

A Journey in Search of Bottle Treasure

My quest for knowledge

By Bill Borchert

Collinsville, just across the river from St. Louis, Mo.-"The Gateway to the West"-was an appropriate location for the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors to hold its 2007 show. The first EXPO was held in St. Louis in 1976. The Federation's primary goal is to educate collectors and advance the knowledge about the history and manufacture of historical bottles. So in a way, the Federation's shows are providing a gateway to the past.

John Eatwell and Dave Clint, in their extraordinary book on the Pikes Peak gold rush and Pikes Peak flasks, relate how people left St. Louis with great expectations of seeking treasure in the Rockies.* We left Cheyenne, Wyo. (100 miles north of Denver, Colo.) with great expectations of learning more about early beverage bottles - knowledge about early bottles is my treasure.

In 1859, the trip from St. Louis to then Denver City along the banks of Cherry Creek took about fove weeks. In 2007, the 900 miles to St. Louis and Collinsville took 13 hours and was filled only with the regret of not being organized to leave a day earlier, the humdrum of concrete highway cracks, and the hazards of 60-foot long, 43-ton semi-trucks pulling into our lane.

In 1859, not being organized meant you might not have sufficient provisions for the arduous journey or proper tools for digging; the hazards were many, beginning with the risky 4-day steamboat trip on the muddy Missouri River to Leavenworth, K.T. From there across the plains of Kansas with handcart, ox cart, or mule wagon, travelers experienced cold, heat, mud, accidents, breakdowns, and Indian raids. (Eatwell & Clint, 2000, pp. 81-84)

Both the soon-to-be prospector of 1858-59 and I shared one common thing during our trips - we persevered with the thought of gaining wealth - gold for him and knowledge for me. True to the Federation's goal of advancing bottle knowledge, many members have toiled long and hard to gain their bottle knowledge, and for me at Collinsville, visiting with and learning from a few of these members became the bottle treasure I sought.

For many years, I have been collecting early black and green beverage bottles with the goal of using the bottles as my gateway to the past in understanding their ages, origins and changing bottle-making techniques. Unfortunately, rubbing the bottles did not release any genies that would reveal to me the secrets of the bottle's past. However, local diggers and collectors who have consciously or unconsciously documented dug bottles and those who have diligently researched their bottles have greatly helped my understanding.

As part of my studies, I collected some variants of American ale and soda bottles, including some from St. Louis. While seeking information about the St. Louis bottles, Curt Faulkenberry told me I needed to talk to Jerry Mueller, who was known for his zeal in researching St. Louis bottles. When I first called Jerry, he was indeed very knowledgeable about the St. Louis bottles and was willing to share his information with me. We visited several times by phone, but as I moved on to studying other bottles, I lost track of Jerry. So coming to St. Louis, Jerry was high on my list of collectors to visit. Sadly, however, when I arrived I discovered that he had passed away February 12, 2000. Jerry Mueller's passing certainly was a deep personal loss to his wife and to his family and friends, but also a loss to the bottle collecting hobby.

ATTRIBUTE TO JERRY MUELLER

As the Federation show was near St. Louis, it is appropriate that we recognize and honor Jerry for adding to the knowledge of St. Louis bottles and thus, contributing to the bottle collecting hobby. Jerry's wife, Gerri, relates how he had a passion for researching at the library and gathering information from wherever he could about St. Louis bottles and not just for himself, but also for others too. Curt Faulkenberry has an ale with seal embossed, "THIS IS D. COLVERS (star) BOTTLE" that Jerry researched to find it was for Daniel Colver of St. Louis in 1847 (Figure 1), the earliest known St. Louis ale.

Since 1971 when he was bitten by the bottle bug, he grew his St. Louis bottle collection to one of the best in the St. Louis area. According to Curt, Jerry had great collections of St. Louis pontiled colored and aqua sodas, cider bottles, and marked stoneware bottles, plus a great collection of pontiled fruit jars and a grouping of St. Louis ales.

He enjoyed selling bottles at many shows; however, Gerri recalls how he really loved talking to new collectors and sharing his knowledge with them. His artistic skills was shown with his creation of bottle displays for the St. Louis club's bottle shows. He usually displayed his St. Louis pontiled sodas, which were his favorites.

