



Figure 1



Figure 2

# The Stoneware Doctor

By John Savastio

## J. W. Mason / Nelson Co KY / Whiskey

I became a bottle digger and collector at age nine in the summer of 1970 when my family moved from Niantic, Connecticut to Newport News, Virginia. You see, I was born with a genetic predisposition for loving old bottles, and when I met Tom and Kevin Barnes and saw their amazingly cool collection they had dug up like a couple of archaeologists, the dormant gene was awakened, and I was instantly hooked for life. Our greatest finds in those early days were local blown-in-the-mold Coca Cola and Pepsi Cola bottles, as well as the bottles of their many rivals, such as Lemon Cola and Cristo-Cola.

While we greatly desired stoneware jugs, crocks and bottles, they just weren't coming our way in the dumps we were

digging in those days. It was not until around 1980, after I had moved with my family to Clifton Park, New York, and returned to Virginia for summer digging with my old friends, that I found my first stoneware piece of any significance. We were excavating the legendary Berkley dump, an 1890-1910 era ash midden about eight to ten feet deep. The Victorian era refuse was deposited on a swamp, so the bottom layers filled up with water, making digging very difficult. Tom and another Virginia digging legend, Ross Becker, were so determined to get at the treasures that lay at the base of this bottle mine that they bought a large gas-powered pump that could very quickly drain a hole and keep it dry. The downside to this was lugging the heavy beast into the dump, then tolerating a deafening engine spewing noxious gases in your face while going through the arduous task of digging!

On this notable day, I was fantasizing about finding one of the amber Pepsis that were coming out of there. While I was not lucky enough to dig one of those, I did find an amber Norfolk Coca Cola. Fairly common yes, but I loved it nonetheless, and that bottle still sits on my shelf forty years later. Not long afterwards, a little 3 1/4-inch mini jug popped out and floated in the water in front of me (either Tom or Ross had the

pump at the time). I picked up the petite beauty and was elated to see that the following was "scratched" in cursive in the shiny Albany slip glaze: "J. W. Mason / Nelson Co KY / Whiskey." Unfortunately, the top and the tiny handle were missing (see Figure 1). It was otherwise perfect, and just so appealing that I had to keep it.

Although I see them from time to time, and find them very alluring and collectable, I know very little about the miniature stoneware jug genre, and there's disappointingly little information about them on the internet. From what I've been able to gather, they were samples or giveaways, courtesy of saloon or distillery owners who gave them to preferred customers or perhaps to targeted clientele they believed could become regular customers. It's not entirely clear to me exactly how the giveaway worked. Was it up to the discretion of a saloon owner, bartender, or liquor store owner as to who a potential customer was? Or did the distillery give them away? Did they place them on the counter at their establishments with a little sign that said, "Try

Figure 1: J. W. Mason / Nelson Co KY / Whiskey jug dug in Berkley Dump circa 1980, unfortunately with top and handle broken off.

Figure 2: Close up of damage to THOMPSON & CO. MAMMOTH SPRING WATER. Note the chip between the "A" and the "M" that I filled with Elmer's glue!

me, take one?" In any case, the giveaway jug appears to have been a rather costly means of attracting customers, but there are enough of these little beauties out there to make the case that it was an effective method for distillers to promote their products.

Despite the dearth of data on the internet about miniature jugs, I was fortunate enough to find one article. Titled "Collecting the Miniature Advertising Jugs," this informative and interesting piece was written by Dr. Ralph Van Brocklin and was published in the winter 2006 issue of *Bottles and Extras*. Dr. Brocklin, onetime president of the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors (FOHBC), was a highly regarded figure in our hobby before his untimely passing. Following are some relevant highlights from the feature:

"The standard miniature jug stands between 2.25 and 3.5 inches in height. They typically advertise a product, proprietor and/or establishment, the advertising either being scratched into or stenciled onto the jug."

"The total number of miniature advertising jugs almost certainly exceeds 3,000. There may be someone out there who has the resources and interest to try to obtain an example of every one that surfaces, but most choose to collect in a more practical fashion, limiting their collection to one or more categories."

"In Kentucky and Tennessee alone, there may be as many firms which utilized mini jugs as in all the western states combined."

"In the early 1980s, they were still routinely available in the \$10-\$50 range."

"Repair of stoneware has been going on for many years. Many of these repairs are excellent and I'd love to tell you that I never miss a repair - but I do! Watch for lip repairs, new handles and the coloring in of lip flakes. Don't hesitate to ask a dealer if an item has been repaired."

"The collector should consider the extent of damage and the amount/quality of repair when purchasing an item and adjust its value accordingly. Stoneware collectors appreciate mint items as much as those who collect bottles. But little nicks here or there or "pops" in the glaze/clay do not as drastically affect the price as similar problems would on a bottle. This tends to hold truer with the scratched jugs than with the stenciled ones. I have a number of damaged and repaired pieces in my collection that are integral to the collection as a whole."

"Among the categories of collecting are Redwing jugs, Fort Dodge Stoneware, Uhl Pottery, Christmas giveaways, hotel jugs, jugs with unusual slogans, pictorial jugs, jugs advertising a brand of whiskey sold by a specific proprietor, vinegar jugs, jugs with advertising on both sides, jugs advertising a bar or saloon, grocery/mercantile/trading company jugs and jugs from a given locale."

"Regional collecting is particularly prominent in areas where few merchants produced jugs. Thus, collectors from the West will often try to build collections from anywhere west of the Rockies. Where a considerable quantity of jugs exists, collecting by state becomes more typical. Tennessee and Kentucky, for example, each have comparably large numbers of jugs and there are a number of collectors who focus on those particular states."

