

New Mexico Bottle Collecting History

By Jerry Simmons

One of a series

Any attempt to recapture the complete history of organized or semi organized bottle collecting in New Mexico is bound to have gaps, especially in the earlier years, due to the size of the state and the few who were involved early in the bobby.

This rendering of history is from my memory as early as 1964 when I became very interested in old western mining town history and the bottles/trash left behind. I was blessed to be living in a mining district as well as close to the farm and ranch homesteads in the area. These areas provided a lot of entertainment in the way of learning about the items found or dug.

I never really joined a club, but met a few of those who were involved in them. The following account will give the details, as best I know them at this time, of those individuals and groups that were aggressively hunting old bottles.

Mid to late 1950s: The National Park Service hired government archaeologists George Cattanach and Rex Wilson and assigned them to Fort Union National Monument to get it ready for public viewing. At least 1,500 bottles were uncovered during the 1956-58 excavations and I have cataloged and examined more than 1,400 of them. Among those found were U.S.A. Hospital bottles, ginger beers, sodas, whiskeys, bitters, pepper sauces and other food containers.

Some years later, Wilson published a book, *Bottles on the Western Frontier*, and many of the bottles discovered were published in color on the book's dust jacket.

It was this project that encouraged May Jones, of Nara Visa, N.M., to begin her bottle work in the 1960s, some of which took her to Fort Union to converse with Wilson and see first hand the bottles that had been excavated. Her publication, *Bottle Trail*, got its start and many of her articles were published in *Old Bottle Magazine*. In 1961, Jones did bottle illustrations for Adele Reed's *Old Bottles and Ghost Towns*.

Fort Union was established in 1851 as the guardian of the Santa Fe Trail. There were actually three different forts constructed close together. The second was built after the start of the Civil War in 1861. The third fort was constructed from 1862 to 1868. You can imagine the bottles used by the troops and officers during that period.

Other New Mexico pioneer collectors included Elsie Simmons, of Truth or Consequences; Alkie and Pat Hicks, of the Roswell area; Carl and Ruth Stegamen, of Santa Fe, and Mr. and Mrs. Blackburn, of Gallup, N.M. Simmons searched for bottles around the old Fort Craig area south of Socorro where she had dug some rare early New Mexico



Ft. Union, North of Las Vegas, NM



Here's just a portion of Fort Union site



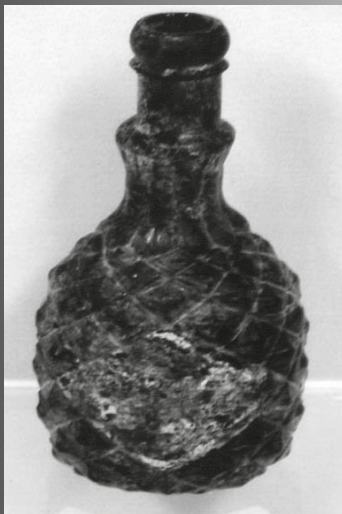
USA Hospital Bottles run gamut of colors



L - R: Lediard's Celebrated OK Plantain Bitters in amber, unknown and unembossed cabin - type in center and another Lediard's in olive amber all came from Fort Union Supply Depot. The one on the right is embossed ST. LOUIS and is unlisted in the Ring-Ham Bitters Bottles Book. (Photos courtesy of Jerry Simmons)



New Mexico's oldest (1878) known amber ales embossed Wm Carl & Co./ Santa Fee (2 ees) / N.M., and found at Fort Union



Pineapple - Shaped bitters dug in Fort Union Privy

bottles and some U.S.A. Hospital items. The Hickses collected from mostly the southern part of the state and used old post office material to locate old towns and dig them. Three good areas they worked were Fort Stanton, Capitan (Billy the Kid turf) and Carthage.

Fort Craig was established in 1854 and was one of the largest and most important of the frontier forts in the West. It was one of eight forts situated along the primary north-south road in the Rio Grande Valley. It played crucial roles in the Civil War and Indian campaigns. The Fort Craig National Historic Site is located about 35 miles south of Socorro.

The Stegamens had amassed a goodly number of Santa Fe bottles from the old city dump prior to its closure and were members of the only Santa Fe club or group that existed for a time in the 1960s. I heard numerous rumors of good collecting that had been and was continuing to be done in the Fort Wingate dump area near Gallup. In the early 1990s, Lynn Loomis, of Albuquerque, bought a lot of bottles from Mrs. Blackburn. Fort Wingate is located seven miles east of Gallup along present day Interstate 40.

A woman from the Wilcox, Ariz., area was collecting bottles from that area as well as southwest New Mexico. She collected a lot of bottles from the forts in these areas and had amassed a sizeable collection of New Mexico Hutchinson sodas and some drugstore bottles. The bottles were eventually bought by Sam Michaels, of Mesa, Ariz., who sold them to Keith Austin, of Las Cruces, N.M., who sold them to Johnnie Fletcher, of Mustang, Okla., who then sold them to Ken Malone, of Wichita Falls, Texas and Lynn Loomis, of Albuquerque, bought them from Ken. The largest groups of New Mexico Hutchinson sodas are in the collections of Loomis and Zang Wood.

