

Jimmy the Pup and I Go Digging

By Mark C Wiseman

Jimmy the pup at the test hole.

Sunday August 19th, 2018

Jimmy the pup and I loaded up in the old blue truck and headed north to look for a place to dig. I had heard about an apartment house in Ames that would be torn down soon. So I thought I'd give Ames a try. I probed the back yard of the apartment house thoroughly without finding anything to dig. I had some maps for Ames and drove some alleys, stopped and obtained some permissions and did some more probing, again without finding anything to dig. It was time to move on, so I drove west to Boone and decided to retrace some previous digging locations. The first place I stopped was on a lot Reggie and Jim Menzel and I had dug several holes a couple years ago. At that time the house although empty was present on the large lot south of a rail line. The previous house was now gone, which surprised me, and based on some utility work along the south street side of the lot, the lot was for sale and likely soon to be developed with a new house put on it. I parked on the grass off the alley on the west, and began to probe along the east rear portion of the lot. We had not dug on this side of the yard previously, but it was a big lot and it seemed reasonable a pit could be on this side, and there was one. I hit glass with the probe. I noticed the neighbor to the northeast across the tracks was coming over as I was figuring out the boundaries of the pit.

He remembered me and told me he thought the lot had changed hands, and that it was for sale which I had seen the sign. The neighbor told me it would likely be ok, he knew the owner and had seen how we had returned the grass previously to its original condition. He



The large stoneware flower pot.

stuck around as I spread out a tarp for a test hole.

There had been a newer pit on the other side and I wondered about the age of this pit. I started a small test hole about two feet square cutting out the sod and setting it aside. Jimmy was probed down nearby to watch, the weather was reasonably cool it had sprinkled earlier and it was cool day for August. In the top of the hole was a big earthenware or unglazed piece which I worked on with the trowel for quite a while before I came out. It was a huge flower pot, and there were other shards of it, and glass and ironstone shards. .



Jimmy looks down the small test hole.

I put the whole portion in the truck, spread out another tarp and looked for shards digging with a bucket and a trowel. Below I found a brown glaze jug. I cut out some more sod and soon began to find whole slick bottles, and lots of broken stoneware shards

and broken dishes. I found an amber pint fruit jar, nicely whittled "Trade Mark, Lightening" no lid, but I put it away in the front seat of the truck. This was followed by a half gallon aqua jar "Whittall's Patent, June 18th 1861, Millville Atmospheric Fruit Jar", which I stopped and took a picture of in the grass.

The pit was five feet long, 5½ feet deep, and 3 feet wide, and



Whittall's Patent, June 18th 1861, Millville Atmospheric Fruit Jar

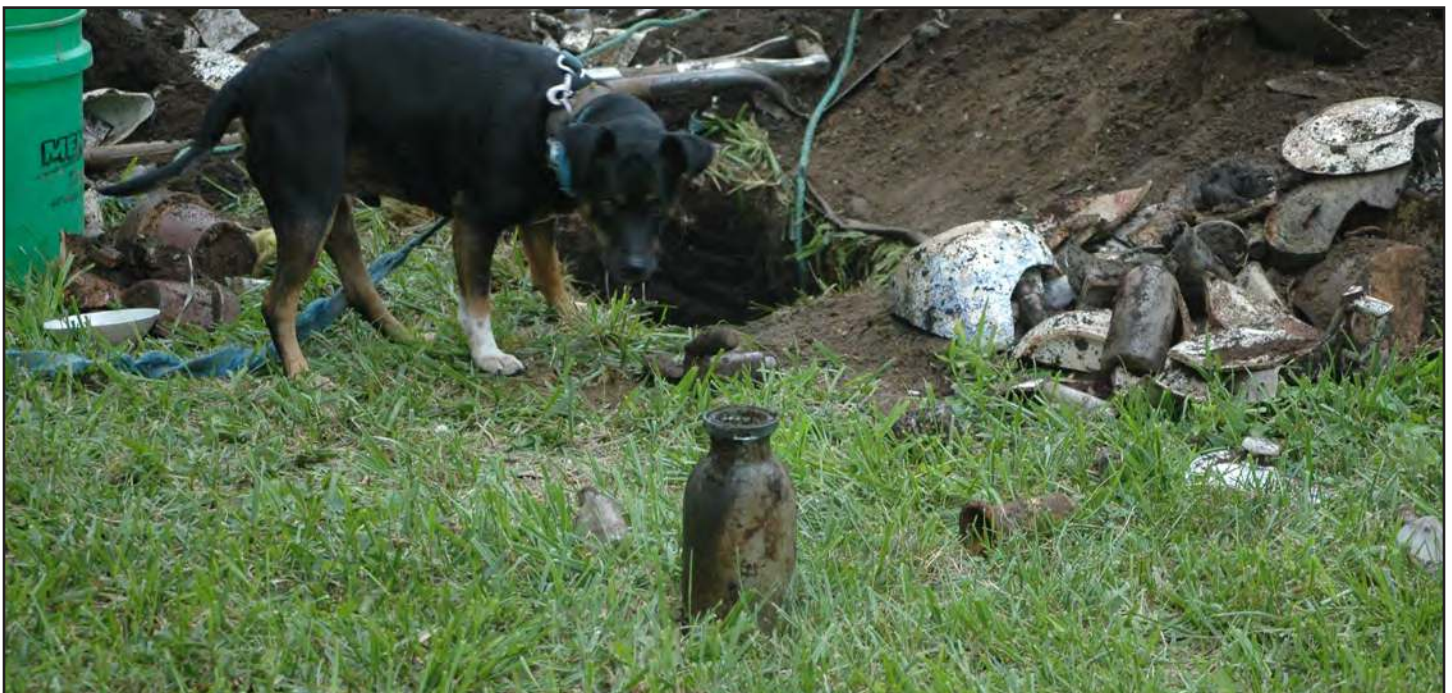
there was no visible lining on the brown clay sidewalls. As I dug deeper I dug a large clear drug store bottle embossed "De Tar & Son, Druggists, Boone, Iowa", and later a drug store bottle embossed "J.W. McMecham, Druggist, Boone, Iowa".

