

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Serving the National Capital



October 2004

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Meeting October 26

Please join us at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda at 8 P.M. for our October club meeting.

Announcements

Our club and its members did very well in the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors contests, and we received several awards at the 2004 Expo in Memphis.

- **Andy Goldfrank** won first place in the Best Original True Story contest for "The Rookie." Congratulations to Andy and thank you to the Baltimore Antique Bottle Club for submitting this article.
- **Jack Sullivan** also won an award for an article, but his was submitted by the Ohio Bottle Club.
- The *Potomac Pontil* won first place in the newsletter contest. **Jim Sears** is shown accepting the award at right, but much of the credit goes to Andy and Jack, both of whom have articles in this issue.
- Our club won second place in the Show Flier contest. Thank you to **Steve Charing**, who designed the flier.

Congratulations to **Peter Rydquist**, who married GERALYN Ward on October 10th.

Congratulations to **Marco** and **Jill** on the birth of their son.

Jeff Jones has a new email address: jcjones1@comcast.net.

Matt Knapp reports that he must miss several of our upcoming meetings and would like to end his term as club president. Please let us know if you are willing to serve in any of our club offices including vice president, secretary, or treasurer for 2005.

The Potomac Bottle Collectors will not meet in December because our normal meeting time would be so close to Christmas. We do expect to meet on the last Tuesdays of October, November, and January.



S.T. Suit: Little Brown Jug, How He Loved Thee!

By Jack Sullivan
(Special to the *Potomac Pontil*)

Friend of Presidents, Kentucky colonel, founder of a town that bears his name, titan of industry, three times a husband, castle-builder – that was Samuel Taylor Suit. And he owed much of his power and influence to the proverbial “little brown jug.”

S.T. Suit was born in Bladensburg, Maryland in 1832. Reputedly because his father refused to pay for his education, he went West at about 15 years of age. He lived in Keokuk, Iowa for a time before beginning his whiskey-making career about 1857 at a distillery in Louisville, Kentucky. During the Civil War he is said to have served at least briefly in the Confederate Army, hence the title of “Colonel.”



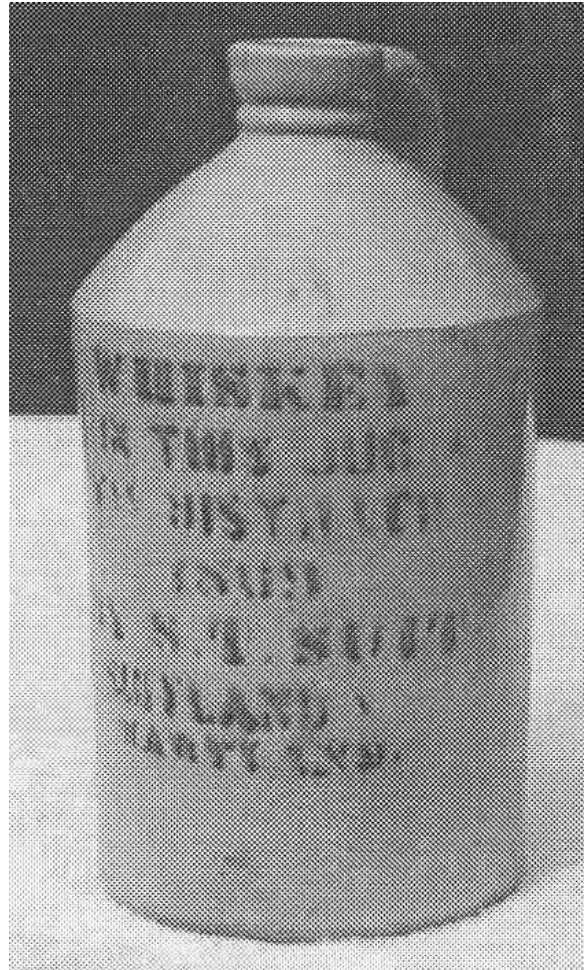
The young Samuel Taylor Suit

The young go-getter apparently had an aptitude for making and selling whiskey because by 1869 he had established his own distillery in Louisville. He stayed in that city for a decade and is reported eventually to have owned the largest whiskey warehouse there. But Suit yearned to return to his native Maryland. In April 1867 he bought 300 acres of land just outside the borders of Washington, D.C., and called it Suitland, Maryland.

