

A View Through a Bottle: An Artifact Study from Heaven Hill Farm



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Introduction

Buried beneath layers of the discarded past, a glimmer of amber lured me to understand more about the rich history Heaven Hill Farm could provide. From 1876 to 1915, Heaven Hill Farm, a 1200-acre farm in the mountains of North Elba, NY (Fig. 1), was home to Anna Newman, the wealthy daughter of a Philadelphia merchant. The farm was known to be a welcoming place where Newman would provide meals and work for those who needed them. Archaeology at the farm through the 2024 SUNY Potsdam Archaeology Field School, provides a new window on Newman's time there. In this poster, I examine how the fragments from one bottle found there -- a J.D. Doyles Hops Bitters bottle (Fig. 2 & 3) – reveal details about daily life at the site during the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Research Questions

- ❖ What does this vessel reveal about site formation processes in the area where it was excavated?
- ❖ What does this vessel reveal about Anna Newman's consumption patterns?
- ❖ What does this vessel reveal about trade networks in the Adirondacks?



Figure 1 (Left) Location of North Elba
Figure 2 (Middle) Image of the first fragment of the bottle
Figure 3 (Right) Image of the whole bottle

Research Methods

To start the study, secondary sources from the archeological literature were examined to learn more about where similar medicine bottles have been found and how archaeologists have interpreted them. I also used primary sources like newspaper advertisements to consider how this type of medicine was being marketed. I compiled the information from the articles and considered these sources in light of how Anna Newman (Fig. 4) and her community members lived on the land at the farm (Fig. 5).



Figure 4 (Left) Image of Anna Newman with her beloved horse (Kruczek-Aaron 2024)
Figure 5 (Right) Image of Heaven Hill farmhouse(Kruczek-Aaron 2024)

Discussion of Results

Site Formation Processes

Two major questions were asked about the formation of the area where the bottle fragments were found in summer 2024:

- ❖ What kind of activity area is represented by this deposit?
- ❖ Was this context made from daily use during Newman's occupation? Or was this made after Anna Newman's passing?

The bottle was found at the base of a hill behind the back door of the main house in unit N506/507E528 (see Fig. 6.). This unit would be considered in a midden due to the artifacts found there; in addition to the bitters bottle, more complete vessels as well as food remains were found. This would suggest that the objects would have been intentionally discarded rather than dropped during an activity.



Figure 6 . Site map showing excavation areas, Drawn by Dr. Kruczek-Aaron

Because the fragments of the bottle were found on the surface of the area excavated, as well as in levels 59 cm deep into the unit, I can infer that the midden was created all at once. This also would suggest that the midden was not made during Newman's occupation but instead could have been part of a household cleaning episode after her death.

The evidence of heat alteration found near the surface helps support the hypothesis that past peoples burned materials at the site of this deposit. This could have happened because food remains were found in the deposit, and past users of the property may have burned the trash to keep scavengers away. Second, in the first levels excavated, building materials were abundant there was an abundance of building materials. This suggests that they discarded parts of a building and burned the remains on top of the midden.

Consumption

Anna Newman's obituary described how she would medicate herself using medicines found at the store instead of going to the doctors to get medical help (Brown 1913). The presence of this bitters bottle supports this statement because advertisements show that it treated ailments of the stomach, urinary organs, liver and kidney (Peachridge 2014). This preference is despite the fact that Newman had the means to pay a doctor. As a result, this bottle shows her frugality, which is also seen in her ceramic preferences. Instead of buying fancy porcelain dishes, she preferred non-decorated Ironstone for her tableware and teaware. A dozen undecorated ironstone eight-inch plates in 1897 was eleven cents (or four dollars and twenty-four cents today; Sears 2007).

Discussion of Results, cont'd

Scope of Local Market

The evidence suggests that patent medicines such as hops bitters were available for purchase locally in the North Elba region. Notably the J.D. Doyles Hops Bitters was manufactured in Rochester, New York. Some of the patent medicines were advertised in local newspapers like the New York Dispatch(Fig. 7 & Fig. 8)

Despite being remote in the High Peaks region of the Adirondacks, the local market in North Elba was likely influenced by the boom in tourism in the late 19th century. Hotels started to arrive in the 1870s, and railroads arrived there in the 1890's (Adirondack Railroad).