There were other bottles deeper in the pit, a "Hoods Sar-Sa-Parilla, Apothecaries, C.I. Hood & Co., Lowell, Mass.", a nice "Warner's Safe Kidney & Liver Cure, Rochester, N.Y." with a double collar lip, a whole and a broken "Mrs. Winslow's Sooth-

ing Syrup, Curtis & Perkins, Proprietors", a "Dr. Thompson's Eye Water, New London, Conn't", and a smaller aqua master ink with a pour spout embossed "Stafford's Ink". There were two "Dr. Pitcher's Castoria" bottles, two "Gillets Double Flavoring Extracts, (shield), Gillet McCollough & Co., Chicago", a broken Gillets bottle had the owl on it, three whole round aqua English type pickle bottles and some broken ones, many slick drug store bottles including large ones, broken large aqua square pickle bottles, a blond doll head, a whole green pressed glass saucer or small plate, a bird cage waterer, a spoon, a white marble, a large clear oil lamp, most of a white glass spittoon with blue flowers and gold paint around the rim., a caster bottle, two ironstone shaving mugs, and a whole iron stone saucer.

I saved a number of interesting stoneware shards including broken flower pot piece with grape leaves around the rim. Another nearly whole stoneware flower pot had been previously painted green which was now coming off.

I saved some broken items some fancy blue and white dish shards, and stoneware shards that were interesting. I had been looking for the large flower pot shards as I dug. After finishing the corners I began to fill back in. There were quite a few soft bricks to return to the hole, many broken fancy dishes, tureens, plates, bowls, some broken tea leaf pattern bowl pieces, a broken ironstone chamber pots, shattered fancy pitchers including an amber glass one. There was a broken Bennington spittoon, minus the top, a very rusty iron base for a lamp, pieces of a broken yellow ware bowl, pieces of a broken Bennington bowl, broken clear glass dishes in fancy patterns, catsup bottles, a broken half gallon Millville jar, a fancy small pitcher with a broken top, some corroded clock parts, and iron pieces of a pitch fork and a rake. A slick amber chemical bottle was returned to the hole with some foul smelling liquid still in it. I tamped the sod back and raked up carefully and the location of the pit was nearly invisible again. I thought maybe there was another pit close by and had left a message on the For Sale sign phone number answering machine.



Jimmy watching over the finds



It was time for Jimmy and I to return to Des Moines, I laid out my finds in the garage for a list and more photographs.





I glued together the large flower pot (with wood glue) I had dug the last weekend. It was likely made in Boone by Maxon Griffiee.

(I received a call back later it was ok to try more digging, but the other pits did not appear). It was time for Jimmy and I to return to Des Moines, I laid out my finds in the garage for a list and more photographs.

Sunday September 9th , 2018

The weather had begun to cool off and it had began to feel like fall! In the late morning Jimmy and I drove up to Boonesboro (and Boone) in the old blue truck. After probing the vacant lot some more with my new owners permission, I decided there really was not another pit close by as I had hoped. Jimmy and I drove back over to Boonesboro and stopped at the location of the former Block 3 Pottery, which was the location of the Griffiee Bros. There was a lady outside in the yard and I stopped and obtained permission to probe in the hopes of finding shards from the old pottery. I found a pit next to the garage that probed like it had a lot of pottery shard type clunks in it, and showed this spot to the lady and her husband, who then gave me permission to dig. I spread out the tarps and cut out the sod to start a hole.



Jimmy the Pup waiting his turn to get in the pit.

