

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

February 2008

In this issue:

The Rogue and Roxbury Rye by by Jack Sullivan.....page 2

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows.....page 4

A Whimsical Dig: Uncovering the History of Vinegar Hill,
the Phoenix Glassworks, and the Brooklyn Navy Yard
by Andy Goldfrank.....page 5



Artifacts found near the Brooklyn Navy Yard
See article beginning on page 5.

Meeting February 26th Annual Club Dinner at 7:30 PM

Our February Meeting will start promptly at 7:30 for the annual club dinner. The club will provide sandwich fixings and soft drinks. Members are welcome to bring a dish to pass, but all members and guests are welcome to join us for food and fellowship regardless of whether they come bearing food. Awards will be presented to the winners of our annual club contest. The winning items will be featured in our March newsletter.

Baltimore Antique Bottle Show March 2

We look forward to seeing everyone at the huge Baltimore Antique Bottle Show on March 2nd. Many of our club members will offer a wide variety of antique bottles and related items for sale at this show. See show listings on page 4 for details about this and other upcoming bottle shows.

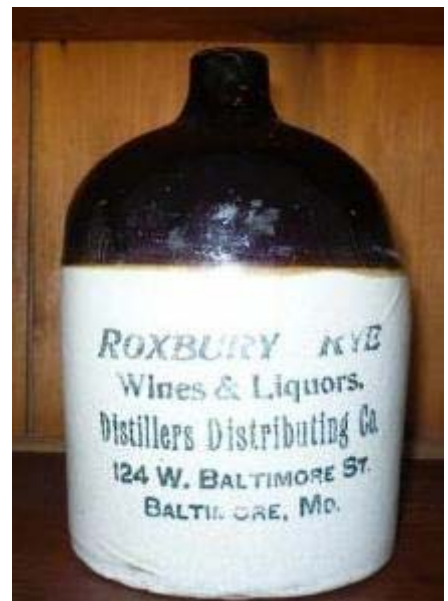
Arlington Bottles Wanted for Historical Society Display

Club member Mark Benbow is seeking Arlington, VA bottles for a display at the Arlington Historical Society. If you have bottles that you would be willing to loan, please contact Mark@rustycans.com or visit the Historical Society web page: www.arlingtonhistoricalsociety.org.



Mark Benbow displays a rusty can at the January meeting (left).

For history of Roxbury Rye (right), see Jack Sullivan's article beginning on page 2.



The Rogue and Roxbury Rye

by Jack Sullivan

(Special to the Potomac Pontil)

Behind many pre-Prohibition whiskey brands lie stories, but few have the soap opera quality of Maryland's Roxbury Rye. Its saga begins with its founder, George T. Gambrill, whose reputation as rogue and scoundrel seems to have pursued him throughout a long life.

Gambrill is a familiar name in Maryland. A 1973 genealogical publication records three hundred years of the family in the state. Many Gambrills, George included, were involved in the grain trade in Baltimore and elsewhere in Maryland. One observer called the extended family "a milling dynasty."

Born about 1845, George's first brush with the courts may have been in 1864 when, as a very young man, he was forced to declare bankruptcy, unable to pay a host of creditors. Later he would claim that he had been "drawn into the affairs of Gambrill Bros.," grain dealers, apparently naively, and that he had paid off his creditors by 1868.

By 1870, according to Baltimore city directories, he was back in business as a principal in Gambrill & Williar, grain dealers. Their offices were in the posh Eutaw House, a downtown hotel (Fig. 1) where Edgar Allen Poe is said to have written "The Raven." Ten years later we find George with another grain firm, Trail & Gambrill. Since wheat, rye and corn are the basis of whiskeys, it seems a natural move for him to branch out into distilling.



Fig. 1: Eutaw House - Baltimore
He Registers Roxbury Rye

In 1893 he registered Roxbury Rye as a brand with the government, with a distillery in Roxbury, Maryland, a tiny town in Washington County, about twenty miles south of Hagerstown. An energetic salesman, he built Roxbury Rye into a nationally recognized brand in relatively few years. Gambrill merchandised Roxbury Rye in attractive quart bottles with embossed script that read: "Roxbury Rye...Geo. T. Gambrill...Baltimore, Md." (Fig. 2). A labeled pint from the distillery claims to be "The Purest Rye Whiskey in the United States." (Fig. 3). He also issued attractive back-of-the-bar decanters (Fig. 4).



Fig. 2: Roxbury Rye quart



Fig. 3: Roxbury Rye pint (left)

Fig. 4: Roxbury Rye decanter (right)

Before long the distillery was Maryland's sixth largest in terms of capacity. It also maintained impressive sales office in Baltimore at 115 West Baltimore St. In 1900 Roxbury Rye was important enough to be among a handful of American distilleries exhibiting at the Paris Exposition.

Stolen Coal and Fatal Fires

But George found it difficult to play it straight. By 1901 he was back in court in a case brought against him by John Schooley who claimed that Gambrill had reneged on a deal to give him lodging, money and distillery warehousing space in return for overseeing the Roxbury operation. Schooley also claimed slander because of a letter allegedly written by Gambrill saying Schooley "stole my coal."

In addition to denying that the letter was in his handwriting, Gambrill made a bizarre defense claiming that he really wasn't in the distillery business since all his product for five years – 3,000 barrels of whiskey – had been promised to Steinhardt Brothers of New York (White Lily Rye) and that, in effect, the Steinhardts were running his distillery. The court rejected that notion and quickly found for Schooley. A 1902 appeal by Gambrill failed.

Meanwhile, Roxbury's Baltimore sales operation was taking a hit. On the afternoon of Jan. 4, 1901, a fire broke out in adjoining building and spread to 115 West Baltimore. According to a New York Times account, the Roxbury Rye Company, mostly from water damage, lost \$10,000 in inventory and its building was damaged to the extent of \$510,000. All losses were covered by insurance. The cause of the fire was unknown.

