

South Carolina's Bottle Collecting History

Adventures on Hilton Head Island, S.C.

By Bobby Hinely

One of a series

In mid 1964, my mother had a shop in Sea Pines when Hilton Head Island was being developed from the southern end. She met a man who had found a Honesdale, Pennsylvania Glass Works (1849-61) soda at the northern end of the island and told me.

So I drove over to the island and read the historical marker. I was unaware of the role the island had played as a base for Union blockade ships during the Civil War. No fewer than 12,653 Yankee troops and sailors were stationed there.

So I was pumped as I headed toward the marsh. The first things I saw laying on the marsh in the tall grass was an amber Ellenville whiskey and an emerald green E.R. Squibb bottle. I walked into the marsh at low tide and found many broken bottles. So that was the start of my years of digging before that end of the island was developed.

I once found a telegraph pole and recovered a threadless teakettle insulator. Later, I found a map showing the placement of the telegraph line, but I was never able to locate the other poles. I dug by myself, or would take my family and have a picnic. There was no rush. It was peaceful and there were miles of marsh. One day, I heard a shout, looked up and saw the sheriff. I told him I was hunting Civil War artifacts. "This is private property and you can't do that," but I continued to dig there for eight or nine years, being careful to avoid that sheriff.

Development came slowly in 1968 and there was the call of Indian Street in Savannah, with John Ryan and other bottles being found in privies and trash pits..

Bottles in the marsh were covered in saw grass and buried 12 to 20 inches deep. I'd cut a 24-inch by 24-inch square with a spade and take a potato rake, bury its tines in the center and pull the grass and roots out of the way. Then I'd see the virgin mud layer from the 1860s and I'd use a hand tool to dig through it.

One of the best bottles I dug (and I've



A young Bobby Hinely shows off a double eagle flask manufactured by the Pittsburgh Glass Works. It came from the marsh adjacent to the Civil War-era Union Fort



Two John Knechtle Hilton Head Islands Sodas flank another embossed S.C. Dennis.



An ecstatic Ed Gray, of Marietta, Georgia, shows off a colorful batch of Hilton Head Islands finds. (photos courtesy of Bobby Hinely)



Bobby Hinely holds a couple of cobalt Savannah, Georgia sodas in this 2009 Photo

never seen another) was a smooth-based T.J. Dunn / Rooster / Gin Cocktail / Boston in olive green. I also dug a teakettle ink and later traded for a green U.S.A. Hospital bottle. Along the beach at low tide, I found a green William Dean / Newark, N.J., soda shaped like a mineral water, a round, deep olive whiskey pint and a crude, light olive wine. I also found the first ginger beer ceramic bottles.

Later, I moved to Atlanta and met Tom Zachary. He and I would drive to Hilton Head on weekends (I couldn't afford a motel room) and dig all day. I also met Ed Gray (of Marietta, Ga.).

Typical bottles included U.S.A. Hospital bottles, Dr. Townsend's Bitters, Sharon Sulfur Springs Water, Udolpho Wolfe's Schnapps, cathedral pickles, lots of northern sodas and perhaps the first S.C. Dennis Hilton Head sodas. I even dug a Pittsburgh Glass Works Double Eagle flask.

In eight years of digging behind Robbers' Row, I found only two cobalt John Knechtle and four S.C. Dennis Hilton Head sodas. Ninety-nine percent of all the sodas found were northern.

After a few run-ins with the local sheriff, I'd have a friend drop me off and I'd head into the marsh where I could not be seen. So that kind of digging wasn't much fun as I could not be in the open and was always looking over my shoulder.

On one digging trip, I was baling water out of a hole and throwing it into the brush. I kept hearing a hissing sound. I kept thinking it was caused by my boots in the mud, but I got out of the hole and saw an alligator basking in the sun. I was throwing the water onto him. It was the first and last time I ever saw "Freddie," as I named him, or any more of his family members.

Other artifacts found were Yankee shoes preserved by the mud and minie balls, including a .577 caliber Enfield from England, a rare .69 caliber Confederate Gardner, .58 caliber Williams Cleaners, a .58-caliber three-ring with a machine mark stamped in the hollow with five or six distinct lines, almost like a star, and a .58 caliber Union three-ringed minie made at Frankfurt, Ky., with a distinctive star stamp.

Today, Hilton Head has million-dollar homes and a security gate. All the saw grass is short and what artifacts are left are buried in the marsh and sand for many years to come..