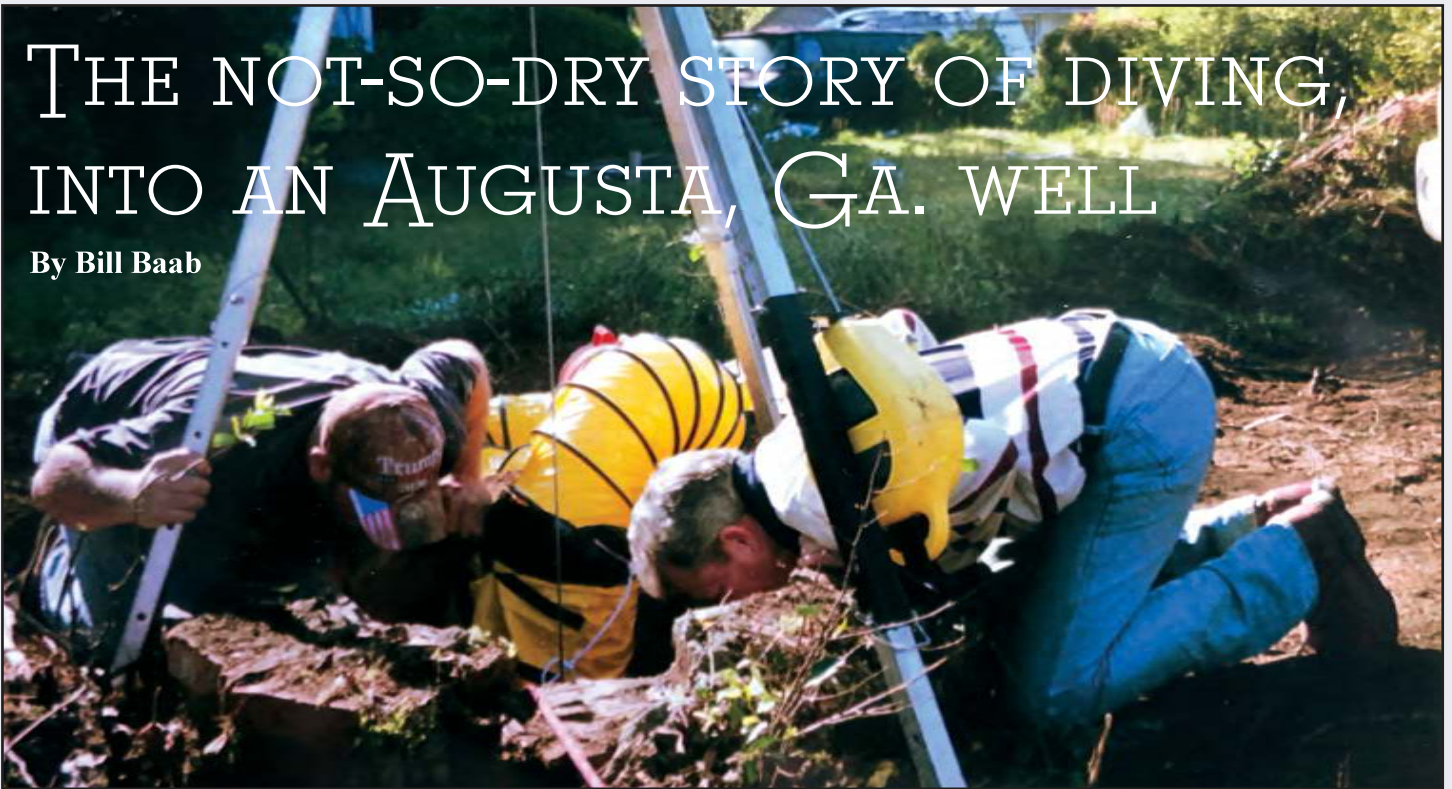


THE NOT-SO-DRY STORY OF DIVING, INTO AN AUGUSTA, GA. WELL

By Bill Baab



Keith Deas (left), Karl Harrar flank yellow oxygen tube as they peer into well's depth to listen to in-depth remarks from Jeff Mansir (Bill Baab photo)

Karl Harrar, of Aiken, South Carolina, has been a researcher, digger and collector of antique bottles for a couple of decades. He also is the developer of a ground-penetrating radar system that can reveal ancient privy holes and underground trash piles. (See easyradarusa@gmail.com)

So when he discovered a well on property in the old Summer-ville section of Augusta, Georgia, an area first settled during the 1840s, he thought it might have possibilities. Those possibilities in his mind's eye included pontiled sodas and medicines and American historical flasks.

Over the years, people being people dumped all kinds of trash into wells, including bottles, the philosophy being "out of sight, out of mind." Harrar's first objective was to determine if the well, located on the crest of a hill, was dry. So he lowered a "fish camera" attached to a long cable into the depths of the brick-lined well. Images taken at the bottom of the 40-odd-foot-deep well and displayed on a monitor screen seemed to indicate no water was present.

