

Coal Mine Yields Unknown Seal Bottle from Alabama

By David Jackson Jr.

A chance meeting at a Mississippi antique bottle show led to a North Carolina collector purchasing a one of a kind seal bottle found by a heavy equipment operator while excavating a coal mine near Birmingham, Ala..

"David Reed called me from Mississippi. He recalled meeting me and learning that I collected whiskey and seal bottles," said this writer, who lives in Greensboro, N.C. "He sent me some photos and put me in touch with Andrew Self, who was selling the bottle on behalf of his father-in-law, who had accidentally dug the bottle.

"I e-mailed (veteran Alabama collector) Tom Lines to see if he had ever heard of the bottle. He said others had contacted him and, as far as he knew, it was the only known example. He and other collectors had never seen even a piece of one.



"I was able to purchase the bottle and after it arrived at my home, I was thrilled to see its great condition. The bottle and its previous contents were produced by the J.C. Marks & Co. in Birmingham. It was embossed J.C. Marks & Co. / Old Monongahela Rye / Birmingham, Ala.

"Now in my collection are four different examples, including one embossed Birmingham, another with Birmingham and Louisville (Ky.) and a Louisville example with a Banana Cordial label. This latest example resembles a Paul Jones sealed bottle from Louisville.

"Andrew's father-in-law. Eric Milligan,

(Left) Here is a mini jug from the same Wholesaler, J.C. Marks Liquor Co.



New Seal bottle from the J.C. Marks & Co. Wholesalers



Embossed with three barrels and an eagle on top, a great looking whiskey bottle



The front label of the bottle to the left, Banana Flavored Cordial

phoned me later and explained how he found the bottle. He said he was a heavy machine operator for a company that recovers coal from old underground mines by digging from the surface and especially around pillars that supported their roofs 100 years or more.

“He was digging out rock from around one of those pillars when the bottle popped out of the coal and landed sitting up in the hole. He stopped his machine and retrieved it. He said he had found many artifacts, but this was the first undamaged bottle.”

***J.C. Marks & Co.**, was a wholesale wine, liquor and cigar dealer with offices, shop and warehouse in a four-story building at 2117 2nd Avenue North in Birmingham. Organized on May 1, 1887 by J.C. Marks and former schoolmaster A.S. Loventhal, the company offered a range of domestic and imported products. Those included brandies, cordials, absinthe, California and Virginia clarets and Catawba wines.

The business in 1904 moved across the street to 2024 2nd Avenue and in 1908 when Jefferson County was formed, Marks moved his business to Louisville's Main Street. The business closed in 1914, probably because of impending Prohibition.

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Here is a J.C. Marks bottle with the embossing advertising "Our Sign, the 3 red barrels" Whiskey.