But a far more devastating fire would visit Gambrill's sales operation barely three years later. The Great Baltimore Fire of February 1904 (Fig. 5) destroyed its building and all the contents. Not long after, the Fisher Bros. Co., a local liquor distributor, claimed in ads to be the "successors to George T. Gambrill, distiller..." This firm first shows up in Baltimore directories in 1899. It too was displaced by the fire, moving temporarily to 406 W. Camden. By 1905 Fisher Bros. was in permanent quarters at 124 W. Baltimore Av. and advertising as "agents" for Roxbury Rye.



Fig. 5: Ruins of the 1904 Baltimore Fire

Gambrill Down, Waldeck Up

In 1905 George Gambrill, who was running the distillery at Roxbury, re-registered the Roxbury Rye brand with the government, this time as a product of the Roxbury Distilling Co. He was still having problem keeping on the right side of the law. A grain speculator, he bet the wrong way on wheat prices, lost his shirt, and once again was unable to pay creditors. As a result he was hauled into court in 1910, accused of putting up the same whiskey as collateral for separate, forfeited loans totaling some \$500,000. He was tried, found guilty, and sentenced to four years in prison. Although he appealed, his Roxbury distillery was shut down and George exited the whiskey business.

Although Fisher Bros. Co. disappears from Baltimore directories about 1907, there shortly was another liquor company at the same W. Baltimore Street address. It was the Distillers Distributing Co., advertising "fine old liquors," and mentioning prominently its manager, J. W. Waldeck (Fig. 6). Like Fisher Bros., the firm featured Roxbury Rye, indicating that Gambrill had sold the brand name.



Fig. 6: Distillers Distributing Co. shot glass

Waldeck put new juice into advertising for the whiskey. He issued shot glasses (Fig. 7), cork pulls (Fig. 8), and even a thimble (Fig. 9): "Just a thimble full of Roxbury Rye," it reads. The base makes sure that we understand this is from Distillers' Distributing Co. (Fig. 10).

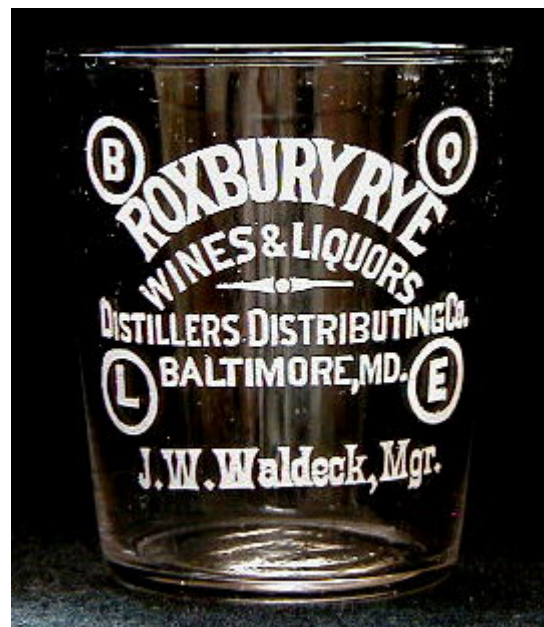


Fig. 7: Roxbury Rye shot glass



Fig. 8: Distillers Distributing Co. cork pull



Fig. 9: Roxbury Rye thimble - rim



Fig. 10: Roxbury Rye thimble - base

Waldeck appears to have broken away from Distillers Distributing about 1914 to start his own liquor company, called the J.W. Waldeck Co., located at 105 H. Howard St. He carried Roxbury Rye with him and merchandised other favorite Baltimore brands, including Bal-Mar Quality Rye, Ballard & Lancaster, and just plain Waldeck Rye.

The End of the Story

Meanwhile, George Gambrill was filing motions left and right, appealing his conviction, much as he had against John Schooley. A dozen years later, for murky reasons, he still had not served a single day in jail. Instead, according to U.S. Census records, he was residing with his wife, Margaret, at 715 St. Paul and working as an executive with the Gambrill Grain Products Co. at 1311 Bolton St.

While awaiting the outcome of his legal battles, George watched the onset of Prohibition in 1920. The whiskey he created and brought into national prominence disappeared forever, as did the J.W. Waldeck Co. Finally in 1922, a judge quashed the fraud conviction citing Gambrill's frail health and advanced years (about 77). It may have been an old rogue's last con game: George managed to live another eight years in his mansion home, dying at the age of 85. In the end both he and Roxbury Rye had written their names into whiskey history and Baltimore lore.

References: Material for this article was drawn from a variety of sources, principal among them Jim Bready's excellent article on Maryland whiskey for the Winter 1990 issue of the *Maryland Historical Magazine*. The illustrations in Figs. 6-10 are courtesy of Robin Preston and his pre-pro whiskey website (www.prepro.com).

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

MARCH 2 - BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

The Baltimore Antique Bottle Club's 28th Annual Show & Sale (8 AM - 3 PM) at the Physical Education Center, CCBS-Essex, 7201 Rossville Blvd, Essex, Maryland. INFO: BOB FORD, PH: (410) 531-9459, E-mail: bottles@comcast.net

MARCH 8 - BADIN, NORTH CAROLINA

The Uwharrie Bottle Club's 1st Annual Antique Bottle & Collectibles Show & Sale (Sat. 8 AM - 3 PM, Adm. Free; Set-up, 6 - 8 AM) at the Badin Fire Department, Badin, North Carolina. Tables (8 ft.) \$20. INFO: TODD MCSWAIN, PH: (704) 474-0552, E-mail: mcswain8649@alltel.net.

MARCH 9 - TYLERSPORT, PENNSYLVANIA

The 14th Annual Bucks-Mont Bottle Show (9 AM - 2 PM, Early Buyers 8 AM) at the Tylersport Fire Company, 125 Ridge Rd, Tylersport, Pennsylvania. INFO: DAVID BUCK, PH: (215) 723-4048 or GREG GIFFORD, PH: (215) 699-5216

APRIL 27 - HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

The Historical Bottle-Diggers of Virginia 37th Annual Antique Bottle and Collectible Show & Sale (9 AM - 3 PM) at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds, (US Rt. 11 South, Exit 243 off I-81), Harrisonburg, Virginia. INFO: SONNY SMILEY, PH: (540) 434-1129 or E-mail: lithiaman1@yahoo.com.

