

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors Serving the National Capital



November 2004

In this issue:

Bottles and Bricks, Crucibles and Cops by Scott Jordan.....page 2

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows.....page 6

Burying George Washington's "Dirty Little Secret" by Jack Sullivan.....page 7



Scott Jordan dug the rare Brinckerhoff's bottle shown here in Jersey City, New Jersey. The crucible, fire brick, and cullet came from the same site. See page 2 for a full account of this unusual dig.

Meeting November 30th

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

Announcements

Congratulations to the 2005 club officers chosen at the October meeting.

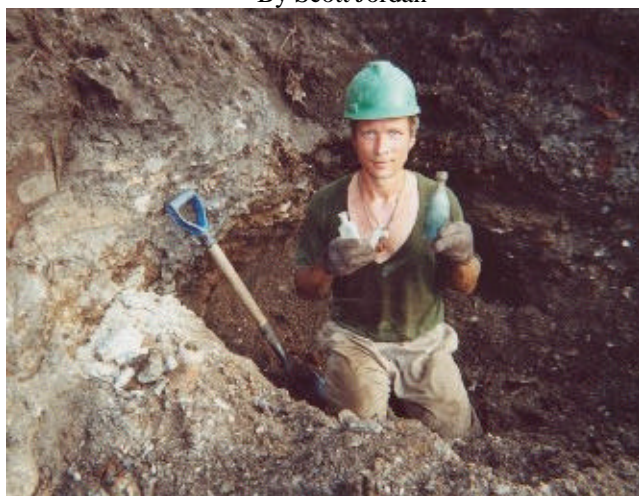
- President: **Andy Goldfrank**
- Vice President: **Al Miller**
- Treasurer: **Lee Shipman** (Ken Anderson will remain co-listed on the club bank account.)
- Secretary: **Jim Sears**

The Potomac Bottle Collectors will not meet in December because our normal meeting time would be so close to Christmas. This means that our annual "collector of the year" contests will take place at the January meeting.

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: 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: pehraug@aol.com

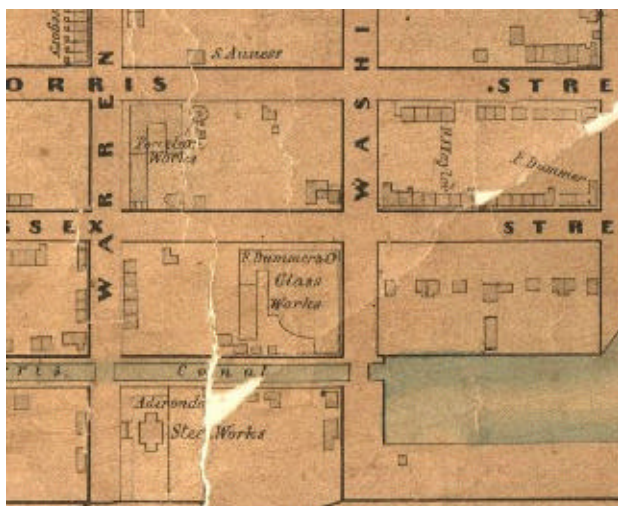
Bottles and Bricks, Crucibles and Cops: Lessons from Jersey City and the Industrial Revolution

By Scott Jordan



The author holding 1850s bottles from a trash-filled layer at the crucible site

It was one of those hot New York days in July laden with heat and humidity. David Cutler and I were out searching Hoboken and Jersey City for possible digging spots when we came upon a construction site that we had scouted about six months before. The site was on the shoreline of the Hudson River in Jersey City across from the towering skyscrapers of Manhattan. On our previous visit we had not stuck around long enough other than to talk with the construction crew and to secure permission to look around for bottles. It was one of those sites that did not look good the first time we saw it because it was covered with coal ash cinders which were coarse, dark and bubbly. This ash and cinder mix is much like the kind found in train yards or at smelting sites, and made us feel it was industrial landfill that was unlikely to be a productive site. Plus there were no older bottles or trash visible even though the construction crew could care less about bottles.



