

## The Australian Connection, Part II

By Rex Barber

If you happen to be a history buff then the following three items are worth a read on “Google” as each is a great story in its own right. The maritime museum in the port city of Fremantle Western Australia is well worth a visit if you ever holiday over here as it houses shipwreck displays from this remote coastline. Inside the building is a quarter of the hull of the infamous Dutch shipwreck “BATAVIA,” recovered and re-assembled displaying thousands of items, including bottles and bearded man stoneware jugs from the 1600s.

More importantly for the connection are items and specie recovered from the American Trader “RAPID,” which shipwrecked on the Ningaloo Reef near North West Cape in 1811, before the Colony of Western Australia had been founded. The “RAPID” carried 280,000 pieces of eight and, after the captains burnt the hulk to stop any salvage attempt, the whole crew was able to row all the way back to Batavia ( Modern day Jakarta ).

Items from this early American visitor are on show in the maritime museum.

Another American visitor of important note was the



**Early Traded Bottles from Coastal Settlements**

whaling ship “CATALPA,” which assisted in the escape of six Irish Fenians in 1876. Earlier, John Boyle O’Reilly had escaped on another American whaler “GAZELLE” and became the editor of a Boston newspaper.

We were very lucky to be invited to have a fossick (search) and a dig at “HELLS GATE,” a convict depot that held Fenians sixty miles inland, and in appearance similar to your box canyons, with high granite natural walls on three sides.

Western Australia was established as a free colony in 1829, but by the 1860s the colony needed help and received convicts to help in public works, roads, bridges, etc.

At “HELLS GATE,” we found plenty of black glass bottles from that period such as “Six to the Gallon” and “Woods Portabella” embossed on the base, obviously from the prison guards.

American whalers were operating in the Indian Ocean as early as 1789, and it is also recorded that at one time as many as 300 American, French, British and Australian ships were operating along the coast with many shore bases. If you are lucky enough to find such a site, you might recover bottles and artefacts



**American Whale Oil Pot and Anchor**

shown in the photographs.

As mentioned in the previous article (January/February, 2009 issue of *Bottles and Extras*, page 26), many American miners came to Australia during the three major gold rush periods --- the Victorian fields of the 1850s, the Northern Queensland Fields of the 1870s and the main gold rush of Western Australia in the 1890s.

However, it seems that only the international type bottles and collectables found in any quantity here are the likes of Warner's (Safe Cure) four cities, Holloways, Dr. Townsend's and some American pot lids. Some of the bottle digging that took place at these huge mining towns were on dumps that were thirty feet high, spreading over several acres in the case of Kalgoorlie and Boulder city.

Coolgardie just twenty miles away had a tip about ten feet high over several acres and this now ghost town once held an international mining exposition in 1905. Unfortunately, these huge tips have gotten in the way of huge modern mining super pits that leave open cuts up to a mile deep or alternatively have been rehabilitated to minimize dust blowing over these

re-born townships.

Because of the mining boom in Western Australia in recent years, and before the current 2009 recession our state population doubled to two million people and precast, stand-up town houses became very popular.

For the serious bottle digger, this was terrible because no longer were blocks vacant that had once supported old buildings and their backyard dumps. No sooner had the old structure been torn down than a portable fence was placed around the site while the stand-up was constructed.

Old school sites and sports grounds were traditionally build on rubbish dumps from the 1880s, as this was government ground. As smaller schools were closed for larger schools, these areas were quickly built over, allowing the bottle collector a very limited window of opportunity to have a dig.

Some huge rubbish sites that were in use between 1880 and 1920 were deemed unsafe for the new urban expansion between 2000 and now, so huge excavators and trucking fleets cart these contaminated tips away to an enclosed site for deep burial, much to the dismay and frustration of the

genuine diggers.

But for all the sadness this causes the bottle collector there are still digs to be had, although not as productive as the period between 1970-1990.

Gold mining and timber towns that are long abandoned, rail lines to long forgotten camp sites, old coastal ports and even telegraph lines servicing all the above are well worth a fossick (search). For example, the telegraph line that runs across the Nullarbor plains linking Western Australia with the rest of Australia had water tanks every ten miles for a camp site for the linemen and we recovered many good bottles from these, of which quite a lot had turned purple in the desert sun.

It was along this treacherous coastline in the 1840s that the great explorer John Eyre was rescued by an American whaler after traversing from East to West and nearly dying of thirst and starvation.

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Coloured Australian Manufactured Glass