MAY 18 - WASHINGTON, PENNSYLVANIA

The Washington County Antique Bottle Club's 34th Annual Antique Bottle Show & Sale (9 AM - 2 PM, Donation \$3) at the Alpine Star Lounge, 735 Jefferson Ave. (From I70, Exit 17), Washington, Pennsylvania. INFO: RUSS CRUPE, 52 Cherry Road, Avella, PA 15312, PH: (724) 345-3653 or (412) 298-7831, E-mail: heidirus@gmail.com.

MAY 18 - BRICK, NEW JERSEY

The Jersey Shore Bottle Club's 36th Antique Bottle, Post Card & Local Memorabilia Show & Sale (Sun. 8:30 AM - 2 PM) at the Brick Elks, 2491 Hooper Ave (Old Hooper Ave) Brick, New Jersey. INFO: RICH PEAL 732-267-2528 or E-mail manodirt@msn.com.

AUGUST 8-10 - YORK, PENNSYLVANIA EXPO

The 2008 FOHBC EXPO (Fri. Seminars and Specialty Meetings in AM; Set-up, Early Adm. 1 - 5 PM, Banquet 6:30 PM; Sat. 9 AM - 5 PM, Early Adm. 7 - 9 AM; Sun. 9 AM - 3 PM) at the York Fairgrounds, York, Pennsylvania. 600-800 tables capacity for the largest EXPO ever! For consignments, contracts and INFO: R. WAYNE LOWRY, 401 Johnston Ct., Raymore, MO 64083, PH: (816) 318-0161, E-mail: JarDoctor@aol.com

A Whimsical Dig:

Uncovering the History of Vinegar Hill, the Phoenix Glass Works and the Brooklyn Navy Yard

by Andy Goldfrank

Every privy digger knows that you have to dig your share of mediocre outhouse pits to find the rare hole that makes one shake with joy. Well back in the spring of 2004, Scott Jordan and I had wandered the mean streets of Manhattan and Brooklyn more than a handful of times without finding a pit worth mentioning. Despite this seemingly unending spat of dry holes, we made plans to get together for a couple days over the Memorial Day weekend (as I was returning to DC for a massive party on Monday, which my wife Joan was hosting with friends). Our scheme was to punch holes through an old parking lot of a 1920s factory on the Brooklyn waterfront, with the permission of the demolition contractor, in search of the privies from houses that significantly pre-dated the site's industrial use. As you might have guessed, we spent most of the day pounding the breaker bar on blacktop and only found a brownstone-lined root cellar that had been filled in the early 1890s with ash and the occasional *piece* of a blob beer. Different dig, same story was our mantra.

Sometime late in the afternoon, our sludge-master friend Dave Cutler came by to check on our progress. During our conversation with Dave, as he regaled us with tales of the gold and diamonds he was extracting from the sewers of New York, some passing remark reminded Scott about a potential spot that a couple of our friends had mentioned. One digging buddy, Winston Krieger, who often works at the ConEd plant on the edge of the East River in Brooklyn, had told Scott of an active excavation in the area. Moreover, Scott recalled that another digger, Adam Woodward, had shared a story about a cache of Mochaware pottery shards he had recovered in the earthen bank of a construction site near the Brooklyn Navy Yard. Putting this all together, we figured that Winston and Adam must be talking about the same place, located in an isolated part of Brooklyn called Vinegar Hill.

1851
Dripps
map
showing
Navy
Yard



Brooklyn Navy Yard

Vinegar Hill has been called, by *The New York Times'* architecture critic, "a small settlement out on the prairie, isolated not by amber waves of grain but by a swath of surrounding power plants, highways and housing projects." In the 1780s, John Jackson and his brothers built a shipyard in the Brooklyn flatlands where they constructed under contract a number of vessels for the United States including the 28-gun frigate *USS Adams*. Shortly after 1800, the federal government purchased Jackson's shipyard for the creation of the New York Navy Yard, commonly known as the Brooklyn Navy Yard. At about the same time, Jackson attempted to develop the adjoining slopes and bluff overlooking the new federal facilities, naming the location Vinegar Hill after a 1798 battle of the Irish rebellion against the British. Perhaps his aim was to attract "sentimental Gaelic immigrants" to this new neighborhood. Regardless, the community eventually become known as Irish Town, with many a brothel, bar, and gambling hall springing up to cater to the neighboring military personnel and employees. It was also home to a vast number of those employed at the nearby factories that occupied the shores of Brooklyn. Most of the residences and shops were built between the late 1820s and the 1850s. Over the years, Vinegar Hill has shrunk to just a handful of city blocks in the wake of the construction of the Brooklyn-Queens Expressway, a massive ConEd plant, and public housing towers aptly named Farragut Houses after the Navy Admiral. Nonetheless, today, many a visitor rattling down the stone-paved lanes amidst the historical streetscape quickly forgets the surrounding behemoths of the modern era and readily travels back to an era of 150 years ago.

Shortly after our conversation with Dave, we were rumbling across the Belgian-block streets of Vinegar Hill and quickly assessing the digging potential of this Brooklyn nook. It took us no time to find the sole construction site in the neighborhood that abutted the brick walls of the Navy Yard and faced the main gate to the former Naval Commandant's House – actually an early 1800s mansion – which overlooks the Navy Yard. The odd-shaped lot was surrounded with a plywood fence and, even though it was late afternoon on a Saturday, the gate was wide open. Not seeing anyone on-site initially, we were hesitant to wander in, so all three of us just peered at what looked like the outside stone lining of a privy; then, at the same

time, we noticed something moving behind a wall of dirt but figured it was an animal or a construction worker. Dave, at that point, took-off to go home, clean-up, and have some dinner. In turn, Scott and I kept gawking at the possibly-exposed privy and trying to figure out our next move. And then, like an apparition, out walked Adam from the open gate.

