Hunting Hunt's Hon Hole 7here is a spooky old mansion

By Jack Klotz

Well, here I am, writing a story about digging before I even stick a shovel in the ground. I always start my videos before digging but starting to write the story before digging is a first for me.

There is a spooky old mansion in Hannibal, Missouri that was in poor condition when I first set eyes on it over ten years ago. In all that time while it sat vacant, it hasn't gotten any better. The yard and shrubbery had passed the unruly stage by 2012 and shot into jungle stage by the mid-teens. It stands somewhat isolated from the neighbors on either side by this "green belt" which also offers a wall of greenery along the back property line while hugging a deserted, overgrown dirt alley. I have probed and hunted this property at least a dozen times over the years, making Swiss cheese out of most of the accessible areas of the yard. Areas that were less "friendly" forced me to break out my 6-foot probe and radically angle probe.

I have a certain "moth to a flame" thing going on here with these big old antebellum period mansions. The imagination runs wild thinking of the possibilities of high-end, pontil-era bottles hidden deep within the bowels of the privy hole, pun intended. Equally enticing are thoughts of high-end 1860s glass. Then reality hits as hard as a probe smacking into cement a foot deep! "Damn these massive yards, and why were the rich always proud of covering everything in cement?" These are just a sampling of my print-worthy mumblings as I searched another year with the same results.

Nowadays, I merely drive by and dip my head in shame, knowing it has beaten me time after time! That is until now. I finally won! At least I think I've won! I'm excited if nothing else! However, we're into mid-November and though it's been unusually mild weather, the ground will be frozen soon enough.

My latest excitement started three days ago on November 12th. I happened to stop in at a friend's antique shop where I caught up with him finalizing a negotiation on a house he was trying to buy from a fellow at his counter. My timing couldn't





have been better as they both seemed happy with their agreement. My friend called his realtor and they had a short conference call to close within two weeks if not sooner. After the call, my friend was talking about the home being built in a style earlier than the noted construction date of 1858, which got my attention immediately. I know every pre-Civil War home standing in town, as well as the location of most other ones not standing.

This is where I butted in with, "so which house are you guys talking about?" It turned out to be the Hunt mansion that shamed me for all these years. I was happy for my friend but the memories of constant defeat held no excitement for me. I was in no big hurry to get my butt kicked again by that cruel yard! I'm sure I've missed hunting about one-third of the yard in all my visits, but who knows.

On my way out of town to head back home, I decided to stop to take a hike in the yard. I was pleasantly surprised to see a few trees and most of the overgrowth had been removed or cut back, exposing areas previously impossible to get a probe into the ground.

I returned the next day after asking my friend for permission to only probe since nothing had been signed or finalized and thus he was not yet the owner of the property. This entire half-block had originally belonged to the mansion with a large barn well off to the east side, which is now a part of a newer 1930s church property. Two homes currently take up original land west of the mansion, narrowing down the available search area, which was still a sizable amount of ground.

I had refreshed my memory the night before using the Sanborn map of 1885 as to the location of the barns. A second, smaller barn stood straight back from the house along the alley and a large shed next to that. In addition, a massive 2-story brick structure was on the map about ten feet from the back of the house, and between that and the barn stood another large single-story wooden shed. All the barns and sheds are long gone except for the large 2-story brick structure. The shed closest to the brick building disappears from all maps by 1890 which is usually a good indicator it might have been a privy. Problem is, it is much too big for a family-sized privy and, secondly, the maps usually are a good indicator where not to dig!

I have also spent two or three trips probing every square yard within ten feet of the large disappearing shed with zero evidence of any ground disturbance. I had probed out what had felt like a possible cistern on the far west side near the alley which was confirmed on this latest visit as the cement slab had been moved off of it, exposing the cavern. I tried probing some of the newlymade accessible areas and again was frustrated when I smacked into cement slabs! I had hoped for an old walkway but it turned out to be more in line with a patio. I slowly worked my way from the alley property line against my better judgment. The privies around these parts tend to be close to the barns and on rare occasions inside the barns. "If it stinks, keep it together," must have been their motto. I reluctantly stuck my 4-foot workhorse into the ground where the large disappearing shed had stood, only to have virgin clay staring back at me from the tip of the probe. Shaking my head in defeated disgust, I couldn't help from thinking again



the privy was in the neighboring yard.