Other clubs that existed during the early years were based in Carlsbad (Cave City Bottle Club) and Albuquerque (Roadrunner Bottle Club. Newsletter: Beep-Beep!).

The Hickses were involved to some degree with the Roswell group. I only heard that the Albuquerque group got in some good digging in old dumps and at construction sites. In 2002, my son, Philip, and I purchased a couple of nicely embossed New Mexico bottles from Mariano Sandoval, who had kept the bottles from a couple of front end loader scoops from the excavation for the Albuquerque Convention Center in the 1960s. He shared with us that he kept chasing out people who were digging bottles out of the area he and his crew were trying to excavate. He finally wised up and decided to take a couple of scoops out and set them aside where the diggers couldn't get to them and later get the bottles out for himself. He described the choice area where the bottles were found as the dimensions of a 40-foot single wide mobile home – obviously a dump site behind a group of businesses. Bottles dated from the 1880s to early 1890s.

Ardel Scartaccini, of Golden, N.M., southwest of Santa Fe, was finding and selling bottles and rocks in her sales shop across from Rincon Mercantile Store. I first saw and heard

about the finding and selling of old bottles in the area from Ardel. Her husband, Gene, worked as the foreman for my dad's farm and ranch.

Park Center, of Cerrillos, N.M., was visiting northern New Mexico villages and acquiring old bottles from attics. He could speak Spanish, which allowed him to converse freely with Hispanic residents of the communities visited.

My family (Gerald, Jessie and Jerry Simmons) began collecting and digging in 1964-65 and began to explore the mining towns and homesteads near the Santa Fe / Albuquerque areas. I purchased bottles from Park Center and met the Stegamens of Santa Fe.

Moro Montoya, of Albuquerque, was collecting and digging bottles in the mid to late 1960s. Many of his bottles were sold to Lynn Loomis of Albuquerque in the early 1990s. Very possibly the oldest known glass bottle found in the state – a “camel bottle” in teal green with a pontil – was found by Montoya in the town of Algodones, N.M. This bottle likely was brought into the area during the Spanish Conquistador period (16th-17th centuries) of New Mexico's history.

Dee Brechiesen and Ray and Melba Scott did a lot of collecting of tokens via metal detectors and would also find bottles. I would trade tokens I had found to Dee for bottles he had found. I eventually sold my first collection to Ray and Melba in 1974. Both the Scotts and Dee had started to collect New Mexico Hutchinsons and Dee eventually accumulated 21 to 23 of those before he passed away. His Hutch collection was purchased from his son by Bob Gallegos, of Albuquerque, about 2005.

Gene Pfeifer, of Albuquerque, collected a lot of items, including bottles, from Fort Wingate and southwestern New Mexico military sites, but focused on World War I items. Metal detecting was Gene's main way to discover artifacts.

The June 1971 issue of *Old Bottle Magazine*, then published by Ken and Shirley Asher out of Bend, Ore., listed bottle clubs as well as businesses that sold bottles. Flinn's Coin and Stamp Shop in Albuquerque, owned by Van Johnson; the Bottle Trading Post in Carlsbad, Krol's Rock City and Mobile Park in Deming, and the Bottle Shack in Gallup were the businesses listed.

Those clubs and businesses were nearly nonexistent by the late 1970s, early 1980s, as interest in bottle collecting waned. A few people remain active in related areas, including coins, tokens and militaria. Moro Montoya continues to collect, along with a few others like Brecheisen, the Scotts and Gene Pfeifer. I continued to collect in the Socorro area while in college. During the 1980s, there were a few active collectors, like Larry Jones of Tijeras, N.M., and Nick Smadder of Albuquerque, but no active clubs.

In the 1990s, I became acquainted with Lynn Loomis and we talked about starting a club. In the spring of 1995, the New Mexico Historical Bottle Society (NMHBS) was officially organized. Out of a list of 50 people, 15 joined. The group was



L - R: Earliest New Mexico Hutchinson is embossed Wiegand vertically. Center blobtop indented on the each side of the top for a wire bail. It's embossed Schidamantle / Denver, N. M. Hutinson on the right is embossed Scherer & Wiegand / Santa Fe / N.M.



Three sizes of U.S. Marine Hospital Service bottles



Fort Marcy - Santa Fe, N.M. The privy that was only 1/2 excavated.



Archaeologists check out types of insulators found at Fort Marcy near Santa Fe, N.M. Man at left holding threadless insulator. Two others in black glass join aqua Boston Bottling Works in the drawer.



Two -tone fine china spittoon was used at Fort Marcy.