Scott and I were both dumbfounded and then immediately realized that Adam must have been digging in his cache of 1830s-40s pottery shards. Sauntering over to us with an iron-pontiled cobalt, *Dearborn* cylinder soda in his hand, Adam asked if we had been inside the site and told us that he had picked up the bottle off a dirt pile a few minutes ago. He surmised that the heavy equipment had clipped a privy but because of the trapezoid shape of the lot he had failed to locate a pit other than perhaps under the sidewalk directly next to the excavated work ramp into the site. Most importantly, he informed us that the construction crew not only was still there (building forms for the next week's concrete pours) but they also had no problems with us exploring for bottles. At this point, Scott and I stumbled over ourselves as we tried to explain to Adam where we thought an outhouse pit was perched in the bank and that it could easily be dug. Frankly, Adam was skeptical of our possible privy because he had walked by the slope carved by the track hoe on a handful of occasions and not seen any signs. Scott suggested that I get a probe out of the truck to test our theory but instead – obviously full of bluster – I left the probe and just gathered a couple of shovels and digging sticks along with the breaker bar.

In the meantime, Adam and Scott had wandered in to look at the large seam of Mochaware pottery shards that had kept Adam coming back to this redevelopment site. Walking past the boys, I went directly to the spot we had identified as a potential outhouse. Balancing on the steep bank about 15 feet above the excavated floor of the construction site, I immediately knew that despite my cocky attitude we were going to be rewarded. There was a slight difference in the color of the soil and a loose grouping of stones, about the size of basketballs and watermelons, sticking out of the dirt. Scraping the earth away, I revealed a massive cluster of stones. Although these rocks did not look like they were laid in a wall, as one sees from the neat interior of an outhouse pit, it appeared to me that I had exposed the rough, outside of a stone-lined privy. To confirm this, I then worked the breaker bar between two boulders and popped one of the stones out – and white ash promptly trickled from the hole. I distinctly recall my audible sigh of relief.

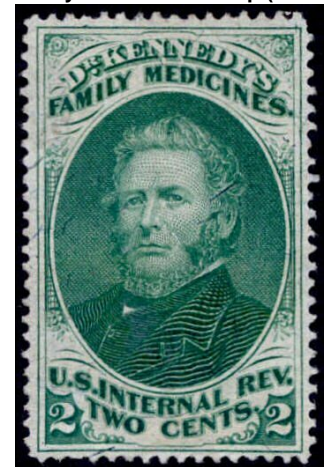
By then the boys had come over to inspect my efforts: Scott was knowingly smiling because he knew here was an easy privy to crack open and Adam was shaking his head in disbelief because he had sauntered by this pit so many times without seeing it. With all due respect, this was in the formative years of Adam's privy digging tutorial – he is quite the maestro now at locating privies on construction sites. A quick perusal of his internet website (available at <http://homepage.mac.com/newbowery/PhotoAlbum3.html>), aptly named "N. York," shows the breadth of his digging prowess. After jabbering about the clues for spotting a privy in a bank of earth, the three of us started removing stones to make

a V-shaped opening in the cylindrical wall of the privy. The purpose in making this cut is to prevent the walls from collapsing while we extract the contents of the privy and shove the interior dirt down the embankment. As the rock from the cut in the privy wall tumbled down the slope, ash started to flow too.

Soon enough, with daylight fading, Scott and I were shoveling out the loose ash cap at a rapid pace as our exhaustion from digging all day without results was now long in the past. The first bottles that came to light were in the ash and a typical but good sign: a couple of aqua sodas and a nice yellow *Udolpho Wolfe's Aromatic Schiedam Schnapps* which appeared to be from the late 1860s or early 1870s. As we worked the hole, which was about 5 feet across, the ash turned to a mix of brownish and grayish soil: this was a rich "use layer" of trash and nightsoil along with pockets of ash.

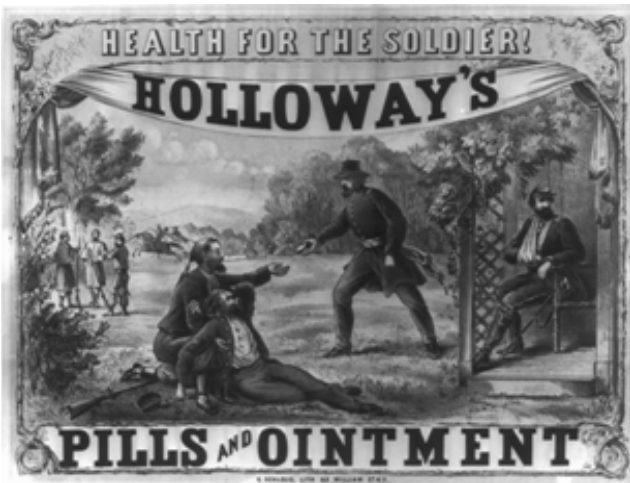
Dr. Kenney's Revenue Stamp (below)

Immediately we started to uncover dated aqua sodas from the Civil War era and a cache of medicines. In a span of a few minutes, we revealed four, aqua, wide-mouthed, smooth-based *Kennedy's Salt Rheum Ointments* with neat, curved embossing (produced by Donald Kennedy of Roxbury, Massachusetts, who is better known for the oft-dug *Dr. Kennedy's Medical Discovery*). Our research later revealed that salt rheum is an antiquated term for eczema and other chronic skin diseases. Even without knowing this medical tidbit, we all surmised that the folks visiting or living in this house over 150 years earlier had problems with their skin. In short order, we put in our pile a trio of plain pottery ointment pots. While removing all of the ash so that we could focus on the trash layer, we uncovered another grouping of *Kennedy's* including one that was in a bulbous shape and pontiled. Nearby we brought to light two small, transferware *Holloway's Ointment* pots with New York and London addresses (indicating a post 1853, as that year is said to be when Holloway opened his New York office).



