

“I Have Just One More Question...”
Contest Winner: 1st Place - Original True Story
by Johnnie Fletcher
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Friday - March 14, 2003

It was about 9:00 a.m. by the time I got my car loaded with my digging equipment and headed north on I.H. 35. I was going to Halstead, Kansas to meet up with fellow digger, Kenny Burbrink, for some bottle digging.

Kenny had gotten permission for a vacant lot in the nearby town of Burrton, where the Frisco railroad section house had once been located. All we had to do was find, and dig, the old privy.

We had visions of a big pit that was loaded with all types of bottles brought in on the railroad. I also was dreaming of finding an embossed Burrton drugstore bottle to add to my Kansas bottle collection. We had previously dug several pits in Burrton and they had all been full of bottles, but we hadn't found any druggist bottles from the small town. We believed that one could exist because Jim Hovious, from nearby Hutchinson, had found a damaged drugstore in Burrton. The embossing hadn't been complete, but it sure looked like it could be from Burrton.

I arrived in Halstead shortly after noon. Kenny took me on a tour of his recently completed bedroom remodeling project and then gave me a look at his bottle collection, along with the shelves (which he had built) on which they were displayed.

Kenny's Kansas bottle collection has really grown in a short time, and I could see that he would have to get busy making more shelves soon.

After loading Kenny's digging tools into my Blazer, we took off for Burrton.

After arrival there, we drove to the west edge of town. Kenny pointed out the vacant lot where the railroad section house had been located. Kenny had talked to some of the local residents and found out the approximate location of the building. He pointed to where he thought it had stood and then told me that a railroad station had been located across the street. We walked over to take a look.

The foundation and loading docks could still be seen at the railroad station. We walked around the outside of the foundation, and wondered if we were walking over an old railroad outhouse. Kenny

volunteered to do more research on when the station had been built and who owned the property to pursue further at a later date.

We then walked back to the vacant lot to start our search. The lot didn't have an alley in the rear, or any indication where the lot's lines might be located, so it was time for some luck!

The 1899 Sanborn map for Burrton showed the section house and the nearby railroad tracks. The tracks had been removed, but the old right-of-way could still be seen, so we estimated the distance and decided that the location, where the old building had stood, was where he had been told it was located.

We then walked back to where we figured the outhouses should be located. I stuck my probe in the ground in a shallow indentation, and it immediately went to the handle. I told Kenny, "The ground sure is soft here." However, a few more probes into the ground and I decided that I had found a pit!

Probing, we could feel some crunchiness and lots of glass, but water ran off the probe when it was pulled out. We had found a very wet pit!

Deciding that we would rather dig something a little dryer, we continued probing. We soon found a second pit and then a third! It was time to dig.

Putting on our coveralls, and collecting our digging tools, we started the last two pits we had found.

We probed out the four walls of each pit, laid out a tarp, and started digging.

These holes weren't as wet as the first, and we were glad for that. Digging a wet and messy hole isn't a good way to begin a digging adventure.

Kenny started digging the hole that would have been closer to the building, while I was digging a few feet away.

My hole started yielding bottles almost immediately. The only problem was that they were from the 1950s! Kenny, on the other hand, wasn't finding anything except for seeds, so he soon filled in his hole and started probing again. He quickly found two more pits!

I soon gave up on my pit, and we started digging the two he had just found.

My pit was located close to the original

(wet) one, and was six or seven feet deep, only two feet wide and five feet long.

Both pits contained lots of bottles, but neither one ever got old enough. Kenny was pulling out liquor bottles with *Federal Law Forbids...* embossed on them, indicating a date after the 1930s. My hole was producing green ginger ales from the 1930s and 40s, however, since it was fairly deep, I decided to take it to the bottom to see if it would get old enough.

I dug down, and after pulling a screwcap bottle from the bottom, I decided to give up. Kenny was also discouraged and decided to fill in his hole before he reached the bottom.

