

# A Country Home's Bottle Bonanza

*Cod liver oil fed, not cured, this addiction*

*By Frank E. Kurczewski*

In 1966, I purchased a three-bedroom home on a dead-end street in the village of Marcellus, Onondaga County, N.Y. The street ended at Nine Mile Creek, along which, to the immediate north and south, were two abandoned woolen mills, the Upper and Lower Crown Mills, dating to the early 1800s. Near both mills were dead-end streets, each with a row of mill houses dating to the 1880s or 1890s.

In 1966, I had given no thought to antique glass. Then, in May 1973, while walking along the abandoned trolley tracks on the east (opposite) side of Nine Mile Creek, I found an olive green threaded insulator with a star (and sizable chip) near the base among other broken glass bottles.

I excitedly ran home and grabbed an ordinary yard rake from the garage. I walked back across an iron I-beam of the old railroad trestle straddling the creek to the site where I had found the insulator, and began raking the soil. My time spent there that day was pretty fruitless, although I did go home with two machine-made bottles from the 1930s: an amber screw cap covered with fish scales and a fish embossed in the front panel, and an aqua snap-cap SCOTT'S EMUL-

SION, also with an embossed fish on the front, both partly filled with cod liver oil.

That summer I confined my search for old bottle dumps to the west (near) side of Nine Mile Creek between my backyard and the Upper Crown Mill. I first had to equip myself for the task at hand. Instead of using the unwieldy garden rake, I bought myself three potato rakes in case that I would dig so much the tines would wear down!

Next, I found a khaki WW II U.S. military bag that would hold a roll of heavy-duty paper towels, work gloves, garden trowel and large knife.

Despite spending practically every nice day looking for broken glass or rusty metal on the west side of Nine Mile Creek, all I had to show for my efforts that summer was an intact but well-worn 1890s PAINE'S CELERY COMPOUND located under tree roots about fifty yards from my home. In early September 1973, while digging in soil next to the Upper Crown Mill, I heard the sound of broken glass and empty tin cans on the other side of the creek. Lo and behold there was a middle-age man on his knees with a short, arm-length rake, digging for bottles! I decided to ignore him.

Unbeknownst to me then, he was digging in a 150-yard-long dump between the creek and Limerick Street with its row of mill houses. I later found that this street dump contained mainly ashes, broken or cracked bottles, and badly rusted tin cans.

I waited until spring 1974, after the snow melted, before I crossed back over the trestle carrying my neighbor's mongrel, Brownie, in one arm and my digging equipment in the other arm. I proceeded to rake the northern third of the dump as the southern two-thirds had pretty much been churned through.

After digging for a spring and a summer in the Limerick Street dump, I found many whole bottles but few keepers. The best finds from several months of digging were an amber DR. M.M. FENNER'S KIDNEY & BACKACHE CURE, FREDONIA, NY (1898) and a cobalt blue HARDEN'S HAND GRENADE FIRE EXTINGUISHER (1884). Most of the bottles were unembossed clear or aqua medicines, food or household containers, and "Warranted" or "Registered" flasks. Such finds dated this dump to no earlier than the mid-1880s, and underlined the non-affluent way of life of the mill worker residents, and also indicated that some husbands imbibed now and then.



Federal-style home on Old Seneca Turnpike, East Hill, Marcellus, 1974, where many bottles were unearthed. The owners of this property in the 19th century included William F. Bangs and Joel Cornish.

Discouraged by the slim bottle finds in the village of Marcellus, I decided to scout the homes in the surrounding countryside that were abandoned or looked to be older than the Civil War. Driving up East Hill on the Old Seneca Turnpike a large Federal Period home from circa 1830 looked attractive, with its sunburst attic vents and arched front door. This home housed “Seven Hearths Antiques” and the owner was Bonnie J. McLeod Pelligra (1941–2018).

One day during the last week in September 1974, I stopped and asked if I could look for bottle dumps on her property. She said that was fine except she would like to have any stoneware I found, whole or broken. She had stopped at our garage sale a year earlier and bought a fancy perfume bottle that my wife had priced at one dollar.

