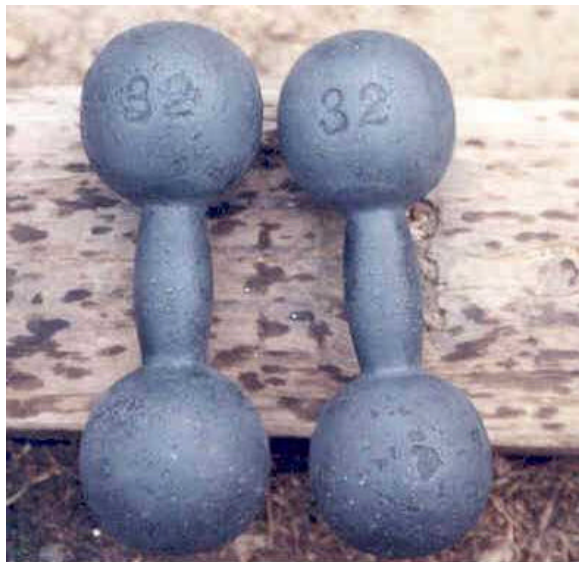
Now this Philadelphia nightsoil is not your ordinary privy dirt as it is black, soupy, thick, smelly and, most importantly, laden with artifacts. Mike Cerbone, my original digging mentor, always regaled me with stories about the smell from a Philly pit as that "pontil odor" – an effervescent scent from the seeping of methane and other gases stemming from cold-boiled 140-year-old organic droppings – which is every privy digger's dream smell because it means you are into the pontils. Mike used to joke that he could hold a choice soda or pontiled medicine, close his eyes and let his mind recreate that "pontil smell." I explained all of this to the digging crew and said it was time for some serious digging. Water kept creeping into the hole and the muck was as wet as I had ever experienced but, of course, into the brickliner I went. During the next few hours, we proceeded to pull out a nice collection of bottles, although it was no easy task.



Scott Jordan in the Muck

The privy appeared to have been dipped a couple of times because the next few feet contained a mix of 1850s to mid 1880s items. We determined the latest date from a Cunningham & Co. transitional soda embossed "1884" on the base along with a couple of stylized pharmacy bottles (Supplee's / Pharmacy / Green & 13th Sts. / Philada; W.B. Webb / 1000 Spring Garden St. / Philadelphia). The bottles were hard to find in the midst of the muck and at one point I just started scooping the slop by hand into the

buckets without looking for bottles – we would do the sorting on the surface. Slowly but surely, in the midst of bulk bottles, were some nicer recoveries, including colored squat sodas, pontiled aqua medicines and glazed pottery containers. Once I determined that only a few feet remained, I started digging down to the bottom on one half of the hole and created a shelf to extract later. At this point, I found a large cast iron bar bell; it was not until an hour later when finishing the second half of the hole that its mate showed up. The broken shards of glass and pottery were plentiful indicating that lots of bottles and pottery were thrown into this pit. As the black muck splashed down on me as the buckets were hoisted out of the hole, I remained hopeful that in addition to the bottle I recovered below the boys on the surface were finding even more. At long last I cleaned out the entire privy and climbed the chain ladder to the surface 25 feet above me.



To my surprise, I was greeted at the top of the hole with laughter because from head to toe I was covered in black with only my eyes poking out, much like a vaudeville act of the 1920s. Also, I was delighted to discover that quite a few bottles and other artifacts were pulled from the buckets of mud. All told, there were about 75 decent bottles, a small pile of potlids, the barbells and some caked metal artifacts to sort through dating from the 1840s to the 1880s. The best colored pontiled sodas were a Jacob Haberele and a Ph. J. Tholey, along with the usual Roussell and Twitchells. Amongst the medicines and cosmetics there was a black glass snap-pontil X. Bazin, a heavily embossed Mutter's Cough Syrup produced by Frederick Brown of Essence of Jamaica Ginger fame, and a crude open-pontil Storr's Chemical Hair Invigorator ([See Holst, Pontiled](#)

Top Right: Storr's Chemical Hair Invigorator
Bottom Right: Pontiled Jacob Haberele Soda from Philadelphia



Medicine Price Guide, S 172). Mixed in was the usual assortment of other pontils: Trask's Magnetic Ointment, R.R.R. Radway & Co., Spalding's Glue, puffs, umbrella inks, unembossed medicines, and utilities. The intact pottery was highlighted by two crude purple-glazed barrel mustards and an early 1830's interior brown-glazed ½ gallon crock. The cryer of the dig was an iron pontiled Wisharts Pine Tree Cordial. There were also some neat smooth based bottles such as perfumes, florida waters, mucilages, inks, flasks and a J.V. Sharp Williamstown, N.J. which is an early aqua fruit bottle intended to be sealed with a waxed cork. (See Leybourne, *Red Book* 2619-2).



