

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

February 2010

In this issue:

The Big Drink: Buffalo Lithia Spring Water
by Jack Sullivan.....page 2
Upcoming Area Bottle Shows.....page 5

Meeting February 23rd at 7:30 PM

Our February meeting is the annual dinner. The club will provide soft drinks and food including sandwich fixing. Members are encouraged to bring a dish to pass. All family members and guests are welcome. We will meet at our regular location – the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda – but the event will start at 7:30 PM. We will honor the winners of our annual club contest, which was held at the January meeting.



Entries in our “Collector of the Year” Contest

Baltimore Antique Bottle Show March 7th

We look forward to seeing everyone at the Baltimore show in March. After the snow storms of February, we are hoping for some good March weather and plenty of interesting glass.



“Digger of the Year” entries



“Go-with” entries

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: 609/472-5473) & Andy Goldfrank (email: amg_sticky@yahoo.com, PH: 202/588-0543)
Web Site: www.potomacbottlecollectors.org Maintained by Al Miller: www.potomacbottlecollectors.org/contact.php

The Big Drink: Buffalo Lithia Spring Water

By Jack Sullivan

[Special to the Potomac Pontil]

In a 1914 ruling Judge Gould of the District of Columbia Court debunked the curative powers of Virginia's most famous and highly touted mineral water: "*For a person to obtain a therapeutic dose of lithium by drinking Buffalo Lithia Water he would have to drink between one hundred and fifty thousand to two hundred and twenty-five thousand gallons per day. It was further testified, without contradiction, that Potomac River water carries five times as much lithium per gallon as the water in controversy.*"

Thus began the eclipse of Buffalo Lithia Springs Water, a beverage that once could boast 20,000 outlets in drug stores throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. Long gone as a commercial product, its unusual bottles continue to show up at digging sites throughout the East Coast and elsewhere. Three currently are on display at the Sabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum in Alexandria, Virginia.

The Buffalo Lithia Water saga began with the discovery of a series of mineral springs in southern Virginia as early as 1728. At the time a species of American buffalo still roamed the uplands of Virginia (Fig. 1). With very poor eyesight, these animals were quickly exterminated by hungry settlers. Nonetheless, some 70 sites in Virginia contain "buffalo" in their names.



Fig. 1: The nearsighted Eastern Bison

Buffalo Springs, which is located in Mechlenburg County on the North Carolina border, began commercial operation about 1811. When lithium became a favored as a remedy for kidney stones and other urinary ailments, the

spring's mineral water was transformed into Buffalo Lithia Water. Eventually the springs featured a hotel and health spa. The office is shown here in an early postcard (Fig. 2).

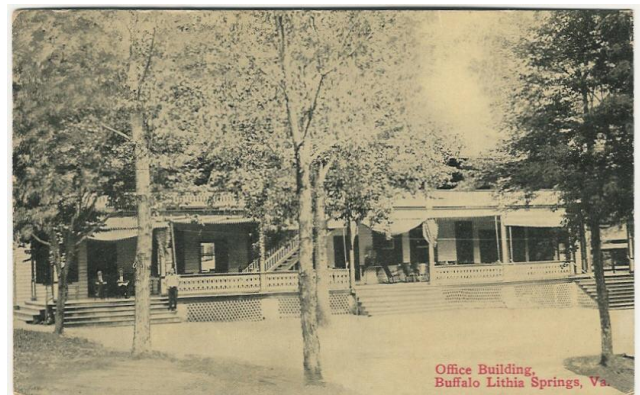


Fig. 2: Buffalo Lithia Springs office - postcard

In the latter part of the 1880s the water was shipped in cases of 12 half-gallon bottles, filled from the spring by hand and transported to the nearest railway. Priced at \$5 a case, or more than 80 cents a gallon, Buffalo Lithia Water was an expensive beverage at a time when 25 cents would buy a good restaurant meal. Like other purveyors of quack cures, the company sponsored splashy and dubious claims-filled ads (Figs. 3, 4, 5).

