

Bottle Collecting

New and old;
all shapes, sizes and colors.
Has something for everyone.

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Bottles that once contained soda, milk, alcoholic beverages, medicine and poison are pieces of history that help tell a story of days gone by.

Collectors see a treasure in old bottles. Searching at flea markets, climbing in attics, rummaging through cellars, digging at old dumps, and bidding at auctions are explorations and adventures for those in pursuit of bottles from days gone by. What was discarded as rubbish can inspire real fascination among collectors today. And it is not always monetary value that motivates collectors; in fact there are almost as many reasons for collecting bottles as there are types of them. Whether for fun or profit, knowing a little about the colorful collectables adds to the fascination of the hobby.

Glass factories in the 1800's were built near sand deposits and abundant wood or coal supplies. The buildings were typically wooden structures that housed beehive shaped furnaces and clay pots that could withstand the heat of melted glass. The basic tools of the workers were two iron pipes; one a five-foot hollow tube called a blow-pipe and the other a solid round rod called a pontil. Glassblowers dipped the end of the blowpipe into the clay pot, which held molten glass. A lump of the sticky substance would be gathered onto the pipe and the worker would blow on the other end, producing a bubble. The glass vessel was then shaped by regulating the puffs of air and by simultaneously spinning the blowpipe. These kinds of free-blown bottles can be identified by their irregular shapes and lack of markings from a mold. The free-blown process ended circa 1860 and bottles manufactured that way command high prices.



Other 19th century bottle-making methods include three-piece molds (1809-1880), paste molds (1880s-1900), and application of the applied lip or mouth. When starting a bottle collection it is important to learn whether the bottle was machine-made or handmade; the lip is a determining factor.

A 19th century bottle can be identified by looking at the applied bottle lip and mold seam. The seam will run from the base through the neck where it will come to an end near the lip. Next, notice the lip was formed by hand after the bottle had already been shaped in the mold. This applied lip indicates the bottle was made prior to 1900. By contrast, looking at a 20th century bottle will reveal the lip was formed first and the mold seam runs from the base through the neck and lip.

Mold seams can be read like a thermometer to determine the approximate age of bottles. The closer to the top of the bottle the seam extends, the more recently the bottle was produced. Early 19th century bottles have seams at the lower neck, from 1860-1880 they extend further up, and between 1880-1900 seams typically reach within a quarter inch of the lip.

In 1900 the automatic bottle making machine was developed by Michael J. Owens, thereby signaling the eventual demise of hand-blown glass. Owens' machine perfected a revolving tank where glass flowed at consistently hot temperatures and a conveyor belt transported the

newly formed bottles. Financial backing to bring Owens' invention to full production by 1903 was supplied by The Toledo Glass Works. Skilled artisans were eventually replaced by Owens' machinery which produced bottles at an accelerated rate of 60,000 per day in 1917.

Whether by artisans or machines, the manufacturing process caused a fascinating change of color to occur in older bottles. Manganese was used to produce cheap clear glass between the years 1880 and 1914 because it counteracted the natural tendencies of glass to turn unwanted shades of green and blue. As the bottles are exposed to ultraviolet rays the colorless glass takes on various shades of purple, depending on the amount of manganese present in the bottle. The colorful shading patterns make these bottles desirable to collectors.

Another interesting feature of bottle manufacturing is embossed lettering, meaning the raised inscription of names, slogans, and other information on the glass surface. This process has caused collectors to focus on particular towns as well as bottle types including whiskey, soda, drug stores, poison, patent medicine, and beer.

Collectors sometimes acquire bottles at shows but may also hunt for old bottles in locations that seem unusual. One of the more adventurous methods is to dig for them at abandoned dumps; the thrill of the hunt is the primary motivation.



Some collectors focus their bottle collecting on bottles that are different shapes and colors. Bottles were sometimes shrewdly shaped to minimize the amount of liquid they would hold.