Artifacts as they came out of the pit (above) and after cleaning (below)



As my eyes scanned the piles of odds and ends, I noticed a couple of rusted metal objects. Picking one up, I turned to the guys and said "Who knows what this is?" Someone said, "We just wanted to show you that stuff but planned on tossing it back into the hole." I responded, "Not sure that I would do that since this may well pay for our entire trip ... this looks like an early mechanical fruit jar lid." At that point, no one believed me but when we returned to the hotel room that night, Marty examined the encrusted metal objects, and likewise thought they were mechanical fruit jar lids and concurred that there was the possibility these could bring some money to fund future digs. We agreed that Marty would take the lids back to Colorado, clean them up a

bit and then list them on eBay. All in all we decided we had dug a decent pit.



William Haller Patd Aug 7 1860 cast iron stopper for fruit jar (above) and inside view of same (below)



The next day the Colorado boys headed south towards Virginia; Scott, Winston and I elected to scope out another pit. Eventually, we found a privy which turned out to be dipped and carved into the bedrock. There were a few interesting artifacts but nothing worth mentioning other than a green-glazed pottery whistle. We all speculated that a parent took the whistle from their child and tossed it into the privy to stop hearing the unbearable high-pitched noise it created. Also, at that location we managed to line up three more houses for future digs from interested neighbors.

Less than two weeks later, Marty put one of the lids on eBay at \$9.99 and noted that it came from a Philadelphia privy. Within a matter of hours, the lid had over 80 hits and the price shot to over \$100. Cleaned up the lid was a cast iron 3-part closure with tin liner below the cast iron dome cap; in addition, the original white rubber gasket was intact. The next day Jim Sears informed me that the lid was a good one; specifically, it was a stopple or stopper patented by William L. Haller of Carlisle, Pennsylvania. These stoppers were used primarily on "H & S" jars.

(See Leybourne, *Red Book* 1182 to 1187). William Haller is also famous for the “The Ladies Favorite” jars. “H & S” stands for William Haller and Adam R. Samuel; these jars were manufactured at Samuel's Keystone Glass Works. According to an 1869 letterhead this company was located at the south-east corner of Howard and Oxford Streets in Philadelphia. In a letter written on this letterhead, Samuel notes, “Haller is out and will no doubt bring back some large orders” for Mason's Improved jars. Thus Haller was apparently at least working for the company that made the jars he patented. Cast iron jar lids, such as the Haller lid, were primarily used during the 1860s. Home canning was still a new concept during this period, and inventors were competing to patent marketable closures. However, iron closures tended to rust and affect the flavor of food, and by 1870 glass and glass-lined closures dominated the market. Although Haller's closures were never a great commercial success, he did go on to patent a form of glass jar stopper on January 4, 1870. It also appears that fruit jar patents ran in the family as Mrs. Ella G. Haller of Carlisle, Pennsylvania obtained a number of patents for fruit jars and closures in 1873. (See Leybourne, *Red Book* 1178, 2494 to 2497; <http://staff.lib.muohio.edu/~shocker/FemInv/sub.php?iname=Cooking>).