My first day searching through the scrub and field behind her house was highly productive. I found three matching pieces of a broken 3-gallon stoneware crock with blue design of a lion wearing a collar that the owner gladly accepted. Then, in almost bare soil with broken splinters of old wood, I noticed the ground was

slightly raised. After digging down only a few inches I unearthed two mineral water bottles, side by side, each half-full of water, with corks and wire bails intact. This was an area where a barn or outbuilding had been taken down, as the ground held little vegetation. I wrapped the two bottles, still dirty, individually in heavy paper towels and took them home, where I laid them on the kitchen floor, unwrapped them, removed the corks and wire bails from the bottle mouths, poured out the water contents, and washed and rinsed them.

They were perfect, shiny and embossed CONGRESS & EMPIRE SPRING CO/ HOTCHKISS’ SONS / E / NEW YORK / SARATOGA. N.Y. Each cylindrical pint had an applied sloping collared mouth and offset lower bevel, smooth base, numerous seed and larger bubbles, thin elongate oblique stretch bubbles in the neck, and mild whittle marks. One pint was golden olive and the other orange amber in color. Upon further research these bottles were evidently made at a Stoddard, N.H., glass company, probably South Stoddard Glass Co., based on the shades of olive and amber colors and characteristic seed bubbles in the glass.

The South Stoddard company thrived on the production of mineral water bottles from Saratoga during a period (1865–’70) when the Mt. Pleasant Glass Factory was moving to the Congressville Glass Works and evidently not in full production. Bottles with Hotchkiss’ Sons embossment were made during the period 1866–69 or perhaps 1870.

The next several days of reconnaissance and excavation behind Seven Hearths Antiques were less successful but nonetheless productive. A swampy area many yards away contained a cluster of aqua, open-pontil medicine bottles, all intact but quite stained: LYON’S KATHALIRON; DR. KENNEDY’S MEDICAL DISCOVERY; PRATT & BUTCHER MAGIC OIL; and DR. DENTON’S HEALING BALSAM, AUBURN, NY.

It’s almost impossible to find pristine aqua, open-pontil medicine bottles in damp or moist soil, especially when they’ve been underground for perhaps a century. Based on bottle magazines, these open-pontil medicines dated to the 1840s and 1850s. Several yards from this group of open-pontil bottles in moist soil were an intact JOHN LINK, SYRACUSE, NY, redware 1-gallon jug (extremely rare, 1891); Queen Louise bisque doll’s head (German, 1885–95) in perfect condition; and several broken unembossed ladies legs in different colors (circa 1880s).

The next time I visited Seven Hearths Antiques the owner showed me a deep cistern at the northeastern corner of the house that was full of broken bottles and large rocks. Nonetheless, I decided to unearth the contents — a full day’s effort. The several broken bottles were mainly mineral waters: D. A. KNOWLTON / SARATOGA / N.Y., quart, olive green (2, 1860–1865); CONGRESS & EMPIRE SPRING CO / C / SARATOGA N.Y. / CONGRESS WATER, quart, emerald green (2, 1871–84); CLARK & WHITE, quart, olive green (1856–65); CLARK & CO / NEW YORK, quart, olive green (1846–56); S. S. KNICKERBOCKER



(soda water) (1852–55), pint, cobalt blue, iron pontil, and unembossed olive, amber and aqua household bottles.

