

My First By Paul Dragos

My collection pales in comparison to just about everyone else in the club. I have one (small) cabinet filled up, I don't really have room for much more, but there is one bottle that is at the front of my collection and always will be; it is also the most cherished. It is the first bottle I ever found and the beginning of my collecting. The year was 1976, I was 15 and working the summers on the Great Lakes as a professional search and recovery Scuba Diver. We were tasked with surveying a recently discovered shipwreck, which we quickly identified at the A.B Williams, a two-masted schooner that sank in 1862. She was (still is) in great condition, upright, intact, and sitting in about 70 feet of water. She was carrying coal in two holds, and fully loaded. Coal covered just about every part of her superstructure, and it was difficult to navigate around the vessel. Being young, invincible, (and pretty foolish) I found an opening in the pile and swam deeper, entering the vessel down a staircase near the stern. Visibility was horrible, and I was basically feeling my way in to a large cabin, which turned out to be the Captain's Quarters. Furniture was overturned and hanging everywhere, and I realized it was probably not safe to go any further, so turned around and started to make my way out; that is when I saw it. On the deck, was this small bottle. I quickly grabbed it and put it in a bag. I met up with my diving buddy and we slowly surfaced and swam to the dive boat. I began to question: "Was that really a bottle or just another lump of coal?" I handed the bag to my buddy as he was on the boat first, and when getting out of my gear asked him if he saw anything interesting in the bag. He replied: "You mean that small bottle?" Yes, I really had found it, an ink well, inscribed: "J.J. Butler CIN" It is very reasonable to believe it was the captain's, possibly last using it the evening the vessel collided with another and sank. So, that began it all, my antique bottle fascination. It is worth very little, if anything, but to me is priceless. Back in 1862, probably the captain of that ship was using that ink well, and when the vessel sank, no one touched it for over 100 years; then I found it. There is something... fascinating, about finding something that no human has touched for all those years. Who was that person? What were they doing? If only the bottle could talk...
Yes, that is my first bottle, and I will treasure it always.