As I paused to rest my 70-year-old probing muscles, I was also able to rest my negative mind. I kept thinking, "How far would I want to have to run...?" A common thought among many frustrated privy hunters. From house to the alley was a good but reasonable and common hike or sprint. But to run to the large barn area to the east was likely twice the distance. Staring at the massive 2-story brick servant's quarters reminded me of the brick outbuilding next to which I dug a fabulous privy just over a year ago. That one was a verified smokehouse; this one has been called a slave quarters. By 1858, with civil war on the horizon, I doubt they would build massive new slave quarters. Besides, I've seen 1920s stucco garages called slave quarters! Therefore, I'm going with servant's quarters for now since the Sanborn maps assign it no definition.

With a very slight boost of energy, I began probing against the east wall to about four feet away to the side. While probing this area I thought to myself, "I've probed here before and felt it was dumb then." I reached the northeast corner and paused. There was a narrow cement walkway along the backside of the house and I figured there were only about eight feet between it and the north wall of the outbuilding. On the west side of the wall was a doorway with about ten feet between it and the east wall where I had just probed. As highly unlikely as it was, I reluctantly stuck my probe in and it sailed on down with relative ease! My mouth fell open as I thought it might be a critter hole. I repeated a foot over with the same result! I kept it up until I covered about eight feet and decided to angle probe for the walls. Standing with my back to the east, I hit a solid wall about two feet deep. I turned aboutface and probed without hitting anything. A step forward and nothing! Another step, nothing! A third step and still nothing! On my fourth step, I finally hit the opposite wall that lined up with the outbuilding's eastside wall! Adding about a foot on each end for the angling, it should measure about ten feet long! The width probed out to four feet—five with the angle considered. At this size, it should bottom out no less than ten feet! The probe showed the telltale powdery orange on the tip indicating a brick liner.

I decided to test probe the equally unlikely area on the opposite side of the yard, just in case. I struck out on the west side but not unusual for Hannibal as most yards had only one privy. They tend to be heavily dipped with regard to these earlier ones. One usually finds only pontil-era scraps or tiny bottles missed by the cleaners. Usually, they reused the privy until they got indoor plumbing and by then the ordinances were either relaxed, ignored or both. I climbed into my truck ecstatic with the idea I finally found it! I beelined it to my friend's shop to tell him the good news. As I drove the ten blocks, I glanced at my watch and realized I found it in only half an hour! When I told my friend, I didn't reveal the location. I wanted to cement and ensure my inclusion in this dig. After all, I had more than paid my dues and EARNED IT THE HARD WAY! Hopefully, they will close the deal soon.

It wasn't until I woke up yesterday morning that I wondered if someone already beat me to it and dug it out. My probe did go down one-handed easily, but it didn't feel like a dug hole as there was some resistance. The ground wasn't soft or spongy or sunk in at all, and it was in the least likely area of the yard for this town.

In all the privies I've dug in town I have only dug one this close to the back door and that was the old courthouse privy! I figured the judge didn't want to have to run a marathon in his robes to the crapper. Not too dignified of a visual, for sure! No, if it has been dug, it was 30-40 years ago. I feel 85% confident it is a privy and 75% confident it is undug. I can't wait to find out, like a kid before Christmas. I just hope it doesn't take that long to open her up. But then since she's been waiting 160+ years, I can wait a while longer, if I have to!

A minor update, I returned with my 6' probe to recheck my initial findings and discovered nobody moved the privy location in my absence, always a welcome relief! The 6 footer went to the handle, same as the 4 footer, and yet this time the walls probed as stone. On occasion, the privies around here were stone-lined up to the last foot or two where they cemented a brick foundation of sorts to construct a brick privy above ground. I suspect that is the case here. The last one like this I dug was 17 feet deep!

Well, winter has come and gone and we are now well into a new year, 2021 to be exact. March 7th to be even more exact. In the time since I last wrote about my "exciting" find of the long-lost and elusive privy, I have had to hang my head in shame, once again! Yup, you guessed it, it was NOT the privy but a huge cistern! UGH! Anything but another cistern! They are always problematic and stingy on the bottles, at least any before the machine age. This one was no exception, with the best being two tiny sample Eddy & Eddy extract bottles that nobody has ever seen and a small size Wyeth dose bottle. Everything else was slick, machined, or busted and nothing worth crying over. I made half a dozen trips and returned today to either finish it up or fill it in. Turns out I accomplished both but, more importantly, I found a spot where "something's goin' on," at least according to my probe. I hesitate, no, I absolutely refuse to mutter a word that sounds like privy when speaking of hunting this yard anymore.

