



## The York Show Soda Report

Fellow bottle enthusiast Russ Butler and I embarked from Tallahassee, Florida at 3:00pm on Thursday and drove through the night and following day, arriving in York at about 11:00am on Friday. The journey was hampered by frequent heavy downpours, but the weather report promised a “rare August cold front” moving in behind the storms. We took this as a hopeful sign that “rare” would also be on the menu at York.

When we got to the fairgrounds at 1:00pm there was some confusion regarding setup and entry times, but we nonetheless got in with the early buyers and began prowling tables, some already setup and some in the process. Our objective was to prowl first and setup later, as we figured there would be intense buying competition from the large number of early buyers and dealers at this show. I had not attended a bottle show north of Baltimore in over 20 years, but my recollection of York shows of the 80’s was still fresh in my mind, and I didn’t want to miss a good bargain in the crucial first hours.

Initially, I was surprised and disappointed to see very few scarce to rare pontiled Pennsylvania sodas, especially the porters. In fact, scarce pontiled sodas from any state were very scarce at this show. Those that were on tables, in my opinion, were mostly over priced. The smattering of common sodas seemed over priced as well. So after concluding that this was not the show for pontiled soda bargains, I broadened my search to include other categories.

It never ceases to amaze me how many items you miss on the first “walk-through” of a large show. I was about to write York off as a complete disappointment when something unusual caught my eye. It was an aqua cylinder marked: NORRIS (arched) / BALT<sup>E</sup>



This little gem featured a short tapered top, open pontil and cylindrical shape not unlike the early soda form of an open pontiled Sutton or Boyd soda from Baltimore, but a hair smaller – whittled to death.

You can imagine my excitement over the name NORRIS which appears on iron pontiled sodas from Ohio, just as the SUTTON name appears on iron pontiled Cincinnati sodas. Frankly, it would have been beyond my wildest dreams to have stumbled upon an unlisted open pontiled Baltimore soda at York, but this felt more like a medicine, and I was pretty happy to have found anything marked Baltimore that was pontiled and rare, especially one with the unusual abbreviation, which is usually embossed as BALT<sup>E</sup>

As it turns out, dealer and long-time acquaintance Chris Rowell knew of a “MRS. NORRIS” Baltimore medicine, but not in this embossing or form.

So I felt pretty good about this acquisition (which the dealer informed me had not seen the light of day since being originally purchased in 1974). Things were beginning to shape up and turn around.

Not much later, a frantic Russ Butler appeared with a look I know all too well. The expression on his face was silently screaming “RARE BOTTLE, GREAT PRICE” and after confirming his signal, he walked me on over to a beautiful display of early New England glass. As it turned out, this was not a display at all, but was in fact a dealer’s sale “table” consisting of two large glass display cases with wonderful items inside being marked for sale from the other side.

Here again, the word was that this dealer was disposing many items from a 30 year collection never before offered for sale. At the bottom of one case sat the object of our enthusiasm, an open pontiled half-pint, dip-mold porter with a crude single taper top, circa late teens or early 1820’s.

Russ knows well of my desire to obtain an open pontiled dip-mold Baltimore porter, and this looked to be the closest thing to it which either of us has ever seen for sale.



While this bottle does exhibit the thick donut open pontil and crude single tapered top found on the open pontiled Baltimore porters, the body and shoulder were completely different. Still, to obtain one of these from any locale is extremely difficult these days, with even the Pittsburgh examples in half-pint sizes getting very scarce to rare, especially in colors other than aqua.



I was simply delighted to acquire this piece of early black glass, and very happy with the price. I showed it to a veteran Philly collector/digger who had a slightly earlier South Jersey example on display, and he suspected it was of New England or upstate New York (Albany) origin, calling it “extremely rare”.

The bottles in the case which accompanied his example were rare indeed, with many being unique. I showed the bottle to Todd Von Mechow the following day and after examining it a bit he spoke one word, “Baltimore?” to which I replied that I wasn’t sure, but wouldn’t *completely* rule it out, even though we knew of no examples being recovered from early Baltimore pits. It was enough for me that it was American. This bottle, and the NORRIS, made the show a success for me.

The only undamaged Baltimore pontiled soda at the show was offered by Chris Rowell-- a common P. Babb mold, but in a somewhat different color than usual. I had seen the bottle on his website and it was pro-cleaned but seemed to have an overall inside haze which tends to scare buyers away on these lighter colored sodas, because you sometimes can never quite get these crystal clear, especially if cutter was used on the inside at some point.

