

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

December 2014 - January 2015

In this issue:

2014 Bottle Statistics by Mike Cianciosi.....	page 2
The Rise and Fall of Farmville Lithia Water by Jack Sullivan	page 3
Upcoming Area Bottle Shows.....	page 6

Meeting – January 27th

Please join us at St. Mark's Orthodox Church in Bethesda at 8 PM. The January meeting will feature our annual club contest for the best bottle, go-with, dug item, and shard acquired during 2014.

We will collect annual dues of \$10 per person or family at our January meeting. If you are unable to attend, **please send dues to Potomac Bottle Collectors, c/o Jim Sears, PO Box 370, Garrett Park, MD 20896**



Jane Nelson sent the photo of a wooden bottle of “100 little chocolate tablets” from Washington, DC. She is doing research for Ancestry.com and asked about Ruppert bottles. Richard Lilienthal sent her some photos including those included here.

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

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 (chosi@cox.net)

2014 Bottle Statistics by Mike Cianciosi

For the past 5 years I've been keeping track of all the beer & soda bottles from Washington DC and Alexandria VA that have sold on eBay®, as well as those that I've witnessed being sold at other auctions, bottle shows, or antique stores. I started doing this to help determine the prices for the bottles listed in the 2014 edition of our club book (which is now available for \$30).

Now that 2014 is over, I have 5 years worth of data. Keep in mind that this is only for local beer & soda bottles, and the prices do not include postage.

There were 251 local beer & soda bottles sold in 2014 for a total of \$16,643, which averages out to \$66.35 per bottle. That's 58 fewer bottles than sold last year, but a higher average price. The increase in the average price was probably due to the 2 high-priced torpedo bottles that sold in 2014, which went for a combined total of almost \$7000. The average price per Hutchinson bottle was also unusually high in 2014 (\$89.78), mainly because of 3 expensive amber hatches, including an amber M.T. BRIDWELL hatch that went for \$1100.

The table below compares 2014's sales to 2013's, and includes the 5-year totals from 2010-2014 inclusive.

Type	2014		2013		2010-2014 totals	
	Qty	Ave Price	Qty	Ave Price	Qty	Ave Price
Hutchinson	32	\$ 89.78	52	\$ 27.63	146	\$ 39.89
Squat / Short blob top	14	\$ 58.08	20	\$ 132.20	80	\$ 106.53
Tall Blob top	53	\$ 39.81	62	\$ 36.16	235	\$ 40.69
Torpedos	2	\$ 3,463.50	0		6	\$ 4,045.17
Straight-sided crown top	77	\$ 23.82	116	\$ 36.53	546	\$ 21.28
Deco crown top	35	\$ 17.80	28	\$ 21.11	133	\$ 17.63
ACL crown top	26	\$ 30.15	21	\$ 12.63	101	\$ 17.83
Picnic crown top	8	\$ 35.50	2	\$ 30.00	19	\$ 22.58
Stoneware bottles	2	\$ 211.50	5	\$ 60.80	18	\$ 92.11
Total	251	\$ 66.35	309	\$ 39.18	1293	\$ 51.73

The highest price paid for a DC/Alexandria bottle in 2014 was \$4,250 for a black amethyst / puce J.ROTHER torpedo that sold at a Glassworks auction. That was one of 3 bottles that sold for over \$1000. There were 21 bottles that sold for over \$100, and 69 bottles that sold for under \$10.

The most common DC/Alexandria bottle sold in 2014 was the Robert Portner blob top with embossing in a round pattern, #547 in the new edition of our book – there were 17 of them sold in 2014. If you include all the variations, there were 77 Robert Portner bottles sold. An honorable mention should go to bottle #62 in the book, the Applied Color Label (ACL) “21” soda by Bantam Beverages, with 12 of them being sold in 2014. This was considered a rare bottle (less than 3 examples known of), until this year when someone sold these 12 on eBay for an average price of about \$32 each. It no longer qualifies as rare, but apparently it's a popular bottle.

Even though we published a new edition of our book in March of 2014, there were already 6 different beer/soda bottles sold that are not listed in our new book. One of the 6 was an unlisted Joe Lewis Punch ACL – there have been 6 of them sold since May of 2014. So it's already gone from “unknown” to “rare” to “uncommon” in just a few months.

Oh yeah – of the 251 bottles sold this year, only 32 were bought by me, leaving 219 that were bought by the rest of the world. So there are a lot of DC/Alexandria beer/soda collectors out there besides me.

Happy bottle hunting in 2015.

The Rise and Fall of Farmville Lithia Water

By Jack Sullivan

[Special to the Potomac Pontil]

A digger coming upon this bottle (Fig. 1) has called it one of the top finds in his career in the trenches. It once held Farmville (Virginia) Lithia Water, a product that in its heyday could gather hundreds to the springs spilling it forth and hundreds of thousands to purchase it bottled. When the public realized the truth about this so-called wonder remedy, however, the market for Farmville Lithia Water can be said to have evaporated.