I have deleted at least half a dozen videos from past failures in this yard with eager anticipation of opening up a loaded privy from the 1860s due to striking out. I therefore will suspend any "whoo-whoo" noises or pats on my back, lest I have to whip myself in the same spot later. No, I will calmly and maturely hold my enthusiasm until more evidence surfaces, or more accurately, is exposed. I am still licking my wounds over the last mistaken "privy" I probed turned out to be a cistern! An amateur's mistake for sure but I was a bit skeptical in the beginning considering its proximity to the house. How I got the probing so wrong I can only say by explaining the top beehive portion had been collapsed into the hole which threw off the opening–normally a good deal smaller than a privy. Regardless, we are moving forward and I have x'd off my map another area not to hunt, narrowing down the search area, little by little.

This new spot is equally baffling as I have probed over this before but hit nothing unusual until today. I did hit a soft spot or rather a softer spot than usual as most of this yard is solid clay, rock, or cement. Take your pick, it's gonna be a rough go. I can usually probe several hundred probe holes in a day but this yard limits me to about half my normal number and that's being generous! Today I decided to focus on a square wooden shed area on the Sanborn maps that sat between the brick outbuilding and

where the barn stood. I used my map on which I measured and marked out my footsteps to correlate the missing shed to the still-existing brick building. Here, I flagged out the approximate four corners and began probing a tight 10" square grid. This square on the map is usually something I would probe around, not inside due to its large size. I was reminded on a recent probing of an 1847 yard that some of these larger features are actually a privy inside a larger shed used for a washroom or other domestic needs.

It seems it was a good refresher course, as I got to about probe hole #50 when it went in semi-easily and had some ashy look clinging to the tip. I moved 10" out of my pattern and hit what felt like cement. A few inches more in that direction confirmed what felt like a slab-a practice not uncommon back in the day to lay a healthy size cement slab over the offending hole when done with it. I was able to find what appeared to be virgin clay to the farthest side from where I had probed, giving me some idea of where the walls should be. I swapped out my workhorse 4 footer for the more practical 5-foot probe to angle for the walls. I decided to check to see if there was depth to the four-foot hole I punctured and the 5 footer went in as easily as the shorter probe and came up with the bonus of what looked like lime on the tip. Lime is always a welcome sign as it was used mainly in privies to aid in knocking down the stench as well as speeding up the decay of effluvium. Angling under the cement slab, I clunked into what felt like a wall but was angled shallow. I gave it a steeper angle further away to try to get some depth and it clunked again at about a five-foot depth. I continued this over two more directions and, having triangulated the pit, I saw no need for the fourth wall to be discovered. I am now about 90% sure it's a privy, in the right spot, and showing to be a stone liner.

I do have concerns, however. The earliest Sanborn map of '85 shows the square as well as the '90 map but goes missing on the '99 and '06 maps. Usually a good thing, but mysteriously it reappears on the 1913 map! Same exact spot! So my mind wonders... is this the early privy or possibly a later one? It could even be the servant's privy, for that matter. Stone liners tend to be earlier privies in these parts, but I have dug a few pontiled brick privies, though they are always shallower than the stone liners. I hope that it is the old privy and had been slabbed shut and the washhouse built over it by the mid-'80s. This is my hope since almost every pre-civil war privy in town got cleaned out by the mid-1870s. I'm hoping there are some sweet 1860s high-end bottles that a bank president, mayor, or major would use to entertain and impress his guests. I know I'll be impressed with a Kelly's, or dare I dream of an intact Booz cabin? Sure, what the Hell, why not? Dream big I say. I'd settle for a pontiled Wishart's Pine Tree Cordial! Well, as I am fond of saying, "Only digging it out will tell the story." That part begins tomorrow.