"In general, the whiskey samples tend to bring higher prices than the vinegar jugs from the same location/region."

I was reassured to see from Dr. Brocklin's article that repaired mini jugs are a well-accepted means to attain pieces for one's collection. I appreciate and prize the uniqueness and personal touch that the scratch method brings to each jug, so it would be interesting to learn about the process (Did they use their finger or some kind of writing implement?). As for value, I was pleasantly surprised to see that a "J. W. Mason / Nelson Co KY / Whiskey"

mini jug, very similar to mine, sold on eBay on Feb 17, 2020 for \$112 (albeit a specimen that was not repaired – or at least not advertised as such!). While I did find three other variants of the J.W. Mason mini jugs online (one scratch style, two stenciled) – for a total of four, I could not find an example of any marked full-size vessel, either bottle or jug. I assume they exist, so perhaps one of *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector's* readers could send in a picture with some more information. There are, however, many other mini jugs from Nelson County, Kentucky, which has been and still is a prolific region of the country for whiskey and bourbon manufacture.

## Mammoth Spring

I believe the first full-size stoneware jug I found was in a large ash dump nestled between old housing developments in Albany County. We started digging this site around 1990 when Gary and Chris noticed coal ash and turn-of-the-century debris piled up around a gopher hole. Thank you, Mr. Gopher, for showing us what lay underground in what was to become a very productive spot for us local diggers! Although I dug many exceptional items from this site, of interest for this article was an unusually tall and narrow cylinder-shaped stoneware jug, 12½ inches in height and 6 inches wide. Adding to its singular form is its unusually broad 3-inch wide lip finish. This late-1800s container lay on the very bottom of an eight-foot-deep hole, partially embedded in the native clay, leaving the distinctive shape of the urn in the earth when I lifted it out. Several of my digging companions were with me that day, and I think they were happy to see my euphoric response as I wiped the muck off the sides and saw that it was stenciled with large block letters: (in top arch) THOMPSON & CO'S. / <-> / MAMMOTH / <-> / (in bottom arch) SPRING WATER. The font and light brown color of the stenciled lettering are also rather distinctive. While this was my first complete full-size jug I ever dug, it

was not perfect. There was a ding in the word “MAMMOTH,” between the “A” and the second “M”, with a hairline fracture radiating diagonally up through and beyond the “S” in “THOMPSON” and downward through the “R” in “SPRING” (see Figure 2). Furthermore, there was a hole in the bottom the size of a quarter. Despite the defects, I was enamored with the find, and there was no doubt it was a keeper for me.

Since I found this jug, my fellow collecting friends and I have always assumed that the proprietor for this water was the local Mammoth Spring, on Mammoth Spring Road in North Greenbush, just a twenty minute drive from the location I dug the olden receptacle. Without taking the time to delve into the local North Greenbush directories to assess the degree to which this site may have exploited by some entrepreneur, I instead did an internet search for “Mammoth Springs.” To my surprise and dismay, I could not find any evidence that the local Mammoth Springs was ever commercially operated, much less sold in jugs throughout the country.

I was able to find a Mammoth Springs jug for sale on eBay, with a more standard form but with the same distinctive font style and oversize mouth. The seller attributes the source of the water to be Mammoth Springs, Arkansas. Wikipedia tells us that this Mammoth Spring “is a large, first magnitude karst spring that arises in the Ozark Plateau within the state of Arkansas.” That’s very interesting but beyond the seller’s attribution, I could find no other information to corroborate that this spring was commercially exploited. Again, perhaps there are *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector* readers who can add some accurate history to this very captivating jug.

### West Troy Pottery with Blue 1

I lived in downtown Albany, New York, from 1984-1996, and took advantage of my proximity to the many remaining old

sites in a city that was once a prolific 19th century hub for beer, soda and medicine merchants. Many of these businessmen had attractive glass or stoneware bottles made to package their merchandise and sold their wares to the local citizens. In my free time, I would slowly drive through the old neighborhoods and commercial districts, in search of construction sites and empty lots where these valued relics might be found.

It was on one of these excursions in the early 1990s that a pair of vacant lots caught my eye on what looked to be a Civil War era neighborhood on Orange Street. Venturing out with my six-foot probe, I located what I thought might be a privy, but turned out to be an ash pit about three feet deep and maybe eight feet by four feet wide. Predominant in this pit were Hennessey and Nolan Albany Hutchinsons with the old State Capitol Building (1812-1879) embossed on the obverse. I may have found as many as ten, with a few of them near-mint, whittled, and in a nice ice blue aqua. The heartbreaker in is this hole was a highly decorated PROFESSOR / GEO. J. BYRNE / NEW YORK / THE / GREAT / UNIVERSAL / COMPOUND / STOM-ACH / BITTERS / PATENTED / 1870. With that amazing find a broken dream, I returned to the site on a warm summer evening after a day of work just up the hill at the New York State Education Department.

I recall slowly chipping away in the crunchy coal ash when my digging tool suddenly struck an object creating a pleasant echoing hollow sound. This same strike exposed the alluring, shiny curved body of a gray stoneware jug or crock. Diggers know that larger stoneware pieces found in old dumps are typically broken. Jugs and crocks were useful utilitarian objects that served many purposes in an 1800s home, and thus were not commonly thrown out until damaged. Compound that with my innately pessimistic outlook, and in most situations, I would naturally



Figure 3: Close up of damage to WEST TROY POTTERY with large blue 1.

assume this centenarian pot was in pieces. However, in this instance, I was encouraged not only by the nice resonating ring that emanated from the artifact when I gently tapped it, but by the fact that it was so firmly entrenched in the ash that it did not budge. I slowly and carefully continued chipping away at the strata surrounding the object and was happy to see that as the top portion was revealed, it was indeed a jug.

