

FOUND: Peacock Blue Stopper For Ayer's Hair Vigor Bottle

In my story, *The Covid Bottles of 2020*, published in the September and October 2021 issues of *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector*, I described several exceptional bottles dug that year. Amongst them was my discovery of my first-ever peacock blue Ayer's Hair Vigor about five feet deep in a turn-of-the-century ash dump in October. Holding it up to the sunlit sky, I confirmed the bottle was in beautiful condition, and I was thrilled with my great fortune [Fig 1]. However, to my dismay, the coveted matching glass stopper was missing. Thus, I immediately initiated a desperate search for the bottle's peacock blue companion, sifting through all the ash surrounding the bottle, but to no avail. Nevertheless, with this gorgeous and extraordinary bottle safely wrapped up in my backpack, I went home a very happy and content man that evening.

As someone with OCD traits, I could not let the missing stopper go. My thinking was that as diggers uncover Ayer's Hair Vigor bottles with missing stoppers, diggers must also be finding Ayer's stoppers with missing bottles. With a wide audience available to me via the Internet (specifically, Facebook), I assumed it would be fairly simple to find someone willing to sell me the matching stopper at a reasonable price. I posted the bottle on various Facebook digging and hair bottle pages, but once again, my efforts to find a stopper for this bottle were frustratingly futile. I was dismayed, but figured that somewhere, somehow, someday, the stars would align, and fate would provide me the corresponding crown to this bottle.

Over two and a half years went by with no developments. Then, on June 15, 2023, while searching through the latest digging posts on Facebook, I was admiring some exceptional bottles recently dug by Michael Patricks in Maine and posted on the *Antique & Vintage Bottle Collectors* page. To my astonishment, the finds included a small oval cobalt blue B. P. Co. medicine bottle with what was clearly a peacock blue Ayer's Hair Vigor stopper inside! [Fig 3] I immediately sent Michael a private message, congratulating him on his great day digging, and asked if he'd be willing to sell the stopper. Michael was gracious but wisely decided to hold onto it, hoping the missing bottle would soon turn up. I'd love to know the story behind someone randomly placing the Ayer's stopper in the BP bottle before throwing it away roughly 115 years ago.

The next twist in the story came just three months later, on Saturday, September 3, 2023. I was in Jim Healy's home with my nephew Michael, picking up my recently dug White's Utica Pine jug from Jim, the Stoneware Doctor, who had added the missing handle. Taking the opportunity to look through his fabulous collection of dug bottles, stoneware and pot lids, I spotted a glass stopper on one of his display shelves that looked like it belonged to an Ayer's bottle!

With my heart now beating at a considerably increased rate, I picked it up and held it to the window. It was hard to tell without an Ayer's bottle handy for reference, but it looked like it could

[Fig 1] My first and only dug Ayer's Hair Vigor bottle fresh out of the ground, October 2020.



[Fig 2] The cleaned-up Ayer's Hair Vigor highlighting its peacock blue color in the natural light of day.



[Fig 3] Michael Patricks' freshly dug Ayer's stopper stuck inside a cobalt blue B.P. Co. pill bottle!



be a match. It also appeared to have a little green to it, so it occurred to Mike and me that it may also go to a Hall's Hair Renewer. Being the always generous friend, Jim insisted that I take it, regardless of the accompanying bottle. Upon arriving home, I immediately took the stopper to the bottle room and confirmed it was not the same distinct color. Damn. It was, however, the exact same size and design as the Ayer's stopper, and as the shade was not too far off, I drilled a hole in a fitting cork I had, wedged the stopper in, stuck it in the top of the Ayer's, and now had the next best to the real thing. [Fig 4]

My tepid state of contentment was blissfully disrupted a few months later, on November 8, when Michael contacted me out of the blue to let me know he had found another Ayer's stopper! This time, though, it was on the top of a broken Ayer's [Fig 5], and he offered to send it to me if I was still interested. Hell yes, I was interested! There was a small chip on the rim, but it was minor.

A few weeks later, the package arrived, and I quickly and eagerly unpacked it and brought it down to the bottle room. Soon, it was in its rightful place: a peacock blue Ayer's stopper resting inside a peacock blue Ayer's Hair Vigor bottle [Fig 6]. A small wrong had been righted in the universe and felt good. Thank you, Michael Patricks, for your generosity and Godspeed to you in digging your own mint condition peacock blue Ayer's.

James Cook Ayer and Edward Haeffely registered a patent for a "Composition for Coloring and Dressing Human Hair" on January 28, 1868. The primary ingredients were tartro-plumbite of soda, glycerin, and water. There were several variations of the recipe throughout the years. Quoting from my 2021 article, *"In the early years, Ayer's Hair Vigor was in direct competition with Hall's Hair Renewer. They were not in competition long though, because Ayer bought out Hall in 1870. Note that Ayer's Hair Vigor and Hall's Hair Renewer were very similar to each other. Early bottles for both products were oval, embossed only on the base, with tight wrappers around the entire bottle."*

Ah, but all that was to change dramatically. The 1908 Ayer's Almanac made the following exciting announcement about the Hair Vigor: "The new bottle is of the finest and best flint glass, of a beautiful peacock-blue color. It is fitted with a practical and most unique patent shaker. The whole forms a decided ornament to any dressing table." The new peacock blue Hair Vigor bottle was made from 1907 to 1913. From 1914 to 1930, the same shape and sized bottle was machine-made, and the color went to cobalt blue. The Hall's Hair Renewer bottle also went through similar transformations during the same time. I am now content and very joyful that I can, at long last, crow I dug an Ayer's with a lovely and "most unique patent shaker."

[Fig 4] My Ayer's Hair Vigor with a Hall's Hair Renewer Stopper. Nice, but not quite right! (Paired with a few other dug hair bottles for contrast and comparison).



[Fig 5] Michael's second dug Ayer's stopper, stuck inside a broken Ayer's bottle.



[Fig 6] My Ayer's Hair Vigor at long last paired with a proper peacock blue crown!