Note from SHPO Survey (Feb 1983 pg. 45): "18. Gore-Hunt-Catlett House, 1011 Lyon St., 1858. Unchanged at least from the turn of the (20th) century, this Greek Revival house is associated with three prominent families. It was built by Jonathan Gore, a saddle maker and county judge, and was bought two years later by Josiah Hunt, president of the First National Bank, major in the Union Army, and four-times mayor. (Hannibal) After his (unexpected) death in 1874, it was acquired by his wife's brother-inlaw, Captain John E. Catlett, whose family still owns it."

In addition, information gleaned from the Riverside Cemetery website indicates Josiah is buried there and was 56 years old when he "unexpectedly dies." His widow Sarah was 77 years of age when she passed in 1914 and his daughter Lizzie was 61 when she passed in 1924.

John Catlett shows no birthdate but it's indicated he passed on November 12, 1914, the same year as wife Mary on Feb 13. Mary turns out to be the sister to the widow, Sarah. There are no fewer than 16 Catletts listed as being buried at Riverside Cemetery.

THE DIG BEGINS

Monday arrived none too soon for my liking. Even for properties that frustrate me as this one has, one must remain "professional" and maintain a short memory. Like an NFL pro who has screwed up learns to shake it off and not allow it to affect his play, so must I to stay in the game. The first tarp had been laid in a position offering me the closest proximity to the edge of the hole while strategically situated on the east side of the hole. The first part of this equation is a constant consideration, the second part not so much. That is unless the wind is ripping west to east! It is easier to go with mother nature as much as possible rather than fighting her and tossing dirt into the wind is a losing battle. I arrived at about 11:30 and immediately began to open up the privy, or so I thought. It was slow going as I was hitting dark gooey dirt for the first couple of feet, then solid cement! At least it looked like cement at first but soon enough became obvious it was limestone chunks. It was extremely slow going but I was determined and persevered until I was about three feet deep where I sat back to take a break out of sheer exhaustion.

Looking at the pile of rubble and where I had been digging, I started laughing and shaking my head, while chanting, "No?" I've done this a time or two before and it's always embarrassing whether alone or with company. Using my short probe, I discovered I had missed the opening by a few inches and was dismantling the privy wall! Now that's the hard way of doing things! After adjusting for my error, I began digging in the right spot and made quick progress. "Well, at least I have a three-foot step down into the hole now," I mused.

Once I got going it took me about an hour to hit my first scrap of glass. I was able to determine it was about the mid-1890s so deducting about 20 years gives the age of mid-1870s, likely the age of artifacts at the bottom. After about another hour, it didn't look much deeper than before when I hit a bottle. It came up whole with a hand-tooled top indicating again an 1890s to early 1900s time period. Then there came another and another until I had half a dozen of what were paper label only rot gut cheap whiskey flasks! And, odd as it seems, the deeper I went the newer the flasks were! At this point in my video, I caught myself saying my brain was screaming at me to fill her in and run, not walk away because there is nothing old in this hole! But my option was to go home and sit on the porch with the dogs, which wouldn't accomplish much, so I said to myself, "So whaddya gonna do, stand here and bitch about it or dig?" Then I came up with "Both! I think I will bitch about it while digging. And that's for you, bottle goddess!" She must have heard me and taken note as well as felt sorry for me...but not until the next day. Continuing



digging below the four-foot level, I encountered more glass and more flasks! All told, there was about 150 half-pint with only half a dozen or so hand-blown while the rest were machined. I finally dug a round, large bottle that turned out to be a quart-size rotgut whiskey match! He finally broke down and bought a quart! Must have been a wedding anniversary or birth of a son. A daughter in those days would have only rated a pint, I'm sure. Again, my mind was nagging at me to quit since there had been no other shards or whole bottles and I was just at the five-foot point. Most of the older pits in town bottomed out at eight feet and usually by now I would expect to be finding whole bottles from the 90s.