With the relic halfway unearthed, I did not see any blue design on it, which fueled my next fear that it might be blank. It was at that point however that enough of the surrounding resisting material had been removed that I was able to carefully raise it from its resting place of roughly one hundred years. Turning it around and lifting it to eye level, my wishes were realized when I saw a large (4 ½ inch), hand-painted blue slip number 1, with horizontal hatch lines filling it in. Above that, the maker’s name: WEST TROY (in arch) / N.Y. / POTTERY was boldly stamped and lightly awash in blue slip glaze. Wow. Excitement. Joy. Disbelief. Next, check the condition. It was all there, but I did find a hairline crack running vertically from the base of the 1 for two inches, then diagonally to the right for two more inches (see Figure 3). I was disappointed that the jug was not perfect, but it was complete and structurally sound. Most

important, it was a splendid piece to add to my collection.

Following are excerpts from an article titled “An English Porcelain Maker in West Troy” by Warren F. Broderick that provides some insight into the history of the West Troy Pottery:

“The Village of West Troy is well known in conjunction with the manufacture of stoneware in the 19th century and was truly one of the major centers of American stoneware production. Located in Albany County on the west bank of the Hudson River opposite the City of Troy, West Troy was incorporated in 1836 from area communities known as Washington, Port Schuyler, West Troy, and Gibbonsville. West Troy became the City of Watervliet in 1896. The Erie Canal passed through the length of the village, just south of its second junction with the Champlain Canal.”

“The first stoneware pottery was established there by Sanford Perry in 1833 at a site along the Erie Canal on Champlain Street, and under various owners it existed there until destroyed by fire in 1845. Following that fire, Nathan Porter and George Fraser opened a new pottery at the corner of Washington and Schenectady Streets” and “operated under various owners until 1899. During much of that time period, it was simply known as the West Troy Pottery.”

Further internet research indicates that West Troy Pottery was prolific in their output for many decades, and their products were shipped west and north on the Erie and Champlain Canals and may be found in many areas of the country. Based on the wide range of striking jugs and crocks created there, they must have employed a substantial number of talented artists who painted a wide variety of animals, plants and abstract decorations using blue slip glaze.

I also found photographs of three other West Troy Pottery number 1 (indicating

one-gallon size) jugs online. The 1s all have a similar design with the large flamboyant 1 filled in with horizontal hatching, but each also has its own distinctive flair reflecting the artist’s individual style.

I did find one other online article about a crock created at the West Troy Pottery worth noting. The following is from the Crocker Farm July 18, 2015 Stoneware Auction lot # 1: “This jar features arguably the finest depiction of an elephant in American stoneware known. Its unusually-large-sized design dominates the horizontal space of the jar’s front, measuring an outstanding 11” long by 9” tall. The decoration, utilizing slip-trailed and brushed decorative techniques throughout, also includes graffito-style carving of the cobalt slip delineating the eye and ear of the animal. An exuberant, folk art quality is created with the heavily daubed and striped cobalt details throughout the elephant’s body. Adding interest to the design is the animal’s distinctive boot-like feet, an anatomical inaccuracy, which imparts a whimsical tone. Coupled with the appealing subject matter and charming style of the design is a wonderful sense of motion, conveyed with the creature’s raised trunk, running stance, and arched tail. This decoration was most likely inspired by the rise in popularity of the American circus during the latter half of the century, in which elephants such as Jumbo delighted large audiences. Price Realized: \$166,750.00 (\$145,000 hammer, plus 15% buyer’s premium).” (See Figure 4). Interesting that while my jug and this piece were made at the same pottery in roughly the same time period, the elephant crock is worth approximately 1,667.5 times more than mine! It does not matter; I still treasure my West Troy Pottery number 1 jug.

### White’s Utica

I dug my next stoneware piece in the fall of 2017 in one of my favorite ash dumps. I already wrote about this specific find in



Figure 4: West Troy Pottery with elephant that sold for \$166,750 in 2015.

an article titled “Collecting a Pot-Pourri of Dug Bottles” published in the April and May issues of 2019 *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector*. Following is a summarized account from that article.

I was digging alone about 20 feet from the edge of the landowner’s lawn. His sister had just visited me to say hello and to carry off a bucketful of our cast-off bottles. I was having a rather dreadful day, not finding anything very exciting. Regardless, this did not dissuade me from digging to the very bottom, as that is part of my creed. Time and time again, I have struck gold at the very bottom of a dump, justifying my doctrine of not leaving one shovelful of a hole undug! My doggedness was rewarded again this day, when the depth of the hole was well over my head, and my shovel pried up an elaborately decorated pottery jar. Although I had never dug one, I recognized its style right away as a White’s Utica piece. With its large, elevated, molded, blue slip sunflower, incised “1” on the back with just a wash of blue, nice gray glaze and raised dot pattern overall, I was immediately enamored (see Figure 5). The jar is small at just one quart in size, and likely was a container for butter, jam or honey. Miss-



**Figure 5:** Freshly dug quart size White's Utica stoneware jar. Near perfect condition but missing lid.

ing was the stoneware lid, so I immediately engaged in an intensive effort to find it. Unfortunately, it was not to be.

I showed the jar to renowned stoneware collector Art Dell at the next bottle club meeting. He said that it would be very difficult to find a matching lid for the jar. Indeed, in the two and a half years since then, his words have been proven to be prophetic. Despite searches on eBay, appeals on stoneware sites and forums, and asking at bottle shows, I have not been able to find a lid in the right style, color and size (3-1/4 inches). It is also missing a wire bail.