Many collectors believed that St. Louis sodas were made with pontils as late as 1865. Jerry's research indicated that some smooth based St. Louis sodas were made in the late 1850s. This indicated a snap-type tool, which left the base smooth, was used in place of a pontil earlier than postulated. This also raised the question that the end of pontiled sodas was likely earlier than 1865. These few examples illustrate how his quest for knowledge and willingness to share touched a lot of collectors.

The foundation of the hobby is collectors like Jerry Mueller who collect and research their local bottles. In the spirit of the Federation's goal, Jerry advanced the knowledge about local historical bottles and for that will leave a legacy and an example for others to follow in the St. Louis area and bottle



Figure 1

collecting community.

PEOPLE I VISITED IN MY QUEST FOR INFORMATION

Curt and Ellen Faulkenberry exhibited not only the bottle collector hospitality by allowing me into their home to view their collections, but great patience. I arrived in the morning with camera, lights and measuring equipment and barely left well into the evening. Curt has an exceptional collection of St. Louis bottles: colored and aqua pontiled sodas, black glass pontiled ales, whiskies and other rare bottles, such as the one-of-a-kind black glass iron pontil bitters embossed LAWRENCE'S - FEVER & AGUE / BITTERS-ST LOUIS, MO. (**Figure 2**). Photographing and learning from him about his bottles was an exciting experience for which I am very grateful to Curt and Ellen for their willingness to share their bottles with me. Although the bottles were a highlight, I must admit I was most impressed by a little girl in their home named Alexa Anastasia Faulkenberry.

Until Alexa Anastasia was 20 months old, she lived in an orphanage in St. Petersburg, Russia. Her surroundings consisted of a bed in line with nine other beds that filled one room. She seldom was removed from the bed - no playtime with toys or the warmth of a loving hug. Short of staff and time, the caretakers had to force food into her mouth with a spoon. At 20 months and weighing only 13 pounds, this all changed for Alexa

when Curt and Ellen traveled to Russia to rescue her and bring her to their home. She was fearful of a spoon for over a year. Now she is four years old, a healthy, happy girl who loves to sing and dance to big band music and enjoys her dance, gymnastics and swimming lessons.

Curt's mother is from the Ukraine, so Alexa benefits from learning about her heritage from Grandma. The focus in the Faulkenberry household now is not the bottles, but their "angel girl." By the way, Alexa's original last name Anastasia, now her middle name, in Russian means "resurrection," certainly appropriate for this little girl's life.

Examples of Curt's earliest St. Louis bottles are the soda, CONGRESS HALL / ST LOUIS / MO, ca. 1847 (**Figure 3**) with open pontil/blowpipe pontil mark; and the ale with seal embossed with star and, THIS IS D. COLVERS BOTTLE, ca. 1847 with rough sand/glass chip pontil mark (**Figure 1**). Curt also has two historic Civil War period bottles, the whiskey, U.S.A. / MEDICAL SUPPLIES / FROM / PIKE & KELLOGG ST. LOUIS marked A ARBOGAST PITTS on base, ca. 1864-65 (**Figure 4**); and the ale, COOPER & CONGER / ST LOUIS / ALE / BREWERY, ca. 1865 (**Figure 5**). A Cooper & Conger bottle was found on the steamboat Bertrand, which sunk on the Missouri River near De Soto Landing, Nebraska Territory on April 12, 1865 (Switzer, 1974, pp. 1 & 21)

Wayne Lowry was the show chairman for the 2007 Federation National Bottle Show at Collinsville, as he was for the 2006 and 2005 shows and as he will be for the Federation's EXPO 2008, in York, Pa. Undoubtedly, we all owe him and his sidekick, June, who most likely has shared some of his burdens, our admiration for the terrific jobs they have done. But my personal experience with Wayne was with his other side, not a Dr. Jekyll, but one who he calls "Jar Doctor." He designs, builds, improves, promotes, sells, and stands behind his own bottle-cleaning machines, associated



Figure 3



Figure 2

< Figure 4

Figure 5 >

equipment and supplies.

Before attending this show, I had been planning for years to build my own bottle-cleaning machine. My visits with Wayne made me realize I did not want or have the time at my age to build my own and chance damaging the different type bottles I needed to clean through a trial and error process.

I was a bit skeptical about his claims until I visited with him and found him to be a unique individual. Wayne impressed me as a person with all the old time skills of an entrepreneur, manufacturer and problem solver of the 1870s when so many improvements in tools and equipment were made - many times by individuals.