The Colonel moved his distillery operation to the area, where it continue to prosper with sales nationwide. He sold his whiskey almost exclusively in brown stoneware containers. To the contemporary eye his jugs seem somewhat deceptive in their labeling. For years the wording read, “Whiskey in this jug was distilled in 1869,” indicating an aged product. Later he would revise the messag to, “Little Brown Jug...The

whiskey in this jug was made in 1869 and jugged by me, 1880.” Whatever the thirsty public thought it was buying, S.T. Suit’s products proved popular. He grew in wealth and prestige.

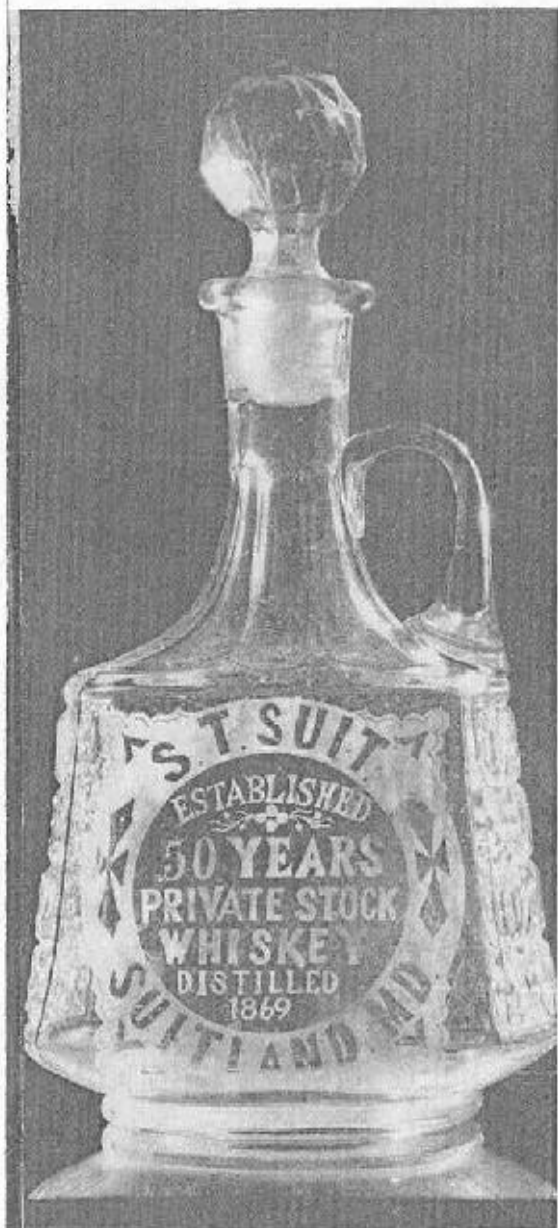
An early S.T. Suit quart jug



Multiple views of a Suit Jug



A Suit “back of the bar” bottle



S. T. Suit, Est. 1869-1873,
Louisville, Ky.

Suitland, Md. 1874-1888

In time the whiskey-maker owned and operated his own hotel and was acting president of the Anacostia Wharf & Docking Co., the Washington & Chesapeake Railroad, and the Washington City & Point Lookout Railroad. He built an English-style mansion in Suitland that often was a meeting place for dignitaries, including Presidents Ulysses S. Grant and Rutherford B. Hayes. Suit himself became interested in politics and served a term in the Maryland legislature. One report also has him operating as a presidential emissary to England.

Using his political clout, Suit was the driving force behind the creation of a road that connected Anacostia in the District of

Columbia with Suitland, Maryland. It became Suitland Road and undoubtedly helped spur development of the Colonel's town. Even so, at the end of the 19th Century, the village of Suitland had only a general store, several churches and six or seven houses. It did, however, boast a post office – more evidence of the Suit's clout with federal officials.

“Love” was Suit's Achilles heel. Said to be “tenderhearted and kind,” he had a definite weakness for the ladies. After his first wife divorced him, he married a younger woman who also eventually left him. In 1878, when he was 42, he met and fell in love with 17-year-old Rosa Pelham, the daughter of a congressman. Because of the age difference, she initially rejected him. But five years later they met again near what is now Berkeley Springs, West Virginia. When Rosa mentioned that she always had wanted to live in a castle, Suit pledged to build her one if she would marry him. She accepted, and three days later they were wed in Washington, D.C.



The Berkeley Springs castle

At this time the Colonel was being drawn away from Suitland and his distillery by prospects for developing business at Berkeley Springs. The draw of reputedly therapeutic hot springs at that location already had spawned three large hotels. Suit is said to have envisioned the place as a Mid-Atlantic spa to rival Martha's Vineyard. Therefore, at a cost of \$100,000,

in 1883 he began building Rosa's 13-room castle on Warm Spring Ridge, overlooking the baths. It was built to a one-half scale of Berkeley Castle in England. The project took almost five years and before it was completed, Suit, age 56, died, leaving Rosa a very wealthy 28-year-old widow with three children, living in a castle. She made the most of it, throwing lavish parties. Her sophisticated friends called her "Queen Rosa."