This A.R. Samuel letterhead from April 30th 1869 was purchased on Ebay by Ron Ashby

Due to Marty's cleaning efforts and the excellent state of preservation from being in the Philadelphia muck, one could read the incused writing that said “William Haller Patd Aug 7 1860” on the stopper below the wingnut. I immediately pulled out my *Red Book* and was delighted to discover that these lids are valued in excess of \$500. My only concern, however, was that because of the less than perfect condition of ours, we would not get close to that figure. The evening the auction was to expire, I was showing my brother-in-law Gary our discovery from Philadelphia with about 5 minutes left in the bidding. My growing concern that my pit-side prediction (about paying for the digging trip) would not come to fruition was erased as the close of bidding approached; the stopper appeared to nestle in at around \$300 after a few days of competitive bidding which seemed fair for a privy find and for a



This H&S jar photo comes from <http://hoosierjar.com/> where Greg Spurgeon is offering it for \$4000. Greg bought a closure for this jar from Marty.

mechanical lid that was not in workable condition. It did appear the lid was the object of much attention in the fruit jar world because the bottom of the computer screen indicated the auction had been viewed by over 500 different people. In addition, Marty answered a ton of emails about the lid and we concluded that at least a few dollars would go into the kitty to cover next year's digging trip expenses. With about 30 seconds left on the auction, Gary and I were called to dinner but decided to see if the lid would jump a bit more. Gary hit refresh one last time and to our delight, the Haller lid's price cruised past \$1000 and closed with a bang!

(In the next few weeks, Marty unloaded the other two lids for comparable sums. Future all-expenses paid digs are on the horizon. In the end, the Colorado boys, the New York contingent and I all got the opportunity to recover some interesting bottles for our shelves and also managed to cover our expenses for a future expedition. We definitely learned that when digging, if ever in doubt as to an artifact's value, never throw it back in the privy. That piece of rust may well pay for the next digging trip and what

more could a privy digger ask for other than a good pontil-laden hole, of course.

Hope you enjoyed this column. 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

AUGUST 15-16 - ASHEVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

Asheville's 12th Annual Antique Bottle Show & Sale (Fri. 12 noon – 7 PM, Sat. 8 AM – 2 PM) at the Waynesville Fairgrounds, Routes 19/23 South exit 105, Asheville, North Carolina. INFO: **LARRY GLENN**, PH: (828) 667-2049 (days), (828) 667-0529 (nights), E-mail: lglenn@webtv.net or **TIM BRANCH**, PH: (828) 669-5486, E-mail: redheadbriana@cs.com.

AUGUST 24 - MOOREFIELD, WEST VIRGINIA

Potomac Highlands Antique Bottle & Glass Collectors Club's 5th Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM – 3 PM) at the Moorefield Fire Co. Auxiliary Bldg. (green building by the RR), Jefferson St., Moorefield, West Virginia. INFO: **RODNEY FUNKHOUSER**, Rt. 1 Box 132, Baker, WV 26801, PH: (304) 897-6910, E-mail: rfmfg@hardynet.com

SEPTEMBER 7 - LEWES, DELAWARE

Delmarva Antique Bottle Club's 11th Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM - 3 PM) at Cape Henlopen High School, Lewes, Delaware. INFO: **FERD MEYER**, 16 Cove View, Long Neck, DE 19966, PH: (302) 945-7072, E-mail: jfmeyer@ccc.com

SEPTEMBER 21 - BRICK, NEW JERSEY

Jersey Shore Bottle Club's 31st Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM – 2 PM) at the Brick Township High School, 346 Chambers Bridge Rd., Brick, New Jersey. INFO: **RICHARD PEAL**, 720 Eastern Ln., Brick, NJ 08723, PH: (732) 267-2528, E-mail: boxcar1@att.net, Website: <http://www.geocities.com/dtripet2000/jsbc/jsbc.html>.

SEPTEMBER 21 - WINCHESTER, VIRGINIA

Apple Valley Bottle Collectors Club's 30th Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM – 3 PM, \$3; Early Admission 7:30 AM, \$10) at the Hampton Inn, 1204 Berryville Ave. (Route 7, I-81 exit 315), Winchester, Virginia. INFO: **GINNY BOWERS**, 681 Coal Mine Rd., Strasburg, VA 22657, PH: (540) 465-3952.

