

# SHARDS OF GLORY – Part III

(Plus some digging stories and criers)

by Jeff Mihalik

You dig, then dig some more;  
it will happen!

Rare yellow green anchor scroll flask





Ed Kuskie, after a full day's dig with barrels of bottles

I started writing this article just to focus on some great new shards that I have acquired digging this last year or so, but it morphed into shards and more. So here is how it goes.

Heck, it seems like I have been hammering all the lots that I have permission on, working hard to get new permissions, and digging with anyone crazy enough to spend a whole weekend hoping for a miracle.

Bottom line is that I have found and dug many rock, brick, and wood lined pits over the last couple months. I hesitated to write a

digging story as I was hoping to find at least 1 or more outstanding pieces of history to showcase. But as most diggers know, you're in this "sport" for the long run, and it can take much longer than you hope to discover great glass. That said, at least I have been finding a lot of bottles with ages ranging from 1930 to 1830! What a diverse range of finds!

I tried digging in several of the local older towns that dot the landscape here in Western Pennsylvania. Ed Kuskie came out on several of these digs and on several others, I dug solo. I had permission on the log home that was a hotel in the 1870 onward





This is the back of the hotel, that was once a log home. Can you guess which part is the log cabin part?

(as mentioned in my previous article) and several other lots that had houses show up on the 1876 map. Bottles were found, but mostly in the 1880 to 1900 range (which is no surprise as during that time frame privies were numerous and well fed).

I started to expand my digging range and went to some towns that were over a 1-hour drive for me. What I tell people is that I can

get permissions, find privies, but I can't put the bottles in the privy to dig. So once again, we ended up in an ancient old town many miles away, had several good permissions, found the privies, and dug bottles, but nothing of much interest, except an 1890 Arkansas Hot Springs Pharmacy!! What the heck was that doing up here??

I went back to digging in some local cities and larger towns since there are more ancient privies still buried and waiting to be found. We hit a couple very old privies (circa 1830) but in most cases, this age produces mainly broken pottery and bottle shards. Good thing is that I asked Luke Yoas (of the Pittsburgh Extreme Digging Crew) to come out with me. His sidekick Kim Burrows (which is actually his relative- cousin so he says) also came out to help out. We tested out a pit I previously attempted to dig,

but it was filled with water at the 3 foot level and took the whole 7 foot probe (we knew that it would be too much for us to tackle at this time being a 6x6x10 pit and nowhere to put all that water!!). We did find an adjacent pit that turned out to be circa 1830's and started to find shards of ancient glass. Shown is a cup plate shard showing a steamer passing by a bridge (which is most likely a commem-

Steamship under bridge, an early cup plate shard







Fairview Glass Works flask shard, a fantastic bottle to dig

*Then wham, bam, thank you, ma'am, we uncover a large green looking bottle with a funky top.*



Jeff Mihalik, the author, holding a freshly dug Vaughns Vegetable Lithontripic Mixture in emerald green.

orative of the Steubenville Bridge given the location of where the shard was found). Unfortunately, that may have been the best piece of glass from this pit.

Not sure how we do it, but I never get discouraged and neither did Luke. We regrouped and went at it again the next weekend. The owner of this property told us he is planning on covering up the whole backyard with fill to put in a parking space, so have at it. I actually dug this lot with Thaddeus, my usual partner, some months ago in the winter, but never really spent a lot of time on this property. Luke quickly probed out a likely spot. I started to dig a test pit down some 3 feet or so. After probing, it didn't seem to be a privy but I felt a rock lined wall to one side of the test pit. We opened up another test pit on the other side of this wall, and

wham.. we were in a privy. In the first shovel full, Luke spotted a bottle which turned out to be a Peppermint Essence open pontil. Hmm...so was this privy dug and they missed that bottle? We kept going and at the 5-foot level found a Borhaves Holland Bitter from Pittsburgh (complete) along the wall. Ok, so things are looking good now as that is a great age for finding great glass and maybe the pit wasn't dug. Well, we didn't find any other glass for several feet. When we got down to the 7-foot level, I uncovered a lime layer that went across the whole bottom of the pit (so no way anyone dug this). Under the lime, we started to find ancient shards of ale bottles (forest green) and crazy wormy mocha and redware chamber pot shards. But no whole bottles. We were very disappointed but figured we best take down the side walls. I was just about to call it quits when a bottle finally appeared. I could





Gorgeous find, but badly cracked emerald green, open pontil Vaughns Vegetable Lithontripic Mixture.

tell it was a scroll flask, as I slowly pulled it out of the wall.. but then saw that one side had a blowout. Shoot! But it was an Anchor Flask similar to the deep green one we dug a couple years ago but this one looked like a plain aqua flask. After we got it out and cleaned it up some, it did have a greenish look. Back home I started to wash it up. It turned out to be yellow green! What a great piece of glass and so close to getting a nice complete example of this super scare bottle.

During the next week, I was able to secure another excellent permission at a historical mansion. Luke was in to dig again and came down to my place the following Saturday. As we headed out, we talked about how its been really fun digging old pits, but also how difficult it is to get good bottles out of those ancient pits. We were hoping to find some “newer” privies, like ones from the civil war era (never thought I would actually be wishing for newer pits!). I already had 2 pits probed out so when we arrived at the site, we got right at it. It was raining and forecasted to rain for several hours, so we quickly set up the digging tent and started to dig into pit 1. The rain stopped after about 15 minutes (and never did rain again) but the humidity really went up! Long story short, the first whole bottle was an open pontil Lyons hair bottle (we found 3 more) but all the really good early local pontil meds were broken. Having dug about 2/3 of the pit, we were still hopeful something more would be found. Then wham bam thank you mam, we uncover a large green looking bottle with a funky top. It turns out to be an ancient pontil Vaughns Vegetable Lithontripic Mixture in emerald green!!! Behind that we find a J. Ogden porter top. The last bottle (shard) out of the hole is about 1/3 or a tad more of a Fairview Glass Works ribbed flask (long hair variant).

I'll spare you all the details of pit 2, but it was also pontil and once again, most all the good bottles were broken by the many bricks and stones that were thrown down into the pit. We did get a green Dyottville Glass Works soda, several puffs and other unembossed bottles, as all the embossed pontil meds were broken once again. So two pits, both 1830 – 1840 era. Where are the newer pits!!

I think it was Willie Nelson that said, “At 2 I went home with a 10, at 10 I woke up with a 2”. Well, Luke and I were really pumped up about digging the Vaughns, thinking finally we dug a great piece of glass (and whole!!).. but as it turns out, at 7 I went home with a 10, and by 8 I cleaned up a 2 (badly cracked emerald green, pontil Vaughns).. just shows how really difficult and often once-in-a-lifetime it is to find intact great glass.

On one hand, it was a downer that the flask(s) and medicine were damaged, but on the other hand, it was great to be digging such early pits, spend time with a digging friend, and have the opportunity/potential to find such great bottles!

You dig then dig some more; it will happen! I will never give up hope or my enthusiasm for digging!