This 1850s map of Jersey City, NJ by Matthew Dripps shows the vicinity of the dig near Morris Canal. The American Pottery Manufacturing Company factory is labeled *Porcelain Works*.

On our return visit that July day, we checked the square holes the trackhoe had excavated recently in preparing a foundation for the apartment building being constructed. There was nothing visible but some shards and lots of glass chunks which appeared to be from a glass works and pottery factory. We were about to leave after checking a couple dozen excavated pits when Dave went to go look at some pits we had overlooked on the far side of the site. Within a few minutes he came back and held out slip-decorated red ware shards; Dave said that he had found them in a layer of oyster shells and pinkish-purplish ash. I walked back to the holes to investigate and scratched with my boots and hands because our equipment was still in the car. My foot kicked out some 1860s bottle fragments and an intact unembossed snapcase medicine. Dave then went to get the shovels and digging sticks out of his car but I was confused because he came back too soon. He had found a pontiled New York soda sticking out of an ash layer two pits away! Now Dave rushed off (and Cutler is not known for moving fast) to get the digging tools. Once Dave returned, we dug in the two pits where the bottles had been discovered and in a short span of time found a few plain 1860s bottles and a broken pontiled pickle.

The sun was setting and we decided it was time to get going. However, before leaving I pointed out to Dave one more spot on the opposite side of the trench where the ash had a purple tone which usually indicates older non-industrial ash and might contain household garbage. After convincing Dave into staying a bit longer, I started to dig in the layer that attracted my attention. About six strokes into the layer, my digging stick popped out a dark rectangular medicine bottle! Picking it up with shaking hands and rushing heart, I recognized the bottle immediately. All that flashed through my head was "Brinckerhoff's ... Price \$1.00." I yelled to Dave (and probably to anyone with a mile): "I found a Brinckerhoff's, I found a Brinckerhoff's!"



The Brinckerhoff's Health Restorative rests in the midst of shoreline rubble from the factories of Jersey City, not far from where the pontiled medicine was found.

Dave interrupted me with one of his patented questions, "What's a Brinckerhoff's?" Astounded I replied, "Dave, don't you study your Greer catalogue and Glass Works Auctions catalogues?!" Turning the bottle over and over, and inspecting the dark green color along with the cool rectangular pontil, I explained to Dave the significance of this bottle. I read him the crude, narrow embossing, "C. BRINCKERHOFF'S / HEALTH RESTORATIVE / PRICE

\$1.00 / NEW YORK,” and told him about how Cornelius Brinckerhoff operated a proprietary medicine empire out of shops on New York’s Hudson Street and Broome Street in the 1830s through the 1850s. This colored pontiled medicine had been on my wish list for as long as I can remember. As daylight faded, we stopped to look at this sweet bottle for quite a while (plus to calm down) and speculated about how it had come to rest at this spot some 150 years ago.

Despite the dark, I continued to dig and found an intact pontiled decorative rolled lip food bottle. Shortly thereafter, the neck from a sapphire blue Wynkoop’s Sarsaparilla was sitting in my palm. This find again got my heart racing but no intact Wynkoop’s, or any other colored pontiled medicines for that matter, revealed themselves in our feverish diggings. By then it was well into night, so we went home prepared to come back soon. On the car ride home, we talked endlessly about this great discovery and what had been on that site in the 19th Century.

Dave and I returned the next day after work hours and walked into the site through a large section of fencing that was left open. In our quick survey we spotted where the excavator had cut a new trench. Dave and I jumped down into the new pit and found a layer of broken crucibles for melting glass or pottery glaze. There were also layers of unfinished pottery shards, kiln hardware and devices for stacking pottery, and deformed pieces of pottery along with coal; moreover, in the midst of this debris there were thousands of chunks of glass cullet and slag (also known as gall) ranging from flint glass to classic green soda glass. At that moment I realized this was not simply a waterside landfill but rather waste from a pottery factory and glass works. This was confirmed minutes later when I noticed fireproof bricks in the ground stacked in the shape of a kiln. Many of the bricks had the name of “J.H. Gautier and Co. Crucible Works” impressed into the surface indicating they were made here in Jersey City where we were digging.



