

# humble pie noun

## Definition of *humble pie*

1. (Cookery) (formerly) a pie made from the heart, entrails, etc., of a deer.
2. eat humble pie to behave or be forced to behave humbly.
3. a figurative serving of humiliation

By Jeff Mihalik

For sure, this article is not about eating an actual humble pie! It is, however, about how the privy and hobby of privy digging can have the effect of compelling you to accept and, more importantly, remember how you enjoyed your humble origins in the pursuit of bottle digging and collecting.

I love to collect the bottles I have dug through privy digging. But I often wonder, if I didn't have so many great and successful privy digs over the years, would I still love it? I started in this hobby like many others by digging bottle dumps. I can still remember finding my first ketchup bottle in a dump and how thrilled I was! I still have the first Hutchinson bottle I found there [See Fig. 1]. Like many others, I kept at it, made many friends along the way, learned about bottles, glass manufacturing, local history, and became knowledgeable.

Fast forward a lot of years!! No longer does a "3-in-1 Oil" make me smile, but when I see some online video of someone who is now first getting into the hobby and digging a dump and how they get so excited about what they are finding, I do smile as it reminds me of my first digs. So THANKS to all those who are posting and or publishing their digs and finds! In the end, it is not about the monetary value of a find (although that's not a bad thing, and I would admit that value can turn up the excitement), but how it makes you feel when you first make your discovery.

I still dig with my good friend, Rick, who first taught me about privy digging. On many days, when we find no "good" bottles, we always make an effort to enjoy our time together (grab some food and a few beers and find stuff to laugh about), so that long-time, great friendship helps in making not-so-productive digs, enjoyable.

So, friendships aside, every privy digger, whether just starting or having been at it for a long time, will tell you how crazy demanding this hobby is. I remember my first privy dig being good, and I thought every dig would be similar. I was so wrong! Then it seemed like we used to believe that one out of every five digs

would be good, and by good, I mean we would find 50+ bottles with a few of them being worthy of putting on your shelf.

As time went on, I started to realize that maybe you could expect one out of ten digs to be productive. Now, I often think that maybe one in twenty-five or thirty are going to be better digs. Heck, I

just saw where a long-time digger said that he had dug 100 privies without much luck.

I started to think about this, and one thing that stood out was that I was finding a lot of bottles, many interesting bottles, but not many

or any that I would put on my bottle shelf. So, although many of my digs were productive, I had lost my beginner's mind. With knowledge came a sort of arrogance. If you have ever dabbled with western religious philosophy, especially Zen Buddhism, you may have heard the term Zen Mind Beginners Mind. Sort of related to ignorance is bliss, but without ignorance, if you know what I mean.

I realized that I needed to eat some bottle digging humble pie, get back to experiencing the moment, appreciate what I am finding, and be grateful I can dig as much as I do being over 65.

**"Real knowledge is to know the extent of one's ignorance."**

Confucius

## TO THE DIGS

For many years I often dug 15 or more privies that have pontiled bottles. This year, just one pit was pontil age. Some of this was due to starting a new business, covid, and other obstacles, and I really didn't dig as much as I typically do in a year, but I probably have dug 50 or more privies.

I had been trying to get permission for a couple of years at this house with five windows across the front, which usually indicates civil war or earlier structures. I finally had a chance to talk with the owner this summer, and he was all good with what I wanted to do. I am not a door knocker and typically wait until I see someone outside.



[Fig. 1] Wm. G. Reid, Shindler Mfg. Co. Nacogdoches, Tex. Hutchinson

I probed for about 30 minutes and found a nice-sized spot along the back fence. I was alone but decided to open it up. The first bottle was a nice 1870s era “Dr. Keyers” from Pittsburgh but with a hole in the bottle. It seemed all the bottles were damaged. Just under this layer, I started to find pontiled bottles, but all were broken, including a huge 9-inch, clear pontil “E. Roussel” from Philadelphia. Finally, near the bottom of the pit, I found my first whole bottle, a “Dr. McLanes - American Worm Specific,” a smaller-sized one with a pontil and bold embossing. Other than that, the only other whole pontiled bottle was a small medicine embossed “Pure and Genuine” with both “N’s” in “genuine” being backward [See Figs. 2 & 3]. It took a while, but I learned to appreciate these bottles, the humble worm specific and aqua med, and on the shelf they went.