White's Utica factory was very prolific in the later part of the 19th century and into the early 20th century. Per the internet *Antique Gazette*, the roots of the firm were started by Noah White in the 1830s. Noah's sons and grandson later joined the company, and it went through a series of name changes. From 1876 to 1882, the firm's mark became "WHITES, UTICA, N.Y." The company used the name "CENTRAL NEW YORK POTTERY" from 1890 to 1899, and then "WHITES POTTERY INC." until the company stopped making stoneware in 1907.

The article does not state the reason for its abrupt demise, when the volume of its output would indicate the company was very successful.

## ACORN DISTILLERY

July 14, 2019, Bastille Day, was hot and humid with the high peaking at 86 degrees Fahrenheit. In other words, it was a good day to dig. It was also a good day in terms of the volume of good bottles I would find. The haul included a 2-inch amber indented panel bottle embossed PROTO NUCLEIN; four Hutchinsons, including a quart-sized DeFreest; a NYC pint strap-sided flask with slug plate embossed "A. NEURAD 202-204 FIRST AVE;" a local embossed pharmacy; several Bromos; a Kilmer's Kidney Cure; an amber blob Weber's Weiss Bier Albany; an 1858 Mason jar, plus a dozen more bottles that were at least sellable. At about six feet down, I was still in a very rich layer and digging accordingly with extra caution.

When a digger meets a bottle — or any vessel — there are different manners of introduction. Sometimes you just bump into each other, which can be dangerous to the bottle if the digger is not careful with his digging tool. On other occasions, a small sliver of the artifact is suddenly revealed to the digger, teasing him with what might be. I've had bottles unexpectedly fall into the hole right at my feet as I'm chipping away at an ashen wall. On this day, in this instance, my shovel spade sunk into the crunchy ash without obstruction, but as I pried the load of olden coal embers upward, a peculiarly shaped jug popped up from the earth.

It was in my hands and in front of my face in a heartbeat. I was stunned. Bulbous in form, with a cream-colored base and a lightly orangey-brown top, it was magnificently stenciled. I was delighted beyond words but was aghast when I noticed the very top was sliced off (see **Figure 6**). Other than that, it was intact and in lovely condition, including the

handle. The broken exposed surface was infused with rust, reflecting the hundred-plus years it had spent in the ground with metal and other trash from long ago. I mused that if it was complete, such an enchanting piece could never have been thrown out by anyone in their right mind. No, instead it was purchased around 1890, as a loving gift from a wife to a husband with sophisticated tastes who appreciated a quality Irish Whiskey. The blessed man was delighted and cherished every drop of the finely distilled beverage. He also treasured the elegant and striking jug it was packaged in and placed it on the mantle above the fireplace as a reminder of his wife's tender devotion. There it stayed undisturbed for a decade, until it was struck by a ball, errantly thrown by one of the grandchildren (Vera, Chuck and Dave) while playacting baseball stars of the era: Christy Mathewson, Frank Chance and Honus Wagner. The prized piece tumbled end over end to the floor, where the very top was tragically shattered. With the beloved object beyond repair, Grandpa reluctantly threw it into the ashbin, along with the Hutchinson soda bottles the grandkids (who were now in a bit of trouble) had placed there earlier, and the strap-sided whiskey he had polished off the night before.

Whatever the circumstances of its purchase, consumption, breakage and disposal into this ash tip around the turn of the last century, I was now the privileged caretaker in this chain of ownership. Being an obsessive collector (like many of you readers), I next turned to the internet to find out all I could about my new revered possession. My searches based on the compelling wording of the transfer: "ACORN DISTILLERY / (in top arch) TIPPERARY CO / (intricately designed acorns on branch with oak leaves) / (in base arch) IRISH WHISKEY / RIPE & MELLOW / GUARANTEED ¼ GALLON" turned up very little. One thing I was sure of, it was British made. I based this on two factors:

1) The high quality of the transfer. The British had mastered and industrialized this craft, creating enormous quantities and varieties of elaborately designed flagons, ginger beer bottles, creamers and pot lids. American transferware, by comparison, is plain, rudimentary, and scarce.

2) The transfer on the jug clearly indicates it was an Irish Whiskey from Tipperary County, Ireland.

This compelled me to seek further information from the Facebook private forum *Bottle Diggers and Collectors*, dedicated to the experiences of the British bottle digging and collecting community. I posted pictures of my Acorn find there, along with a description. I was impressed that one of the very first persons to respond was none other than Alan Blakeman, owner of BBR Auctions.

To my astonishment, Alan straight away corrected my assumption on the county of origin. “American made” he stated bluntly. He added that it’s “quite a scarce piece” and “well worth repairing - with correct neck/lip finish.”

How were Alan and the others so sure that it was of American manufacture? One giveaway I quickly learned is the location stenciled on the jug: “TIPPERARY COUNTY.” Niall O’Connor remarked that “My Dad was from County Tipp. No one (from Britain or Ireland) would say ‘Tipperary County.’” He further informed me “there was an American Acorn Distillery in Pennsylvania.”

Paul Bloomfield offered his considerable knowledge on the artifact: “I would have thought it was at least a hundred years old. American made (probably Sherwood Bros) for the American market. If you google ‘Weideman Company Cleveland Ohio,’ they had an identical style jug made for Auld Lang Syne Malt Whiskey. The spelling of whiskey with an ‘e’ is also a good clue to American origin.”

