

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

November 2013

In this issue:

Daddy, What Happens When You Die? by Nic Queen	page 2
Eugene N. Belt: "Shame and Scandal in the Family" by Jack Sullivan	page 3
Upcoming Area Bottle Shows.....	page 6

Meeting – Tuesday, November 26th at 8 PM

Please join us at St. Mark's Orthodox Church in Bethesda. Participants are encouraged to bring **ink bottles** for show & tell. The inks shown at right came from Lucy Faulkner at the Richmond, Virginia bottle show, and they were part of our October show & tell. The Faulkners amassed a large collection while writing an excellent book on American ink bottles, and Lucy has recently been selling a few of her bottles. Our club has a copy of the Faulkners' book, which will be available for reference at our November meeting.



Virginia DeVaughn

We were sorry to hear that club member Virginia DeVaughn passed away on November 4th at the age of 88. Ginny had been unable to attend meetings or shows in recent years, but she was always very complimentary about our club newsletter. Below is a link to her obituary.

http://hinesrinaldi.tributes.com/our_obituaries/Virginia-G.-DeVaughn-96640657

With the recent deaths of club members Al Steidel and Virginia DeVaughn, this seems a very appropriate time for us to consider Nic Queen's question, "Daddy, what happens when you die?" Thank you to Nic for allowing us to reprint this article from the newsletter of the Baltimore Antique Bottle Club, Inc.



Show & tell at our October meeting featured a variety of bottles and even the base plate from the mold for an Alexandria, VA Coca-Cola bottle. The Frank Hume whiskey flask shown at right is unlisted in our current Washington, DC bottle book.



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 Mike Cianciosi (chosicox.net)

Daddy, What Happens When You Die?

By Nic Queen

Well this question has been asked by many a child to their parents. Being an avid bottle collector, I have seen firsthand what happens when you die. Your left-behind loved ones have the task of getting rid of all your worldly goods, including your prized bottle collection.

This is the story of Riley "Howie" Guynne of Woodbine, Maryland. I was contacted by his granddaughter Sierra, who said her family has a large bottle collection that "has to go." Howie's family are good people and did not want to throw the bottles out; this was Howie's legacy. Aside from children, this was another way Howie was to leave his mark on this world. Well, I contacted Tom Robusto and Paul Fite and said I felt we need to go check this out!

The three amigos headed out to Woodbine to see the spectacle. We met with the family who explained that Howie was a collector all his life, even back to the days when his daughter Evelyn was a child. She told us when they would finish with Sunday churchin' he would take her and her siblings bottle digging. Well, ol' Howie was a proud man, a true bottle digger. Like me, he found everything a gem and brought everything home. The bottles were then wrapped in newspaper. A large part of the bottles were wrapped in 1970-1977 judging by the dates of the newspaper. This man had amassed what I estimate to be around 6,000 bottles at least!

Well, after striking a fair deal for the lot of them came the task of getting them out of the basement. The basement had leaked water for some time and all the boxes had molded and begun to fall apart. We had quite a job to re-box, repack, and get them out of the house – so much so that we had to rent a U-Haul truck. Tom employed a few other bottle friendly folks to help with the move. The move from the basement to the truck with five people took approximately four hours: four hours of breathing mold spores and back-breaking, sweat-laden, straight-up hard work.

We got the bounty back to Tom's house to go through everything. The bottles dated from the 1800's to the 1960's. There were some real keepers in the bunch! The bad thing is that nothing was separated: Masons with milks, beers with medical bottles, sodas with plain jars. The sort-out took two days. Again, there were some real keepers in the bunch: bottles from Baltimore to Frederick to DC to Reading, PA, to Richmond, VA and even to California in a few cases! All in all a huge task, but, to tell you the truth, I loved every minute of it! Unwrapping those bottles was like Christmas to me. You never knew what was inside each wrapper.

We have to send out a big "THANKS!" to Howie's family for contacting me. I love this hobby, and I am a proud collector too, but I have no kids. So I pose the question, what will happen when I die?

I figure my biker friends and family will argue over my Harleys and cars or trucks. Tom Robusto and Paul Fite will champion the task of getting all my bottles out of the house. My parrot will go to my ex-wife. My dogs will go to anyone who will feed them! The rest of my worldly goods are up for grabs.

Again, I'm single with no kids, so what will my legacy be? A huge debt? A knack for junk collection? Well, if anything, my love for bottles will be my legacy.

I guess...