[Fig. 2] Dr. McLanes - American Worm Specific



**“He who is not contented with what he has would not be contented with what he would like to have.” – Socrates**



[Fig. 3] “Pure and Genuine” with both “N’s” in “genuine” being backward

This fall, I was digging in a small local town. Over the years, I’ve dug here many times before and have made some nice discoveries, so available and better pits were getting scarce. However, I was permitted on a lot that I have not dug where the 1870s map showed a couple of structures. I located two spots that felt very crunchy! After opening the first pit, I started to hit bottles; but, they were the 1930s, maybe 40s or even 50s! Nothing I would typically dig, but I thought, what the heck, I’m here digging, and there are bottles. Well...my take-home included a couple of hobble-skirt cokes, a nice Nehi, a Jumbo peanut butter, and a bunch of other miscellaneous stuff, including an “Indian Celt!” [See Fig. 4]

Also, I found something I have never dug before, painted label milks! I found three local milks, all nicely embossed. [See Fig. 5] However, the best milk had a picture of a cow on one side and a woman on the other. Unfortunately, it didn’t do well upon getting some water on it. That said, the other two milks actually held up, and I could get them to look very presentable. [See Fig. 6]. I’ve never collected milks, but given the local history, which I have only been able to get via oral history from some local old-timers, I appreciate them for what they are, and didn’t let what they were not, become foremost in my mind.

**“Do not spoil what you have by desiring what you have not”**  
- Epicurus



[Fig. 4] my take-home included a couple of hobble skirt cokes, a nice Nehi, a Jumbo peanut butter, and, a bunch of other miscellaneous stuff, including an “Indian Celt!”



[Fig. 5] Painted milks fresh out of the hole.



[Fig. 6] The other two milks actually held up, and I could get them to look very presentable.





[Fig. 7] Embossed local creamery bottle.



[Fig. 8] But, at the bottom of the pit, we did find a couple of older whole bottles. First out was a "Warners Safe Cure."



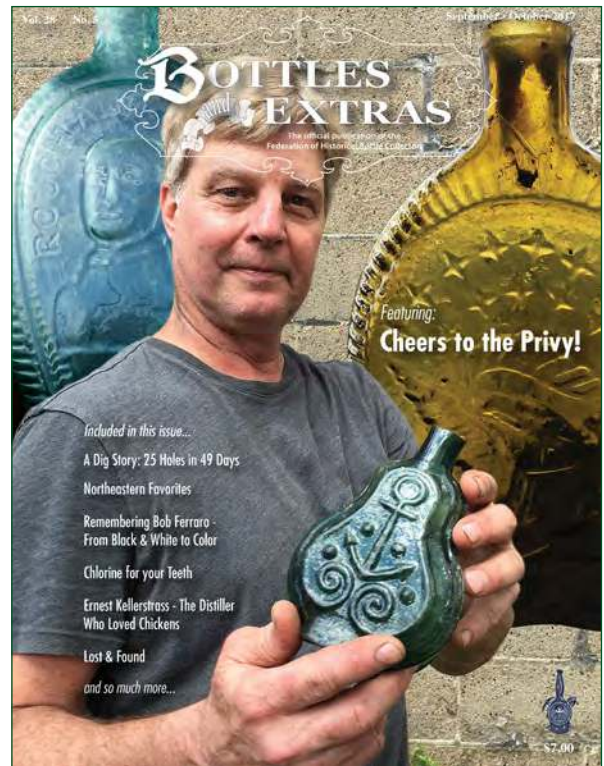
[Fig. 9] Then I uncovered two bottles side by side [See Fig. 9]. When I initially saw this amber, embossed, round-shaped bottle, I at first thought it was a USA Hospital Dept bottle! However, it turned out to be a "Weyman's" snuff jar!



[Fig. 10] Two embossed "Weyman's Copenhagen Tobacco Co. Snuff jars.

The other lot produced many bottles, with the best one being an embossed local creamery bottle [See Fig. 7]. I was pleased with this find as the locals kept telling me of the local creamery, and now I had both a painted label example and an embossed one! On the shelf it went!

In October of 2021, Rick and I were in another local town where we have dug many pits. I always liked this one home; although it did not show up on the 1870s map, it just looked old enough to have some privies. Well, we got the permission, probed, and found one pit that seemed rock-lined. Rick's daughter was with us as well as her boyfriend. They have been to several of our digs, but they were all busts, so we were hoping to find some bottles for them to see! And did we find bottles? LOL, about 200 clear and non-embossed whiskeys! But, at the bottom of the pit, we did find a couple of older whole bottles. First out was a "Warners Safe Cure." [See Fig. 8] Then I uncovered two bottles side by side [See Fig. 9]. When I initially saw this amber, embossed, round-shaped bottle, I thought it was a USA Hospital Dept bottle! However, it turned out to be a "Weyman's" snuff jar! [See Fig. 10 cleaned up some]. Heck, now I wish I hadn't traded that Weyman's jar lid I dug some years ago! Next to the Weyman's was an embossed ale from Youngstown, but when I pulled that one out, the lip was 70% missing.



[Fig. 11] Jeff Mihalik on the cover of the September–October 2017 issue of *Bottles and Extras*. Feature article *Cheers to the Privy!*

So there you have it—no green scroll flask with an anchor [See Fig 11], no colored bitters or rare pontil medicine, no loads of unusual or valuable finds, just humble pie bottles. And, yes, I do feel very good about what I did find and the new additions on some of my bottle shelves. They remind me to enjoy the moment, appreciate what is given to us, and it's good to eat humble pie and remember that what you now have was once among the things you only hoped for!