So, there you have it, very compelling evidence that the jug was in fact made

in the United States. Paul Bloomfield, incidentally, is the coauthor, along with Alan Blakeman, of the masterful *Whiskey Galore (a celebration of stoneware whiskey jugs ... & more!)* As soon as I knew of this book, I ordered a copy directly from Alan, and when at last it arrived (autographed by Alan), I was delighted at the in-depth detailed research and the high quality of the graphics.

The description of the jug from page 11 in the book is as follows: “ACORN DISTILLERY: There is no record of Acorn Distillery in County Tipperary, Ireland. This jug looks American in manufacture, and most examples have been found there. The reverse layout of ‘Tipperary Co’ is again typically American. ‘ACORN DISTILLERY / TIPPERARY CO / IRISH WHISKEY / RIPE & MELLOW / GUARANTEED ¼ GALLON’, America, no pottery mark, (probably Sherwood Bros), 7.75ins tall. Value £200-250.”

Further internet research confirmed that the Sherwood Brothers were the only American company who mastered the skill to produce quality transfer printed stoneware with sophisticated design. However, firm attribution is difficult because they do not appear to have marked any of their whiskey jugs. From the pieces I have seen ascribed to the Sherwood Brothers, there is a wide range in the level of detail and complexity in the transfers. Probably the most elaborate are the superb Martindale & Johnson jugs with a scene of an Indian maiden in front of a waterfall.

Jack Sullivan’s November 5, 2009 blog on the Sherwood Brothers, ‘Bottles, Booze, and Back Stories; Sherwood Brothers: Under the Radar,’ offers a little more insight on this company and their high-quality transferware that distinguished them from all other potteries in the U.S.:

“Almost two decades ago, I wrote an article entitled ‘Who Made America’s Whiskey Ceramics?’ At that time, I was convinced that most, if not all, of the

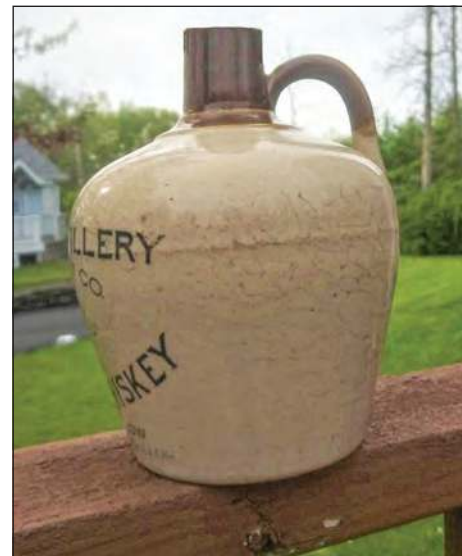


Figure 6: Side view of ACORN DISTILLERY IRISH WHISKEY missing top.



Figure 7: Sherwood Brothers Pottery salesman’s sample demonstrating the skills of the craftsmen.

fancy jugs and bottles were made in Scotland or England and shipped to our shores. Alan Blakeman, the leading guru on British bottles, disagreed. He argued that the U.S. must have had pottery firms with the capability of designing and executing even intricate transfer designs. Alan was right.”

“I saw the proof for myself in 1998. It was a small stoneware crock, a salesman’s sample for the Sherwood Bros. Pottery

of New Brighton, Pennsylvania. Shown here in a detail (see Figure 7), the crock is drawn with an elegance and precision equal to anything the “Old World” could produce. The ad copy on the item offers to provide underglaze transfer printed items of equal perfection to Sherwood Brothers clients.”

“New Brighton is nestled in the western Appalachian Mountains not far from Pittsburgh. Because of good clay sources in the region, the town spawned a number of ceramic manufacturers. About 1879, the Sherwood brothers, G.W. and W.D., founded their pottery. By 1895 they were employing as many as 140 workers and had the capacity to produce two railroad carloads of pottery per day. Their success extended into the 20th Century.”

“For most of its existence Sherwood Brothers had a highly skilled force of pottery workers and artisans. Unlike other American potteries of the time, this firm had mastered the art of the underglaze transfer. This process requires great skill and precision. Sherwood Brothers boasted of its ‘Sherwood Ware’ as a ‘decidedly superior line, made up in a decidedly superior way.’ Its transfer work, the company said, was accomplished ‘from fine designs cut in copper, bringing out patterns than cannot possibly be reproduced by a rubber stamp.’ Stamping was a more commonly used, and cruder, method of inking a design or label on pottery. The firm bragged about its workforce: ‘Sherwood artists, experts who devote all their time to this work, are constantly producing some strikingly beautiful results.’”

“A catalog from early in that period shows Sherwood Bros. Company offering a wide range of stoneware items, including whiskey jugs, stoneware bottles, inks, canning jars, jelly crocks, mugs and steins, pitchers, teapots, stacking bowls, cuspidors, match scratchers, and water coolers, chicken watering fonts, ice tubs, butter and preserve jars and -- not to be overlooked -- chamber pots.”

“Because a major component of the firm’s trade was whiskey containers, the arrival of Prohibition in 1920 was serious blow to its business. This shock was compounded by the onset of the Great Depression a few years later. Business directories indicate that by 1931 the number of employees had dwindled to 40 and by 1935 was only 35. About 1939 Sherwood Bros. went out of business.”

“Other defunct potteries such as those in Red Wing, Minnesota; Knowles, Taylor & Knowles in East Liverpool, Ohio; and White’s of Utica, New York, have continued to attract the attention of generations of collectors to their ceramic containers. Sherwood Brothers, perhaps because they did not always mark their products, consistently have flown below the collector radar. As America’s foremost transfer printing pottery of the 19th and 20th Centuries, they deserve a much better fate.”