When I get to those pearly gates, Saint Peter will say, "Outside of evil, what have you accomplished in your life on earth?" My true answer will be, "Well, Pete (I can call you Pete, right?), I think my greatest legacy will be being President of the world's greatest bottle club, knowing all the great eclectic people who are my members and finding the trash people throw out 100 plus years before me and bringing it home. Pete will hopefully say, "Well, my son, you can come in for now...."



Nic Queen is shown here with an edition of the Baltimore City Paper that features his bottle tattoo.

Editor's Note: If any club member would care to leave the legacy of being president or even vice president of the Potomac Bottle Collectors, please let the club know. We will hold elections as soon as we find a victim volunteers.

Eugene N. Belt: “Shame and Scandal in the Family”

By Jack Sullivan

[Special to the Potomac Pontil]

Yes, Eugene Belt was a Baltimore liquor dealer (Fig. 1), but his “blue ribbon” background makes him seem like an unlikely centerpiece in an 1880’s scandal that commanded newspaper headlines from coast to coast for two years and involved beautiful women, two U.S. Congressmen, a messy divorce, perjured testimony, and dramatic rescues by a former Confederate general. You can’t make up stuff like this.



Fig. 1: Cahn, Belt logo

Belt was born in 1828 or 1830, depending on the census you read. His parents were Thomas Walter Belt and Louisa Ann (Steeper) Belt. His father was of English and his mother of German descent. According to a contemporary biography, on both sides his ancestors were among early settlers of America. His father’s people settled in Prince George’s County, Maryland, in 1647. The town of Beltsville took its name from the family.

Eugene was educated by private tutors in Baltimore and at an institute in Louisville, Kentucky, even then a hub of the whiskey industry. After finishing his education he went to New Orleans to work in a mercantile house but returned to Baltimore after several years. Belt tried his hand in the insurance and banking businesses in his home town but clearly was looking for something more lucrative. In 1859 he joined with a Baltimore local named P.C. Martin to create a liquor business they called Martin, Belt & Co. For reasons not fully explained, this enterprise was forced into liquidation two years later, reputedly because of the outbreak of the Civil War. Like many Marylanders, Belt may have been a Southern sympathizer.

The war years are a blank in Belt’s biography but in its aftermath, in 1868, he again entered the liquor business. This time his partner was Bernard Cahn of Baltimore, a German Jewish immigrant who had come to the U.S. as a boy of 15 and had found considerable business success. Together they created a prosperous Baltimore liquor business called Cahn, Belt & Co. From 1870 until 1904 their establishment was located at several addresses on Lombard Street. They packaged their whiskey in both clear and colored glass (Figs. 2,3).