Over 15 years of selling machines, Wayne has used careful observation, innovation, creativity and responsiveness to users' problems and ideas for seven improved designs. Each has improvements in functionality, usability and durability. His latest design is shown in **Figure 6**. He is never satisfied with "good enough," but constantly reevaluates all aspects of his machines and associated components to make them better. Beyond that, over the years, he has experimented with different cleaning techniques, materials, and compounds to develop the most efficient and safe cleaning of all types and conditions of bottles. To top it off, he is a phone call away for advice and problem-solving assistance. I bought one! I think it comes with a lifetime guarantee and return privileges for full refund after I am done using it. Or maybe not! Check with Wayne.

Cecil Munsey is the author of the "The Illustrated Guide to Collecting Bottles," which in Charles B. Gardner's words in the book's introduction is "the first book that examines every aspect of this fascinating hobby." I had been collecting for about five years when this book came out in 1970. Upon returning from Viet Nam, I was excited to get such an expansive book. It broadened my outlook on the hobby. Even now it is changing hands on eBay to newer collectors. Wow! Imagine the royalties being made.

Since this landmark book, Cecil has continued to be active in the Federation and to write prolifically, including many articles for *Bottles and Extras* and many other magazines and publications, often about collectibles other than bottles. In 1987, Dr. Cecil Munsey was inducted into the Federation of Historical Bottle Clubs (now Collectors) Hall of Fame. A very generalized description of his accomplishments listed in the Federation 2007 National Show Souvenir program is as follows: "Bottle collecting pioneer noted for many significant contributions to the organized hobby. His skilled research, writing, and editing pervade the literature, and his book, 'Bottle Collecting,' is the hobby primer."

I was fortunate to be able to visit with Cecil Munsey after the Federation's meetings and benefit from his experience and insight on various bottle-related subjects, such as sources of information, copyright considerations, and his 1970

book. Cecil says his goals are to continue to add to the literature and to promote and support the Federation and the hobby. Recently, he has greatly contributed to the hobby by creating indices of articles in the following publications: "*Bottles & Extras*, *The Federation of Bottle Clubs Journal*, and *Western Collector Magazine*."

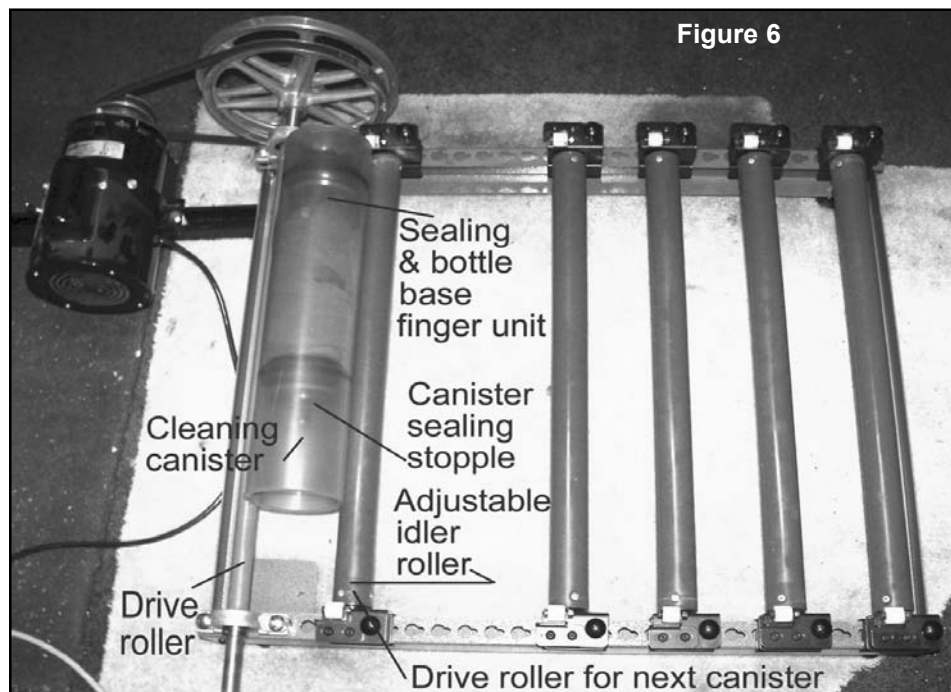
These indices are found on the Federation website. As many of the titles of early articles were more creative than informative, he even revised those titles to better reflect the actual subject of the articles. He not only indexed the articles for these publications, but will provide copies from his personal archived collection of publications, as described in the Federation website. Creating these certainly was a very tedious and time-consuming project, but one that is invaluable to all of us when we want to search these publications for information.