In years past dumps were typically holes dug near the house, convenient ravines, or a common location within a mile of town limits. The current practice of transporting garbage to regional landfills would have been nearly impossible (and certainly viewed as unnecessary) in the days of limited transportation. The growth of public dumps in the late 1800s means that old bottles are centrally located and readily available to those willing to look for them. Enthusiastic collectors have been known to scour old dumps and even pay for the services of a backhoe operator to dig down to the lowest (and oldest) levels.

Digging in a privy is sure to raise eyebrows among the uninitiated. Actually, a privy is the best place to find bottles made prior to 1870 because they were not hauled to dumps. Why haul garbage when it could simply be tossed in the outhouse? Privies were typically 6-10 feet deep and had linings of brick, stone, or wood that made clean-outs easier. Many houses had a privy until the 1920s, so look for subtle depressions in the soil near older houses. It is also recommended to use a probe to determine the perimeter of the privy; this will avoid unproductive digging.

Many collectors use a shovel for investigating and digging in the soil, while more experienced ones first use a metal probe to assist in locating objects beneath the surface; glass, crocks, bricks, and other objects make distinctive sounds when contacted with a metal pole. This method of searching prevents the breaking of glass that shovels often cause. All of this exploration, of course, depends on permission from the property owner.

Local bottle collectors are a good source of information about digging locations, especially the sites of old dumps. One favorite site in Allegany County was an abandoned city dump on the south side of Cumberland that yielded thousands of bottles before being declared off limits by government officials. Dumps located on private land are usually a guarded secret, or as local collector Glenn Clayton states, "Digging sites are kind of private. Collectors usually don't say much about them." Glenn's statements were supported by Bob Pyle of Morgantown, West Virginia, who collects Cumberland artifacts. "Often a collector will say, 'Don't ask because I can't tell where I found it.'" Allegany County resident, Steve Shaw, assembled his collection of



Left to right: My-Coca bottle from the Morgantown Ice Cream & Bottling Works, Cumberland Brewing Co. bottle, and The Geo. Gunther Jr. Brg. Co. Baltimore, Md.

over 2,000 bottles mostly by digging. "Most of my bottles have been dug. Some were found on private land and others at old dumps around the area. Collectors usually don't say much about where they found the bottles."

Locating an old undisturbed dump can be rewarding. Bottle collecting surged in popularity during the 1960s and 1970s primarily because ghost town dumps of the old West were uncovered that had remained untouched for a hundred years. Cases of glass-blown bottles were found intact, providing collectors with colorful reminders of the rough and rowdy days associated with that time period. Those discoveries fueled the public's imagination and increased the number of hunters.

Discovering old bottles naturally leads to an inquiry of the past and is a great way to learn and preserve history. And it is an interest in history that motivates many local hunters, including Bob Pyle, who search for old bottles. "I am more concerned about preserving the past than making money by selling bottles. The dollar bill has never



A



B



C



Bob Pyle examines two circa 1890s hand-made glass marbles.

A – Three types of Whitehouse Vinegar bottles, circa 1906.

B – Four sizes of Jumbo Peanut Butter jars. Jumbo was packed by The Frank Tea & Spice Co., Cincinnati, Ohio. The smallest jar (3.5 oz.) is considered the most rare and valuable to collectors. Embossing on the jar also includes: Made from No. 1 Spanish and No. 1 Virginia peanuts, salt added.

C – Some different shaped bottles include: Flat brown bottle of Dr. Hays Hair Health; a cone ink bottle, a porcelain bottle that held a poison; a twelve-sided bottle that held Atwood's Jaundice Bitters, Formerly made by Moses Atwood Georgetown, Mass.; a square bottle from The Burckard Blacking & Oil Co. Baltimore Md. USA; and an E. Mercer Blackburn "marble seal" bottle with a "Patent Safe Groove."

D – The Lucky Joe (Lewis) Bank was put out by Nash-Underwood, Inc. of Chicago and held 8½ oz. of Nash's Prepared Mustard. Joe Lewis, one of the most famous boxers of all time, became the world heavyweight champion in 1937.



D



been my primary concern.” Glenn Clayton, is also motivated by non-monetary interests. “Some collectors dig to keep bottles, others collect bottles to sell on eBay. Most of my bottles are local ones that I have identified and put on display.”