Fig. 1: Dug Farmville Lithia bottle

A Farmville businessman named John Huston, an entrepreneur who had made his money in the tobacco trade and managing Farmville coal mines, owned a property near town that contained a series of springs. Around 1880 a storm of interest had grown up around the healing properties of lithium, a metal that is found in trace elements in spring water. Increasingly hyped as a providing cures for a whole range of ailments, nostrum peddlers were quick to take advantage of the publicity. Virginia led the way. By 1893 there were no fewer than 22 lithia water bottlers operating in the state.

Huston had the jump on many of them. The water from his springs had been noted for their supposed healing powers for some years by people in and around Farmville. The springs, ten of them, were located in a grove about 300 feet square, each encased in brick masonry (Fig. 2). Huston had signage above them to indicate the purported analysis of each. Some were marked for lithium. Rejecting offers to buy his property, the

canny businessman instead interested a group of Eastern capitalists in investing in a company to exploit Farmville Lithium Water.



Fig. 2: Lithia spring photo

They formed a corporation that quickly made Huston's springs a travel destination. Huston opened his home as a hostelry. A company brochure depicted tour groups visiting the spring marked "lithia," sampling the water and buying bottles to take home (Fig. 3). A large year around hotel was to be constructed on Huston's land, not far from the springs, able to accommodate hundreds of visitors. In the meantime other ancillary buildings were developed as shown on a souvenir postcard (Fig. 4)."



Fig. 3: Illustration of Farmville visitors



Fig. 4: Lithia Springs postcard

The construction was paralleled with a strong publicity campaign, apparently generated from the company offices in Philadelphia. Trademarked as “Nature’s Own Remedy,” Farmville Lithia Water claimed to cure a wide range of illnesses from kidney stones to malaria. A list attended a bottle label (Fig. 5). Note the illustration: a Middle Eastern wizard applying a major wand to a suffering soul.

Farmville Lithia Water

NATURE’S OWN REMEDY

FOR THE CURE OF
 Dyspepsia.
 Bright’s Disease
 of the Kidneys.
 Gout.
 Biliousness.
 Nervous
 Prostration.
 Calculus,
 or Stone in the
 Bladder.
 Indigestion.



FOR THE CURE OF
 Rheumatism.
 Dropsy.
 Inflammation
 of the Kidneys.
 Albuminuria.
 Gravel.
 Piles.
 Torpid Liver.
 Female
 Weakness.
 Malaria, etc.

FARMVILLE LITHIA WATER CO.,

PRINCIPAL OFFICE,

—No. 1123 Arch Street,—

PHILADELPHIA. PA.

Fig. 5: Bottle label with claims

The Farmville Lithia Water Co began shipping its product to many locations east and west. The Piedmont town had long been connected to the rest of the nation by railroad. During the 1880s the Norfolk & Western Railway bought the existing road, improving service, and constructing a second route near

Farmville. The water was diverted from the spring to bottling houses by a pipeline. There it spilled into a giant tub from which containers were filled. It was a short distance to haul water from in casks and cases to the railhead by a company truck (Fig. 6). This one was said to hold 532 demijohns bound for St. Louis.

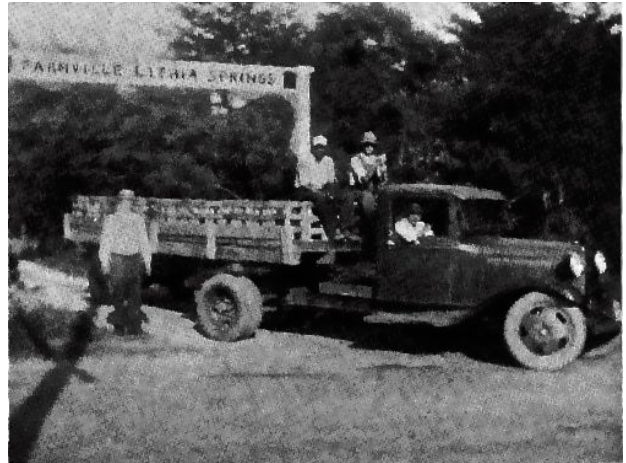


Fig. 6: Company truck photo

Some lithia water was encased in pottery jugs (Fig. 7), but most sold at retail were in glass bottles. Although labeled, the bottles themselves were heavily embossed. Shown here is the same dug bottle shown above as it was cleaned up (Fig. 8). In addition to naming the product, embossing on the bottles included an illustration similar to that on the label shown earlier. The wizard is missing but the suffering patient, weeping against a rock, is featured. Shown here are other glass containers for Farmville Lithia Water, each with a slightly different look (Fig. 9,10).



Fig. 7: Lithia ceramic jug



Fig 8: Cleaned Farmville Lithia bottle



Fig. 10: Lithia bottle #3



Fig. 9: Lithia bottle #2

The lithia water craze lasted well into the 1930s. So lucrative was the trade that Farmville Lithia opened an office on South Troy Street in Chicago, using a well-decorated truck to deliver the goods to retail outlets (Fig. 11). But truth was beginning to catch on to extravagant claims. As early as June 1890 *Journal of the American Chemical Society* reported that a Professor E. Waller had tested the Farmville water with a spectroscope and could find no lithium in it. When he tried again by evaporating the water, the residue was too small to test. The journal called the results “rather surprising.”