Although she had many suitors, she never married again because of a stipulation in Suit's will that if she did she would lose everything he had bestowed on her. That did not prevent Rosa from spending many nights with her suitors in the castle. One night, following an argument with her, one of them fell or was pushed from the roof to his death. He is said to have cursed the heiress and haunted the castle ever since. Rosa herself eventually lost both her money and her mind. In the 1920s she was evicted from the castle, went West with a son, and died there.

Meanwhile, with no one to tend the whiskey business, S. T. Suit Distillery went out of business well before Prohibition. One date given for its demise is 1888. Samuel Taylor Suit himself is buried in St. Barnabas Church cemetery, Oxen Hill MD. The little brown jugs that gave him fame and fortune are found in collections nationwide. And the castle, highly visible from U.S. 522 as one enters Berkeley Springs, remains a tourist attraction – albeit a haunted one – to this day.

References: The material in this article is from a number of sources, including websites for the Chambers of Commerce for Suitland and Berkeley Springs. A genealogical website created by Chris Dunmore in 2003 provides a well-researched chronology of Suit's life and the youthful picture of Suit shown here.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

OCTOBER 24 - BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

The Mid-Atlantic Bottle, Paper & Advertising Show (9 AM to 3 PM) at the Maryland State Fairgrounds, 4-H building, Timonium, Maryland. INFO: **Bill Thomas**, PH: (410) 538-5558.

NOVEMBER 7 ELKTON, MARYLAND

Tri-State Bottle Collectors and Diggers Club 32nd Annual Show & Sale, (9 AM to 3 PM), at the Singlerly Fire all, Routes 279 & 213, Elkton, MD. Info: **Dave Brown**, PH: (302) 738-9960.

NOVEMBER 14 - PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

Pittsburgh Antique Bottle Club's Annual Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM – 2 PM, early admission 7 AM) at the Washington Twp. Firehall, Route 201 (1.8 miles south of I-70), Fayette City, Pennsylvania. INFO: **Bob DeCroo**, 584 Fayette City Rd., Fayette City, PA 15438, PH: (724) 326-8741 or **Jay**

Hawkins, 1280 Mt. Pleasant Rd., West Newton, PA 15089, PH: (724) 872-6013.

NOVEMBER 21 GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

3rd annual Greensboro Antique Bottle, Insulator & Collectibles Show & Sale (9 AM to 3 PM early buyers 7:30 AM), at the Farmer's Curb Market, 501 Yanceyville St, Greensboro, NC. Info: **Reggie Lynch**, PO Box 13736, Durham, NC 27709. PH: (919) 789-4545, or **David Jackson** PH: (336) 288-2677. Web: www.antiquebottles.com/greensboro

NOVEMBER 28 - BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA

Forks of the Delaware Bottle Collectors Assoc. 31st Annual Show & Sale (9 AM to 3 PM, early buyers 7:30 AM) at the Bethlehem Catholic High School, Madison & Dewberry Aves, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. INFO: **Bill Hegedus**, 20 Cambridge Place, Catasauqua, PA 18032, PH: (610) 264-5945.

MARCH 6, 2005 - BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Baltimore Antique Bottle Club 25th Annual Show & Sale (8 AM to 3 PM) at the Physical Education Center, Essex Campus of the Community College of Baltimore County, 7201 Rossville Blvd., Baltimore, Maryland. INFO: **Bob Ford**, PH: (410) 531-9459, E-mail: bottles@comcast.net



JUNE 26 – CHEVERLY, MARYLAND

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Annual Show & Sale (Sunday 9 AM to 3 PM) at the American Legion Post 108, 3608 Legion Drive, Cheverly, MD 20785.

Plans for our 2005 show are still tentative, but the club expects to keep the same weekend as the 2004 show. Please contact Jim Sears if you would be interested in assisting with or even chairing our 2005 show.

A Little Exercise . . .

By Andy Goldfrank

A few of weeks ago, in late September, we got together to dig a friend's privy in the heart of New York City near the Bowery and Houston Street. Our goal was *not* to bring any bottles and relics home but rather to recover all the artifacts and keep most of them together in one collection so that he could put together an informative and cool display in the lobby of the building. The intent was to try and tell the tale of those who had lived and worked in that particular building through our finds. It was/is our hope that this dig and the display will inspire other building owners in the neighborhood to give us permission to dig their privies. We want to let landowners know that we appreciate both the finds and the related history along the artifacts association with a particular site; in addition, we want landowners to know that there are plenty of relics for all to share.