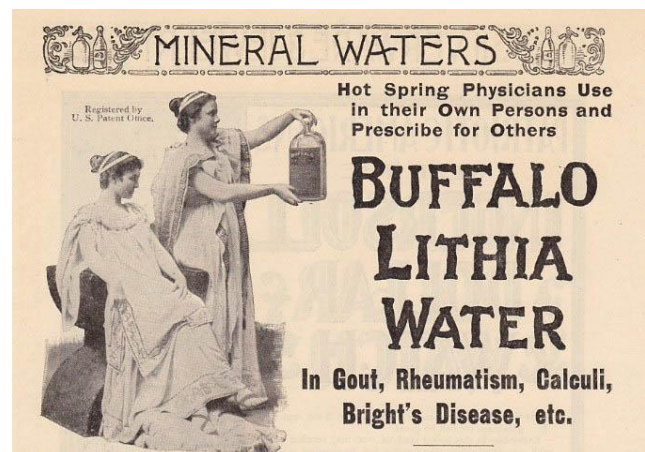


Fig. 3: Buffalo Lithia Water ad #1

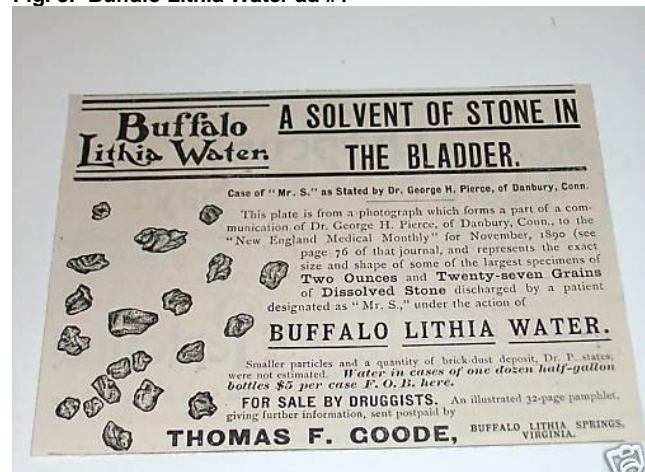


Fig. 4: Buffalo Lithia Water ad #2



Fig. 5 Ad #3 - Appendicitis

Buffalo Lithia’s owners also sought and got testimonials from leading doctors. One surprisingly came from a former Vice President of the American Medical Association, usually one of the watchdogs against quackery: “[Buffalo Lithia Water] is strikingly superior to emergency solutions of lithia tablets, even where the said solution is an exceedingly strong one.” A physician to the Pope hailed the product for its efficacy in cases of gout and various forms of rheumatism. Sales soared.

In 1900, to answer demand, the company opened its own bottling plant. Subsequently Buffalo Lithia Water containers began to display the image of a seated woman with a long dress and a pitcher. The bottles, which could be either green or aqua, were embossed with this picture, sometimes crude and sometimes refined, depending on the capabilities of the glasshouse providing the bottles.

Among the crude representations was a bottle (Fig. 6) identified on the base as from the “O B Co” -- identified as the Ohio Bottle Company. It was a short-lived (1904-1905) merger of three Newark, Ohio, glass houses. Shown in detail here (Fig. 7), note that the female figure

looks Egyptian and her skirt has no pleats, as compared to the embossing of a more realistic look and pleats on a second bottle, maker unknown (Fig. 8). All glass containers had a paper label that also pictured the seated woman (Fig. 9).



Fig. 6: Gallon Buffalo Lithia Water bottle



Fig. 7: Detail of embossed figure



Fig. 8: Aqua bottle (left)

Fig. 9: Bottle with paper label (right)

With the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906, the situation drastically changed for the Virginia mineral water. Misbranding became an offense subject to a Federal fine. Clearly attempting to avoid prosecution, the company changed its name to Buffalo Lithia Springs Water, apparently hoping that citing the historical name of the water source might absolve it from scrutiny. It also registered its trademark (Fig. 10) with the Federal Government. Under the altered name, the company continued to advertise widely (Fig. 11).

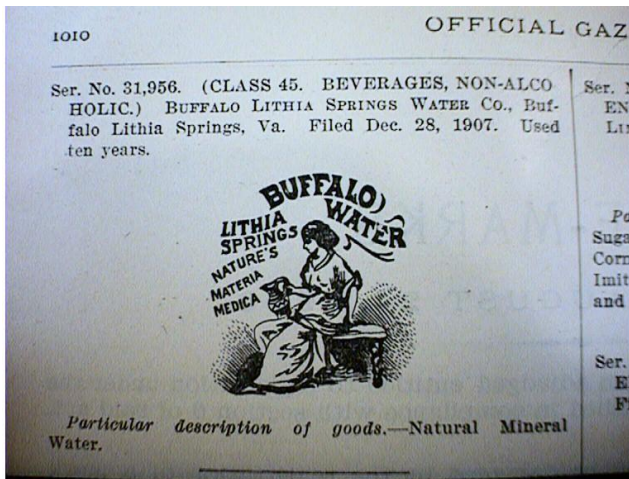


Fig. 10: Logo registration



Fig. 11: Post 1906 ad

Food and Drug Agency authorities were not fooled. In 1910 they declared Buffalo Lithia Springs Water misbranded. The company filed a motion to delay indefinitely imposition of a fine and an order to desist fraudulent advertising. A friendly Virginia court agreed. In 1912 the Feds tried again. This time Buffalo Springs executives foolishly decided to fight the ruling in a DC Federal Court. That trial led to Judge Gould's decision that Buffalo Springs Lithia Water was misbranded and had less therapeutic value than Potomac River water. The company, stung by the decision, appealed all the way to the United States Supreme Court. In 1917 the Supremes refused to overturn Judge Gould's ruling. The Virginia company reluctantly paid court costs and dropped "Lithia" from its name.