Holloway's Ointment pot – front and back

Although only a little over an inch tall, these pots are covered in writing informing the reader that Holloway's was "For The Cure Of Scrofula; Inveterate Ulcers; Sore Breasts And Legs; Burns; Scalds; Ringworms; Scrapes; And All Cutaneous Diseases; Gout And Rheumatism" and that the product was "Sold in Pots for 25 ¢., 62½ ¢. & \$1. Each." As Scott was reading the writing, I commented that it would be nice to find the rare \$1 size *Holloway's* transferware pot lids especially as this product was, according to the company's advertising during the Civil War, a favorite amongst soldiers and sailors. Adam, in turn, suggested that finding some relics indisputably linked to the Navy Yard would be nifty too.



Holloway's Civil War Advertisement

Plying through the nightsoil layer with his hands and the digging stick, Adam revealed a pontiled *RRR Radway's* along with a large crockery beer. As the beer was pulled out, he pointed out what appeared to be the neck of soda. Scott directed the flashlight at the bottle while we all hoped that it was intact. Adam then plucked out of the soil a green, paneled, iron-pontiled, bottle embossed *Hamilton & Church, Excelsior Mineral Water, Brooklyn* – we were stunned. Here was a beautiful bottle all of us had heard much about but never dug an example. These are scarce bottles that are rarely found.



Vinegar Hill Sodas (Hamilton & Church on left)

Gary Guest wrote an article for *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector* titled "Sided Sodas ... from New York City" in which he talked about the lack of information on the firm of Hamilton & Church. His research efforts, primarily from plowing through the old Brooklyn business directories, revealed an interesting string of soda manufacturers. First, in *Hearne's Brooklyn City Directory* of 1850-51, William P. Davis was listed as a soda manufacturer at Powers and Dean Streets (and there are beautiful, sided sodas in green and cobalt bearing the Davis name). The next year, 1852, the firm of Childs & Church is identified as likewise being in the soda business on Powers Street. Two years later, in 1854, there is a listing for Hamilton & Co. as being in the soda business. Hamilton & Co. logically appears to be a corporate iteration either before or after the firm of Hamilton & Church. There are no known bottles embossed Childs & Church or Hamilton & Co. However, close examination of the *Hamilton & Church* mineral water shows that the word "Hamilton" is on a replacement slug plate. Deductive reasoning suggests that this slug replaced a panel embossed "Childs" as in the firm of Childs & Church because of the apparent chronological sequence of soda and mineral water firms in the Brooklyn business directories. As we continued to shovel dirt out of the hole, Scott and I even speculated that maybe one day we will stumble across a mineral water embossed Childs & Church or Hamilton & Co. The entire time Adam listened intently and smiled during our rapid discussion about the evolution of mineral water manufacturers, and then said we should forget about printed pot lids and focus on finding more colored, pontiled sodas.

Keeping this in mind, it was my turn next to work the layer. However, instead of finding any pontiled sodas, my digging stick revealed a light amber Union oval flask with a cool birdswing, another dated aqua soda, and a pontiled aqua *London Mustard*. Scott then jumped in to dig a bit and, in moments, popped out a *U.S. Navy Pepper*. This pontiled beauty was right on time because Adam and I had just been talking about how the flask was probably sipped from by a sailor or soldier stationed at the Navy Yard during the Civil War. Here was a direct link, as these *U.S. Navy Peppers* have been found on Union seafaring vessels dating to the late 1850s and early 1860s, and the contents used to spice up the cured (and sometimes rancid) foods served aboard ships. The shipyard we were mere yards away from, was the central base for distributing stores and supplies to the Union fleet prior to and during the Civil War. In fact, the ironclad *USS Monitor*, which fought the *CSS Virginia* nee *Merrimac* in the Battle at Hampton Roads, was outfitted and commissioned at a dock within shouting distance of our dig hole. As if on cue, Scott pulled out two more pontiled *U.S. Navy Peppers* along with an almost fully intact Bennington-glazed spittoon. Little doubt remained in our minds about the connection between the users of this privy and the Navy Yard.

As Scott cleaned out the loose soil, not quite done, he flipped out not one but two large size, sepia colored transferware *Holloway's Ointment* pot lids with bases! And these were sporting the rarer 80 Maiden Lane, New York address. The lids were decorated, to describe the contents, by transfer-printing in a mechanical process which was effectively

the sole domain of the British as they produced virtually all pot lids for the entire world. Originating in Liverpool in the second half of the eighteenth century, transfer printing was not adopted for bulk packaging until the 1840s. "Printing" on a pot lid was a staged, time-consuming process: first, a tissue-like paper pulled the pattern from an engraved copper plate that previously had been inked; second, this paper was put onto the lid after the first baking or bisque stage, and rubbed until the print firmly adhered to the pottery; third, the paper was carefully removed either by washing or floating it off in water. Thereafter, the lid was glazed and fired to fix the design. In Great Britain, this technique was used for merchandise until about World War I, while in the United States more economical packaging (e.g., collapsible toothpaste tubes, tins, foil-lined paper boxes) was discovered a generation earlier. As I placed these nifty lids with our growing pile of finds, which were gathered a safe distance from our dig spot, I told Adam and Scott that this was one fine pit indeed even if it stopped producing at this point. Amazingly, this was not even the midpoint in our remarkable pit.



Masonic Hall (above)
Newton Bottler Soda (right)



Large Size Holloway's Pot Lid

Adam then took his turn and, as we have often come to expect when this lad digs, he managed to find a bottle even rarer than the *Hamilton & Church*. We all must have shouted, as a neighboring dog started barking, but we could care less: in his hands, Adam held a cobalt, iron-pontiled, scalloped-shouldered soda embossed *Newton Bottler, 316 Broadway, New York*. Although it was not in perfect condition, this bottle is a real treat to behold with its wonderful color, graceful shoulders and bold embossing. Thomas W. Newton was one of New York's first soda manufacturers operating from 1843 to 1850 in Manhattan at the Masonic Hall, which was one of New York's grandest buildings at the time with a lounge and display area know for its luxuriousness. Amongst New York City privy diggers, this is one of the prize bottles to dig and some say harder to find than a Crystal Palace soda.