I had bought this bottle first, before the NORRIS and the early porter, thinking it might be the only thing I'd come home with, but after acquiring the other two bottles I had second thoughts about it and sat it on the sale table with the original price tag both Saturday and Sunday. The P. Babb soda got picked up several times, and was looked at hard, but never sold. Later, I was very glad it hadn't.

The displays at this show were the best I'd ever seen and were well worth photographing. I had hoped to see bottles like these for sale at prices below \$10,000. I also bought several informative, illustrated books, one documenting the research and lineage of an American egg mineral, circa 1818, which is a spectacular find for many reasons. The bottle itself was in the same display case as the South Jersey porter mentioned earlier, which is in the lineage of the one I'd acquired.

I would mention more names, but I realize that anonymity is paramount among collectors who have amassed a fortune in bottles over the years sitting in boxes or on shelves in their homes which now have a greater value than the contents of a medium sized bank's cash vault. Thankfully, these rare treasures are not as easily exchanged as currency, but in today's economy they certainly hold their value more than the American dollar does.

I saw bottle people that I hadn't seen in 5 to 25 years including Brian Wade from Long Island, Chris Vaught from Baltimore, Norman Heckler of course, and a few others. Plenty of Florida people attended too, including Alan McCarthy, Carl Sturm, Ed Herrold, Jim Mitchell and others. And I met some new people who are veteran diggers and collectors, making some new connections there.

We left York Sunday afternoon amidst a freak and violent hail storm (that's right, an August hail storm) completely exhausted, but excited nonetheless. Our load of inventory was seriously depleted. Russ was literally "wiped out" Saturday morning, and continued to sell well into Sunday. At 3:00pm we broke down and left with the few remaining boxes, beating the arrival of the oncoming hail storm by a good half hour. From the looks of the tables as we left, we knew that many dealers would still be packing up and trying to leave the building as we watched the violent winds and hail from the safety of a local restaurant nearby. Electrical power flickered once as we watched, but held steady through the 20 minute battering. Soon after, the skies cleared just as suddenly as they had darkened.



The drive home was grueling and neither of us could keep our eyes open for more than a couple hours at a stretch. The torrential rains returned during the trip home (primarily during the night driving hours) but despite not having brought umbrellas, we never did get caught in it the whole time.

When I got home I was pretty spent, but I just had to pour some muriatic acid into the P. BABB soda to see what it might do. Ten minutes later I had a sparkling clear turquoise blue example sitting on the shelf. As it turns out sometimes, when cleaning a soda, the inside will develop an overall haze from remnants of the cleaning solution and the way it reacts to the chopped copper wire.

I have seen a hazy gray or brownish film develop in varying degrees. A muriatic acid rinse after cleaning can sometimes do the trick. Needless to say, I was extremely happy, as more often than not, the haze is the result of inside cutter being used, and can sometimes never be completely removed. This time, I was lucky!



Here are the pontiled sodas and beers or ales I saw that I thought were worth mentioning:

- 1) A blue “METCALF’S / BREWERY / LOUISVILLE” quart with a single tapered top, iron pontiled, priced out of my range (taking bids over \$10,000). This example is a different variant than my listing and needs to be added.
- 2) A “BAKER’S / MINERAL / WATERS / LOUISVILLE - B” iron pontiled soda in a medium blue-green coloration (at a fair price of \$485 and in pretty good condition). This example is a different variant than my listing and needs to be added.
- 3) A “FONDERSMITH’S - BEER” oversized, sided amber beer, iron pontiled and temptingly priced at \$1200.00. I almost emptied my wallet for this one, but there was some heavy case wear on a few letters.
- 4) An “OLD WHITE (^) / BEAR” porter in the form where the embossing is at the lower half of the bottle inside an oval frame. It was priced at \$2750, and sold (Hagenbuch).
- 5) An “E. BIGELOW (^) / & CO. / SPRINGFIELD / MASS – SODA / WATER” soda form, priced at \$800 and in good shape, but with weak embossing toward the bottom.
- 6) A near mint “GEO. SCHOCH \* (^) / PHILADA” iron pontiled porter in a gorgeous teal blue, which surprisingly hadn’t sold for \$450 by the end of the day Sunday.

There was a WALKER quart ale from Cincinnati for \$475, as well as a P. JONTE (in the same price range but with lip damage) and a COOK (Memphis) quart priced at \$1600.

In summation, I would have to say that York was probably a success for buyers with a good eye and a great success for sellers with good glass at fair prices. It was a good show for me, but I came away with a greater respect for my local Southeast Region shows than ever before. I will be attending the Jacksonville show next month and reporting on it (as well as future shows I attend, time-permitting). Until then, *“may your purse be heavy at your next show, and your shovel be light at your next dig”*.