

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

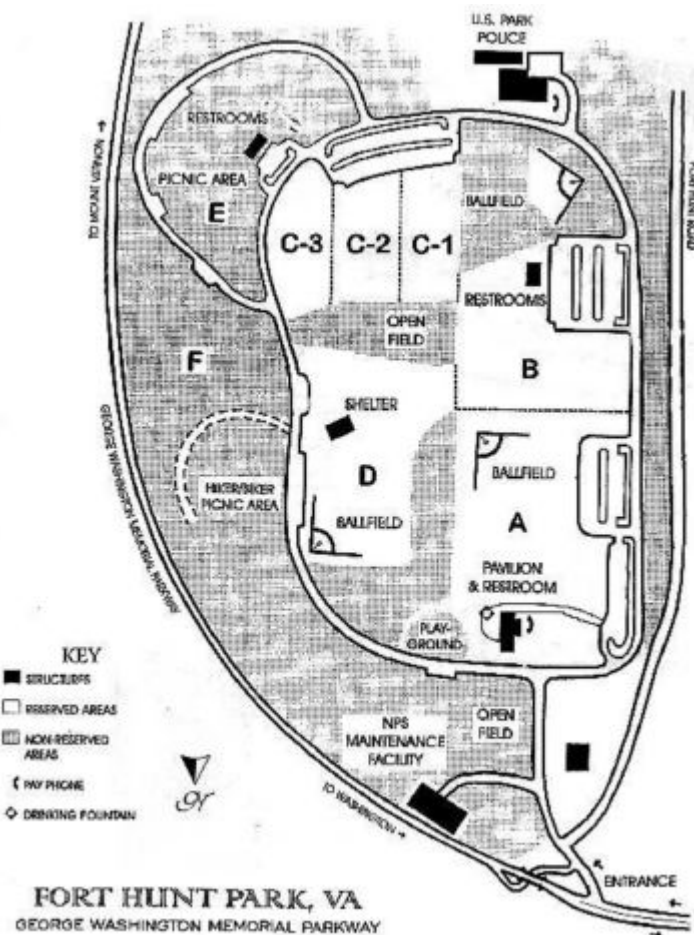
July - September 2011

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Picnic – September 24th

(Picnic Takes the Place of Regular September Meeting)



Show & Tell items from June meeting

Please join us at 1 PM on Saturday, September 24th for our club picnic at Hunt Park in Alexandria, Virginia. The club will provide hamburgers, hotdogs, and soft drinks. Members are encouraged to bring a dish to pass, but everyone is welcome regardless of whether you have food to contribute. We would enjoy seeing any visitors and guests who wish to join us. If you happen to have a large number of guests coming, please contact Jim Sears so that we make sure we have enough food for everyone.

To minimize confusion, we are scheduling the picnic for the same time and place as last year's picnic. We will meet promptly at 1 PM in the picnic area marked E on the map at right. Please note that this map is a bit unusual in that north is at the bottom.

We do want to see bottles at the picnic. Members are particularly encouraged to bring along summer finds for show & tell.

Directions: Fort Hunt Park is located 5 miles south of Old Town Alexandria along the George Washington Memorial Parkway (parts of which are also called Mount Vernon Highway and Washington Street) in Fairfax County, Virginia. To reach this road from Washington, DC, cross the 14th Street Bridge south toward Virginia, and take the exit for Mount Vernon/National Airport. To reach it from the Beltway in Maryland, take the very first exit after the Wilson Bridge. To reach it from the Beltway in Virginia take exit 1 North, go to the first traffic light and take a right on Franklin Street; go about 3 blocks and take a right on South Washington Street.

Meetings: 8:00 PM on the last Tuesday of each month January-June, October-November; picnic in September.

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 Great Roanoke Beer Wars

By Jack Sullivan

[Special to the Potomac Pontil]

In 1882 a sleepy town in Southwestern Virginia with the colorful name of Big Lick was chosen by the Norfolk and Western Railroad as a hub. Almost overnight the community began to attract entrepreneurs, businessmen and boosters from North and South. At that point the citizenry determined change its name to Roanoke. By 1890 Roanoke was the fifth largest city in Virginia, on its way to number three. That growth in a place residents dubbed “The Magic City,” set the stage for the Great Roanoke Beer Wars.

Portner and The Opening Skirmish

Alexandria brewing giant, Robert Portner, took due notice of the increased population in Roanoke and the lack of any brewery in the region. His Portner’s Brewing Company, based in Alexandria, had become one of the South’s largest breweries. In 1885, the company began operating a depot in Roanoke. Their beer was shipped and bottled there (**Fig. 1**). The depot was located along Shenandoah Avenue just a few blocks behind the Hotel Roanoke. It boasted the most advanced artificial refrigeration machines and air conditioning units for the storage of lager beer. Portner’s beer dominated the growing Roanoke market for several years.



