

Richmond, Virginia Club was Organized in 1969

One of a series

By Dick Wilcox

Mechanicsville, Va.

One of Virginia's pioneer collectors of antique bottles was Bonnie Greene who, in 1971, published *Old Richmond Bottles, 1850-1941*. The cover shows a mug base Hutchinson soda from J.W. McAdam / Bunch of Grapes trade mark / Richmond, Va.

The 28-page book was a checklist of bottlers, distillers, glass works, dairies, druggists, wine and liquor dealers, mineral water sellers, pickle bottlers, patent medicine men and brewers, starting with the earliest year in business and ending with the last. Most of her listings came from city directories.

In 1989, collector Vernon Grant published a more comprehensive book titled *Bottled in Richmond, 1819-1920*. The 254-page book also was well illustrated with black and white photos and copies of advertisements.

The Richmond Area Bottle Collectors Association began publishing its newsletter, *The Bottle Digger*, in June 1970. Volume I, No. 1 did not have a title and club president Bob Greene asked members to choose one. Reporters were Bonnie Greene and Pami Duarte.

Volume I, No. 2 revealed its new name. Vernon Grant won a three-piece mold bottle for coming up with the title. Dick Wilcox of Mechanicsville came aboard as editor-publisher (he was in the printing business) and the newsletter not only is "newsy," but it's professionally done as well. Dick had gotten into the hobby in 1967.

The club heard a talk from Fred Rawlinson, founder of the Milkbottles Only Organization (MOO), at its August 1970 meeting. He was the author of *Make Mine Milk and Old Bottles on the Virginia Peninsula* and spoke on the "History of Glass and Bottles."

The club had its first dig on private property in October, but rain nearly washed out the whole deal. Only 10

members braved the elements. Just pieces of black glass bottles, clay pipes and pottery were found by the diggers. Wilcox and a friend plied their metal detectors and came up with an Eagle button and the butt plate from a musket.

In February 1971, the Richmond club voted to have a display in a show put on jointly by the Norfolk (Old Dominion) and Hampton clubs. The Richmond club's first show and sale was held June 4-5, 1971 at Eastgate Mall. It drew 11 dealers and also had 11 displays. Club president Bob Greene said an estimated 1,500 people visited the show.

In July, Bonnie Greene and Ricki Stringer dug bottles from a pig sty at a 100-year-old home in Morratoco, Va. They netted about 40 milks from the basement level, including a Fairfield Dairy (Maryland), Farmers Creamery and Zellars Tappahannock. Two half-gallon Mason jars also were found as the pigs followed the collectors.

The Historical Bottle Collectors of Virginia club was founded in 1969 and Richmond Area members attended their show at the Shenandoah Caverns near New Market, Va., on July 31.

The Richmond club's second annual show at Eastgate Mall May 19-20 attracted 40 dealers and had 10 displays. Newsletter editor Wilcox ran four black-and-white photos, three showing the top three prize winners' displays and the fourth the club display. Mike Post won first prize with his bitters, Bob and Bonnie Greene were runners-up with an all-green bottle display, and Tommy Goodrich placed third and won the Old Bottle Magazine Showmanship Ribbon. His display featured backlit bottles in a simulated attic window surrounded by boards with real ivy growing up them.

Felix Woods penned an article called *Digging the Kanawha Canal* in the August 1972 issue. Flood waters undermined the bank in part of the

canal and, after the water drained out, diggers were having a ball. The canal was completed in 1840.

Among goodies found included a Silver Leaf Rye and a Peter Stumpf beer, a cobalt Francis Dusch and a Pen-Mar Hotel flask, a Terry Bros. flask and a F. Dusch XXX Porter, an ice blue M. McCormack with iron pontil and an emerald green Mason & Burns.

The club was experiencing growing pains and Bob Greene took the membership to task for not being more supportive. Attendance at meetings improved after that. Editor Wilcox issued a plea for news in the October 1972 issue for the umpteenth time.

The November 1972 issue announced that the club's first bottle had arrived, but with little description. A club decal was designed for free by Bob Fisher and numbers were made available to members at 50 cents each, according to the April 1973 issue.

Carlo Sellari, publisher of *Eastern Bottles Price Guide*, was a judge at the club's third annual show in April 1973. Doug Lee and John Mullen, both from Charleston, S.C., were the others.

A club dig was set on Berkeley Plantation on July 21, 1973. The Northern army camped there during the Civil War and you'd think some bottles would be found. None were.

The club became incorporated in November 1973. Bob Greene was reelected president for the sixth time. Felix Woods was vice president, Violet Wilcox secretary and Tommy Goodrich treasurer.

Club members had been digging in a dump outside the penitentiary walls and finding some good stuff. Enter editor Wilcox: "It is expected most any time that some of our people digging at the Penitentiary will come up for air and find themselves inside the walls. Then what are you going to do?" Some of the prized bottles being dug

there include two Saratoga Congress & Empire Spring Waters, one green with contents and one dark olive; two Peter Stumpf bottles; two Anheuser Busch "A" bottles and a Dr. Petzold's Genuine German Bitters.

The Kanawha Canal was still producing good bottles in 1974, especially for editor Wilcox who found a rare Peter Stumpf and a turtle ink. Ten exhibits and 56 sales tables highlighted the club's fourth annual show, but crowds were thin.

