

Koch's 1892 map shows the CP&B's route in today's Maddox Park area. MARTA's Bankhead station is now at this location. - Courtesy *Streetcars in Georgia*

# Maddox Park:

## Diggers' Delight Down in Dixie

By Bill Baab

I had been collecting antique bottles for less than three years when I heard about the diggings in Atlanta's Maddox Park in the early 1970s.

Actually, Augusta collector friends Lonnie and Hilda Mitchell first heard about it and invited my wife, Bea, and I to ride with them to the park one Sunday morning. After we arrived at the 51.5-acre park off the Bankhead Highway, we were told (1) there was a small fee and (2) we had to join the Southeastern Bottle Club in Atlanta.

No problem.

When we saw the bottles and jugs that were coming out of that dump, we didn't hesitate and spent a number of enjoyable Sundays among the other "gophers" burrowing into the earth.

The park was listed in the "City of Atlanta Expenditures" for 1889 that indicated the land three miles west of Atlanta between the old Mayson and Turners Ferry roads was to be used as a landfill. Veteran Georgia bottle collector Bob Basford was doing research on old Atlanta dumps and found out about it.

"Then we got permission for the club to dig it on weekends," Basford said. "It was about 1971 that John Joiner and I dug a test pit at the dump, a landfill that ran down a hill. He found an At-

lanta Hutchinson and the dig started. The depth of the slope was never reached. The fill consisted mostly of cinders from fireplaces and furnaces and the bottles and jugs would run thick and thin. You could reach the bottom where the landfill leveled off onto a terrace."

The park, about 1.5 miles west of Georgia Tech, first opened to the public in 1931. It was named in honor of Robert Maddox (1870-1965), Atlanta's 41st mayor (1909-1911).

In addition to Basford's recollections, there were a number of other stories about how the landfill was discovered. Take your pick:

The dump was reported to have been discovered by unnamed metal detectorists who found a Civil War-era bayonet in the bed of Proctor Creek, which flowed adjacent to the park, according to Basford. "They noticed a lot of antique glass in the hillside and got in touch with Bobby Hinely, a Newnan, Georgia collector, who contacted his friend, John Joiner, who lived in the same city," Basford recalled.

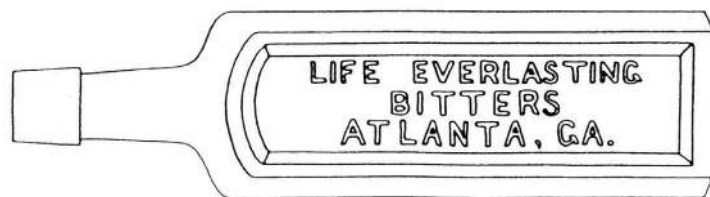
Another version comes from Ed Gray, of Marietta, Ga.: "A friend of mine (Jimmy Albech), who was employed by the telephone company, was working on a routing station located behind the park. He saw a bunch of broken glass and called me. So I joined him to check it out. Then I phoned the Fulton County commissioner of parks and he gave me permission over the phone for our bottle club to dig. I had to promise that we'd get a bulldozer and clean up the park after our dig ended.



A CP&B streetcar passes through a wooded stream corridor near Maddox Park. (From: *Street Railway Journal*, March 1894, p. 188.)

"We had one controversial incident when a reporter from *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* came to the park. We charged everyone a fee to help pay for the bulldozer and we asked her to pay. She thought we were charging a fee for digging on city property and wrote a story about it. Of course, she was mistaken, but it caused a bit of trouble."

Gray was president of the Southeastern Bottle Club at the time and dug at the park just a few times. Mostly Hutchinson bottles were being dug there and Gray had a better place to dig: the Union



Drawing of the extremely rare LIFE EVERLASTING BITTERS from Atlanta, Georgia. -  
Courtesy Bitters Bottles.

Army's Fort Mitchel dump in the marshes on Hilton Head Island where iron pontiled sodas and other Civil War era bottles were being found. It was one of four forts on the island during that war.

Joiner succeeded Gray as president of the bottle club at the time and he and his wife joined Hinely and his wife on an exploratory dig at the park.

"We wanted to be sure it was worth getting Hop Kidd (the late attorney Hopkins Kidd) to apply for a one-year permit (from the Atlanta Parks Department) for the club to dig," Joiner recalled. "You could see some bottles in the dirt when we got there. We filled several buckets with bottles in just a few hours of digging.

"We dug as a club for one year with truckloads of bottles and pottery jugs coming out of the ground. The club's contract (with the city) was about to end at about the same time our club was hosting its annual bottle show at Callanwode, home of Asa G. Candler, who had established the Coca-Cola Company.

"The club did not renew the contract, but some other individuals did get another contract and bottles were dug there for several more years. I dug my first Crawford County pottery jug that first day. We dug Hutches, inks, common medicines and miscellaneous items."

The really best times came after the club rented a backhoe/front end loader. The backhoe dug through a few feet of fill to reach the trash layers and the front end loader refilled the holes after each dig was over, saving all of us backbreaking work.

Suffice to say that all those mentioned were among the earliest to enjoy their digs in the park.

Some really incredible bottles, Crawford County, Georgia jugs (most signed by the potters' initials on their handles) and salt-glazed jugs were found.

"One of the first Wilson & Company whiskeys from Atlanta – a rare one – joined a pair of 1867 John Ryans, one with a chipped lip, and a likewise rare amber Jones & Company Atlanta beer (later purchased by Newton Crouch, a Griffin, Georgia collector)," Basford remembered. The Ryans were joined by perhaps six more, which carried an 1867 date, were probably late throws since the bulk of the dump dated 1890-1900, generally known as the Hutchinson bottle era.