Fig. 11: Chicago delivery truck photo

As evidence piled up of lithia water containing very little lithium and having little or no therapeutic value, federal officials targeted the product. In March, 1931, 23 five-gallon demijohns of Farmville Lithia Water were seized by the U.S. attorney in Chicago. They were found to have only five thousandths (.0005) of a milligram per liter of the element. The water was characterized as misbranded and “false and fraudulent” with no ability to cure the ills listed on the bottle. The company did not contest the action and the water was destroyed.

As the demand for lithia water sank, the Farmville Lithia Water Co. declined. The tourist hotel apparently never was built. According to local resident, Robert Flippen, who has written a book on the subject (Fig. 12): “Shortly after 1945, the business venture deteriorated....Eventually, a dispute over the lithia springs property left the original cluster a struggling enterprise which later folded.”

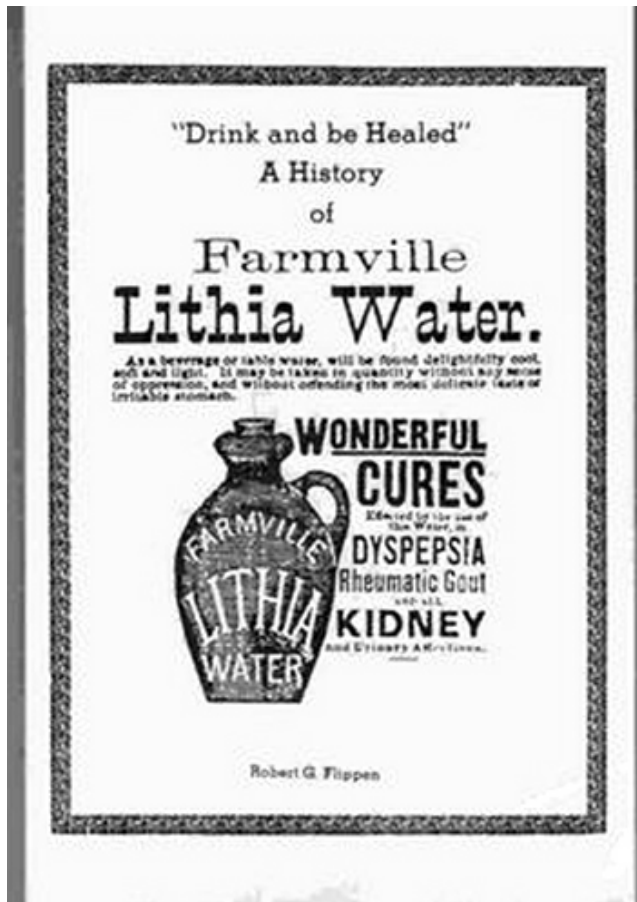


Fig. 12: Book cover

Given the number of years that Farmville Lithia was in business, the number of bottles it produced must have been in the hundreds of thousands. Diggers who find them can get excited over the unusual embossing but it is open to question how rare they may be.

Note: Some of the information and several photos shown here were taken from an article by Mr. Flippen in an historical periodical. His book, providing a more complete history of Farmville Lithia Water, is available for purchase on several Internet sites.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows



- February 1 Manville, NJ
- February 8, Columbus, OH
- February 8, Pewaukee, WI
- February 14 Las Vegas, NV
- February 20-21 Columbia, SC
- February 22, Enfield, CT
- February 27-28 Phoenix, AZ
- March 8 Baltimore, MD**
- March 16 Flint, MI
- March 20-21 Morro Bay, CA
- March 22 Wilmington, OH
- March 28 Daphne, AL
- March 29 Tylersport, PA
- April 11 Kalamazoo, MI
- April 12 Dover, NH
- April 19 Rochester, NY

- February 28 Grand Rapids, MI
- March 13-14 Chico, CA
- March 15 St. Louis, MO
- March 20-21 Deland, FL
- March 22 Bloomington, MN
- March 29 Enfield, CT
- April 11 Antioch, CA
- April 11 St. Clairsville, OH
- April 12 Hutchinson, KS
- April 29, Harrisonburg, VA

The
BALTIMORE ANTIQUE BOTTLE CLUB
Presents its
35th Annual Show and Sale
Sunday, March 8, 2015







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

Physical Education Center
Essex Campus
Community College of Baltimore County
7201 Rossville Blvd. (off exit 34, I-695)
Baltimore, Maryland 21237

Free bottle appraisals

Bottles, Jars, Stoneware, Advertising, Breweriana, Small antiques

The Largest one-day Bottle show in the world!—over 300 tables
Admission \$5

For Information Contact:
Rick Lease - Show Chairman
Telephone: 410-458-9405 Email: rinksburg21@comcast.net
For Contracts: Andy Agnew
Telephone: 410-527-1707 Email: medbotls@comcast.net

www.baltimorebottleclub.org