Embossing often causes bottle hunters to specialize their efforts according to geographic locations. It becomes a logical extension of their digging efforts to follow up with inquiries about the information that appears on bottles. As Glenn Clayton notes, “When I find a local bottle, I try to find out who owned the company, where it was located, and whatever else I can find out about it. I am especially interested in local dairy, soda, and pharmacy bottles, although a variety of other types still catch my eye, like the old refrigerator water bottles.”

A typical example of the inquiry process is when a local hunter discovers a Cumberland, Maryland, *Whistle* bottle, an orange flavored soda that originated in the Midwest during the 1920s and was bottled locally by the Reinhard family on Greene Street. The Whistle company created slogans and colorful advertising gimmicks that have great collectable value today. “Thirsty? Just Whistle” became its signature slogan. Stories of local residents ordering hot dogs and then making the typical whistling sound (indicating the order was to include a bottle of *Whistle*) is evidence of the drink’s popularity. Another story of the “human fly” arriving in Cumberland to scale tall buildings using a climbing rope also adds to the nostalgia of the time period and the fun of uncovering *Whistle* bottles. The human fly (no doubt an advertising promotion) climbed the building, stopped at each story to drink from the bottle, and then shouted a slogan to the crowd assembled below.

Top photo: Glenn Clayton preparing a bottle for display.

Bottom photo: A nicely displayed collection of soda bottles featuring different shapes and ACL or “applied color labels” which was achieved by a process known as pyroglazing or silk screening.



Whistle came in several styles but the most distinctive is the “pinched” model resembling an hour glass; it may be found with “Cumberland, MD” embossed on the bottom. Even though the Whistle company fell victim to the Great Depression, its stories and artifacts remain alive through collectors’ displays.

Soft drink bottles are a favorite among local collectors. Glenn Clayton favors the Deco or proprietary bottles that featured colorful advertising of the 1920s-1930s. Proprietary bottles meant the company was individually (family) owned and could make its own decisions. Owners used their imagination to create fancy embossed soda bottles to distinguish themselves and promote sales. A fascinating variety of products was marketed nationally during this time period including *Tip-Top*, *Surprise*, *Mickey Mouse*, *Brownie*, *Chocolate Soldier*, and *Whooppee*. Some of those bottles are very scarce and command top selling prices. According to Glenn, “When *Coca Cola* came out with its distinctively shaped hobbleskirt bottle, everybody else jumped on the bandwagon. I like the Deco bottles from the 1920s through the 1940s. There are local examples from Keyser, Romney, and Berkley Springs, West Virginia, and Berlin, Pennsylvania.”

A local soft drink bottle that generates conversation is *Hohing*, a business located in Lonaconing, Maryland. The bottle has an embossed horse head on the shoulder, circled by “Edward Hohing Lonaconing MD.” Long-time Lonaconing residents recall a variety of flavors that were bottled in the small building near Main Street but the one most often mentioned is cream soda. The Hohing building was razed in 2007; however, the cave behind the building, where soda was stored, may still be viewed from Route 36.



This wicker-cased wine bottle circa 1850s, features a glob top with ceramic stopper and wire bail.

Brian Wade, a collector from New York, has taken the lead in cataloging the Deco category of bottles and may be referenced for research.

Great examples of colorful painted soda bottles can be uncovered with the names *Braddock Club* and *Sun Crest*. These brands were bottled by the Reinhard family at their 71-75 Greene Street business address, along with the *Pepsi-Cola* brand they acquired in 1939. *Nehi*, famous for its grape soda, was bottled on Springdale Street in South Cumberland and is a favorite of collectors who grew up during the 1950s.

The painted bottles fall under a category known as “applied color label” or ACL. The production of colorful soda bottles was also the result of Prohibition when breweries temporarily sought to avoid bankruptcy by switching to soft drinks. Paint was applied to the soda bottles by a pyroglazing process. Those labels preserved unique moments in American history and distinctive scenes of local interest. Among the most sought after painted labels on the national level (that may be overlooked by local collectors) are: *Bingo* from Waukesha, WI; *Dart* from Emporia, KS; *Eight Ball*,

Altoona, PA; *Fudgy* from Ludlow MA; and *Golden Slipper*, Philadelphia, PA. But a word of caution when discovering a painted bottle is offered by Glenn Clayton, “The first thing people do when they find an old painted bottle is try to wipe the dirt from the label; usually this will cause it to smear or wipe off completely.”