Crouch said he'd dug at the park just once "and didn't have much

luck. My luck came later when I was able to buy some really nice bottles" others had dug in the park.

The Mitchells and I dug many Jacobs Pharmacy drug store bottles, including an amber skull and crossbones poison and a cobalt "generic" eagle sitting on the rim of a mortar (pestle absent) drug store bottle. At least a dozen Hutchinson sodas from as many Atlanta bottlers joined at least one (perhaps more unreported) Fischer's N.E. Cough Bitters, a small, rectangular aquamarine bottle. At least one (perhaps more unreported) Life Everlasting Bitters from Atlanta surfaced.

I remember seeing a few Congress Waters from Saratoga Springs, N.Y., as well as a cobalt Hutchinson from Detroit. Inks, common medicines and miscellaneous items also were dug.

Veteran Georgia collector Tom Hicks, of Eatonton, Ga., also dug Maddox after learning about the park by accident. He and Gray were attending the 1972 Georgia-Carolina Empty Bottle Club Show and Sale at Julian Smith Casino in Augusta. Hicks accidentally heard Gray tell another man, "They're digging a lot of stuff, but it's mostly Hutchinsons."

Hicks said he wasn't intentionally listening in. "I was just passing by and heard Ed's conversation. I filed that bit of information in the back of my mind because back then, I valued Hutchinsons very highly," said Hicks, then employed as a game biologist with the Georgia Game and Fish Department.. But he didn't go to the park at that time.

"The week after the Augusta show, the department was holding a regional meeting and I rode with (fellow game biologist) Dan Marshall and (wildlife ranger) Drew Whitaker. We headed out to the meeting in Drew's car and our topic was bottle collecting. I said, 'I heard about this place,' and told them all about Maddox Park.' A month goes by and I hadn't gone and then we had another regional meeting and again I rode with Dan and Drew. I asked, 'Y'all go to Maddox Park?' Drew said he'd gone a few times and was digging lots of bottles.

"Nut head!" I said, meaning myself.

"Well, off I went and there must have been 100 people digging, from creaky little old ladies in huge straw hats to tiny children with little toy shovels," he said. "The whole thing appeared to have been dug, but in reality, it was dug only a few inches deep as bottles could be found from the surface down.

"So, they thought, there was no need to dig deep, but you had to probe to learn how deep others had dug so as not to be digging





Among varieties dug in the park were (from left) Ross/Belfast round-bottomed ginger ale, J.J. Sprenger and Southern Bottling Works Hutchinsons and R.P. Culley Co./Belfast round-bottomed ginger ale. (Mike Newman photo)

an eight-footer that had already been dug. I looked around, saw nobody I knew, looked into a deep hole and was greeted with the friendly, smiling face of Dave Swetmon, from whom I learned that you had to be a club member to dig. He could handle that since he was the club treasurer.

“He had just dug a master pottery ink debossed Levinson’s Ink / St. Louis and he said it was the 21st different one he had dug, or something like that.

“Then I tried to dig and quickly learned why you needed to probe as I got into a few already dug deep ones. (At the end of each dig, all holes had to be filled). I do not remember what I dug that day, but I am sure there were a few Southern Bottling Works, Atlanta Consolidated and Standard Bottling Works Hutches. Many thousands were dug there long with thousands of other Hutches and a few blob top sodas and beers.

“The digging persisted for more than 20 years and I am sure as many as a half-million bottles and jugs must have been dug there. I dug there only a few times as it was a 160-mile round trip (from his Eatonton home) and the drive back seemed much longer due to dirt, fatigue and no one to talk to.

“One day, the ground was frozen several inches deep, becoming safe to tunnel when you finally got to where you could. I remember digging a few jugs that day. Another time, the weather was very cold and the city had bulldozed a huge hole down to a layer of decomposing hay from the stables. Lots of air was condensing as the warm air rose and collided with the cold air.

“Suddenly, an apparition with a bald head appeared in the mist. It

was a digger we all knew – Drew Whitaker – who dug many bottles from Maddox. I had told him about the dump, but he had someone to dig with and I did not.”

Whitaker, now deceased, was the chief wildlife ranger with the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Law Enforcement Division. He maintained a home in Dearing, Ga., but worked out of the Atlanta office. Later, he joined this writer and his wife as a dear friend and digging buddy. Hicks remembers some of the better bottles coming out of that dump as including a rare amber Atlanta City Brewing Company, and an olive-amber John Ryan Ginger Ale, Savannah, another late throw.

“There were no crown tops, no straight-sided Cokes,” Hicks recalled, but Joiner said a lot of the

latter were found close to the edge of the access road.

“There were plenty of Charles Binder sodas from Philadelphia, Pa. Their big block lettering made them hard to miss. What were all those Philadelphia sodas doing in an Atlanta dump?” Hicks asked. I told Tom it was because of all those Yankees coming South and staying. I speak with experience. I was born in Pennsylvania.

Dan Marshall dug the park only once, riding with Bea and I early one Sunday. He remembers digging some Jacobs Pharmacy and common bottles plus a salt-glazed jug. He still owns the jug. Other collectors who dug at the part included another state biologist – Jim Scharnagel, from Gainesville, Ga. Alas, his memories have faded with time.

Select examples from the Maddox Park dig. (John Joiner photo)