So his next steps were to obtain permission of the property owner and discover the best way to safely enter the well, including ways and means of safely climbing out. He checked Facebook and found Jeff Mansir in Clover, South Carolina. The 55-year-old for the last 10 years has

been dropping into blocked-up sewers for that city and he's also dropped into privy holes.

He had never dropped into a well, but that was about to change.

Mansir came equipped with a heavy duty tripod equipped with a winch filled with 50 feet of steel cable. The end of the cable snapped onto an attachment on the upper back of a safety harness. He also wears a hard hat to avoid having bricks or other



A tablespoon, a child's shoe and junk bottles among other trash hauled up from the well (Bill Baab Photo)



Mansir (right) handles the winch as Harrar begins descent into the well (Bill Baab Photo)

debris falling on his head during the descent, an unpleasantly painful experience.

Joining them was Keith Deas of nearby Evans, Georgia, owner and operator of a backhoe with a front end loader. It was Keith's job to push off the well cover and he later assisted during the operation. After the operation ended, the open well was filled and the opening covered, eliminating the possibility of wildlife, pets and even people falling in.

The operation took place on a crisp, cold Saturday morning, April 3, 2021. This claustrophobic writer was present as a non-diving observer.

Mansir donned his safety harness, attached the steel cable's fitting and with Harrar turning the winch handle was slowly lowered into the depths. The diver discovered there was little chance of being struck by loose bricks, the well (shall we say) being well-built.

Once the diver reached the bottom, he told those above that there was all sorts of modern trash, including carpet remnants, blocking further egress. He also admitted being a bit nervous and decided he would like to come up and get out of the well.

So Harrar offered to trade places. Up came Mansir, down went

Harrar who decided to remove some of the trash layers. He filled a large plastic bucket with a stout handle to which a strong rope was affixed. The rope being threaded through its own pulley system.

Mansir started hauling until Deas could grab the bucket handle and dump the trash on the ground next to the well. Out tumbled carpet remnants, brick fragments and 1970s trash, including a throw-away Pepsi bottle, 20th century clear whiskey flasks, a ceramic doorknob, the bottom fragment of a hobbleskirt Coca-Cola bottle, miscellaneous pieces of plastic sheeting and the top of a 1930s milk bottle.

Five bucketloads of such things were hauled up and dumped, after which electronics engineer Harrar received a shock. Water began pouring into the well after the last load. There must have been a spring and it was coming in at such a rapid rate that Harrar knew a sump pump could not keep up with the flow.

He was philosophical about the whole thing.

"Well, I gave it the old college try and am glad I did," he said. "Had I not, thoughts of what might have been would have been forever on my mind."



"Pipe!" He Hollered

By Bill Baab



Edgefield District pipe discovered by Eric Nygard in privy. (Courtesy of Edward Moody)

Eric Nygard found himself in the depths of an 8-foot-deep, wood-lined pre-Civil War privy in the heart of downtown Augusta, Georgia during an early spring day this year.

He was a member of a party organized by Karl Harrar, an electronics engineer from Aiken, South Carolina. Harrar is famous for developing a portable ground-penetrating radar system the longtime collector of antique bottles and pottery uses to pinpoint locations of outhouse holes and trash pits of yesteryear.

The system had located two previous privies on the lot dating to the late 19th century and a few bottles from that era had been found. A few weekends later he had found the much older third privy jammed against the foundation of an adjacent building. He earlier had learned the lot was the site of a 19th century hotel.

So Nygard had found himself at the very bottom of the privy, scratching in the dirt in search of more artifacts deposited during the 1850s. All the bottles excavated were pontiled, including a pair of Clark & Company iron-pontiled mineral waters from Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

Suddenly, from out of the depths, Nygard shouted "pipe!"

"I thought he meant he'd found a water or sewer pipe," Harrar said.



Salt-glazed bottle said to be early French ink (Courtesy of Karl Harrar)



Unusual 2-1/2-gallon churn found in pre-Civil War privy. (Courtesy of Karl Harrar)

But it turned out to be an alkaline glazed clay pipe whose bowl sported facial features. It is believed to have been made by a master potter residing in the old Edgefield, South Carolina District a scant 30 miles away. That area was called "Pottersville" was founded by renowned master potter Abner Landrum during the 1820s who also was credited with developing the alkaline glaze process.

Pipes for smoking made in that district are considered rare by collectors and usually bring four-figure sums at auction.

During research for this story, other

pipes were brought to my attention, including three excavated some 25 years ago behind one of the earliest homes of Macon in central Georgia by my friend and fellow collector Jim Grantham. One was a fancy molded clay example, the others featured facial features and all are illustrated with Nygard's example (he won it during the post-dig picks) with this story.

Tony Carr of North Augusta also found a whole pipe and the remains of another while digging several years ago in the Miles Mill pottery site in Edgefield County near Trenton, S.C.



Ornate clay pipe (right) with face among trio dug in Macon by Jim Grantham. (Courtesy of Jim Grantham)



Here's the face pipe dug by Jim Grantham in Macon, Ga. (Courtesy of Jim Grantham)



Tony Carr found this pipe near Trenton, South Carolina. (Courtesy of Tony Carr)