I gave it hell for another hour before quitting for the day, only reaching another foot deeper. My probe said it bottomed out at ten feet deep and the third wall showed it to be about four feet wide. The fourth wall on the long end was still unknown and I presumed it was 5-6 feet away from its opposite. When I stopped, I was beginning to see some age to the 1870s but mostly wax sealer fruit jars. I found at least three of them all broken. They were still a welcome sight yet they are misleading because fruit jars were meant to be reused. More often than not they are late throws, out of context, and older than the daily trash surrounding them they are found with. The one thing that gave me hope for some older age was a top, neck, and base to a base embossed whiskey cylinder that looked civil war period, if not older. I had trouble making out the crude lettering without my glasses and, even with my glasses back at home I could only make out "Pitts. Pa." and some disjointed letters above it. With some research, I was able to decipher the name "Arbogast & Co." and dated to 1860-1863! Now we're talking! This is the sweet-spot era for some really interesting glass.

Tuesday, day two at the dig, and I arrived an hour earlier than Monday. I was rarin' to get to the bottom of this elusive pit. The weather report was for a high in the low 70s which was rare for early March. I had already walked the dogs at the park earlier than usual and decided to leave them outside for the day to enjoy the warm spell. The pup, Godiva, disappeared to the backyard, forgetting her treat, so I gave her treat to Taz, the older dog. Both are chocolate labs, Taz was now 10 years old and had been diagnosed with late-stage lymphoma in the middle of December with only weeks, if not days, to live. I had always spoiled my dogs but Taz got more extras than usual and, being a true foodie, I spoiled her with extra food and treats whenever she wanted since her bad news. I gave her ears a rub and a pat on her head and said my goodbye for the day and headed off to the dig. I had a brief moment thinking of bringing her along but thought she'd be more comfortable at home.

I arrived and immediately picked up where I left off. I began to dig several local pharmacy bottles and was surprised by how diverse they were. Usually, a family settles on one or two pharmacies but this one looks like they were doctor seeking...or spreading around their addiction to not look like there was a problem. I found two bottles from one pharmacy that was strictly from the 70s as they moved to San Antonio, Texas in 1880 and two more from a pharmacy from the 70s and early 80s when their partnership dissolved, leaving only one owner. The rest were from no fewer than four other pharmacies. I pulled out a nicely whittled Bromo Caffeine in a darker than usual cobalt color, eight square

unembossed shoe polish bottles, two of which had a star and an N in the center indicating a product of the Newark Star Glass Co. of Newark Ohio 1873-1904. These two were older and cruder looking as though from the 1870s so I figured I was nearing the bottom. I still had 2 ½ feet to go to hit the end. I suddenly hit a pottery chamber pot with the handle and rim missing so I gave it a good yank and dumped the contents out and, would ya believe, out popped a nice amber bottle with sloped shoulders. I immediately recognized it as a bed bug bottle due to this unique shape and got excited...especially when I saw it sported a rolled lip and a straight hinge mold! Embossed "Lyon's Powder" on one shoulder and B&P on the opposite, I was excited to finally dig one of these.

It was looking 1860s all day long and was elevated a notch when I dug a duplicate a foot away! Next to that was one of the two criers in the dig, a honey yellow-amber Mrs. Allen's Hair bottle in about ten pieces! They sparkled like loose gems from the bottle goddess's crown as I bemoaned the condition and held them up for her inspection. She was already working on something better for me, knowing my future was later destined to take a sad turn. In the meantime, she distracted me with an aqua version of the hair bottle and followed up with a second one. As it turned out, I dug no fewer than nine sets of pairs, four of which were identical twins, while the others were slight variants or different companies.

Suddenly, one bottle surfaced looking like a plain unembossed paneled square guy with fancy side panels and a sunken front panel. At first, I couldn't see any writing but eventually was able to make out "J. C. Elms" in an arch with "Circassian Oil St. Louis Mo." So far it's an unlisted one nobody has heard of. Another hair bottle rolled out and looked like it should be embossed and it didn't disappoint. It read "X Bazin Hedyosmia." Another hair bottle showed up embossed "Lyon's Kathairon For The Hair New York."

None of these hair bottles had I ever dug before and two I had never heard of! This was already becoming an epic dig and I hadn't even hit bottom yet! Not only that but I had no idea how far back that last wall stood. Another Worcestershire-type sauce bottle arrived and when I examined it I couldn't believe it was another one I never heard of! "S S Newton's" read the vertical embossing and around the shoulder was "Engli Sau..." with no more lettering. It was rather crisp and no peening out of earlier mold embossing so it is a mystery why Sauce and English are not completed. So far only an obscure mention by Zumwalt is found with no mention of any sauce named for him.