Fig. 1: The Portner Depot in Roanoke

That situation did not go unnoticed by a group of Roanoke businessmen. They were aware the Portner’s beer had to be carted more than 200 miles from Alexandria to reach their town. Why not make good beer right in Roanoke? In 1890 six of them decided to invest in a brewery in Roanoke and call it the Virginia Brewing Company. A local businessman named Herman Crueger was named president (**Fig. 2**).

Recognizing that they could never beat Portner by making inferior beer, the group reached out to L.A. Scholz, then the brewmaster for J.H. Von der Horst & Son in Baltimore. Scholz had emigrated to the U.S. in 1882 after an apprenticeship in a German brewery. He tasted the local water and declared that it was excellent for making good beer. He agreed to come.



Fig. 2: Herman Crueger

The brew house was built near the Norfolk and Western tracks to take advantage of the new line (**Fig. 3**). It was a three-story frame structure just south of the Machine Works on Railroad and Wise Avenues between 12th and 14th Streets. It was part of a complex that included stables, an ice plant, an office, a home for Scholz, and an adjacent beer garden that Scholz’s brother managed.



Fig. 3: The original Virginia Brewing brew house

Beginning slowly at first, the capacity of the brewery grew rapidly, selling its products in draft as well as in embossed clear bottles (**Figs. 4,5**). Within a few months, the brewery was producing six thousand bottles of beer and twenty kegs of beer weekly. Soon it opened distributorships in Lynchberg, Shenandoah, and Pocahontas, Virginia, and Henderson, North Carolina. At that point Portner, in effect, tossed in the bar towel and admitted defeat.



Fig. 4 & 5: Virginia Brewing bottles

Anheuser-Busch and All Out War

But a tougher opponent was on the horizon. The Anheuser-Busch Brewing Company also had its eye on the Roanoke market. The St. Louis-made beer sold at a premium above Virginia Brewing's lager. Recognizing that the Roanoke company had cornered local markets and was eating away at its regional sales, Anheuser executives decided to drive Virginia Brewing out of business by severely dropping price of its beer. A keg that cost \$9 was cut to \$4, below a price that the local brewery could meet. Anheuser-Busch now was the cheapest brew in town. That step touched off the second beer war. As symbolized by a trade card, the St. Lewis brewery clearly expected that its beer would triumph over the "the baby" in Roanoke (Fig. 6).

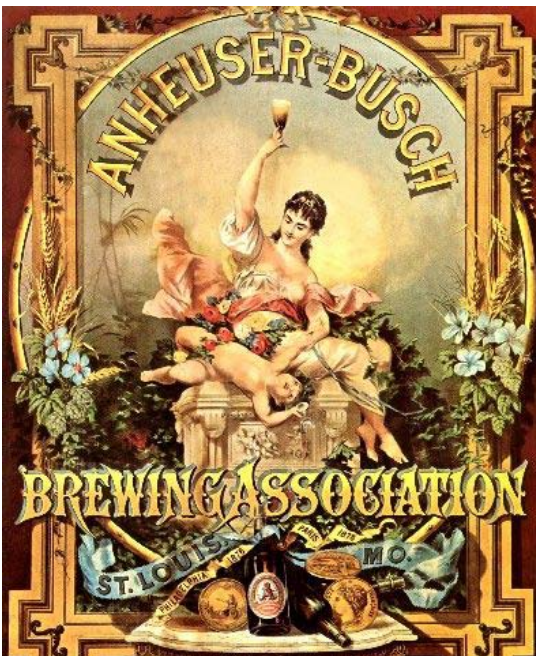


Fig. 6: Anheuser Busch trade card

The Anheuser folks had not, however, figured on local pride in The Magic City. Local editors, angered by this tactic, rallied to the side of Virginia Brewing. In an editorial the *Roanoke Times* declared that the brewery was crucial to the future of the town. It cited a payroll of \$8,000 for local workers and lauded it as an "infant industry, built up and owned in great part by Roanoke people." Anheuser-Busch on the other hand was a "foreign enterprise" with deep pockets out to destroy the locals.

Resisting the blandishments of rock bottom prices, the drinking public of Roanoke stuck with Virginia Brewing. The company survived. After 11 months of cutting its prices, Anheuser-Busch in effect admitted that it had done little to wean away Virginia Brewing's clientele. Without fanfare It raised the keg price back to \$9, conceding defeat.