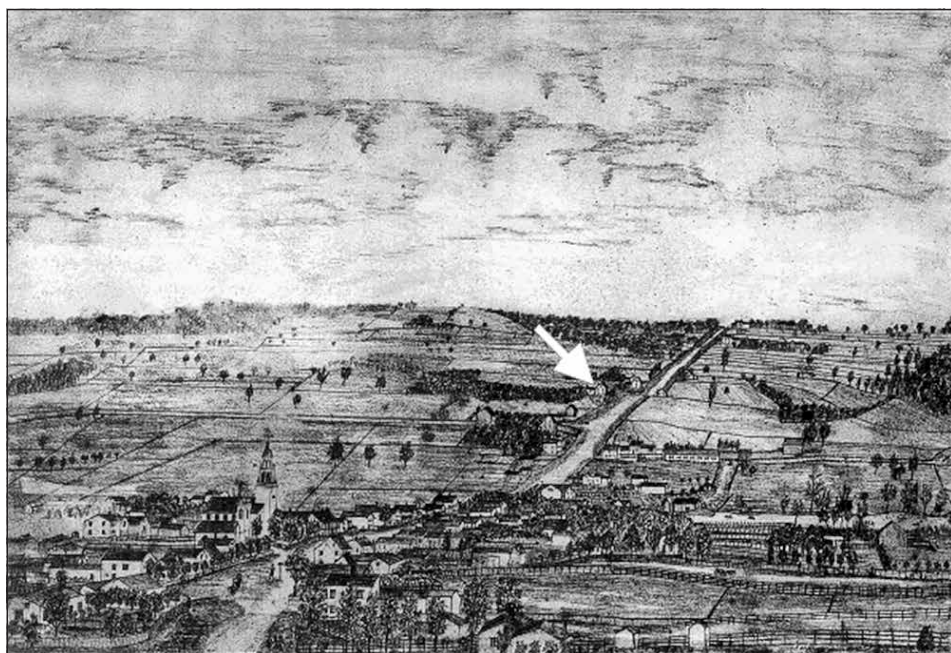
After several hours of excavation and at a depth of five feet I had only a single, common unbroken bottle in mint condition to show for my effort: CONGRESS & EMPIRE SPRING CO/E/SARATOGA N.Y. / EMPIRE WATER. pint (1871–84). I had dug to a depth where my shoulders were at ground level. Finding only large rocks, no other glass and fear of a cave-in, I stopped digging.

Before leaving, the owner invited me inside to ask me questions about some of the glassware in her shop. After an hour, we moved from the showroom to the attic where I showed her openings at the edges of the floorboards where the builder would sometimes dispose of his empty bottles.

The next time I visited Seven Hearths Antiques she showed me a perfect example of a multisided S. SMITH / 1857 / AUBURN, NY [SODA WATER], pint in cobalt blue, iron pontil, that she found in a recess at the edge of an attic floorboard!

William Freeman Bangs is the first name in the early 19th century to be associated with this homestead. Bangs was born on Feb. 11, 1779 in Barre, Mass., died on Oct. 29, 1864 in the Town of Marcellus at age 85, and is buried in the Old Marcellus Village Cemetery. Bangs may have built the Federal period home as early as 1830, according to an old map and drawing of the Village of Marcellus and surrounding countryside.

William F. Bangs is listed in 1810–60 Town of Marcellus censuses. W./W. F. Bangs is resident on the property in 1852 and 1859 Town of Marcellus maps. Bangs' son, Dr. Franklin Bangs, a physician, had an office/residence on Main Street in an 1859 map of the Village of Marcellus. Following Bangs' death, his wife Roxana, 83, moved in with Franklin and his wife, Sarah. The 1865 census shows Roxana, Franklin and Sarah Bangs all living in the Town of Marcellus. Bangs' heirs sold the homestead to Joel Cornish



Map/drawing of Marcellus, East Hill, and Old Seneca Turnpike heading east from the village, circa 1830. The homestead where the bottles were found is marked by the white arrow.

in 1865, but this census does not show Joel Cornish and his wife, Delia, residing in the Town of Marcellus. The information in the 1865 census was derived from the previous year, 1864. Joel and Delia Cornish are living there in the 1870 Town of Marcellus census and 1874 *New York State Historical Atlas*.