Fig. 2: Clear embossed flask-detail

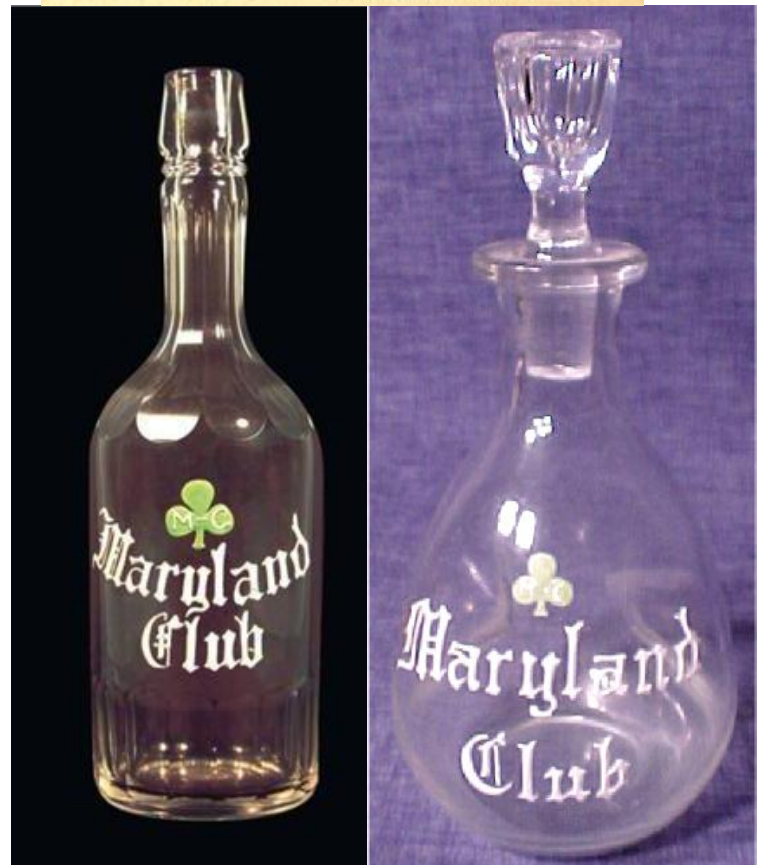


Fig. 3: Purple flask

Cahn, Belt featured number of brand names, including "Belt," "C B & C", "Cartwig," "City of Baltimore Pure Rye," "Crown of Baltimore," "Jim Hackler" "Little Straight," "M C," "Original Martin," "Emory Grove" and "Roadster." The company flagship label was "Maryland Club." (Figs. 4,5) It was advertised widely with the slogan, "It tastes old because it is old." The partners also made it a feature of their giveaway items to favored saloon customers, particularly with attractive back-of-the-bar bottles, garnished with a shamrock (Figs. 6,7). Probably to insure a steady supply of whiskey for their blends, they purchased Baltimore's Monticello Distillery and its "Monticello Rye" brand. Cahn became president of the distillery.



Fig. 4: Maryland Club ad #1
Fig. 5: Maryland Club ac #2
Fig. 6: Back of the bar bottle #1
Fig. 7: Back of the bar bottle #2



Both the 1860 and 1870 censuses found Eugene living with his widowed mother, Louisa Ann, and his three unmarried sisters, Louisa, 35 years of age; Georgiana (“Nannie”), 32, and Emily, 27. Still a bachelor himself at age 42, he was surrounded by women, including a female servant. Increasingly wealthy from his liquor business, Belt seems to have found his social outlet in being active in a plethora of organizations, including the Maryland Historical Society, in which he was an officer, the Archeological Society, the Merchants’ Club, the Maryland Club and the Elk Ridge Fox Hunting Club. He was a pillar of the Episcopal Church, attending Baltimore’s St. Luke’s.

Enter “shame and scandal.” In 1884, now 54 years old and quite rich, Belt was vacationing at a seaside resort when he encountered a considerably younger and very attractive blonde widow. Her name was Mrs. Mary Alice Godfrey. Later Belt told the press that he had met her “among people of character and respectability and never imagined that she was other than a pure and virtuous woman.” Moreover, he probably was impressed that she was the sister of Mrs. Benjamin Willis of New York City, the wife of a prominent U.S. congressman. Both sisters were beauties. One commentator claimed that they had become the “rage” of the Washington society. Belt fell in love with Mary Alice, quickly proposed marriage, she accepted, and they were wed in October, 1884, in Morristown, Pennsylvania. They may have chosen a remote location because of apparent opposition to the nuptials from Eugene’s sisters and other female friends.

Soon enough Belt came to regret his decision and, by his own admission, left his wife the following January and filed for divorce in May 1885. He had found out to his horror that Mary Alice had been connected with a famous Washington, D.C., scandal known as the Congressman Acklen Affair. Moreover, Belt told the press, he had discovered additionally that she previously had lived “a life of infamy” and that he had been a victim of an abandoned woman. Newspapers from coast to coast had a field day (Fig. 8). The New York Times made it front page. A California paper headlined, “A Prominent Merchant Insnares by a Sea-Side Demi-Monde.” (A demi-monde is a woman of dubious virtue.)