Now it was (finally) my turn again to dig. Slowly, I started removing the fluff and working the layer across from the back of the privy to the front. The rear seemed to have fewer artifacts but leaning against the back wall, I pulled out a couple of pieces of green and teal slag glass mixed in with the nightsoil. The three of us speculated back and forth as to why these were in the privy but could not come up with an acceptable theory. And yet, within a few minutes we had an answer. As I worked my way counterclockwise along the wall of the round stone-lined privy, the stick slid across some glass near the front of the hole. Wiping away the dirt with my gloved hand, I saw a panel of a sided soda. Moving a bit quicker, I slid my hand forward looking to grab the neck, and my fingers popped into the middle of the bottle as the top was missing. Disappointed, I told Scott and Adam – who were hovering only a few feet away – that this was another paneled mineral water but that it was broken. Reaching in, I grabbed the glass and pulled it out of the ground. The collective roar that came next was unbelievable because sitting in my hand was not a broken sided soda but rather a whimsy cup made from a *Hamilton & Church*! The neck had been cut off when the glass was hot and the edges crudely folded over to form a sided, embossed drinking cup. Flipping the whimsy to look at the base, we saw a large open pontil scar. We were all slack-jawed, as this was a find that none of us had ever imagined recovering from an outhouse.

The combination of the whimsy along with the slag glass (or cullet) of the same color lead us to believe that some time in the 1850s, someone (who had lived in this house on this spot where we were digging) visited or worked at the glass factory where the *Hamilton & Church* bottles were manufactured. We were collectively leaning toward the notion

that someone had visited the factory on behalf of the mineral water bottler when, a few minutes later, I pulled out a second complete, iron pontiled *Hamilton & Church*. Our logic was not perfect but credible: someone who worked at the glass works would only want to sneak out the whimsy, while some who worked at the bottler would have both functional bottles along with the whimsy cup. On the other hand, we were certainly proximate to the likely location where these bottles and the whimsy would have been manufactured in the early 1850s, and other privy diggers in Maryland, Ohio and Pennsylvania have reported finding glass and pottery whimsies in outhouses which were relatively close to glass and pottery works.



Hamilton & Church Whimsy Cup along with Cullet

By the 1850s, Brooklyn's factory district encompassed the shoreline and the blocks running landward in the area where we were digging this privy. Factories and plants, oriented toward the Navy Yard and everywhere else around the Nation, flourished: New York was the nation's leading manufacturing center (and Brooklyn alone was the fifth largest). By 1860, within a few miles of the Navy Yard, there were the world's greatest sugar refineries, drug company plants, iron foundries, hard rubber factories, white-lead (paint) manufactures, and whiskey distilleries. Tucked into the midst of this Mecca of manufacturing were at least a dozen glass works.

Many focused on flint glass and specialty products such as whale, oil and kerosene lamp shades or cut glass. The most famous of the lot was Christian Dorflinger who started a five-pot factory of his own on Plymouth Street and Bridge Street in 1853, called the Long Island Flint Glass Works, to make chimneys for oil lamps and clear druggists' bottles. Dorflinger shortly thereafter introduced glass cutting operations and by 1854 his operations were focused on fine cut tableware for which his name is known today. (We have since had the opportunity to dig on that site and primarily found castoff remains and wasters of fancy lead and cut glass products.) By 1858, Dorflinger's enterprise had prospered to the extent that he was able to pay off the remaining mortgage on his initial venture and build a larger factory on Concord Street aptly named the Concord Street Flint Glass Works.

Yet just a couple of blocks from our site, as shown in Matthew Dripps' map of 1851 (and depicting the city as of 1850), was a major glass house that is known to have manufactured soda bottles. Prominently labeled on this map as the Phoenix Glass Works, the facility was located on Marshall Street between Gold Street and Hudson Avenue near to the water's edge. *Hearne's Brooklyn City Directory* of 1850-51 notes the factory office was at John Street and Hudson Avenue with a mercantile office across the East River at 38 Burling Slip in Manhattan. The same directory identifies Robert B. Clark as the business' corporate secretary.

Clark's role and, more importantly, some background facts on the Phoenix Glass Works were captured in court rulings from an early 1850s legal dispute about corporate loans. Specifically, there is an opinion titled *Beers v. Phoenix Glass Co.*, 14 Barb. 358 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. & Super. Ct. 1852) that spells out the findings of a trial court and the approval of an appellate court. Among the pertinent facts, the court states that "Engle and Jones" were defendants along with Robert B. Clark, who "was one of the directors of the company, and its secretary." *Id.* at 359. Clark was a director, as was his father-in-law, and was the primary handler of business at the company's office. *Id.* at 361. The court also found, after a trial held in September 1851, that the Phoenix Glass Company was incorporated in December 1848:

with a capital of \$7,500, for "the manufacturing of glass in all its varieties, and in the purchase and sale thereof, and in purchasing all the materials, tools and instruments necessary for the manufacturing of glass, and generally to do all business connected with the manufacturing of glass, and the sale and disposition thereof; and to rent, hire, lease or purchase such real estate as might be necessary to carry on said business."

Id. at 359. Although incorporated in late 1848, the enterprise probably was not up and running quickly because *Spooner's Brooklyn Directory* of 1848-49 does not list Clark or the Phoenix Glass Works. Nonetheless, the court did indicate the glass works was operational before September 1850, at which time the business was suspended for about three months before it resumed operations. *Id.* at 359-61.

There are a few examples of a soda embossed "Phoenix Glass Works Brooklyn" in a circle, which will soon be available for viewing on Tod von Mechow's new website (and, in the meantime, enjoy his current excellent site oriented toward pontiled soda and beer at <http://mysite.verizon.net/vonmechow/index.htm>). Webmaster and glass historian scholar von Mechow opines "that the marked Phoenix bottle dates about 1852-54" and "looks like a bloated pony. They come in aqua and a very pale green." Examples were sold in Glass Works Auction 38 as Lots 206 and 207. This 1852-54 date range is supported by the historical record. Specifically, court rulings indicate that the Phoenix Glass Works started in 1849-50; meanwhile William Perris' map of 1855

identifies the location as the Empire Flint Glass Works and there are no listings in the Brooklyn business directories for a Phoenix Glass Works as of 1855. Thus, with the date range of the mineral water firm of Hamilton & Church is believed to be 1852-55, there is certainly a strong nexus between the *Hamilton & Church* whimsy cup we recovered and the Phoenix Glass Works both in terms of location and chronology.