I have discovered that Cecil Munsey is more than a sum of his accomplishments, but a person who is and enjoys being accessible and helpful to any of us. He indeed honors his goals to continue to add to the literature and to promote and support the Federation and the hobby - much to our benefit.

John ("Digger") Odell presented a seminar entitled, "How the Internet changed Historical Research." His presentation was great! Except while in church, I usually take notes to keep from nodding off; but with John, I wanted the notes to help me recall the many interesting ideas he presented. Really, he did a great job of using visual aids and a computer to literally show us how to search for information and access the websites. His demonstrations were so realistic that he included the proverbial "computer glitch" as part of his presentation, to show by his example, how we too can persevere on the computer.

John discussed the value of traditional research sources: Print, such as city directories, newspapers, magazines, advertising, catalogues and trade journals and almanacs. Government records such as, census records, corporation records, and patent and trademark records. Historical societies and state archives are some of the other research tools. But more and more of these sources are being digitalized and made available to the public on the internet and to you, only a Google away.

A proliferation of websites exists with much information and with connection to



other informative sites. Using Google to find sites can take some time and patience. For example, Googling just the Library of Congress brings up over 49 million results with some private sites using the library to masquerade as the real one. Searching with United States Library of Congress lists the real Library of Congress as first choice. This is an excellent site to spend time in as it contains search engines and links to other sites. For advertising, John found the link to Duke University's website and a searchable database and at the Duke site, more links are found to other sites containing early advertising and on and on. Thus the nature of a search on the internet. John went into a lot more detail and examples than space here allows.

So how do we handle all this information on the internet if we wish to use it in our writings about our bottles? John reminded us that "Googlization" should be used with care as anyone can write anything, even on a well-designed website. A good idea is to check more than one source, whether the information is in a university or other "official" site or a personal website and cross-check information for consistency with other information about the bottle and even the bottle's characteristics.

Absolutely credit the sources of your information whether print media or from the internet, which editors or publishers of magazines should require for every article. A good example of crediting internet sources is a listing for von Mechow, Tod, in the References on page 57 of the article by Bill Lockhart in *Bottles and Extras*, May - June 2007. His reference to the website source does not only give the website address, which can change over time, but also the author or editor of the website, date for website, title of article and author if different from website, and title of website, and website address. The purpose of crediting the source, such as one by Tod von Mechow, is not only to give credit to Tod for his efforts in collecting, researching, studying, and writing about bottles, but also to give articles credibility by showing use of other sources. It gives reviewers and readers the chance to verify your interpretation of the sources and the quality of those sources.

But Digger Odell has contributed to our historic bottle hobby in other ways than this seminar and the articles in bottle magazines. He has compiled, edited and published antique bottle price guides for various categories of bottles with prices realized at

auctions. He also has written a book on privy digging secrets and a new one about the original digging of privies, not for contents but use. Bottlebooks.com, where his books are for sale, provides bottle information for a variety of subjects. I was impressed to see credits given to his sources on his website.

Carl Sturm is amazing at his age, at least over 39. He seems to be as active in the bottle collecting hobby as when he started. I was impressed at the Federation board meeting when some of the members got a bit rowdy over a simple copyright infringement issue by how Carl kept his cool and did not reveal any traits of a cantankerous, power-hungry president.

At the show, he shared some of his knowledge about black glass bottles with me and reassured me that the price I was paying for his unusual onion was reasonable and within the range of the world-wide market, considering the devaluation of the U.S. dollar. Carl is certainly an expert in black glass bottles and judging by the bottles in his display of half-pint flasks, an expert in flasks and other categories. His honest and accurate descriptions for bottles he sells on eBay are a breath of fresh air, in a climate where even advanced collectors tend to mislead and exaggerate. We are fortunate that Carl stayed with bottles in his retirement and didn't wander the Caribbean in a sailboat or something.