At this depth, I decided I needed to see just where it bottomed out as I had yet to discover the inevitable. I picked a corner where I had been chasing the older glass and hit the bottom clay at ten feet. I angled to the stone wall a few inches away to follow down the stones to confirm the bottom. When you hit hard clay and the stone wall ends you can pretty well bet that's the bottom.

"Be sure to dig out the corners" you will hear other diggers say, ad nauseam, as the dippers often missed smaller bottles in those pesky corners. My answer is always a snarky, "What if the hole is round?" Anyhow, I dug into the corner and discovered, for

whatever reason, the corner stones went a few inches deeper than the rest of the pit as I scraped my screwdriver against a piece of glass. As I began clearing the dirt I could make out the base to a very crude-looking flask and it was green! Luckily the ground was soft and seedy which probably explains how a flask as thin as this one survived a free-fall ten feet down with stones lining the walls! As I pulled my prize loose and into the muted daylight in the hole, I could see it had a star on one side and some lettering on the other side but all I could make out were two large S's together. I got the camera and began videoing while wiping away the dirt to read what it was. I honestly had no clue as to what it was but had hoped for a Pike's Peak Flask. What I discovered is something more than I could have hoped for. Embossed in very crude letters is "Ravenna" in an arch and "Glass Works" just below it. The embossed side is sunken in as it is so crude along with what I first thought was a lip chip that turned out to be a smooth in-the-making flaw. The base looks so crude as to barely stand up without wobbling and again looked like three chips near the base edge but, under a magnifying glass, it too is smooth and appears to be an in-the-making flaw. In other words, in my opinion, it is damage free! Yowza! Best bottle of the year! Maybe the decade!

Later research indicates this was likely an early flask from this company that started in 1857 to 1864. As for value, I can't find another in this wild color. They are listed as found in shades of amber or aqua but no mention of green! Right next to this, the next bottle out was, of all things, a Pike's Peak flask! In halfpint size with the hunter on the back shooting a deer, it is listed as a common variant, but it's a first for me! Also on the bottom, I dug another crier, a cathedral pickle jar minus the top! Next to it, I dug a little screw-top barrel that looked like a sample mustard, but I never heard of a sample mustard. No matter, as I have learned to take everything home with me to clean up and get a better look at, just in case. Good call on this one as it was embossed "X Bazin Philadelphia."

As I dug towards the fourth wall the older stuff became more sporadic, yielding a few unembossed bottles along with one that had an open pontil as well as a few pontiled bases to a couple of cylinders and barbershop tonics. Close to the end, I had a minor cave-in that buried my old friend, the screwdriver. I spent about 20 minutes trying to locate it but it was of no use. I mentioned in one video how I hate losing things I've had for years. Little did I know this was just the beginning. By the end of the dig, I was whooped! Now I had to fill it in as rain was forecast for the next morning and the rest of the week. The last thing I care to have hovering over me is the thought of slinging mud. So I spent an hour filling it back in before collapsing on the ground for ten minutes.

By now it was dark and I knew the muttleys would be getting hungry and wondering where I was. My ride home was like riding a rocket to the moon! Wow, what a great dig! I couldn't have asked for better. As I ended my nearly hour-long drive home, I decided it best to park in front with a direct route to the kitchen with all my valuable treasures. As I approached the gate, I was surprised to see Godiva there since Taz is usually the one to greet me. As I entered the yard in the darkness I asked Godiva, "Where's Tazzy?" as if she would answer in a human voice. She just looked at me as if to say, "I'm not sure where she went." I

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instinctively sensed something was wrong as I went "Uh, Oh" and grabbed a flashlight from the kitchen and went on a search of the yard.

My search was short as I exited the back door and went down the stairs. I quickly noticed something lying by the edge of the porch. There was my Tazzy, looking as if she just simply laid down and let it all go. She looked peaceful but was cold and stiff to my touch, indicating she likely passed away shortly after I left that morning. As I held her close and kissed the top of her head, I couldn't help but wish I had brought her with me now, but that would have presented a whole other set of problems. It was enough that I had to move her into the garage to keep Godiva from her though, in hindsight, I realized Godiva had been in the yard for almost eight hours with her passed away. In a selfish but self-preserving thought, I moaned at the idea of having to dig yet another hole in the morning.