With all of us shaking (and maybe even giggling a bit) from the excitement of the dig, we continued to work the stone-lined privy down. At this point, we were about 9 feet from the surface and rapidly nearing the base of the pit. We knew that the floor was close because when one pounds a hand on fill in a lined pit, there is a hollow sound or reverberation when there is some depth left and, alternatively, there is a dull thud when there is little left to dig. After my efforts, Scott and Adam split the remaining un-dug portions of the privy in half so that they would both have a chance to find some bottles in the last of the nightsoil. The next foot or so revealed a few more keepers that ordinarily would be significant on their own. Scott turned up a sweet, iron pontiled, 8-sided, cobalt *J. Boardman, New York, Mineral Waters*; John Boardman was one of the earliest, prolific bottlers in New York. In turn, Adam found another bottle which I had never seen come out of a pit, an iron pontiled, teal *B.W. & Co.* embossed in a slugplate. *B.W. & Co.* stands for Bishop Wilson & Co. of Manhattan. He and Scott also recovered a couple of stoneware ginger beers with the highlight being a multi-sided version stamped, inside a shield, *W. Smith, Patent Pressed*. Washington Smith was a potter in Manhattan's Greenwich Village that produced multi-sided, stamped stoneware bottles, starting in at least 1847, via a mechanical method which extruded, pressed or molded clay into stoneware bottles. According to *A History of American Manufactures* from 1864, Smith's enterprise was called the Greenwich Pottery. The primary publisher on stoneware bottles, David Graci, co-authored an article for *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector*, and stated that Smith's "stoneware is hard come by." After these recoveries, the three of us scraped the floor of the outhouse which resulted in a few more relics including a massive skeleton key and some crisp China marbles with geometric designs.

Jumping into our cleaned out hole, I looked up and realized that a significant overhang containing the ash privy fill remained that could be dislodged. Despite our best efforts this material had not caved in earlier when we opened our hole because a massive cluster of roots had kept the overburden intact. Scott and I took turns poking away at this tightly packed area in the hopes of revealing some more bottles. After about 15 minutes, Scott literally flicked out of the ash a crude, light amber *Hostetter's Stomach Bitters*. A few minutes later, I exposed the side of a massive, foot tall, deep red-amber bottle that seemed to tease us as we attempted to extract it from this tight layer of ash and roots. Soon enough we held in our hands a champagne style soda embossed *C.C. Haley & Co., Celebrated California Pop Beer* bearing an 1872 patent date on the reverse. Again our delighted chatter filled the air, because this pit had provided yet another bottle that none of us had ever excavated from the ground. Finishing off the remaining overhang there was little else but that certainly did not dampen

our excitement from the rush of finding some extraordinary bottles and relics.

Darkness had long since fallen and we vowed to capture the results of our dig on film despite the late hour; we then all ventured back to Adam's loft where we placed our remarkable finds on a table for some pictures. Although the quantity of finds did not approach the numbers in many of our digs, the quality was outstanding and the historical significance incomparable. Sitting before us were five extremely desirable, pontiled colored sodas along with a whimsy cup fashioned from a sided, colored soda; four, highly collectible, transferware pots and pot lids; three extremely popular, open pontiled military foods; a cache of rare, aqua ointments; and, albeit newer being from the 1860s and 1870s, an amber patented soda, an odd seam-sided flask, a yellow schnapps, and a pile of dated sodas.



Vinegar Hill Finds before Cleaning



Some of the Vinegar Hill Finds after Washing

Although this privy was the only one we could locate on the construction site, Adam and Scott ventured back to scout for features as the track hoe removed dirt from the site. One Saturday, the digging boys stumbled upon a brick cistern, cracked open by the heavy equipment but still full of water. Literally wading into the hole, the guys extracted a large number of military brogans, boots, and belts that were preserved by being submerged in water. In the midst of these amazingly

intact leather goods, they did manage to pull out some bottles such as 1860s dated sodas and a sided, aqua *U.S. Navy Mustard* (to accompany our *U.S. Navy Peppers* recovered a few feet away). However, these leather and glass finds pale in comparison to the other military artifacts recovered from the cistern: buttons, bullets, friction primers from cannons, coins, and belt buckles. Remarkably, the two sets of military buckles were exceedingly rare three-piece variants issued from 1832 to 1839. Specifically, these were artillery sword belt plates that were issued to both regulars and local militia during that short time span. One disc depicts an eagle with downward wings holding three arrows and olive branch while the other disc displays crossed cannons representing the artillery between the letters "US." Another buckle, of which Adam only recovered the tongue, shows a dynamic eagle with a large shield on its chest; this buckle is likely part of a stock pattern militia officer's from the late 1840s to the early 1860s. All told these are spectacular finds much sought by the relic hunting and militaria collectible communities. The connection to the Brooklyn Navy Yard is inescapable and resonates loudly to those with even a passing interest in the military clashes preceding and during the Civil War. These relics are a fine addition to the spectacular bottles we uncovered from the site's privy and present a full picture as to the significance of the site and its relationship to our nation's manufacturing and military history in the middle of the Nineteenth Century.