Temporary Peace and Prosperity

Ironically, the war had no sooner ended than the Roanoke brew house burned to the ground. Brewmaster Scholz assured his customers that he had enough barrels in reserve to last until a brand new brewery could be built. Insurance covered the loss and, in effect, allowed Virginia Brewing to enlarge its capacity. In less than a year, during the spring of 1892, a new brick brew house arose (Fig. 7). It could produce 25,000 kegs per year. It was part of a massive complex that included a larger ice plant, bottling works and housing for rent to employees, as illustrated on a company letterhead (Fig.8).



Fig. 7: The rebuilt brew house

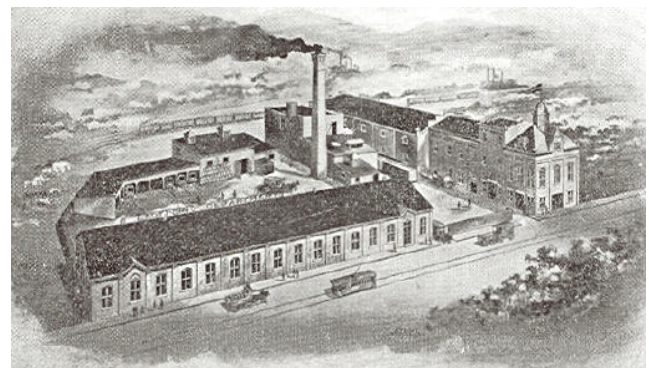


Fig. 8: The Virginia Brewing complex illustration

About the same time Louis Scholz replaced Crueger as president of the brewery. Like the original investors, Scholz was a “go-getting” businessman. He identified with the notion of the “New South” and beer glasses bearing the Virginia brewing logo trumpeted “Southern Progress” (Fig. 9).



Fig. 9: “Southern Progress” beer glass

Another plus for the brewery occurred at the Jamestown, Virginia, of 1907, celebrating the 300th anniversary of the founding of the colony by small flotilla commanded by Captain John Smith (Fig. 10). There the Virginia Brewing Co. won a gold medal for its pilsner beer. The ownership proudly marked the award in its advertising (Fig. 11, 12). It also issued a special beer glass commemorating the honor (Fig. 13). Sales topped the 3 million bottle mark, up from 150,000 bottles only nine years earlier.



Fig. 10: Jamestown Exposition souvenir

GOLD MEDAL
JAMESTOWN EXPOSITION
 1907



Fig. 11: Gold medal ad



Fig. 12: Pilsner beer ad



Fig. 13: Gold Medal beer glass

Prohibition and Surrender

As Virginia Brewing basked in this prosperity, another battle was looming. Prohibition forces were on the march in the Commonwealth and the Nation. Roanoke was a target city of the “Drys.” Though initially unsuccessful, the challenge was clearly understood by Scholz and his backers. Their ace in the hole was an endorsement from the United States Health Bulletin of New York, one of a number of journals that often gave advertisers extravagant endorsements. It cited Virginia Brewing’s beer as a disease preventative, aid to digestion, and a beverage that promoted mental and physical well-being.

The Roanoke brewery seized on this testimonial to advertise its pilsner beer as “endorsed by the highest medical authorities” and as “preeminently a family beverage. The beer, it contended, promoted true temperance – not the phony Prohibitionist kind – and was a safeguard for health and home. Its Wuerzburger Ale, a Bavarian-style beer, was marketed as a tonic for nursing mothers and convalescents. Its advertising asserted that Wuerzburger was “highly recommended by physicians for its nutritional qualities.” A trade card for the brew featured a winsome little girl wheeling a barrow of puppies (**Fig. 14**). Wuerzburger, the card declared, should be used as “a family tonic.”



Fig. 14: Wuerzburger trade card

In the long run none of this puffery really mattered. This was a war Virginia Brewing could not win. The Commonwealth would anticipate National Prohibition by four years as the electorate statewide voted dry in 1916. The brewery closed. The equipment was sold very shortly after for scrap metal in demand during World War I. Although Louis Scholz was ready to try again upon Repeal in 1934 and a new brewery arose, he died in 1936 before the work could be completed.

New ownership lacked Scholz’s ability and the brewery changed hands several times over the next 22 years as it struggled against competition from national brands. At the end the owner was a North Carolinian who renamed the facility, “Mountain Brewing.” His operation lasted just a year. The brewery was shut down in 1959 and the buildings were razed in 1964. Thus ended the history of the Virginia Brewing Company, a winner of two beer wars and survivor of a third.

Notes: This article is drawn from a number of printed and internet sources, a chief one being *Roanoke, Virginia, 1882-1912: Magic City of the new South* by Rand Dotson (University of Tennessee Press, 2007).