One of the most valued soft drink bottles, however, is not a painted one but the amber colored, straight-sided, *Coca-Cola* bottle that may sell for several hundred dollars. The early model is similar to a beer bottle in color and shape but is embossed with *Coca-Cola* on both sides at



Examples of local soda bottles include a Braddock Club bottle from Reinhard's of Cumberland, MD, two different styles of Whistle bottles from Cumberland, MD and an Edward F. Hohing bottle from Lonaconing, MD.

the shoulder and may be found with "Cumberland MD" marked on one heel. These bottles were produced from about 1905-1917. A later version of the bottle featured an embossed diamond marking on the front with "Cumberland MD" on the lower right side of the diamond.

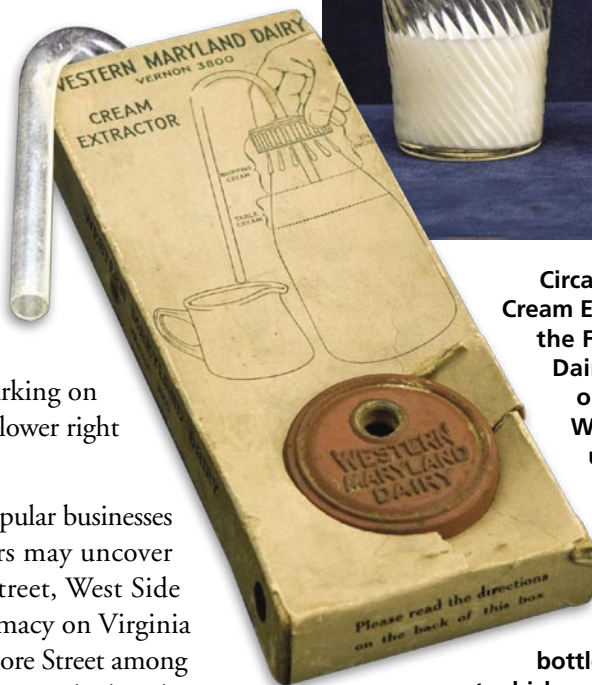
A variety of local bottles recall once popular businesses that have disappeared over time. Hunters may uncover bottles from Liechtenstein's on Henry Street, West Side Pharmacy on Greene Street, Truitt's Pharmacy on Virginia Avenue, Holtzman's Drug Store on Baltimore Street among a myriad of others. Also found are bottles marked with "Malamphy Bottling Works" on the shoulder and "Cumberland MD" near the bottom. Similar bottles are embossed with "Gooding" and "Cumberland MD." Those names may be traced to the distributing company located at 218-220 Williams Street, Cumberland, Maryland, which was operated by E.L. Gooding. Malamphy's also distributed Old Export Beer.

Information on bottles is shared by newsletters and collectors at shows. The Potomac Highlands Antique and Bottle and Glass Club Newsletter lists dates of regional events and featured articles. One of the largest shows is



Circa 1930's Sealtest bottle with Cream Extractor. This bottle is from the Fairfield Western Maryland Dairy. The Cream Extractor (in original packaging) from the Western Maryland Dairy was used to remove cream from an undisturbed bottle.

The richer cream close to the top of the bottle was used for whipping cream. By lowering the tube further into the bottle, lighter cream was drawn out which was not rich enough to whip, but was ideal for fruit, cereals, and coffee.



held at the York County Fairgrounds in York, Pennsylvania. Shows also provide a wealth of information for both the beginner and experienced collector because there is always something new to be learned. As Glenn Clayton states, "Just when you think you have it figured out, something new comes along."

Mountain Discoveries would like to thank Glenn Clayton for sharing his bottle collection and Bob Pyle for his expertise and the loan of some of his bottles for photography purposes.