### James Van Dyk Tea Pot

Several weeks later, digging in the same venerable ash mound, a delicate and delightful miniature pottery teapot, measuring 3 inches tall, and 1-1/4 inches at the base, popped out of the ground. The top half was in a brown glaze with a cream-colored bottom, and it was stenciled with black lettering within a rectangle: “JAS. VAN DYK / TEA IMPORTER.” I was instantly enchanted with the find, but my joy was significantly tempered by the glaring fact that the pour spout was broken off.

Looking online that evening, I was able to find a few pictures of complete VAN DYK teapots just like mine that included a cute little lid (that too was missing on mine). Additionally, I found a variant of the teapot that is stenciled “JAMES VAN DYK CO. / TEAS & COFFEES.”

According to ads found online from the 1930s, the company was founded in 1760 by Nicholas Van Dyk, grandson of one of New York City’s first inhabitants, when

he hung a sign in front of his little shop in Newark announcing the sale of coffee, chocolate, mustard and spices. His business prospered, even in the perilous days of the Revolutionary War. The tradition of coffee roasting was handed down from father to son for six generations.

I was able to find further information about the James Van Dyk company from *Who’s Who in New York City and State Edited*, by John W. Leonard, Third Edition:

“James Van Dyk: Tea and coffee merchant. Born in Carondelette Mo., January 23, 1863, parents Nicholas and Eliza (Bennett) Van Dyk. attended Public School No. 1 in Brooklyn and had private instruction. He married Cecile Russell in Brooklyn, N.Y. Children: James Johnson born 1893, Doris born 1895, Francis Russell born 1901. In coffee roasting business with father when 13 years of age: in retail tea store when 15: before 16, opened a branch tea store for the C.A. Tea Co., at New Bedford, Mass, which is still running. Opened tea store for himself when 18 in Brooklyn, which is still in existence, being owned now by Van Dyk & Bayer. Traveled west in 1901, studied medicine for 2 and ½ years until Sept. 1902. Then conducted several tea stores in Brooklyn. In 1900 started the James Van Dyk Co., which now operates 40 stores in 15 cities.”

James was quite the entrepreneur! It may be indicative of how deeply the family business was instilled in his DNA when he bailed on his medical studies after two and a half years to go full tilt into the tea and coffee business that had been in his family’s blood for 140 years. It seems like a good decision, because by 1914 James was operating 65 stores in 27 cities. Three Van Dyk stores were opened in my neck of the woods – in Albany, Schenectady and Troy. Besides coffee and tea, they sold groceries. I assume one of these stores was the source of my teapot.

Diane Van Dyk, great granddaughter of James, manages the Facebook Forum:

*Van Dyk Teas and Coffee*, and provided some additional information about her great grandfather's business. "The James Van Dyk teapots were giveaways for the Van Dyk Coffee and Tea Company. The teapots like yours were little banks, because, per their ads, the money you saved by buying their quality affordable coffee or tea left you money in the bank. My grandfather Francis (son of James) passed away at a young age and his older siblings, Doris and James Johnson, then controlled the business. Unfortunately, they did not have their father's business acumen and they ran it into the ground. My father, Nicholas, was too young to be of any help, and the business was sold off in the mid-1940s. My great grandfather James was, in my opinion, ahead of his time as a businessman. Reading his ads, he was very creative." Judging by his success, I must agree with her.

I do not have the opening dates for the stores in my area but judging by the 1900 founding date of the company, and the 1890-1915 range of the ash dump where I found the pot, it probably dates from around 1902-1910. They must be fairly scarce because Diane said they go for around \$200 when they pop up on eBay. One other note of interest: Jack Sullivan's Sherwood Brothers blog does list teapots as one of that company's products, and at least one eBay seller attributes his Van Dyk teapot to the Sherwood Brothers Pottery. Diane confirmed that this was her understanding as well. However, like the Acorn Distillery jug, it is unmarked.

## Healy the Healer

While I loved each of the stoneware pieces described in this narrative, the hairline cracks, dings, chips and missing handles bothered me. But what could I do? I did know of people who repaired stoneware and pottery, but they only did it for their own pieces.

Fortunately, as fate would have it, somehow, sometime, somewhere – probably at a bottle show, or bottle meeting, or



**Figure 8:** Front and side view of repaired J.W. Mason mini jug restored to its original form and luster.

maybe while digging side-by-side in a bottle dump, I met Mr. Jim Healy. I don't recall the exact circumstances, but I do remember that I felt an affinity for Jim right away. Perhaps it was his gregarious nature, or a good deal he gave me on a bottle I liked, or the sweet essence of his relationship with his wife Gert, who is always by his side at the shows. As I got to know Jim better, I became aware of his artistic skills, as well as the fact that he was dabbling in stoneware repair. As I broached Jim on the possibility of his mending some of my damaged pieces for a fee, he said he was about ready to go into practice doing stoneware repairs, and we made plans for me to bring him some of my damaged items.