At our June meeting Jim Sears and Roland Longerbeam displayed many jars and some lamps that they had recently purchased at an auction in North Carolina. In the photo above Jim is holding a jar stopper that the auctioneer described as an oil lamp.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

September 25 (Sunday)

Hammonton, NJ

New Jersey Antique Bottle Club's First Annual Hammonton, New Jersey Show & Sale (9am - 3pm) at the Hammonton Volunteer Fire Company #2, 51 N White Horse Pike, Hammonton, NJ 08037, Info: Paul Delguercio, ph: (856) 252-7730, email: paulhavoc@comcast.net.



October 1, 2011 (Saturday) Richmond, VA

Richmond Antique Bottle Show and Sale (9am – 3pm, early entry 7:30 am) at the Chesterfield County Fairground, 10300 Courthouse Road, Chesterfield, VA 23832. Info: Marvin Croker, ph: (804) 275-1101, or Ed Faulkner, ph: (804) 739-2951, email: RichBottleClub@comcast.net.

November 6, 2011 (Sunday) Elkton, Maryland

The Tri-State Bottle Collectors and Diggers Club 39th Annual Show & Sale (9:00 am to 2:00 pm) at the Singerly Fire Hall, Routes 279 & 213, Elkton, Maryland. Info: Dave Brown, 302.738.9960, dbrown3942@comcast.net

November 13, 2011 (Sunday) Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

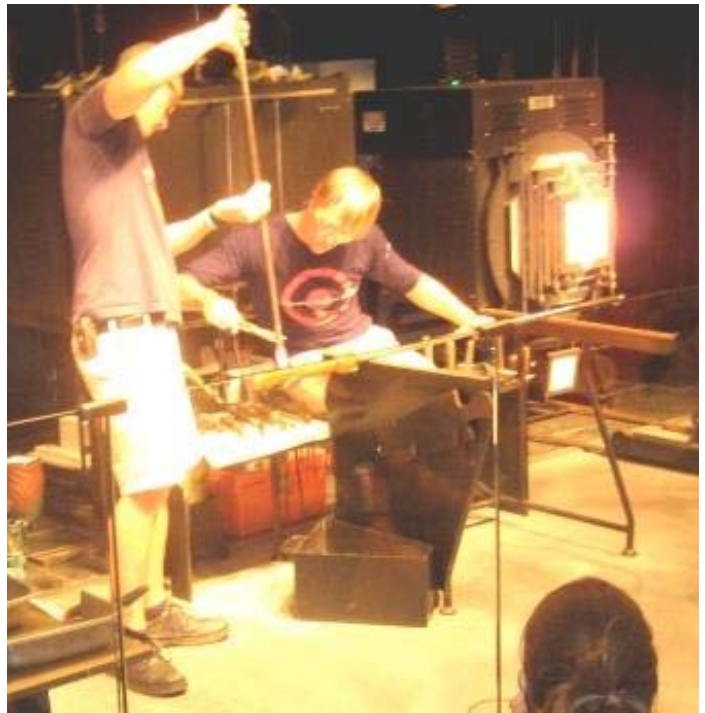
The Pittsburgh Antique Bottle Club's Annual Show & Sale (9:00 am – 2:00 pm \$3, early admission 7:00 am \$25) at The Ice Garden, Rostraver Twp, Exit 46B off I-70 to Rt 51 North 4.1 miles. Info: Bob DeCroo, 694 Fayette City Road, Fayette City, Pennsylvania 15438, 724.326.8741 or Jay Hawkins, 1280 Pleasant Rd, West Newton, Pennsylvania 15089, 724.872.6013.

November 20, 2011 (Sunday) Greensboro, North Carolina

10th Annual Greensboro Antique Bottle, Pottery & Collectibles Show & Sale indoors at the Farmer's Curb Market on 501 Yanceyville St, Greensboro, North, Carolina, Public admission 9:00 am-3:00 pm for \$1. Free appraisals. Dealer setup 7:00 am-9:00 am, No Early Buyers. Info: Reggie Lynch 704.221.6489. www.antiquebottles.com/greensboro

November 27, 2011 (Sunday) Bethlehem, Pennsylvania

Forks of the Delaware Bottle Collectors Association 38th Show & Sale (9:00 am – 3:00 pm, early buyers 7:30 am) at the Bethlehem Catholic High School, Madison & Dewberry Avenues, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, Info: Bill Hegedus, 20 Cambridge Place, Catasauqua, Pennsylvania 18032, 610.264.3130



At our June meeting, Lee Shipman described a cruise she had recently taken that featured glass blowers. The photos above show these glass blowers at work as well as a bowl that she made and that Lee won in a raffle.