

# The Diary of a Digger

By Mark Wiseman

*Sunday June 2nd, 2019*

In the early afternoon I went down to the construction site and did some more probing, and I was not finding my guessed at alley lines. They had been cutting out the area where I had dug previously, and more probing over this area did not reveal any new pits. To tell the truth, I could not tell exactly where I had previously dug, the dirt movers had covered and cut and it looked different, and the piles of trees were now gone. I walked out the north portion of the site and probed with no luck. I decided to wait a few days and see what the next phase of digging might open up. So, I headed for home, picked up Jimmy the Pup, and headed out to Don's farm west of Madrid, stopped and visited with Reggie and the big dog, Winston the great Dane, before driving on north up to Moingona. Jimmy loves to run through the woods when we go to the Moingona pottery dump. I dug in the flats on the north side, did not find much cobalt decorated stuff, just enough to keep me coming back in the future. Then it was time to head for home.

*Thursday June 7th, 2019*

After work about 6 pm I drove down to the construction site to take a look around. I put on my vest and hard hat, grabbed my probe, and through the gate I went. The area where I had dug had changed again a deeper excavation, which made a central ridge across the middle of the site. This ridge had been an asphalt covered drive on the north side of the south parking lot and had a border of trees along its north side. The trees were taking the hit now, only part of one was left standing, and the asphalt had all been removed. I probed a pit that I figured must have been on the west side of the alley if the previous two pits had been on the east side of the alley farther south. I went and got my shovels and tools and started a test hole. The temperature was not bad now, there was a breeze and nobody was around in any direction, I had the site to myself. This pit was five-foot-deep from the present surface and wet at the bot-



Here are some bottles that came out of the pits during this week of digging





Broken chamber pot and a couple of colored fruit jars

tom. The pit was wood lined and seedy in the bottom two feet. There was a big chunk of remnant asphalt, not intact but hard to deal with covering part of the pit. I found bottles and glass in the seedy layer, and a crown top soda above this layer in the fill. The soda bottle was embossed "American Bottling Works, Israly Bros. Props., Des Moines, IA, This Bottle Not to Be Sold", "I.B." on the base. There was another crown top bottle with a rounded bottom below this one embossed "J K & S, 2536" on a concave area on the rounded bottom. I dug a "Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription, R.V. Pierce M.D. Buffalo N.Y.", a broken "Dr. Pierce's Golden Medical Discovery", two "Tone Brother's, Flavoring Extracts, Des Moines, Iowa", one whole and one with a large hole "Hoods Sarsa, Parilla, C.I. Hood & Co. Lowell, Mass." "8" on the base, an amber "The Maltine Mfg. Co. Chemists, New York", many slick drug store bottles, a broken "Ball" jar, catsup, broken whiskey, broken dishes, pieces of a chamber pot, a larger square 8 oz. bottle embossed "BREED W.B. M. Co." on the base, a clear Cold Cream embossed on the base: "Dagget & Ramsdell's Perfect Cold Cream Trade Mark, Skin Food, Chemists" and another milk glass thing. It was getting too late and starting to get dark, so with about two thirds of the hole dug, I filled it back in, without finishing the part under the asphalt chunk. I put my dirt-covered finds on the table out front, and got cleaned up and prepared for work the next day.

#### *Friday June 8th, 2019*

After work on Friday afternoons I go to the State Historical Library till 4:30. Then I headed home, and at about 6 pm I headed back down to my hole at the construction site. Sure, enough the excavators had bumped the asphalt chunk out of my way and it was much easier to finish the last end of the pit, I had dug most of the evening before. I was digging the west one third of the remaining pit, and in the top portion I dug a hand finished crown top aqua pint beer bottle embossed "Old Style Lager, (sideways) G Heileman Brewing Co. La Crosse, Wis." in cursive lettering. I found an amber chemical bottle, more slick drug store bottles, another amber "The Maltine MFG. Co., Chemists, New York",

and a very nice large size aqua medicine "Dr. Kilmer's Swamp Root, Kidney Liver & Bladder Cure, Specific, Dr. Kilmer & Co., Binghamton, N.Y." So, I had finished the pit, and I filled it back in again and headed home.

#### *Saturday June 8th, 2019*

In the morning I had a gravel pit field trip to supervise and then the mineral club summer picnic, and on the way back went to the historical library, then probed on a vacant east side lot looking for a pit, and stopped at the construction site. I did some more probing, dug an empty test hole, before heading home. When I got home I scrubbed up the bottles I had recently dug for a better photograph.

#### *Tuesday June 11th, 2019*

After work about 6 pm I headed back down to the construction site. I observed the current excavation where I had dug the first two pits south of the berm area. Did some probing and dug a test hole just deep enough to confirm the previous location of the 2nd (blob beer) pit I had previously dug on the site. This confirmed to me the east alley line. So, from this location, I worked my way north and up onto the berm probing along the east alley line. At the crest of the berm I found a pit along the east alley line. I went to the truck for my shovels and digging tools and opened up a test hole to start at this spot. This pit was only three feet deep from the present surface. It was not rectangular almost oval and unlined, about 3½' X 4'. This pit #4 appeared to be older than the other pits I had dug in this site when pumpkin seed whiskey bottles began to appear. I could also tell for I soon had dug an embossed drug store bottle "Norman Lichty, Des Moines, IO",



A Hood Sarsapilla and a Dr. Kilmers Swamp Root Bottles





Hoard of bottles after the cleanup



Prof. Lows Magnetic Liniment from Philada.