The hole was a trash pit about four feet deep, with gray clay, and ash, about 3' X4', and had bottles from about 1915 with pottery shards, kiln furniture and spacers that were older. As I dug I put the pottery shards on the empty tarp and gave them a good look. A large cobalt decorated shard had a flower design, and I found a shard that would have said "Griffiee Brothers Pottery, Boonesboro" with a single circle of stars. All but one of the bottles I gave to the lady owner, there was a "Ball" jar, a round food bottle, a machine made "Wakefield's Blackberry Balsam", a round "Sanford" ink, a small "Foley & Co., Chicago" bottle, two cylinder whiskies, clear and amber whisky flasks, and I kept only a "Doct. Marshall's Catarrh Snuff" bottle. A crier was a broken Boone soda bottle embossed "Seely's". Beside's a rusted metal bucket, and rusted cans, there were the pottery shards and kiln furniture pieces. I saved most of them, and a couple of old spoons, then having covered all the corners of this irregular hole, I filled it back in, tamped the dirt flat then tamped the sod back in place.



Their were pottery shards, kiln furniture and spacers.. As I dug I put the pottery shards on the empty tarp and gave them a good look.



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When I got home I brought in the best shards and made a separate pile outside for the rougher pieces and kiln furniture, to let the rain wash them off in the future.

Wednesday September 12th, 2018



Jimmy the Pup watering the really neat heart shaped tree

At work we were doing some drilling at a very old farmstead in Dallas County, that would soon be bulldozed into land for future streets and houses. In the abandoned shed and on the ground outside we found some glass items. The best find was a half gallon picnic beer with a stopper. The bottle was embossed "Des Moines Brewing Co., Des Moines, Iowa". I also found a metal chicken watering attachment to screw on a fruit jar, two clear quart fruit jars, a "Drey Perfect Mason", and an "Atlas Strong Shoulder Mason", various early looking inside the car door handles, and a model "T" hub or grease cap, "Ford, Made in USA" in pretty good shape.

Sunday September 16th, 2018

The heat had returned and it was very humid also. Jimmy the Pup and I drove out to Don's farm near Madrid and Woodward where Reggie spends the winter, and stopped to talk to Don. I told him I was headed to Boonesboro and to try dig some more. He said he'd like to go along, and I asked him if he had a ladder. A Ladder? What is that for? He said. Well, I explained about the steep cliff at the Moingona dump and the cobalt shards I could see at the bottom along the river. The problem was getting back up if I managed to get down to the river level I explained. Don had an extension ladder and we put it in the back of the old blue truck and headed down the road. Don is a seed collector in the fall, he collects acorns and other seeds for

the State tree nursery, and wanted to go to Mc Hose Park and check on some trees. He told me there was an unusual heart shaped stump in the park. So we went there drove around checked on the trees and I took a picture of the heart tree and Jimmy.

We went to the house at the Block 3 pottery where I had permission to dig. It was so hot I decided to try a test hole along the south garage where there was some shade. I put out some tarps near the center on the north side of the garage and cut out a 1 foot



We found shards of pottery, wads, and kiln spacers, but a very limited amount of cobalt decorated shards.

by 2 foot piece of sod. The shards went down to a depth of two and a half feet. We found shards of pottery, wads, and kiln spacers, but a very limited amount of cobalt decorated shards. After filling this test hole and replacing the sod I tried another test hole in the sun, it had only bricks and it was just too hot to try again. After raking up we headed back to stop at Moingona on the way back. We parked at the normal location and I carried the ladder the long walk back into the woods to the river bank at the Moingona pottery dump. I could see the shards on the shoreline down below. The cliff bank has a lower ledge we climbed down to, Don lowered the ladder down to me on a rope, and then came down to hold the ladder as I clambered down to the river bank. I had brought a bucket on a rope and Don lowered the bucket down to me and I searched for shards on the river bank. I soon had filled a bucketful which he pulled up. The lower ledge looked much different from below. It looked like a wedge of soil glued onto the cliff face where all the other soil covered places had been eroded away during the flooding. There were some shards embedded in this wedge, but I was really afraid to dig at them much with the overhang present. I was pretty sure the next big flood should wash away this wedge also, it looked precarious now at best. Don held the ladder as I made my climb back up to the top, It was hard to get off the ladder there were roots to grab onto and I got back onto the lower ledge. The ladder came up with the rope we had tied on to it, and we climbed back up to the top, where Jimmy was

tied up worrying about us. (I ended up with a bad case of poison ivy from the river bank, later on in the week).. Back at the truck I got a picture of Don with the shards and the ladder.

After dropping off Don, Jimmy and I headed for home on this hot day, I washed off the shards and took some photos of the finds. The 2" tornado shard pretty well confirms this design on other pieces being from Moingona.



Shards of Pottery and a common Medicine



Don showing off a couple shards, while resting on the back of the truck