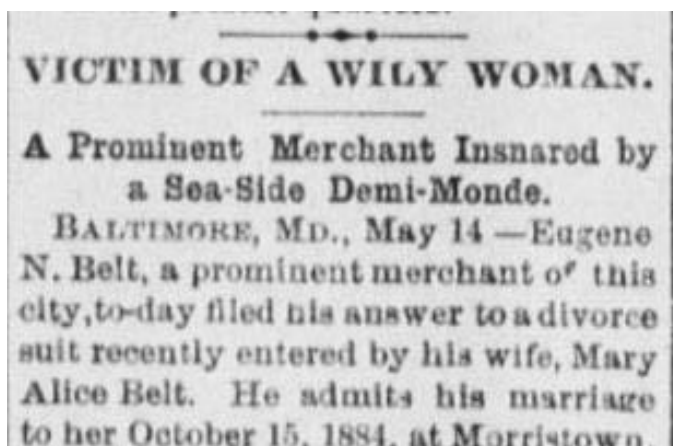


Fig. 8: News paper story of scandal

But the truth may have been otherwise. Joseph Hayes Acklen, a wealthy sugar plantation owner and a congressman from Louisiana, had taken Washington society by storm. Shown here, the young bachelor was rich, eccentric and, perhaps signaled by his waxed mustache, a notorious womanizer (Fig. 9). He had courted Mrs. Godfrey, who was living in Arlington with her sister and congressman husband. One evening at Washington’s highly prestigious Welcker’s hotel (Fig. 10), Acklen reputedly forced himself on her. The cries of Mary Alice were heard in the next room by a highly decorated former Confederate cavalry general named Thomas Rosser (Fig. 11). Rosser rushed to the damsel’s rescue but when the story was revealed, the press had a field day of speculation. Acklen later apologized to Mrs. Godfrey and proposed marriage. She declined.

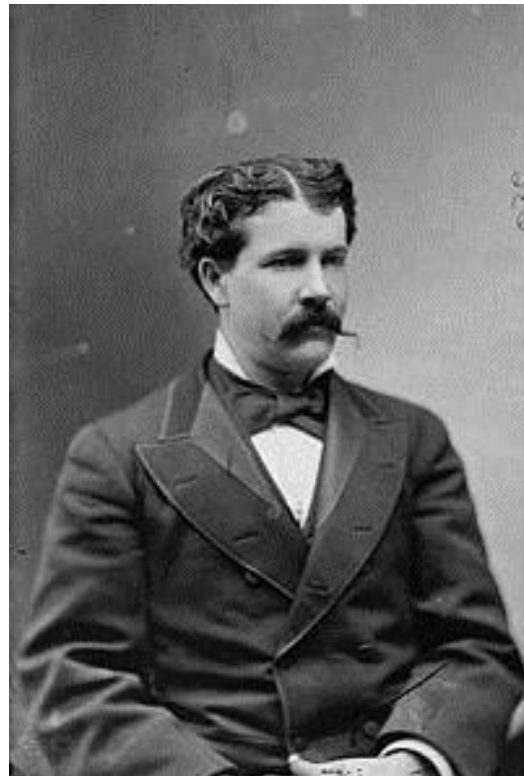


Fig. 9: Congressman Joseph Acklen



Fig. 10: Welckers Hotel DC



Fig. 11: CSA Gen. Thomas Rosser

As for Belt's other allegations that his wife had been a "loose woman" even before this incident, charges he made part of divorce proceedings, it subsequently was revealed that those giving damaging testimony against Mary Alice had perjured themselves. Who was behind these lies, Belt himself, family members or others? That has never been revealed. Once more General Rosser came to the rescue, proving in criminal court of the District of Columbia that one Benjamin Golly had falsely testified in the divorce suit brought by Belt. Golly was convicted and Mary Alice was exonerated. As a result of the smear campaign Eugene Belt's name was blackened nationwide by the press.

When the dust cleared, Belt went back to his usual pursuits, running the liquor business and attending to his many memberships. The 1900 census found him at age 70 and still listed as a "liquor merchant." He was living with two of his spinster sisters in a large Baltimore house with four live-in servants. I often wonder if Belt before his death in 1901 ever thought about those few weeks of marriage to the beautiful Mary Alice and regretted what he had done.

Note: The two Maryland Club ads are through the courtesy of the Ohio State University from its extensive collection of old advertising.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows



Nov 23 Milford, OH
 Nov. 23 Terre Haute, IN
 Nov. 23 Florence, AL
 Dec. 1 Bethlehem, PA
 Dec. 7 Roseville, CA
 Dec. 8 Enfield, CT
 Jan. 10-11 Palmetto, FL
 Jan. 12 Muncie, IN
 Jan. 18 Jackson, MS
 Feb. 1 Rome, GA
 Feb. 9 Milwaukee, WI
 Feb. 15 Columbus, OH
 Feb. 22 Grand Rapids, MI
 Feb. 28 Phoenix, AZ

Jan. 12 S. Attleboro, MA
 Jan. 25 Anderson, CA
 Feb. 2 Manville, NJ
 Feb. 14-15 Columbia, SC
 Feb. 15-16 Las Vegas, NV
 Feb. 23 Enfield, CT
 March 2 Baltimore, MD

The
BALTIMORE ANTIQUE BOTTLE CLUB
 Presents its
34th Annual Show and Sale
Sunday, March 2, 2014







Doors Open 8:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

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 Baltimore, Maryland 21237

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August 1-3, 2014 FOHBC National Show in Lexington, KY