OCTOBER 4 - RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

Richmond Area Bottle Collectors Association's 32nd Annual Show & Sale (Sat. 9 AM – 3 PM, early admission 7:30 AM) at the Showplace Annex, 3002 Mechanicsville TrnPk., Richmond, Virginia. INFO: **JUDY FOLES**, 12275 Cedar Ln., Ashland, VA 23005, PH: (804) 798-7502, E-mail: judyfoles@mail.com

OCTOBER 12 - BEDFORD, PENNSYLVANIA

Bedford County Antique Bottle Club's 26th Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM – 1 PM, early admission 7 AM) at the Bedford County Fairgrounds, 4H Building, Bedford, Pennsylvania. INFO: **LEO MCKENZIE**, PH: (814) 623-8019 or **SALLY CORLE**, PH: (814) 733-4598

NOVEMBER 2 - ELKTON, MARYLAND

Tri-State Bottle Collectors & Diggers Club's 31st Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM – 3 PM) at the Singerly Fire Hall, Routes 279 & 213 (I-95 exit 109A), Elkton, Maryland. INFO: **WARREN CAVENDER**, PH: (302) 998-0690.

The Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors EXPO 2004 will be August 13-15, 2004 in Memphis, Tennessee. The Potomac Bottle Collectors expects to have our 2004 show in late June, which should avoid any conflict.



THE SUN

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EDITORIAL NOTEBOOK

American relics

REMEMBER THE Great Outhouse Brouhaha?

It broke out in the winter of 1991, when Gov. William Donald Schaefer joked, or so he claimed, with a delegate. What came off his lips was, "How's that s---house of an Eastern Shore?"

The Eastern Shore erupted in protest. Some angry residents even hoisted wooden outhouses and bags of manure on their pickup trucks and headed for Annapolis, hoping to dump their loads at the governor's mansion.

These days, owners of outhouses might think twice about throwing them away. Privies are vanishing so rapidly they are becoming collector's items. Old outhouse pits also are drawing swarms of amateur diggers who often find what they are looking for: rare bottles, porcelain and other traces of a bygone era.

In today's Jacuzzi age, it's hard to believe indoor plumbing was not always part of our lives. Or that even urban dwellers relied on privies until fairly recently. Consider:

In 1940, when the Census Bureau began keeping plumbing records, about half of American homes lacked indoor facilities. By 2000, the number of outhouses nationwide had decreased to 671,000. Maryland recorded 9,033 — 3,652 fewer than in 1990.

Yet as late as 1950, the U.S. Census reported that out of 277,880 dwelling units in Baltimore City, 45,187 were without a bath and 17,711 without running water. They had to rely on outhouses in the yard.

Today, finding a privy within city limits is almost impossible. That's why Erika and Will Brockman's brick outhouse on Union Square would qualify as a tourist destination. "We use it as a garden shed," she reported.

Until 1984, outhouses were still in com-

mon use in Oella, the old Baltimore County mill town just across the Patapsco from Ellicott City. Even after indoor plumbing finally arrived, one outhouse, measuring 4 feet by 4 feet, was retained as an information center for the historic village. Alas, it was later taken down.

Professional and amateur archeologists treasure old outhouse sites because the pits often yield all kinds of surprises. Just ask the enthusiasts who have conducted digs in Annapolis and London Town, the old port community on the South River.

Baltimore also is popular among diggers.

Take the case of Andy Goldfrank. He was scouting for digging spots in Fells Point when he saw a demolition notice posted on the façade of a 1920s concrete slab-floor commercial garage. He realized the site had great potential; it was near the original 1700s City Dock. And the slab meant that any privy pits had been protected when older buildings were razed.

Over a six-month period, he located some 10 pits and dug them with decent results, he later wrote in *The Potomac Pontil*, a hobbyist journal. But while he was out of town, another digger, Tom Salvatore, hit the jackpot. He started shoveling on the site on a Christmas Day — that's how keen these guys are — uncovering a trove of rare old crocks, pots, soda and medicine bottles. To make it even sweeter, many artifacts carried identifiable markings of their Baltimore manufacturers.

As one of the oldest states, Maryland has plenty of former privy sites and plenty of diggers. The Baltimore Antique Bottle Club even claims that its annual bazaar ranks as the largest one-day bottle show in the world.

Perhaps the cash-strapped city should take advantage of all this and start selling digging permits?

Thank you to **Steve Charing** for sending in this editorial from *The Sun* in Baltimore. Congratulations to the Baltimore Antique Bottle Club on the reporting of its annual show.

We cannot take the digging permit proposal very seriously, but we are delighted to see evidence that Andy's articles are being read.