Interesting Facts

- Ft. Union dates of occupation were from 1851-1891.
- 3 forts were constructed at the Ft. Union site: Old fort 1851-1861, Star Fort for Civil war period, big fort with Quarter Master's depot for Santa Fe Trail travel 1861-1891.
- I cataloged 1424 bottles that are still at the Ft. Union site. 33% were beer bottles and 8% were whiskey bottles. (note the opposite numbers for Ft. Marcy) Nearly 500 other dug bottles were sent to the Smithsonian, Ft. Laramie, and the Museum of Santa Fe.
- Of the estimated 50 privies at the 3 fort sites at Ft. Union only 6 have been excavated: 1 enlisted men's privy, 1 laundries privy, 1 CO privy, 1 post trader privy, 1 commissary privy, and 1 quartermaster privy.
- A one time visit to the old fort site that included a walking tour where one could see the unexcavated trash and ash piles as well as privy outlines. On the surface of the ground one could pick up graphite pentiled bottle bottoms. Not one privy was excavated at this site.
- At the Star Fort site one doesn't have to walk long before they see broken pieces of Drake's Plantation Bitters, and Miller and Provost sauce bottles.
- A walking tour on the NW sector of the big fort site gave evidence of trash filled adobe brick making trenches and pits. Some of these trenches are 300 feet long. I saw the remains of Boston Bottling Works insulators and brass epaulets laying on the tops of some of the pits.
- Ft. Union was the military supply depot for all the forts in the southwestern US.
- The Ft. Union bottle collection, which I enjoyed going to view, was the major stimulus for my getting into bottle collecting back in the mid 1960's.
- Ft. Marcy is found in the heart of old Santa Fe, NM.
- Ft. Marcy was the fort site from which her commanding officers decided to build Ft. Union and get the majority of the soldiers away from the vices of city life in Santa Fe.
- Ft. Marcy was taken by the confederates under General Sibley prior to their defeat by the Union forces at the Battle of Glorieta Pass some 20 miles east-south east of Santa Fe.
- Sibley and his men were headed to the gold and silver mines of Colorado to take control of them for the much needed revenue for the south. The Union had the gold and silver mines of California and Nevada.
- I identified and cataloged 895 bottles from the city-block excavation in 2006. 8% of the bottles were beer and 32% were whiskey.
- A total of 55 Santa Fe hutch sodas were found during this particular excavation.
- 1/2 of large hospital privy was excavated while the other undug half still lays under the closely adjoining paved street.
- 4 levels of occupation were recorded at the site during the excavation: Old Indian pueblo, Mexican presidio (fort), US occupation fort (Marcy), and a civilian school.
- The excavation area was eventually taken down 30 feet below grade for a large parking complex for the current Sweeny Civic Center.

Jerry Simmons posted interesting facts about Fort Marcy, Union.

not local in membership, but statewide. None of the earlier bottle diggers or club members were involved, except for Dee Brecheisen and myself. Charter or early members included Loomis, myself, Zang Wood, Sam Henderson, Bill Tanner, Mike Parish, Tino Romero, Greg and Marcia Hoglin. More people from other New Mexico cities joined and the society now numbers 36 members and counting.

The NMHBS joined the Enchantment Insulator Club to sponsor the 10th annual bottle and insulator show in Albuquerque in September of 1997. Mike Dickman, who collects poisons, and Bill Lockhart, a master researcher, joined the club, which sponsors two or three digs per year for club members. A Christmas party at my house has become a popular event where show and tell, bottle programs and lots of food and talk were experienced.

By 2001, the NMHBS remained the only bottle club in the state. I remained its president until the summer of 2008 when I took a professorship in Kansas. Greg and Marcia Hoglins, the club's vice president and secretary, respectively, stepped in to fill the top offices. The bottle shows and digs continued. The club membership remains at 35, with three from Arizona and one in Colorado. I played host to the Christmas party in December of 2008.

During 2007-2008 and an off work season for myself, my son, Philip, and I volunteered our bottle expertise to the office of Contract Archaeology in Santa Fe. Our job was to identify and catalog the glass materials found in a recent excavation of a portion of the grounds of old Fort Marcy near Santa Fe.

Fort Marcy was constructed in 1846 on top of a flat-topped hill about 650 yards northeast of Santa Fe's plaza. The city of Santa Fe acquired the site on the hill in 1961, landscaping it and establishing a scenic overlook of the city.

After the job was completed, there had been 10,000 pieces of glass, including bottles, that had been examined, identified and cataloged. Later during that time period, I went on to get permission for a re-look at the bottles excavated at Fort Union 60 miles east of Santa Fe. I wanted to recapture some of the excavated bottle location information that had been lost at the site in the 1950s. I identified and cataloged all bottles for the Fort personnel and presented them a nice final color picture document of my work and findings.

From 2009 on, the NMHBS continued to prosper under the leadership of the Hoglins. The club is sponsoring more digs and continues to play a key role in the annual bottle-insulator show.