Tod von Mechow is "the collector and researcher" of Philadelphia pontiled soda and beer bottles. I have known Tod since the 1990s when I first wrote him for information on these bottles. During that time he not only responded with detailed letters, he sent copies of his listing of Philadelphia pontiled soda and beer bottles and other information on the Dyottville Glass Works-marked squat beer bottles. OOPS! Sorry - not "squat" beer bottles. For bottles of the shape in **Figure 7**, Tod uses the term "PORTER," which was used

by the early bottle makers and in early advertising. For example, an 1815 ad in McKearin and Wilson (1978, p.232) has a crude sketch of a porter bottle and advertises, "One hundred dozen of PORTER..."

These porters are embossed DYOTTVILLE GLASS WORKS/PHILAD.A The iron pontil marks (original ones not affected by burial) on these porters can vary from a large circular area filled with iron oxide residue to all or part of a ring of iron oxide residue and possibly with some residue



Figure 8

inside the ring as in **Figure 8**.

In 2007, Tod compiled his updated bottle listing entitled, *A LISTING OF PHILADELPHIA PONTILED SODA & BEER BOTTLES, 1825 TO 1857*, which consists of information for about 400 bottles from his collection amassed since 1973 and from about 200 other bottles and bottle fragments from other collectors and diggers. It is an excellent resource that I was pleased to see he had for sale at the show for \$10. Tod is contributing to the hobby and to our understanding of bottles in many ways. Now is a time to thank him for about 7 to 10 articles he wrote for the *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector* magazine. His research about the pontiled Philadelphia sodas and porters has indicated 1857 as the last year for bottles made at Dyottville Glass Works to have the iron pontil mark on them. Not all glass works might have made the change at the same time as Dyottville, but his date documented by his studies has given us some insights into the changing times for bottle making in the latter part of the 1850s.



Figure 7

Tod also maintains a very informative, well researched website, "Tod's Antique Soda and Beer Bottles" at <http://mysite.verizon.net/vonmechow/>. He welcomes the use of his site, but as with your use of all information from other sources, please credit him or any source you use for information. Tod has said he would welcome any inquiries for information or copies of his listing of Philadelphia bottles. His email address is todvon@verizon.net.

In the 1948 movie, "The Treasure of the Sierra Madre" with Humphrey Bogart, the three gold seekers thanked the mountain for giving up her gold to them. I wish to thank the Federation show participants who gave up some of their bottle knowledge to me. The mountain had no choice; but bottle collectors have a choice whether or not to share their knowledge with others.

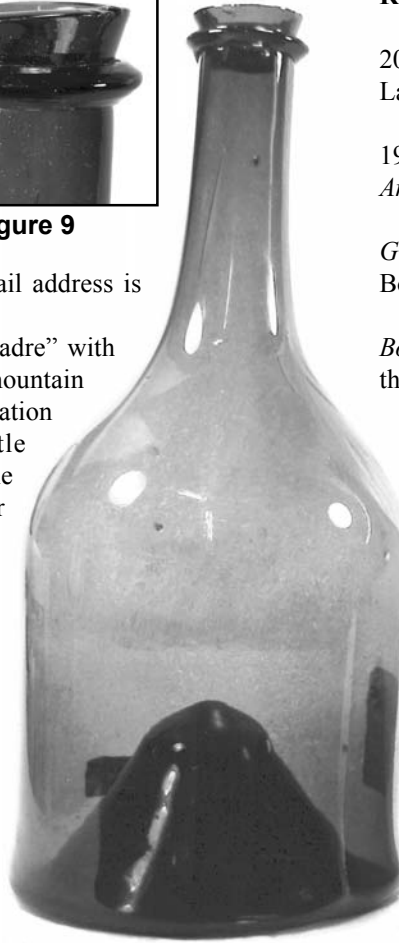
My puzzling bottle

I bought this bottle at the show and need your help in identifying its age and origin: American, French, etc. 10 1/2" high; flared base, 4 3/4" dia., above, 4 1/2" dia. Tooled-V string rim. Open pontil. Golden to yellow amber, thin glass. (Figure 9)

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Figure 9



References

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*NOTE - I highlighted the book *Pikes Peak Gold* to remind us of John Eatwell, not just for his contributions to the hobby and to the Federation, but to honor him and Dave Clint for leaving behind a book that truly follows the goals of the Federation. His book not only describes the flasks, but the life and times that initiated the flasks and the details of their manufacture and their characteristics. It's a great example of a truly historical bottle book!