The property owners came by and were amazed that we had found so many holes already. They soon left after wishing us good luck. It was beginning to look like we needed some luck if we were going to find an old pit.

We were now left with the wet pit. There was nothing to do except start digging, in spite of the water.

After finding a few shards, we hit an old food bottle about two and a half feet down. It looked like we had finally found our old pit.

The digging down to the food bottle had been fairly dry, but below that, it started to get wet and water began to collect in the bottom of the hole.

It was very messy having to stand in the muck while shoveling out the mud, but it got worse when you crouched down to dig in the bottom. The cold water would eventually rise above the tops of the shoes, and then run down inside, while the mud made the shoes feel like lead weights! The only redeeming thing was - we were finding old bottles!

The hole was about five-feet square and about five-feet deep, containing bottles from the 1880s to the 1890s.

Kenny was taking a turn in the hole and handed out the broken pieces of a TIPPECANOE bitters bottle. While I was relating a story about a lady who had found two above her ceiling during a remodeling project, Kenny hands out a whole one!

It was embossed: TIPPECANOE down one side and H.H. WARNER & CO. down the other. Suddenly, in spite of the mud and water, we both got invigorated.

Kenny commented that the water level seemed to be going down. However, that quickly changed as he pulled a bottle out of the wall and we heard a gurgling sound. Kenny told me that more water had poured

out of the hole where he had pulled out the bottle.

Kenny was digging when I heard him yell, "I've got a bitters going!" After several minutes of careful digging, he held up an amber PRICKLY ASH BITTERS! He was excited until he turned it around to check for damage, and discovered the corner was broken out.

I relieved Kenny in the hole, and while digging along the north wall, hit a bottle. I could see it had the shape of a pint, coffin whiskey flask and was embossed! I held my breath as I worked it free from the grasp of the muddy soil. I immediately saw it was damaged and my day was totally ruined when I read the embossing: CHAS. RICHTER/KENTUCKY/LIQUOR/STORE/TRINIDAD/COLO.

We found other bottles, including the following: an AYER'S/CHERRY/PECTORIAL/LOWELL, MASS; an extract bottle embossed JETT & WOOD/WICHITA, KANS./THISTLE BRAND EXTRACT (one I hadn't seen before); a STANDARD/OH. CO.; a N.K. BROWN'S/AROMATIC ESSENCE/JAMAICA GINGER; two MRS. WINSLOW'S SOOTHING SYRUP; a cone ink; a WICHERT food bottle and a DR. McLEAN'S/STRENGTHENING/CORDIAL/&/BLOOD PURIFIER. There were also a number of blob beers, ale bottles and a crock jug missing its top.

It was dark by the time we finished digging and filing the hole.

We decided to return the next morning and continue searching for the 1900-1915 era pit that had gone unfound so far.

We left our muddy tarps and digging tools behind a tree, so we wouldn't make a big mess in the car, and headed back to Halstead.

Saturday - March 15, 2003

I arrived back at the digging site first and had probed out two more possible pits by the time that Gary, another Halstead digger, arrived. Kenny showed up a few minutes later.

While Kenny and I started a test hole into each of the two pits I'd found this morning, Gary redug the hole that Kenny had started digging the previous day, and given up before reaching the bottom. We just wanted to be sure that the last couple of feet didn't suddenly turn older.

Kenny soon gave up on his pit, as he had found nothing. He just picked up his probe and continued looking for the

missing 1900 era pit.

My pit was also empty, not even a shard of glass, but I kept digging in the hopes of finding something down deeper.

Kenny suddenly let out a yell that he had found a pit with glass! I walked over and we attempted to determine how big it was. Using our probes, we determined that the pit was about ten-feet long, six-feet wide, approximately five-feet deep, and was another wet one!

Kenny and I quickly filled the hole I had been digging and spread our tarps by the big hole Kenny had just found, and started two holes: Kenny digging at the north end of the pit, while I dug in the middle.

