

So Many Questions

By Mike Cianciosi

I was fortunate to have participated in a recent privy dig in Fells Point Maryland, which produced several fantastic soda bottles from the 1840s and 1850s. These included the Torpedo and ten-pin shaped bottles shown below.



Torpedoes & Ten-pins prior to clean-up

This dig brought several questions to my mind. The first question I had was why did Baltimore have so many Torpedo and 10-pin shaped soda bottles? Other cities didn't seem to have as many bottles in that shape. Was it because that's the shape that the bottle manufacturer (Baltimore Glass Works?) was offering to the bottlers in the 1840s and early 1850s? Or were the bottlers specifically asking the manufacturer for bottles in that shape? Or was it because the people of Baltimore just wanted their soda bottles to be that shape?

We only found one marble in the first privy (the privy with all the bottles in it), but found several marbles in another nearby privy. Does that mean that the people who lived there during the years when the 1st privy was active didn't have kids? I never quite understood why so many marbles are often found in privies. People say it's because marbles would drop out of children's pockets while they were using the privy. But I've never had anything fall out of my pocket while using a restroom. Were pockets made differently back then?

What did the people who lived there do for a living? Actually – I might have an answer to that one. We found a lot of pyramid-shaped objects that I'm told are called "kiln furniture", and were used to stack pottery objects in a kiln. So at least one of the people who lived there probably worked in the pottery business.

We didn't find any liquor bottles – does that mean the people who lived here were teetotalers? We found several clay pipes, so I guess that means at least one of the people who lived here was a smoker.

For more details about this dig, see the article in the Potomac Bottle Collectors newsletter for May 2013. If you're not a member of the Potomac club, you can still get a copy of the newsletter from their website at "www.potomacbottlecollectors.org".

The article includes a link to a very cool web video that was made during our dig. The video is available at this web site: <http://www.fellspoint.us/History-at-Risk/>.