

"My name is Tom Paskiewicz, and I am an antique bottle collector from Billerica, Massachusetts, 25 miles north of Boston and eight miles South of New Hampshire. I have been collecting for about 47 years, plus or minus—who keeps track of time? My wife Nancy and I are 82 years old and have been married going on 53 years. When I heard about the Houston 24 Expo, I thought you might like to borrow my cobalt blue Wannalancet Indian Bitters bottle for display and to tell its story."

"My wife and I became close friends with Quincy Chamberlain 'the Dean of bottle collectors in the Lowell Mass. area.' I used to visit Quincy once a week to admire and talk about his Lowell bottles. One of those bottles was a Wannalancet Bitters (W 27). I believe he dug the bottle on Maple Street in Lowell at a very old dump site. At the time, the odd thing was that no one seemed to know how rare the bottle was or if it was the only one known.

"In 1988, Quincy called me to his house to tell me he wanted me to have the Wannalancet Bitters. That night I went home with it and not long after Quincy passed away. That is how I became the keeper of the bottle. I am the third owner, and who knows who the original owner was who put it in the old Lowell dump."

And now we must tell the rest of the story.



AB&GC May-June
2024, Vol. 35, No. 3,
pgs 16-18

Epilogue – Ashes to Ashes

By Alice J. Seeliger and the Federation Board of Directors

This story does not have a happy ending, but the end of the Wannalancet Indian Bitters bottle needs to be told and we know you will all share in the sadness it has brought all of us and its owner, Tom Paskiewicz.

As you read in the original article about the Wannalancet Indian Bitters bottle (excerpted on previous page), Tom Paskiewicz thought his beautiful, only-one-known cobalt blue Wannalancet Indian Bitters would fit right in with the displays at the FOHBC Houston 24 National Antique Bottle & Glass Exhibition last July/August. He offered to send it to Expo Chair, Ferdinand Meyer V, who was also collecting all of the hundreds of items to be included in the Bayou City Sunset Auction. A special display was arranged to allow all to see and admire the bottle along with 17 other displays at Hotel ZaZa.

When Ferdinand received the bottle, he carefully unpacked it, gave it a bit of a clean up, took many pictures for the original magazine article, and carefully replaced it in the box awaiting transfer to Houston 24 a few months later.

Then the storms came to Ferdinand and Elizabeth Meyer's house...three unprecedented storms—the East Texas Floods, a Derecho, and Hurricane Beryl with its eye passing right over their property. The threat of flooding forced them to move all of the auction items, and the Wannalancet Indian Bitters bottle, to the second floor. The Brazos River had flooded their home three previous times, and though there had been extensive mitigation to the river banks, these storms were going to test the success of that mitigation.

Daughter Edie, granddaughters Bella and Addy, grandson Nicolas, and Ferdinand carefully carried each item upstairs placing them in every corner and closet they could find to keep them out of harm's way.

When the storms were all over, they were beyond relieved that there was no flooding. Everything went into reverse and all the boxes were brought downstairs again. Except no one could locate the Wannalancet Indian Bitters! Searching continued for weeks until one day Ferdinand was tending the huge firepit of fallen branches, trees, and cardboard boxes. There, he caught the glimpse of broken pieces of cobalt blue glass. Horrified, he realized he had found the missing Wannalancet Indian Bitters, no longer in the shape of a bottle. Crest-fallen, he carried the burden for days before telling Elizabeth. When Houston 24 began, he was faced with telling several board members and those in charge of the displays. Tears and shock filled the room; but Houston 24 obviously had to go on.

Putting aside the tragedy temporarily, we all enjoyed Houston 24, thanks to the Herculean efforts of Ferdinand, the Meyer family, and Team Houston. Four days later Houston 24 came to a successful conclusion.



As-found shards of the Wannalancet Indian Bitters

Now it was time to explain to Tom what had happened. Ferdinand's call was a somber one and Tom was devastated, but gracious in understanding that these things happen. The Board assured Tom they would seek insurance coverage and try to compensate him as best they could, knowing all Tom really wanted was his prized bottle back.

Appraisals were sought, an insurance claim was filed, and the board met many times to reach an agreement on a fair settlement. When that was decided upon, the insurance claim paid for less than half of the settlement, the Federation paid the balance, and Tom accepted with an understandable amount of sadness, bringing the Wannalancet Indian Bitters bottle story to a sad conclusion.

What was left to be told was the apology, a promise, and forgiveness from Tom.

Ferdinand and all of the members of the Federation Board of Directors offered their sincere apologies to Tom. We promised to write this article hoping someone out there has another Wannalancet Indian Bitters and will help us get it to Tom. Compensation, a specially blown, one-of-a-kind commemorative bottle, and this Epilogue to complete the provenance of the only known "Wannalancet," will not bring the bottle back, but Tom graciously offered forgiveness and we all have had to move on... without a cobalt blue Wannalancet Indian Bitters bottle.

A sad ending for Tom, Ferdinand and his family, each and every member of the Federation Board, and all those who cherish their bottle collections...and that one special bottle.