Adam's sister Katie joined in the fun and, despite never having dug a pit before and being in her early teens, had more strength and stamina than some of our more experienced digging buddies. In the next photo Katie is hauling up two buckets filled with dirt and artifacts – and those are heavy! Also, take a look off to the right at all the rocks and bricks that were also in the pit, which we separate to make for easier fill-in when we are done.



Here Adam Woodward and Scott Jordan are starting the hole. A few weeks before, after securing permission, they had scouted the lot and probed the yard. They found that the privy was stone-lined, as is typical, and sat in the back left corner.





Katie also got a chance to get into the privy. In this picture she and Scott are in the pit about 9 feet down. She is holding her first intact find and shortly after that she recovered a nice 1860s beer with a New York address. You can see that when we are in the layer containing artifacts we actually use a wooden stick to dig with and a plastic shovel to pile up the fluff for putting into buckets – this way we insure that no bottles are scratched and no flared lips broken off because of our digging. Although this might take a little more time, we think it is a terrible thing to break or damage a bottle that has rested intact for 145 years.



Adam is bringing to light an intact chamber pot here. I am in the hole because while one guy is digging with the more careful tools, the other guy will be filling buckets to send to the surface via the tripod for dumping. This way we can dig and fill a pit of this size – which was 14 feet deep and a 6 by 8 foot oval – in about two days including putting the yard back in nice shape so that you cannot tell we were even there.



Adam and Scott are inspecting our finds. You can see a bunch of intact bottles and tons of pottery shards, smoking pipes, buttons and such. We found almost half a dozen buckets of shards that are dumped on the ground to the right of the table. We will spend our down time cleaning the shards, separating them, and piecing them back together like a jigsaw puzzle (or rather like 100 jigsaw puzzles all tossed into one box). We always record our recoveries in writing and/or photographs; in addition, much of this historical archaeological record usually ends up with the landowner so that it remains with the house to preserve the historical connection. Also, if the landowner's want some of the artifacts professionally restored and/or special displays built (which takes a ton of time and patience), then Scott, who makes his living in part doing pottery restoration and building artifact displays, will do this for them at a discounted price.



This is a close-up of part of the bottle and relic finds we recovered. Most of the artifacts came from the fill-in period

for the outhouse, which in this case was apparently the late 1860s to early 1870s. This is late for Manhattan as plumbing started going in almost 20 years earlier. As usual, the best stuff was broken including a green torpedo, a Radway's Sarsaparillian Resolvent, and an amber lighthouse figural Seaworth's Bitters from Cape May, New Jersey. The top of the bitters is visible in the bottom right corner of the picture behind a complete potlid and base. In the back, next to the pieces of 2 or 3 chamber pots is a beautiful Majolica green-glazed spittoon that is just missing a couple of rim pieces. The intact bottles included sodas and ginger beers embossed with various New York addresses, some nicely embossed medicines plus the usual flasks, ales and utilities.

This was not the most abundant pit in terms of artifacts but it did "talk" to us about the house and its occupants. It also makes us wonder what is in some of the neighboring yards, and in due time we hope to be able to tell you.

Hope you enjoyed the story and pictures. Gook luck.

Pictures from the Memphis Expo



Jim Sears offers jars in Memphis. Sales were great at the Expo on Friday and Saturday, but the pace was much slower on Sunday. The show featured about 365 tables full of all types of antique glass. The only reason for the empty tables in the background is that a few dealers left early.



Thanks to Mike Jordan (above) for spending so much time watching the sales table for Jim Sears and Jack Sullivan.

Below is Mike's lovely display of Hyacinth vases. Mike and Betty Jordan were very active in the Potomac Bottle Collectors for many years, but they have now retired to Florida. During the Expo, a hurricane was ravaging Florida, and these vases were the only safe portion of Mike's Collection. Fortunately, the storm spared the Jordan home and bottles.





Jeff Harper displayed Ball jar lids at the Expo. Thank you to Jeff for providing several of the photos included here.



Dan Corker had recently purchased a jar collection and was offering an attractive array of colors and closures.



Barry Bernas offered a good selection of jars at the Potomac show in June, but he set aside a few special items to sell at the Expo. Barry and his wife Sally enjoyed the mild Memphis weather and some spicy barbecued ribs, but they were disappointed to find little for their collection.



Bob Dulong traveled all the way from Canada to attend the Expo. He brought along many unusual Canadian jars from the Ken Judges collection.