Broken Crucibles in the midst of glass slag and pottery wasters



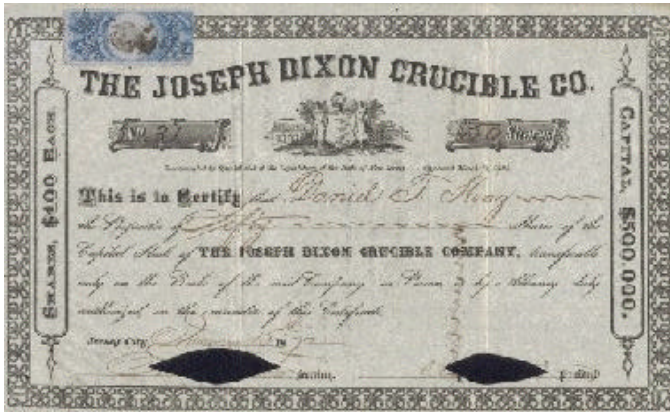
The remains of a kiln or firebox that includes stamped Gautier bricks



Stamped brick heralding J.H. Gautier & Co of Jersey City, New Jersey

J.H. Gautier, whose full name is Josiah Hornblower Gautier, was born in Hudson County in New Jersey in 1818. Gautier practiced as a physician in Jersey City from 1843 to 1853. He then retired from medicine in order to enter into business with Joseph Dixon who had moved his industrial efforts to Jersey City sometime between 1847 and 1850. Apparently with Dixon’s help, Gautier established a crucible works in Jersey City. Crucibles are refractory vessels used for melting metals and minerals made by hand of Chamotte clay and graphite and must dry out 12 months before they can be used in a kiln. This same Chamotte clay and graphite mixture is used in making kiln bricks such as what we discovered on our dig site impressed with the Gautier name. Crucibles are critical to manufacturing steel, glass and pottery in order to maintain safe and efficient control over these materials at the extremely high temperatures (sometimes in excess of 2600 degrees Fahrenheit) needed to melt and work them.

In the 1820s, Joseph Dixon had discovered the merits of graphite as a stove polish and an additive in lubricants, foundry facings, brake linings, oil-less bearings, and non-corrosive paint and manufactured lubricants, pencils, stove polish and graphite crucibles. Dixon, through his experiments, also discovered that graphite crucibles withstood high temperatures, and he secured patents on graphite crucibles for making steel, glass and pottery. As a manufacturer and entrepreneur, Joseph Dixon produced the first mass-made



An 1870s stock certificate from the Joseph Dixon Crucible Company.

pencil in the United States and was responsible for the development of the graphite industry in the United States. He was also instrumental in starting the United States' steel industry including a number of famous foundries in Jersey City. Dixon's companies survive today as the Dixon Ticonderoga Company, named after Joseph Dixon and its oldest brand-name pencil. In turn, the Gautier name today is still associated with steel manufacturing in a legacy that goes back to Gautier's joint venture with Dixon in the crucible and graphite works in Jersey City.



An advertisement from the Joseph Dixon Crucible Company in New Jersey touts the company's stove polishing products.

Significantly, in addition to Dixon's efforts, Jersey City was the home to many innovative American industrial efforts including Robert Fulton's steamboats and ferries, one of the earliest manufacturers of pressed glass in the United States by the namesake of the P.C. Dummer Glass Company, and the Jersey Porcelain & Earthenware Company which later became the American Pottery Manufacturing Company that first introduced American molded pottery for stoneware, Rockingham and yellow ware pieces. The city was also known for its factories and for products that became household names: American Can, Emerson Radio, Lorillard Tobacco, Colgate soaps and toothpaste, and the previously mentioned Dixon Ticonderoga pencils.



This privy-excavated and restored yellow-ware platter was manufactured in the Jersey City at the American Pottery Manufacturing Company.



An incised stamp on the reverse of the platter states the company's shorthand name: "American Pottery Co. Jersey City, NJ."