Gary soon gave up on the pit he had been redigging, as all he'd found was several liquor bottles with the *Federal Law Forbids...* embossing. Definitely, not the age we were looking for. Gary then joined us, and started digging a hole in the south end.

While we were digging, the property owners came by to see how we were doing. We showed them our finds from the previous evening. Kenny gave them the STANDARD OIL COMPANY bottle, as the couple were in the oil business. We also gave them a MRS. WINSLOW'S SOOTHING SYRUP and as they left, they wished us luck - no doubt wondering why anyone would spend their weekend digging in a water-logged hole.

We also had one of the locals stop by to see how we were doing. After awhile, he left to go home and paint his bathroom.

We quickly ran into water, which made shoveling very difficult. However, we found bottles that were from our missing time frame of 1900 to 1915. Some of which floated to the surface after being dislodged from the clay. There was a WAKEFIELD'S BLACKBERRY BALSAM; a FALSTAFF/LEMP-ST. LOUIS beer bottle; a WHITTEMORE show polish, two round inks, a DR. KINGS NEW DISCOVERY; a SEELEY'S from Abilene, a crock jar, a cobalt bottle, a CHAMBERLAIN'S COUGH REMEDY; a YALE MUSTARD, a paste bottle, a half-gallon BALL fruit jar and a BALL MASON fruit jar.

We attempted to bail out some of the water, but the pit was just too big to make much headway. We finally decided it would be best to dig this pit during the dry season, and not fight the water and mud the rest of the afternoon.

Deciding it was time to find another lot to dig, we filled the wet pit. After gathering up our tools, tarps, etc., we divided up our finds. Gary couldn't stay for the afternoon dig, so after saying goodbye, Kenny and I headed to a local convenience store to get something to eat.

We then drove around town looking for another spot to dig. Burrton isn't a big town, so it didn't take long to cover it. There was a basketball tournament going on somewhere out of town, so many of the locals were gone to attend the games. That limited our choices of places, as many people were not home.

We eventually ended up in front of an old two story house on Main Street. According to the Sanborn map, there had been a couple small houses located on the lots before that house was built. The house was now in the process of being remodeled and Kenny went up to see if we could get permission to probe the backyard.

He soon came back with permission and we grabbed our probes and headed for the backyard. It didn't take Kenny long to locate two pits in the center of the large lot. One was just off the alley, while the other one was set in a few feet. Now, if they were just old enough.

We moved our vehicles from the street and parked in the alley. Spreading out our tarps, we started to dig the pit in from the alley.

The pit was fairly large, four-feet wide, five-feet long and seven-feet deep. We figured it was too large for the two small dwellings shown on our map, and probably were for the larger two story house that now stood.

We figured if Burrton did have an embossed drugstore bottle, that it would probably date around 1910 to 1915. We were hoping that this pit would date back at least to that era.

The first bottles were machine-made corks from the 1920s and 30s. While they might not have been old enough, there were lots of them.

While we were digging, a girl of about nine or ten came over from next door and started asking lots of questions. We were both very relieved when someone yelled at her, and she disappeared. However, she didn't stay gone for very long. She soon returned with her sister. Now we had double the amount of questions being asked. I was in the hole digging, while Kenny was topside attempting to answer the numerous questions. He kept looking

down at me and asking, "Are you ready to be relieved?" I merely smiled and told him, "No, not yet!"

One of the little girls said, "I have just one more question." However, after Kenny answered that question, she kept asking more questions. Finally, the owner of the property came and ran them off. She told us that she had a lot of trouble with neighborhood children, and didn't want them around.

The owner said that the house had been built in 1909, and had been used as a doctor's office and a boarding house.

We found lots of glass syringes and a doctor's instrument tray, indicating that maybe a doctor's office had been located there.

We were finding lots of embossed bottles, but they were mostly ABM (automatic bottle machine) from the 1920s, and not the old hand-blown ones we were seeking.