I decided to start with a couple of mini jugs: my J.W. Mason, found as a youth in Virginia around 1980 (as described earlier in this chronicle) and another, even smaller two-tone one with a missing handle (but no inscription on it). This was over a year ago, but from what I recall, the turnaround on the items was quick. As I drove the half hour to Jim's house, my anxiety rose as the moment neared when I would at last be reunited with the precious items from my collection. Once I arrived, and the pleasantries

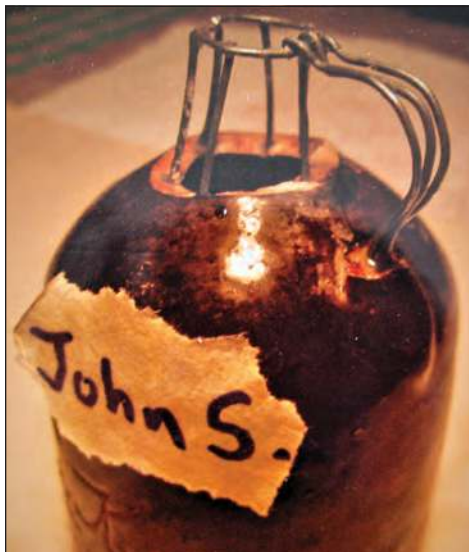
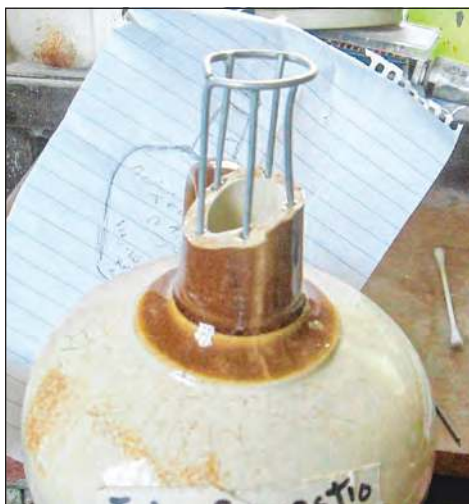
of greeting one another were past, I was finally able to see and hold my restored treasures. I was awestruck and pleased beyond words. The results exceeded my highest expectations.

The top and handle of the J.W. Mason were so perfectly blended with the original body of the jug there was no way to discern where they were melded together. The Albany slip glaze was flawlessly matched to its original, as was the texture of the jug's surface (see Figure 8). The two-tone mini jug with the missing tiny handle, was similarly impeccably whole again. Dreams do come true. If I were not such a manly man, I would have hugged him on the spot, but I instead lavished him with praise and paid him a very reasonable fee for such masterful work.

## The Process

I was so impressed that I asked Jim about his background as an artist and how he does what he does with the stoneware repairs. He said he was inspired to start drawing and painting as a youth by his uncle, renowned local illustrator Leonard Healy. Jim has been an artist all his life, and spent his career traveling all over the country as a blueprint designer for Sears.





**Figure 9:** ACORN DISTILLERY IRISH WHISKEY with holes drilled in top ready for wire to be inserted.

**Figure 10:** ACORN DISTILLERY IRISH WHISKEY with wire frame in place ready for mold and pouring of mixture.

**Figure 11:** The J.W. Mason mini jug repair in process with wire frame in place for both the top and handle.

Jim said he did not discover the materials or invent the process used to repair stoneware, but once he learned, he fine tuned his own techniques to match his skills and experience. Jim first drills small post holes strategically placed around the area to be repaired. Next he inserts 10- or 12-gauge ceiling hanging wire into the holes and shapes them to build the framework needed to support the molds (see **Figures 9, 10 and 11**). He then carefully shapes the molds into the targeted form, whether it's a missing handle or top, or a hole in the side or bottom.

The molds are made from glossy photographic developing paper. Jim uses auto body filler to replace the missing ceramic. He adds the hardening agent to the filler in a proportion that produces the desired vitrified quality to simulate the feel and rigidity of stoneware. Once mixed, the resultant exothermic chemical reaction creates a great amount of heat and hardens within thirty seconds, so Jim must work very fast and with great care as he pours the mixture into the mold.

If creating the top of a jug, Jim will place a wooden dowel right in the middle of the top to form the cork hole. Using cooking spray on the inside of the mold ensures it is easily removed after the casting has dried. Jim will patch up any rough spots by applying the amalgam where needed and using various tools and techniques to simulate and match the surface of the object being restored. This touch-up work must be done within two hours before the surface becomes completely rock hard.

Once Jim is happy with the repaired area, he prepares it for the coloration phase by applying acetone. This process modifies the molecular structure of the surface so that when the first coat of paint is applied, it will bleed into the outer layer of the jug for a base color. Jim meticulously blends his oil paints, and thins the mix with additional acetone, to precisely match the color and look of the stoneware. This may take several coats before he is happy with the result. The last phase

involves the application of up to five coats of lacquer that are sanded and buffed to simulate the glossy sheen of salt glaze. Jim is so exacting in his art that the most intense scrutiny (at least by me) cannot distinguish between the original and repaired surfaces.

With the first pieces from my collection restored to their original glory, and my confidence in Jim's abilities even further bolstered by his detailed description of the exacting nature of his art, the die was now cast. We arranged for me to drop off the next pieces for repair.

## The Restoration

In history, the "Restoration" refers to the return of Charles II as king of England in 1660 following the period of Oliver Cromwell's Commonwealth. In my world, the "Restoration" refers to the extraordinary preservation work made by Jim Healy to several of my most valued dug stoneware artifacts.

I returned to Jim's home on July 21, 2019, along with my nephew Mike, a digger and collector like myself. Visiting Jim's home is like touring a museum. He, too, is a passionate digger and has an incredible collection of dug bottles that includes many scarce Warner's, Saratogas and pottery bottles that Mike and I enviously admired. His gun collection is also very impressive, with many dating to the Revolutionary and Civil wars, but that is a story in and of itself that I will leave to someone else to chronicle. After a joyous visit, I left Jim with several of my most treasured finds. Jim told me it would take a while and to be patient.