Now here Dave and I were, more than a century after this boom in industry and manufacturing in Jersey City, uncovering telltale signs of these historic developments in American history. As I looked around, I pondered the mix of shattered crucibles and kiln bricks scattered in the trench. These crucibles were all about 18 inches tall – apparently not the large kind necessary to make glass batch for a glass works but rather sufficient for making glazes and such for a pottery works. We started digging in the crucible layer at the bottom of the hole but they all were broken from pressure of the trackhoe's bucket scooping out the ground. As a last resort, I decided to dig into the wall of ash to see if there were any intact crucibles. Dave dug alongside me and ten minutes later he found an intact crucible. Determined to find one to memorialize this site and it's history, I persevered but each crucible I carefully uncovered was broken because of their fragile nature. It appeared that the crucibles were carefully laid down then coal ash was put over them; in addition, I started to reveal the shape of a kiln made of the Gautier fire bricks. Dave was happy with his find but he got an itch to get

up and wander around the site looking for bottles. This did not seem like a good idea since darkness was coming and I told him so but, of course, Dave insisted and went on his merry way.



Recovered crucible with lid and glass slag and cullet

Thirty minutes later, I finally found two intact crucibles and two damaged ones along with complete lids. Right then, Dave came back into the trench about 20 feet away and anxiously whispered that a policeman driving by had spotted him and was now in the construction site. Well, despite the fact we had previously gotten permission to look for bottles, that little rush when you really feel afraid came over me and I thought to myself "please God, don't let us go to jail tonight." Then I heard the policeman say to Dave, "Hey you, yeah you, what the #%\$@! are you doing in here?" Dave's timid reply (no doubt accompanied by his knees shaking) was "I'm looking for old bottles and ... and ..." Before Dave could finish, the police officer again shouted for Dave to get out of the pit and to bring his shovel. I had this feeling that it was better to stay low and hide, but I also did not want Dave to get in trouble or go to jail alone. Without any hesitation, I put on my hardhat and took my shovel in hand and went out into the open. Immediately, the officer spotted me and shouted "You ... you too, get up here now!"

Imagine my surprise because I had never seen such a large cop in my life! Here was this six foot seven blue-clad giant towering over Dave. I asked to get my backpack which I had left in the trench and he responded "Get it quick!" By this time I figured that if I failed to put the best crucible and lid in my backpack that I might never again have this opportunity to

save a piece of history and these relics would be lost forever. So I shoved a crucible and lid into my pack, grabbed my tools, and scampered out of the pit.

Another surprise awaited when I reached the officer and Dave, -- they were like old buddies talking shop and discussing bottle finds. It turned out that the policeman, named Mark, was a novice bottle collector and was likewise given permission to search the construction site for bottles. He thought we were trespassing -- not to mention the fact that here were two guys intruding on his digging turf. Once we were done with the introductions, we talked about the site and why it was apparent to me that this was once a glass and pottery factory. Mark was delighted to meet two "real" bottle diggers as he had no digging partners. Dark had fallen by then so we went to a nearby deli and talked about the bottles Mark had found while scouting sites in Jersey City. He bought us some soda and iced tea, asked us to keep in touch, laughed about scaring us in the site, and went on with his patrol.



New York area bottle diggers united: Mark and Dave stand on Jersey City's shoreline with the skyline of lower Manhattan, including Battery Park City, the World Financial Center, the former location of the Twin Towers, and the edge of South Street Seaport.

We also tried to leave, but Dave was still so shaken up that it took him several tries to find his way out of the neighborhood. A few days after that Dave talked to the site supervisor and reaffirmed our permission to search after hours. He also went to the library to research the site and believes that there had been a crucible works on or near that location along with a host of other industries that used crucibles and kiln bricks including a pottery company and a glass works. Our next trip to the site was disappointing because we found work had progressed rapidly and the empty pits were filled with concrete block to make footings for the condominiums being built. This site was done for us but we were glad to have made a new friend on the Jersey City Police force and to have made interesting recoveries. Frankly, this was one of those sites that I wished the archeologists had studied because of the historical goldmine in preserved kilns, factory cafeteria refuse, discarded crucibles, slag and pottery samples, plus the numerous buildings foundations. However, in the window of

time we had to search the site, we did manage to save examples of crucibles along with their lids, stamped fire bricks, glass slag, kiln furniture, pottery wasters, and some early bottles including a terrific colored pontiled medicine. What more could we have asked for when we ventured out on that hot summer day



Dave Cutler with freshly excavated crucibles in a pit on the construction site

Sources:

Joseph K. Baldwin, Patent and Proprietary Medicine Bottles of the Nineteenth Century (1973) (citing Brinckerhoff advertisement of 1844).

