

Around the Swamp . . .

Bottles from our Nation's Capital

by Andy Goldfrank



Spring arrived in Washington, D.C., right on schedule -- the cherry blossoms around the Tidal Basin were so thick that sound was muffled like a mid-winter storm, the slap of softballs landing in gloves resonated across the Mall, and streams engulfed by the seasonal rains roared through Rock Creek Park. With a few hours to spare one wet afternoon, I traveled to a dump that folks have long written off as dug-out to see if the spring rains had brought in some good luck. Maybe, I thought, I would find some early local crown-top beers I had promised a colleague for his home-brew.

Diggers have tilled this dump for at least the past twenty years, uncovering an assortment of bottles disposed of by a neighboring middle-class residential area. Over the last five years, however, diggers have given up on this location because the meager finds hardly make the work worthwhile. Literally, 6 to 10 feet of ash and other debris has to be removed before bottles begin to surface. The bulk of the artifacts uncovered here date from between 1905 and 1915, but occasionally an older treasure surfaces, such as an 1850s redware ink, a pre-1900 blob-top beer, foreign medicine, or blown milk. Machine-made milks, bromo-seltzers, and crown tops have been mixed in with hand blown bromo-caffeines, crown-tops, pharmaceuticals, flasks, medicines, and food/household bottles. This site also has produced some particularly interesting bottles for me, including a blown ribbed amber local Coca-Cola, a teal Buffalo Lithia Water, and a crock emblazoned in cobalt from Parkersburg, West Virginia.

Despite my best efforts that rainy spring afternoon, two hours passed and I still had nothing. Just as I started to get discouraged, I hit a small, undisturbed pocket of bottles -- a tall green capers for my window, an ink for my wife's desk, a porcelain telephone sign for my office wall, and some common local crown-tops destined to be filled with beer again. As I expanded the hole, I came across an unlisted local milk bottle (which is a story in itself to be revealed in a later newsletter) along with some common medicine flasks from Richmond, Virginia, and Washington, D.C. Daylight began to fade and I began to sort through my discoveries and decide which bottles to take home. I picked-up a clear, unembossed (or so I thought) unusually shaped bottle standing almost ten inches

CHRIS. XANDER,

Importer of and Wholesale Dealer in

Wines, Brandies, Gins, &c.

PROPRIETOR OF

MELLISTON,

THE GREAT CURATIVE IN PULMONARY AFFECTIONS.

GERMAN AROMATIC BITTERS,

An Unfailing Remedy for Indigestion and Dyspepsia, recommended by celebrated Physicians.

GENERAL DEPOT FOR

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tall. It is shaped similar to a common turn-of-the-century ammonia bottle -- oval, with a 7 and 1/4 inch body and a 2 and 1/2 inch neck, except it is strap-sided. Holding the bottle up in the fading light, the rain washed the front enough to reveal faint embossing "WASH D.C." near the bottom. "Hmmm," I thought, "I had better take this one home."

Upon cleaning the bottle at home, I could make out block-lettered embossing on one side: "MELLISTON/PREPARED &/SOLD BY/CH. XANDER/911 7TH ST./WASH D.C." Referring to my resource on local bottles, *Antique Bottles from the Washington, D.C. Area* (1995 3rd ed.), I discovered that my particular bottle was not listed but some related bottles and a Christian Xander advertisement from a turn of the century Washington, D.C. directory were. The advertisement emphasizes that Xander was the "proprietor of Melliston, the great curative in pulmonary affections." The address in the advertisement, however, is 909 7th Street in Washington, D.C., right next door to the street address on the bottle I uncovered. A second similar Melliston variant is confirmed: a 9 and 1/2 inch, clear, oval blown bottled embossed "CHRISTIAN XANDER'S "MELLISTON" WILD CHERRY CORDIAL, WASHINGTON, D.C." with no street address.

Another interesting medicine by Xander is rumored: an amber-red turn mold lady's leg bottle with a paper label that reads "Christian Xander's Stomach Bitters Compound" (Bitters/No. 6). The Xander advertisement discussed above states that his "German Aromatic Bitters" were "An Unfailing Remedy for Indigestion and Dyspepsia, recommended by celebrated Physicians." Numerous examples of Xander's other bottled products exist, with some seen recently on the internet, including "Family Brand Rye Wiskey," "OLD PRIVATE STOCK RYE WHISKEY," "Pride of Virginia Port." Other than the Melliston I found, every known Xander bottle displays the 909 7th Street address.

Hope you enjoyed this column. Any comments, suggestions, or questions, please let me know either by calling me at 202/588-0543 or by emailing me at amg_sticky@yahoo.com. Good luck searching. Andy.

Upcoming Area Shows



May 27 (9AM to 3PM) Kutztown, Pennsylvania: The Coal Cracker Bottle Club's 2nd Annual Sale at Renninger's Antique Market.

June 2-3 (Fri. 1 PM to 9PM, Sat 9AM to 3PM) Lumberton, North Carolina: The Robeson Antique Bottle Club's annual show & sale at the Expo & Farmer's Market, I-95 Exit 14.

June 18 (10AM to 4PM, early admission at 8AM) Millville, New Jersey: Wheaton Village in conjunction with the Federation of Historic Bottle Collectors 3rd Annual Show & Sale at Wheaton Village, 1501 Glasstown Rd.

June 24 (9AM to 3PM) Point Pleasant, West Virginia: West Virginia Bottle Club's 5th Annual Show & Sale at the National Guard Armory, Route 62, 3 miles north of Point Pleasant.

Show Reports

Keyser, West Virginia: The May 7th Potomac Highlands show featured a bake sale and a nice display of local bottles as well as about 25 tables of antique glass for sale. Most of the dealers appeared to be doing more visiting than buying and selling.

Mansfield, Ohio: Plenty of good glass changed hands in Ohio on May 12 and 13, but some attendees noted that the event seemed quieter than in previous years. Paid admissions were estimated to be about 350.

New Members

Rod McDonald 5303 Portsmouth Rd., Fairfax, VA 22032, PH: 703/273-0268, email: Digger880@aol.com.

Russ McGaffie 3904 Egan Drive, Fairfax, VA 22030-4819, PH: 703/273-6522.