Between work, time with kids, time with my lady, working on the house, bottle digging, playing tennis, visiting family and friends, the months flew by. In late October, I got a call from Jim. The repairs to my coveted stoneware relics were done. The next Sunday, November 3, I arrived at his house eager with anticipation. The pieces were in his workshop, in the back and detached from the house.

As soon as we arrived in his workshop, Jim handed me a half-pint (small size) Warner's Safe Cure (5WR) that was dark green (see Figure 12). How peculiar! As soon as I held the bottle, its heaviness gave away that it was ceramic. Feeling raised lettering on the back, I turned it over and saw my name, JOHN SAVASTIO, embossed in an arch just like WARNER'S name is embossed on his bottles. Beneath that is a star, and underneath that the bold side portrait of an eagle, and finally at the bottom, where ROCHESTER, N.Y. is normally stamped, was the year, 2019. Knowing that I was a Warner's collector, Jim had created this fantasy bottle as a very special personalized gift. This was totally unexpected, and I was astonished. What a fantastic and poignant present from a very talented and generous friend. But this was just the beginning.

Jim had my items on a table in the back of the room and I took them in one by one. The West Troy jug, with the large blue 1, though only suffering before from cracks on the front, now glowed as if fresh out of the kiln, yet still retained the grandeur and look of an old piece of folk art from the 1880s (see Figure 13). I next picked up my White's Utica honey pot with the blue sunflower. This item had been close to perfect except for the missing lid. Using a White's lid close in size to the one needed for my jar, Jim created a mold that captured the detailed design and adjusted the size to fit my jar perfectly. On top of that, he fashioned a wire bail and added a vintage wood handle just like it would have had in the day. I was so pleased and happy to see this beautiful little jar restored to its original glory (see Figure 14). Following that, my eyes fell upon the Acorn Distillery, the Sherwood Brothers whiskey jug with the ornate yet delicate oak leaf and acorn transfer. The top inch had been long gone when I had dug it up three months earlier, and now it was seamlessly whole again, from top to bottom, with the touch of wear from being buried for

a hundred years still providing it that aged splendor (see Figure 15). I savored the moment and the fact that it would be proudly displayed in my bottle room for many, many years to come.

Jim has quite purposefully placed the Mammoth Springs in the back so that it would be the penultimate of my prized objects to come into view. This flagon had a chip right in the front when I had dug it, along with two radiating cracks. By contrast, it was now so vastly improved that it sparkled and exuded perfection, which brought me immense gratification.

And right next to it was a jug that was very similar in form with the same singular broad lip finish, but because I knew it was not mine, I had not taken note of it at first. However, I was thunderstruck when I recognized that it too was a Mammoth Spring! And not only that, this one was emblazoned in the center with a Woolly Mammoth! Jim took delight in my shock and confusion, and quickly explained that it was a fantasy jug that he had hand-painted on a blank 1870s stoneware container as a special gift for me to augment the original one I dug (see Figure 16). Jim matched the unique style and coloring of the original jug's font but added the spectacular accoutrement of a masterfully painted mammoth, one of the greatest creatures ever to walk the face of the earth. Personally, I feel this is even better executed than West Troy Pottery elephant that sold for \$166,000!

Our hobby is very rewarding when we unearth a great and unexpected find or track down a precious artifact through hard work and diligence. But without the joy and fulfillment that comes with sharing our prized possessions with family and friends, it would be a hollow pastime. And every now and then, our friends will go far above and beyond our expectations and surprise us with something extraordinary. Such was the case with this very special gift from my dear and very talented friend, Jim Healy, the Stoneware Doctor.



**Figure 12:** Front and back of John Savastio WARNER'S SAFE CURE fantasy bottle. Was the backwards "J" intentional?

**Figure 13:** Flawlessly refurbished WEST TROY POTTERY with large blue 1.

**Figure 14:** White's Utica stoneware jar with replica lid and wire bail. Ready to fill with honey!

**Footnote 1:** You can find an advertisement for Jim Healy's stoneware repair services in the April 2020 issue of *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector*, page 23. I noticed a similar service provided by "Stoneware Stoneworks," advertised in the March 2020 issue, page 23.

**Footnote 2:** When I contacted David Graci, author of "White's Pottery" and "American Stoneware Bottles: A history and study" about this article, he had this comment: "There is a long-standing tradition among stoneware collectors, who are relegated to two camps: Those who accept stoneware items that have some repair work and those who refuse any form of repairs. These are long standing beliefs and care must be taken when dealing with any item that you as

a collector wish to have repaired. It has always been my operating method of telling a potential buyer that an item has a repair by placing a tag with pertinent info on the piece with the repair. That way no one is misled." Note that Jim marks his fantasy pieces on the base, and I have a note in my collection inventory spreadsheet documenting repairs so that information will be provided to potential buyers when the items are eventually sold.

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**Figure 15:** ACORN DISTILLERY IRISH WHISKEY before and after. How gratifying to have this beautiful whiskey jug returned to its original magnificent form.

**Figure 16:** Original THOMPSON & CO. MAMMOTH SPRING WATER wonderfully brought back its native state, with the MAMMOTH fantasy jug highlighted by Jim Healy's superbly composed mammothus primigenius.

**Figure 17:** Jim Healy, the Stoneware Doctor, holding the original and fantasy MAMMOTH SPRING jugs.

**Figure 18:** The JAMES VAN DYK Teapot before and after mending. Note the perfect new top that really brings this piece to its past splendor.

**Figure 19:** A group shot of my dug stoneware artifacts that Jim has so immensely improved though his expert craftsmanship.

**Figure 20:** A collection of incredible fantasy jugs Jim has created for the annual Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors (FOHBC) shows.