

THREE-STATE

DIGGING

by Jeff Mihalik

When I am not working, I am either digging a privy or out trying to get permission to dig. Getting permission to dig takes a lot of time and energy, and gas! The further away from home I go to get permission to dig, the more time I have to spend driving around hoping someone will be at the target property and interested in talking with me, and now with the cost of gas what it is, the more expensive it becomes. That said, since this is my hobby, the expenditures in time, energy, and money is just part of making it happen. Heck, I know a lot of other people who spend a lot more time and money going on vacations or a cruise, and I bet I have as much fun or more than most of them, LOL.

I have often written about, presented on, or discussed digging privies in multiple states within my region (i.e., the tri-state area of Pennsylvania, Ohio, and West Virginia). However, in one very memorable short period of time this summer, I was able to dig several privies in all three states!

WHEELING, WEST VIRGINIA

I had been working on getting this permission in Wheeling for several months, and finally, I was able to seal the deal. The property owner was somewhat older than me but very active and took nice care of his property. We had already probed out three privies that were all along the hillside.

We showed him where we wanted to dig, and he had no problem with the privy locations. I was with Luke Yoas that Sunday, and we started to open up the first privy. It was a wood liner and probed to be about six or seven feet deep. In the upper fill, I hit something that made a hollow sound and slowed down my digging since, at this time, I was still using the long shovel. Seeing what appeared to be a jug, I switched tools to the short shovel to expose the jug. Clearing away the dirt and debris, I could see some blue on the handle, so seeing the handle and with blue, it was a great indication that the jug may be whole and stenciled. Sure enough, it was a nice local Wheeling "S. Horkheimer" merchant jug with advertising for their business. [Pic. 1]

[1] S. Horkheimer & Co. No 1152 Water And 1, 3 & 5 Twelfth Sts. Wheeling W. VA. after cleaning.





[2]

We also found several other better bottles (hutches, meds, but nothing great). The pit across the walkway was similar sized, and once again, high up, we found a three-stripped jug. [Pic. 2] This pit also had a decent number of bottles, but again, nothing really worth mentioning. The third pit was right next to pit two, so we moved the tarps over and started to get at it. It was like 90 degrees, and we were beat, but we figured this pit had to be older,

and it was. However, they were really hard on the bottles as they threw in many bricks and rocks to compress the trash. There were literally 50 historical flasks and many other civil war-era bottles broken up throughout the pit, and many embossed "WHEELING VA." However, along one of the walls, I found a complete flask:

a Louisville double eagle in aqua, the first complete bottle! [Pics. 3 & 4]



[3]

Along the wall was also a nice pontiled pepper sauce. Then I saw a black glass ale, ladies leg type bottle and dark aqua flask, and I knew from digging others they were local Wheeling bottles. The ale was embossed "L.S." on the shoulder for Louis Snyder, and the flask was an "OLD RYE WHEELING VA." They looked complete, but when I picked them up out of the hole, the ale had a small hole on one of its sides, and the flask was cracked in half. Heck, they are really scarce bottles, and not having a complete ale in my collection now; I was glad to find it. Part of a free-blown candle stick and many damaged scrolls flasks were also found. [Pic. 5] There were not many more complete bottles other than a really sweet miniature open-pontil Stoddard ink! [Pic. 6]



[4]



[5]



[6]

SMALL TOWN PENNSYLVANIA

Later that week, I headed over to a small town we had been digging in Pennsylvania with some good success. However, being small towns, it is very easy to get through all the diggable lots quickly. One of our connections in this town mentioned that he knew a local historian in another local village just down the road and gave us his contact info. This town probably has like 30 total lots, with about half of those being favorable for digging (i.e., no buildings or parking lots in the back to cover over the privies). After making friends with the locals, we were allowed access to several lots that had homes and businesses that showed up on the 1876 map.

If you have ever dug in a small rural town, you know that they probably used outhouses into the 60s and I mean 1960s! But we soon figured out a couple of good ways to distinguish them, one being that the older privies were not sinking like the newer ones, and you had to probe all areas (not just sinking spots in the yard) to find the pre-1900 privies. I learned this after opening up several 1930-1940-era privies, but I did get a nice local milk! I soon found spots on two lots that I suspected were older. After opening up both of them up, I was stoked to find 1880 glass in the first couple of feet, and they both went back to about the late 1860s or early 1870s. One of the pits was maybe four feet deep and they liked to toss rocks into this one, too. [Pic. 7] I did find several complete bottles in both pits, nothing spectacular but nice finds nevertheless, including four "Baumans Boss Blue Liquid, Pittsburgh PA." in aqua and clear [Pic. 8], early (just missed being



[7] Shards of broken bottles and yellow mocha ware.

it was heavy! The property owner's son, who was in his 50s, was there when I dug it and said he really would like it. I supposed he was into Alchemy, so I gave it to him, but I did warn him not to get it on his hands and that it was potentially poisonous.

pontil) Pittsburgh medicines from "Henderson, Fanstock, and Sellers," a "Burdock Blood Bitters," chemist and apothecary bottles—one being a nice cobalt blue with "A X X" embossed on the base; and several local-regional embossed drug stores. The unusual items included a large end-of-day shooter marble [Pic. 9]. It has issues, but it's the largest shooter of its type I have ever seen and a clear pharmacy bottle that was full of mercury, and

[8]



[11]

[9]



LISBON, OHIO

The weekend was coming up, and after doing a 20-mile bike ride in Lisbon, Ohio, I drove around a few spots I still knew were not dug, or at least I had not dug there. I've been digging in Lisbon for 20 years now and have dug over 150 privies, and know of two other digging groups who have also dug there over the years, so good spots to dig are very limited now. I lucked out as the homeowner was in the back by the garage, painting. We discussed what I wanted to do and where, and he seemed OK,



[10]

but since the digging spot was between his yard and the neighbors, he wanted me to talk with the neighbor, too. The neighbor wasn't home then, but the garage was open, and his lawn-mower was in the driveway getting repaired, so I knew he was local. I drove around town and came back an hour later and, again, lucked out as he was in the yard. He was OK with me digging!

The house that used this privy has a historical marker from the 1840s, so I was excited. I opened it up and started to dig in. There was a lot of rubble on the top (rocks and bricks), so I had to remove all that before I could really get moving. Going towards the neighbor's yard, I found the privy wall, and it was brick! However, that wall was in bad shape and missing bricks and caving in, so I had to keep most of the dirt on that side of the pit intact. I exposed another wall, and it looked in good shape. [Pic. 10] It was mostly all ash after the rubble layer, so it was easy digging for the most part.

The first whole bottles out were several "Porters Cure of Pain Cleveland O." [Pic. 11] OK, a good age to start, but I suspected this pit to be pontil age, so I dug a test hole in one corner. Wham! Up comes a nice pontil medicine, "Barrells Indian Liniment." I probed the pit, and it went another several feet! That was the good news. The bad news was that two side walls were in very bad shape and the only way to do this right would be to take all the bricks out of the wall for several feet. The property owner was there at that point and asked that I not remove the walls as he feared it could lead to a cave-in or compromise the site over time. I very reluctantly agreed. Oh well, that is how it goes sometimes. After filling it in, I found a wood liner next to it, so I will work on making sure I can dig that spot. There was some concern that the family pets were buried near this area, and the property owner had to discuss it with his adult son. Fingers crossed!

So there you have it. One week, a lot of driving around, a bike ride, and six privies later, I had some nice bottles from three different States!