City of Jersey City Website (available at <http://www.cityofjerseycity.org/>).

"Dixon, Joseph." Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, (2004) Encyclopædia Britannica Premium Service. (<http://www.britannica.com/ebc/article?tocId=9362872>).

J. Dixon, Pottery Ware & Crucible Kiln, March 5, 1850, Patent No. 7136.

Jersey City Past & Present Website, Dixon Crucible Company/Dixon Mills (available at <http://www.njcu.edu/programs/jchistory/>).

Cecil Munsey, An Illustrated Guide to Collecting Bottles, (1970) Hawthorn Books, Inc.

John Odell, Digger Odell=s Pontil Medicine Encyclopedia: A Look at America=s Pre-Civil War Medicine Bottles (2000) (noting Brinckerhoff=s New York addresses, showing advertisement, and quoting Brinckerhoff promotional material of 1846).

William H Shaw, History of Essex and Hudson Counties, at 1091-1115 (1884) Philadelphia: Everts & Peck.

Postscript:

If you have any information, questions or comments about these discoveries please feel free to contact me by mail at Scott Jordan, 31-14 23rd Road, Apt. 12, Astoria, NY 11105 or visit me on Sundays at the Columbus Avenue Flea Market (located at Columbus Avenue at 77th Street) where I sell many historic bottles and other artifacts along with artwork made from some of these finds. My passion for over 35 years has been digging in the New York area and studying the region's history.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

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

Reminder to Baltimore dealers:

Contracts are due December 15th. Since there is a long waiting list, last year's dealers will not have tables unless they submit contracts on time.

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.

Burying George Washington's "Dirty Little Secret"

By Jack Sullivan
Special to the Potomac Pontil



George, with a knowing look about his "secret."

In 1933, the State of Virginia as part of a Depression-era public works program decided to restore George Washington's grist mill, located in Fairfax County, not far from Mount Vernon. When the excavation and Washington's records revealed that a whiskey distillery also had occupied the site, Virginia authorities quickly re-buried its foundation.

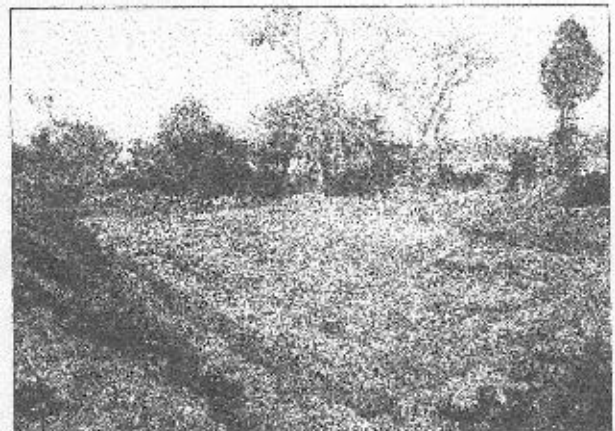
Why? The most reasonable explanation is that this also was the era of National Prohibition that outlawed the sales of all alcoholic beverages and G.W. was an icon of the Drys. For many Americans it would have been a severe shock to learn that our first President not only took a drink but actually made the stuff. So this *dirty little secret* had to be covered over – and was.

But now, as I reported in the July-August 2003 *Pontil*, the folks at Mount Vernon, with financing from the Distilled Spirits Council of the U.S. (DISCUS), are resurrecting Washington's distillery and with it his reputation as a whiskey-maker. The construction is expected to be completed and open to the public in 2006. Moreover, the project already has produced a variety of whiskey containers that are of interest to collectors of Potomac area bottles and whiskiana. Even today some people find the project objectionable. Mount Vernon curator Esther White notes that the staff has received a few angry calls about the project. But the public vehemence could be nothing like the fervor generated in the 1930s. At that

point, most Americans had been deluded into thinking that George Washington was a complete abstainer from alcohol.