Joel Cornish was born Feb. 6, 1792 in Simsbury, Conn., died Jan. 27, 1887 in the Town of Marcellus at age 95, presumably from falling down the stairs in this home, and is buried in the Old Marcellus Village Cemetery. He is listed in the 1810–65 Town of Onondaga censuses and 1870, 1875 and 1880 Town of Marcellus censuses. J. Cornish is the resident on Lot 112 in 1852 and 1859 Town of Onondaga maps, only a short distance from the Old Seneca Turnpike and 4.5 miles from his future homestead. His second wife, Delia A.E. Loomis, was born Feb. 8, 1825 in the Town of Onondaga, died Jan. 7, 1902 at age 76 in the Town of Marcellus, and is buried in Highland Cemetery in Marcellus. She is listed in 1870–1900 Marcellus censuses. Following Joel's death Mrs. J. Cornish resided on the property according to an 1889 map of the

town of Marcellus, is living alone in the residence in the 1892 Marcellus census, and is living in the Village of Marcellus in 1898 and 1900 censuses.

Insofar as associating the bottles, stone-ware and other items found on the property with particular families, the 1840s and 1850s aqua open-pontil medicines, 1850s and early 1860s mineral and soda waters (G.F. KNOWLTON, CLARK & WHITE, CLARK & CO., S.S. KNICKERBOCKER, S. SMITH/1857/ AUBURN NY), and unembossed household bottles were used by the William F. Bangs family. Dr. Franklin H. Bangs, their son, probably selected the brand of medicine. The later 1860s and 1870s mineral waters (CONGRESS & EMPIRE SPRING CO., HOTCHKISS' SONS, E, pints (1866–69 or 1870) and C and E varieties (1871–84) and ladies leg bottles (1880s) were the property of Joel and Delia Cornish. Mineral water bottles at that time were returned to service and reused after their production and initial use. The JOHN LINK, Syracuse, N.Y. jug (1891) and Queen Louise bisque doll's head (1885–95) were probably the property of Delia A.E.



Cornish, who inherited the residence in 1887 upon her husband's death.

The early settlers in Marcellus were mostly men possessed of comfortable means and able to pay cash for their farms. William Bangs and Joel Cornish were men said to be of moral and personal integrity and highly respected in the community. They or their wives may have been teetotalers based on the large number of mineral and soda water bottles and absence of labeled bitters or whiskey bottles and registered or warranted flasks. William F. Bangs and his wife seemingly lived a healthy lifestyle under the influence of their son Franklin, a resident Marcellus doctor. Born in Saratoga, a daily sip of mineral water may have been part of Franklin's wife Sarah's daily constitution. Living and working on a farm served both families well. Bangs and Cornish lived to the ripe old ages of 85 and 95, respectively, and their wives, 87 (Roxana) and 76 (Delia).

The premier quality of the bottles and stoneware from the 1850s through the 1880s and the impressive cemetery monuments, especially for Joel and Maryette Cornish and Delia Cornish, indicate that both families had exquisite taste in glass, marble and granite! The large homestead on East Hill on the Old Seneca Turnpike had the oldest and most impressive bottles of the thiry surface dumps, outhouses and cistern that I excavated in Marcellus from 1973–1982.

Gravestone of William F. Bangs in Old Marcellus Village Cemetery, with birth date, death date and age of deceased. Photo by B. Arnold, Find A Grave.

Side panel of the Joel and Maryette Cornish grave monument, Old Marcellus Village Cemetery, with death dates and ages of deceased.

Maps of Town of Marcellus in chronological order with gray arrows indicating owners of homestead in 1852 (W. Bangs), 1859 (W.F. Bangs), 1874 (J. Cornish), and 1889 (Mrs. J. Cornish). Courtesy of Joseph W. Stoll, Syracuse University; and Peg Nolan, Marcellus Historical Society.

**FOLLOWING PAGE:** Congress & Empire Spring Co. mineral water bottles found behind homestead (left to right): golden olive and orange amber Hotchkiss' Sons / E / New York /Saratoga (1866–69 or 1870); emerald green / E / Saratoga NY / Empire Water (1871–84). Photograph by Lukas Friedrich, Atlanta, Georgia.