Now merchandised as just plain Buffalo Mineral Water the beverage continued to be sold during the 1920s in embossed bottles and additionally in five gallon demijohns. Sometime in the 1930s, embossing was dropped in favor of clear glass bottles with paper labels and screw top caps. As the popularity of mineral waters waned in the 1940s, the Buffalo Springs resort hotel closed. By 1949 all commercial production from the Virginia spring ceased.

The water, however, continues to have its advocates. Mechlenburg County Artist H.W. Farber not long ago painted a Buffalo Springs Lithia Water bottle, a picture he later donated to a local charity (Fig. 12). Farber also provided a testimonial of sorts: "Living only a mile from Buffalo Lithia Springs might have contributed to our laid-back demeanor; surely, our well water also contained a bit of lithium (and we filled bottles at the Springs)...Stories circulate about people who were mentally fine until they left Buffalo Springs. I think I was okay when I lived in MD/DC; well, sometimes a bit edgy. My water bottles are empty--tomorrow I'll make the seven-mile trip to the Springs for refills."



Fig. 12: H.W. Farber painting

 Notes: Material and images for this article were obtained from a number of Internet and written sources. Chief among the latter was *Nostrums and Quackery*, a book published by the American Medical Association in 1921.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

MARCH 7, 2010

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

The Baltimore Antique Bottle Club's 30th Annual Show & Sale, (8 a.m. to 3 p.m.), Physical Education Center, CCBC-Essex, 7201 Rossville Blvd. (I-695, Exit 34) Info: **ERIC EWEN** PH: (410) 265-5745, e-mail: teresaanderic@comcast.net www.Baltimorebottleclub.org



MARCH 13 - BADIN, NORTH CAROLINA

The Uwharrie Bottle Club's 3rd Annual Antique Bottle & Collectibles Show & Sale (8am - 3pm), at the Badin Fire Department, Badin, NC. Info: **Todd McSwain**, ph: (704) 474-0552, email: McSwain8649@windstream.net

APRIL 11 - TYLERSPORT, PENNSYLVANIA

The Bucks-Mont 15th Annual Bottle Show & Sale (9am - 2pm with early buyers in at 8am), at the Tylersport Fire Company, 125 Ridge Rd, Tylersport, PA. Info: **David Buck**, ph: (215) 723-4048 or **Greg Gifford**, ph: (215) 699-5216.

APRIL 25 - HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

The Historical Bottle Diggers of Virginia's 39th Annual Show & Sale (9am - 3pm), at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds, US Route 11 (Exit 243 off I-81), south of Harrisonburg, VA. Info: **Sonny Smiley**, 1025 Greendale Rd, Harrisonburg, VA 22801, ph: (540) 434-1129, email: lithiaman1@yahoo.com

MAY 2 - BRICK, NEW JERSEY

Jersey Shore Bottle Club's 38th Annual Postcards & Local Memorabilia Show & Sale (8:30am - 2pm), Brick Elks Lodge, 2491 Hopper Ave, Brick, NJ 08723. Info: **Richard Peal**, 720 Eastern Ln, Brick, NJ 08723, ph:(732) 267-2528, email: manodirt@msn.com or www.bottleclub.org

MAY 8 - SALISBURY, NORTH CAROLINA

Piedmont Bottle Club's 4th Annual Bottle and Pottery Show & Sale (8am - 2pm), at the Salisbury Civic Center, 315 S Boundary St (AKA Martin Luther King Jr Ave), Salisbury, NC 28144. Info: **John Patterson**, ph: (704) 636-9510, email: ncmilks@carolina.rr.com or **Jimmy Wood**, ph: (704) 692-7888 or **Chuck Rash**, ph: (704) 732-0373. club website: www.antiquebottles.com/piedmont

MAY 16 - MILLVILLE, NEW JERSEY

The New Jersey Antique Bottle Club's Annual Millville Show & Sale (9am - 3pm), at the Elks Lodge, 1815 E Broad St, Millville, NJ. Info: **Joe Butewicz**, 24 Charles St, South River, NJ 08882, ph: (732) 236-9945, email: botlman@msn.com. This is an FOHBC Club

MAY 16 - WASHINGTON, PENNSYLVANIA

Washington County Antique Bottle Club's 36th Annual Show & Sale (9am - 2pm), at the Alpine Star Lodge, 735 Jefferson Ave (Exit 17 off I70), Washington, PA. Info: **Russ Crupe**, 52 Cherry Rd, Avella, PA 15312, ph: 724) 345-3653 or (412) 298-7831, email: heidirus@gmail.com

JUNE 3 & 5 - HERSHEY, PENNSYLVANIA

The National Association of Mile Bottle Collectors' 30th Annual Convention will be held at the Holiday Inn in Grantville (Hershey), PA. Info: **Penny Gottlieb**, 18 Pond Pl, Cos Cob, CT 06807, ph: (203) 869-8411



The items above were entries in our "Shard of the Year" contest. All of the other shards below were also on display at our January meeting. These came from a Baltimore dig attended by several of our club members.