The Founding Father was frequently cited (but only selectively quoted) in Dry propaganda. Just as important, one of the most popular and effective anti-drinking groups – a forerunner of Alcoholics Anonymous – was called The Washington Temperance Benevolent Society. Founded in Baltimore in 1840 by self-confessed former drunkards, the movement became a national one. That organization explicitly identified itself with George and Martha, and its members eventually became known simply as Washingtonians. For a long time The Father of His Country was clasped firmly to the Prohibitionist bosom. In so doing, the Dry lobby conveniently overlooked (or ignored) Washington's August 16, 1777, letter to John Hancock as president of the Continental Congress. The Revolutionary War Commander wrote: *Since our imports of spirit have become so precarious I would beg leave to suggest the propriety of erecting public distilleries in different states. The benefits arising from moderate use of liquor have been experienced in all armies and are not to be disputed.* Moreover, Washington also practiced what he preached. His account books for expenses during the Revolutionary War reveals that he spent significant sums to wine and dine his aides and other members of his entourage.

National Prohibition was still in full swing in 1932 when the State of Virginia purchased land that once had belonged to Washington, intending to restore the grist mill and other buildings at the site as a tribute to its native son on the bicentennial of his birth. In excavating the property they came upon the distillery foundation and photographed it – as shown here.



The distillery site as it looked in when uncovered in 1932.

The discovery appears to have been leaked to a reporter for the Associated Press and the story was featured in newspapers from coast to coast. William Carson, the head of the Virginia State Conservation and Development Foundation, the agency undertaking the project, appears to have taken some extreme heat from the ensuing outcry. Carson was a political appointee and a good friend of then Governor John Garland Pollard.

Evidence uncovered by Ms. White includes a letter Carson wrote to a Texas publication denying a “leak” to the press and implying, quite disingenuously, that the distillery might actually have been a half mile down the road rather than on Washington’s property. Citing Carson’s evasion as proof that the original story was untrue, the Texas journal thundered against “another infamous lie sent over the country by an element who would drag George Washington’s name in the mire.”

Chastened by such public outrage, and perhaps with limited funds for restoration, Mr. Carson and his minions decided that the path of least resistance was once again to cover over the foundation. And so it lay for almost 70 years until Mount Vernon took over administration of Grist Mill Park, located on State Route 235 about one-half mile east of the U.S. 1 intersection.



Archeologist Esther White at the current distillery reconstruction site.

The decision by DISCUS to fund the reconstruction has been a “gift that keeps on giving.” The original distillery had been a two story building and a decision recently was made to turn part of the second floor into museum with displays on whiskey-making. The organization has pledged an additional \$1 million for that purpose, bringing the total cost of the project to \$2.2 million.

In addition, some whiskey has been bottled at the site from barrels shipped down the Potomac for the ground-breaking in 2001 and stored on the Mount Vernon grounds. It has been sold in special jugs and bottles for hefty prices at annual auctions on the grounds of Mount Vernon. Earlier this year additional whiskey was distilled at Mount Vernon itself using Washington’s recipe. That too is being specially bottled and sold at auction, with proceeds benefiting the restoration. The commemorative bottles and jugs are instant collectibles.

The hoopla surrounding the restoration of Washington’s distillery has reaped a blizzard of positive publicity for the American whiskey industry. Stories about the project have appeared in hundreds of U.S. newspapers and other publications worldwide. George Washington himself, always the business opportunist, no doubt would have approved. The

teetotalling Washingtonians, by contrast, are probably rolling over in their graves.



A special Platte Valley jug commemorating the Mount Vernon dig.

Material for this article came from a variety of sources, including the interviews with Mount Vernon staff, and the Mount Vernon and DISCUS websites. Particularly useful was a paper written by Esther White for a meeting of the Society for Historical Archeology in St. Louis in January 2004.



The Potomac Bottle Collectors plot to draft new officers at the October meeting.