U.S. Navy Mustard along with Military Artifacts



Three-Piece Military Buckle, circa 1832-1839

Now that some time has elapsed since our adventures at this site, when Scott, Adam and I get together for other escapades there remains a palpable excitement when we talk about our digs on Vinegar Hill. Some might think it was the sheer quality or economic value of relics that we saved from this

site but in actuality our joy stems from the direct links we were able to establish between the artifacts we found and the history of Vinegar Hill, the Phoenix Glass Works, and the Brooklyn Navy Yard. The objects retrieved from this privy and cistern illustrate to Scott, Adam and me, the confluence of significant events in American history: the meteoric growth and fall of manufacturing, including glass works, in Brooklyn as part of the Industrial Revolution; the transformation of the U.S. Navy into the greatest fleet in the world and the visceral impact of the Civil War upon the United States; and the prototypical rapid growth and demise of a historic community in New York that is now a mere gathering of a few antiquated structures in an urban jungle. It is this opportunity to explore the tides of history, as shovel-wielding historians, that resonates with most privy diggers and particularly so for the three of us that fateful evening on Vinegar Hill.

References

Books

American Military Belt Plates, Michael J. O'Donnell and J. Duncan Campbell (Alexandria, VA: O'Donnell Publications 2000)

American Stoneware Bottles – A History and Study, David Graci (1995)

The Encyclopedia of New York City, edited by Kenneth T. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898, Edwin G. Burrows & Mike Wallace (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

A History of American Manufactures from 1608 to 1860, J. Leander Bishop (Philadelphia 1864).

Manhattan in Maps: 1527-1995, Paul E. Cohen and Robert T. Augustyn (New York: Rizzoli 1997).

(More) *American Stoneware Bottles - An Updated Listing of New Names*, David Graci (2001).

The Presbyterian Historical Almanac and Annual Remembrancer of the Church of 1863, Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson 1863) (containing advertising for Holloway's Ointment).

The WPA Guide to New York City: The Federal Writers' Project Guide to 1930s New York (New York: The New Press, 1939).

Articles

Adkison, Daniel: "NYC Life: Neighborhoods: Close-Up on Vinegar Hill," *Village Voice* (December 10, 2004).

Corley, T.A.B.: "Interactions between the British and American Patent Medicines Industries 1708-1914," *Business and Economic History*, 2nd Series, Vol. 16, pp. 111-129 (Univ. of Illinois 1987).

Frelinghuysen, Alice Cooney: "Ars Vitraria: Glass in the Metropolitan Museum of Art," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Summer 2001).

Graci, David and David Rotilie: "Smith v. Merrill," *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector* (June 2003).

Gray, Christopher: "A Piquant Journey Through Vinegar Hill," *New York Times* (December 26, 2004).

Guest, Gary: "Sided Sodas ... from New York City," *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector* (July 1996).

Leimbach, Dulcie: "If You're Thinking of Living In Vinegar Hill, Brooklyn: On Cobblestone Streets, History Lingers," *New York Times* (August 31, 2003).

Mishkel, Maurice: "The Duality of the Life of 'Professor' Holloway [England]," available at "Australian Postal History & Social Philately" website, www.auspostalhistory.com, under "Professors." (August 2007) (prior version published in *Australian Journal of Philately*, No. 87, pp. 5-10 (March 2004)).

Websites

"Antique Soda & Beer Bottles"

(<http://mysite.verizon.net/vonmechow/index.htm>) – Tod von Mechow's most excellent website on sodas and beers including a nice visual glossary of bottle bases, shapes, lips, colors, etc. (as of February 13, 2008).

www.brooklynnavyard.org – comprehensive site that provides some history of, listing of significant events at, and current use and plan for the Brooklyn Navy Yard (as of February 13, 2008).

"N. York" (<http://homepage.mac.com/newbowery/PhotoAlbum3.html>) – Adam Woodward's picture laden website that shows the amazing bottles, pottery, and relics he has saved from certain destruction at the hands of demolition and excavation crews working for the never-ending redevelopment for New York's urban landscape (as of February 13, 2008).

Bottles and Artifacts from Privy at Vinegar Hill Site

HAMILTON/ & CHURCH/ EXCELSIOR/ MINERAL/ WATER/ BROOKLYN (IP, teal, 8-sided, 2X); PLUS whimsy cup made from HAMILTON/ & CHURCH/ EXCELSIOR/ MINERAL/ WATER/ BROOKLYN (IP, teal, 8-sided); B.W. & Co. (in slugplate, IP, teal); NEWTON/ BOTTLER// BROADWAY/ 316/ NEW YORK (scalloped shoulders, IP, cobalt);

J. BOARDMAN/ NEW YORK/ MINERAL WATERS/ THIS BOTTLE IS NEVER SOLD (IP, cobalt, 8-sided); F. KNEBEL / 1860 / BROOKLYN // K (aqua, SB); F. KNEBEL / BROOKLYN // 1861 (aqua, SB); H. BATTERMANN /1861 / BROOKLYN / N.Y. (aqua, SB); M.B. & Co. / 145 West 35th St. / N.Y. / 1861 (aqua, SB, 2X); ROBINSON (aqua, SB); KENNEDY'S / SALT RHEUM / OINTMENT (bulbous jar, 2 1/8 in., aqua, OP) & (3 1/2 inch cylindrical, aqua, SB, 7X); UDOLPHO WOLFE'S / SCHIEDAM / AROMATIC SCHNAPPS (yellow, tapered lip, large size, SB); HOSTETTER'S / STOMACH BITTERS (amber, crude, SB); C.C. HALEY / & CO. / CELEBRATED / CALIFORNIA / POP BEER // PATENTED / OCT. 29TH 1872 / THIS BOTTLE/ IS NEVER SOLD (red amber, 12 in.); U.S. NAVY // PEPPER (aqua, OP, 3X); MUSTARD // LONDON (aqua, OP); R.R.R. / RADWAY'S / NEW YORK (aqua, OP); Union Oval (light amber, seed laden, w/ birdswing, SB); Crockery beer
Crockery ginger beer
W. SMITH/PATENT/PRESSED (stamped inside a shield) 8-Sided Ginger Beer
Holloway's Ointment, London and New York, (Pot Lid & Base, 2x) & (Pots, 2x)
Bennington Spittoon
Marbles (china, swirl & plain), clay pipes, brass key, shoe horn, plain ointment pots



Bottles and Artifacts from the Privy and Vinegar Hill