Norman Lighty, Des Moines, IO, neat embossing



L.H. Bush Druggist, Des Moines Pharmacy bottle

followed by one embossed "L.H. Bush Druggist, Des Moines." I dug a white ironstone smaller sized gluer chamber pot, a gluer clear glass oval pressed glass dish, a doll plate with flower decorations, a large shard of a drug bottle embossed "C.W. Rogg, Apothecary, Des Moines (monogram)", and a large drug store bottle without the top embossed "A.H. Miles, Druggist, Des Moines, Ia." The previous owner liked his whiskey as I dug ten whole pumpkin seed whiskey bottles, and five coffin whiskey bottles, there were also broken ones. I found a triangular shaped bottle embossed "Martin's Best Sewing Machine Oil, Chicago Ill.", an aqua medicine "Prof. Low's Magnetic Liniment, Philada.", an amber double collar quart blob slick beer bottle with bumps on the base, four clear slick paneled medicine bottles, slick drug store bottles, and broken lamp chimneys. It was not a long hole so after scraping the corners and sides down, probing outward in every direction, it was time to fill in. No sod to worry about, no stomping and no raking. Construction site digging is easy on the cleanup. When you get done filling, it all looks the same again. It was still light enough to go home list and photograph my finds.

### *Wednesday June 12th, 2019*

I stopped by the site at my usual 6 pm, but the excavation contractor was still digging. I left and came back an hour later and the excavator was just getting ready to quit for the day. About 8 pm I went in and probed for awhile.

### *Thursday June 13th, 2019*

I arrived about 6:30 pm at the site and started along the east alley line on the berm. That is where I found Pit #5. This pit was only three feet deep, three feet long and less than three feet wide, wood lined. It had very square walls. In this pit I found an amber pint beer bottle without the top, embossed "A. Gettleman Brewing Co., Pure Malt Hops, (hand with a beer glass in a circle, three leaves), Milwaukee", base "S.B. & G. Co.", three slick whiskey





Gettlemans Brewery and a  
Heross Cross Mason Jar



Another group of bottles to clean up



Billings Clapp &  
Co.

bottles, a prescription type whiskey, two broken milk bottles, one would have been from a Chicago glass company, broken dishes, and a nice whole quart ground top aqua jar with the Hero cross, "Mason's Patent Nov. 30th, 1858" base "Pat Nov 26 67, 128". After filling this pit, I headed home.

#### *Friday June 14th, 2019*

As usual I went to the construction site at 6 pm and began to probe continuing north along the east alley line. I found Pit #6 in some hard-packed top dirt at the north end of the berm. It was time to go get the shovels again. This pit was a full six-foot-deep from the present surface, four feet by three feet in plan dimensions, no wood lining, also with very square sides. The top of the pit was all ash with cinders fill to 4½ foot depth, with little glass. I had moved a lot of volume to get it dug out that far, so I could not quit now. I found a medium sized dreaded bromo, in the mix, a large "Gordon's Gin, England", and the bottom was beginning to show some lime in the mix. I found a "Dr. Pitcher's Castoria", and along the bottom it was getting older. There were broken ground top fruit jars, I found two amber strap sided slick bottles, and on the bottom a clear drug store bottle embossed "Kirkwood House Pharmacy, J.A. Sandholm, Des Moines, Iowa" and that was the highlight of this pit. There were of course broken dishes, a few more slicks, a sharpening stone, a clear glass cylinder embossed Schuyler's New York, and a round clear "Sanford" Ink. Slowly I filled it all back in after scraping the bottom and sides. Then hauled my tools and finds back to the truck.

#### *Thursday June 20th, 2019*

At 6 pm I went to the construction site again but repeated probing did not reveal any more pits. I walked another construction site off Keo Way, it was pretty muddy with nothing showing to the probe, then I went over to the east side where a park was being created on a vacant lot. They had scraped down this former residential lot now flanked by apartments, but left uncut dirt



Kirkwood House Pharmacy, J.A. Sandholm, Des Moines, Iowa

where the grade stakes were. In one of the grade stake areas I found a broken "Dr. Pieces Favorite Prescription", so I went back to the truck for a spade and a trowel. There were many broken

iron stone dishes in green clay with some seeds, and I found a seam based whole bottle with a damaged lip embossed "Billings, Clapp & Co. Chemists, Boston", and an early slick square drug store bottle, more broken dishes and broken chimney lamps. There was no hole to fill I just piled the dirt back up where it had been.

#### *Saturday June 22nd, 2019*

After visiting the Historical Library, I dug a quick test hole along the alley of a now empty east side house, finding natural soils at four feet, and limited glass, it was fill not a pit, so I soon had it put back invisible. I returned through the bad neighborhoods and picked up two dozen "Iowa" bricks from some road construction piles.

#### *Monday June 24th, 2019*

I was at a drilling job at an old landfill in Boone, and found a nice brick "Boone B.R. & T. Co.". In the evening I went back to the road construction and found 23 more "Iowa" bricks in the piles.

#### *Thursday July 4th, 2019*

It was a day off in the middle of the week, I still had to work on Friday. But I went down town to a Jefferson Street and 2nd Avenue construction site. It was pretty much too hot, but I found a pit about three feet deep, with concrete sides. I dug it anyway. It did contain a penny doll, two cobalt screw top "Phillips Milk of Magnesia" bottles, and a couple amber crown top bottles with upside down graduations. At the park site on the east side I walked the scraped over dirt, and found a nice swirly marble with brown and white swirls.

Until next time, Happy Digging