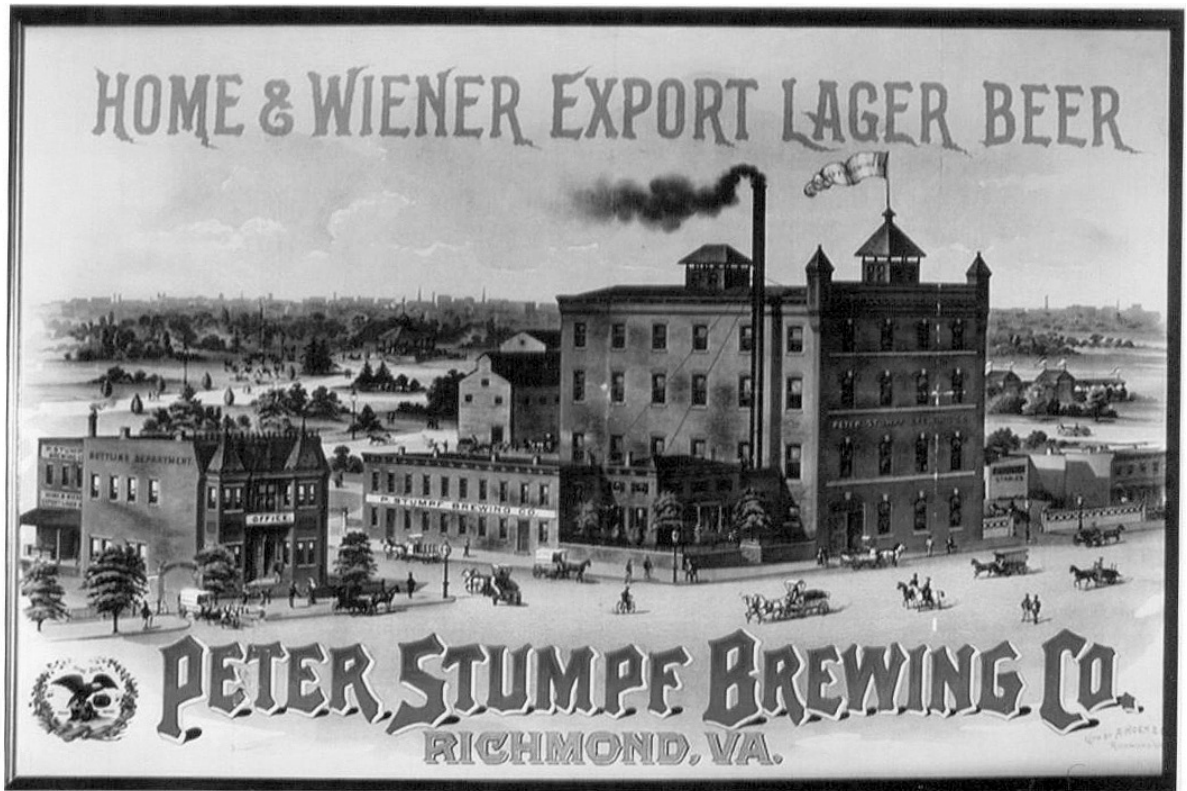
November 23, 1974 was a bad day for the club when Bob Greene, who had been its only president, died unexpectedly while working in his yard at home. He was just 66 years of age. Vice president Felix Woods succeeded him as president.

The club's fifth annual show held at the fairgrounds attracted 36 dealers on 65 tables and eight displays. Felix Woods was reelected club president to serve during 1976. Tom Cox was vice president, Bob Alphin secretary and Jimmy Johnson treasurer. The club has patches made showing the club logo.

The sixth annual show had 15 displays and 35 sales tables and most buyers left happy.

Richard Wilcox was elected club president for 1977, Mike Bailey vice president, Phyllis Johnson secretary and Jimmy Johnson treasurer. Shirley Giddings became editor of The Bottle Digger.

Forty-six tables were sold and eight displays were put up for the seventh annual show in October of 1977. Jimmy Johnson was elected president for 1978, Steve Jackson vice president, Phyllis Johnson secretary and corresponding secretary and



Karl Carr treasurer. Shirley Wilcox (she married Dick in July of 1977) continued as editor and Dick returned to his column, "Digging with Dick."

Tom Cox was elected president to serve through 1979. Lloyd Harnish was vice president, Judy Corker secretary and Karl Carr treasurer. Shirley Wilcox continued as editor.

Dick Wilcox's last column ran in the June 1979 issue. The club was continuing to have membership problems, with fewer folks turning out for club projects.

P.S.: In 2000, Dick and his digging buddy, Archie Moore, were getting cabin fever and decided they would go bottle digging in searching for a privy, dump or well in the farming area.

After spending sometime in the woods, they decided they would dig next to a very large tree. To be fair, one would dig on one side and the other would dig on the other side. The two started finding bits and pieces of glass which was great, because in the early days, farmers would take their trash into the woods and set the bags by trees so they'd be out of the way.

After a while of digging, Dick yelled, "Archie! I think I just dug a Bowling Pin Pepsi Bottle!"

Archie yelled back, "You got to be lying!"

Dick yelled, "No! I think it is a Bowling Pin Pepsi!"

Well, Archie would not take his word for it. So he got out of his hole on the opposite side of the tree and went around and said, "Damn! You did dig a Bowling Pin Pepsi!" Without another word he went back to his hole, feeling really let down because he had dug nothing.

Time marched on when, suddenly, Archie let out a yell: "Dick! I just dug a Bowling Pin Pepsi!"

Dick yelled back: "Now I know you are just fooling around!"

But to make sure, he got out of his hole and went around the tree. Sure enough, Archie had dug one, too. So Dick returned to his hole and the two really went through some dirt. In fact, they nearly dug up the tree, but found no more elusive Bowling Pin Pepsis, so they filled in their holes and went home.

Relating the story to their wives, they both wore broad grins on their faces, very proud since Bowling Pin Pepsis are scarce. — Related by Shirley Wilcox.