We found the following embossed bottles: (8) LISTERINE; a DR PRICES

DELICIOUS FLAVORING EXTRACTS; (2) WATKINS; a PINEX; an ARBUCKLE BROS./CHICAGO extract; (2) DR. W.B. CALDWELL'S; (2) BAKER'S SEWING MACHINE OIL; a DR. BELL'S/PINE-TAR-HONEY/FOR COUGHS AND COLDS; (4) RAWLEIGHS; a THE RELIABLE/OLD-TIME PREPARATION/FOR HOME USE PREPARED BY/DR. PETER FAHRNEY & SONS; a FURST-McNESS CO.; a THREE IN ONE oil bottle; a LAVORIS; a WYETH; a PASTEURINE/JNO. T. MILLIKEN & CO; a THE NAME/ST. JOSEPH'S/ASSURES PURITY; a FORNI'S/MAGEN-STAECKER; (6) cobalt poison bottles, a blue MILK OF MAGNESIA; and (6) blue BROMO SELTZERS.

It was getting dark, so I suggested to Kenny that he sink a test hole in the other pit to see if it was old enough. I continued digging the first hole in an attempt to reach the bottom.

Kenny encountered lots of rocks, but not many bottles. His hole was a little older

and was possibly the time frame we needed, but all the drugstore bottles found were unembossed. He did get a ROYAL PURPLE grape juice and a LARKING CO for his trouble.

I dug down to about the six foot level and ran into a clay plug layer. Since there was only a foot to go to the bottom, I figured that if it was going to get any older, it would have to be now. I broke through the plug and immediately found a bottle. Pulling it out, I discovered I had found an amber ABM, LYSOL bottle. Time to fill in the hole.

Kenny also decided to give up on his pit, so we filled both pits by the aid of a flashlight, since the sun had gone down.

There had been almost two hundred bottles in the pits we had dug. Too bad they weren't old enough. However, we had a good time digging the pits of Barrton, and look forward to the next time. Maybe we'll finally find that embossed Burrton drug store.

Mohawk Valley Antique Bottle Club

Elmer Lester Award for Most Active Club

by Howard Dean

The Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors hopes to spotlight one of our member clubs every quarter, starting with this issue of *Bottles and Extras*. It seems fitting to start this series with the 2003 recipient of the Elmer Lester Award for Most Active Club, an honor bestowed upon the Mohawk Valley Antique Bottle Club.



Howard Dean was presented with the award at the banquet held in conjunction with the Federation-sponsored National Show in Louisville in June. He has graciously commented upon the Elmer Lester award for us and provided a brief synopsis of the Mohawk Valley Antique Bottle Club and photographs of club

activities.

"First, let us establish who Elmer Lester was and what this award is all about. Elmer was an early bottle collector from Sacramento, California, and the first chairman (1969-70) of the Federation of Historical Bottle Clubs (later becoming the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors.) The Federation of Historical Bottle Clubs resulted from a 1968 meeting of representatives from various bottle clubs throughout the country.

"Since that first meeting in 1968, the Federation has been active in promoting numerous projects and programs. Their awards programs include a Newsletter Award, Show Poster Award, Writer's Contests and an award named after the first Federation Chairman which is granted to the club which most typifies Federation standards.

"A self-evaluation process by the club, the Elmer Lester application is a checklist of the events each month with points awarded for each event and the total points at the conclusion of the year being the Club's rating. There are points for speakers, displays, and all the other activities clubs are involved in.

It's really easy if one keeps up on these things. Fill out the form and send it in. The reward to you is the happy faces of the club members when this prestigious award is presented!

"Now, let me tell you about the Mohawk Valley Antique Bottle Club and explain some of the reasons that this club has received this award five or six times in a row!

"This club really began in the old Utica Dump, when a few local diggers sat around the hole and discussed starting a local bottle club. Up to then, the nearest one was the Empire State Bottle Collectors Association in Syracuse, N.Y., 60 miles away.