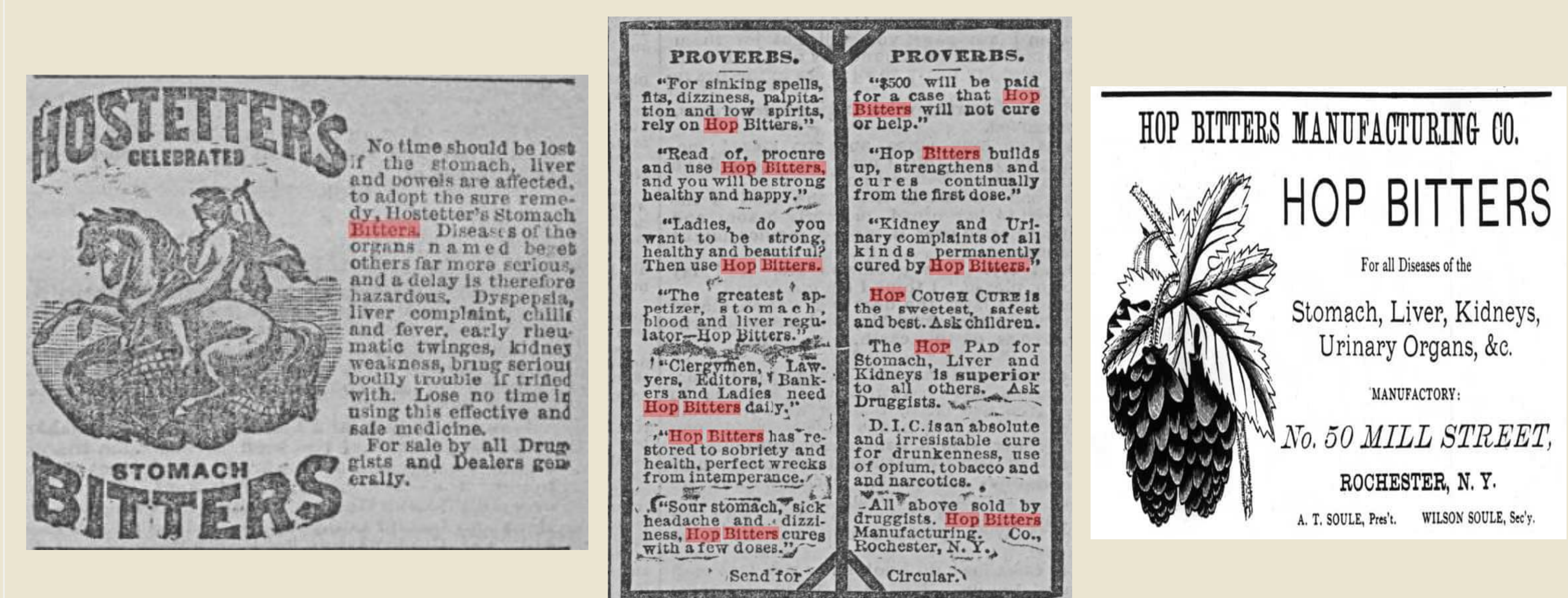


Figure 7 (Left) Advertisement for Hostetter's bitters (New York Dispatch 1883)
Figure 8 (Middle) Advertisement for the Hops Bitters Company (New York Dispatch 1873)
Figure 9 (Right) Doyle's hops bitter company advertisement 1878.

Conclusion

Though just one vessel, this bottle ultimately provides valuable insights into aspects of life at Heaven Hill farm. The bitters bottle helps archaeologists figure out what happened at the site and shows how she utilized her money for over-the-counter remedies rather than getting a doctor's medical opinion. In addition, it sheds light on the trade networks in and around North Elba. Future research on the bitters bottle will take place as the rest of the artifact assemblage is cataloged and analyzed.

Citations

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Figure 1 Shoulders of the bottle showing Doyle's

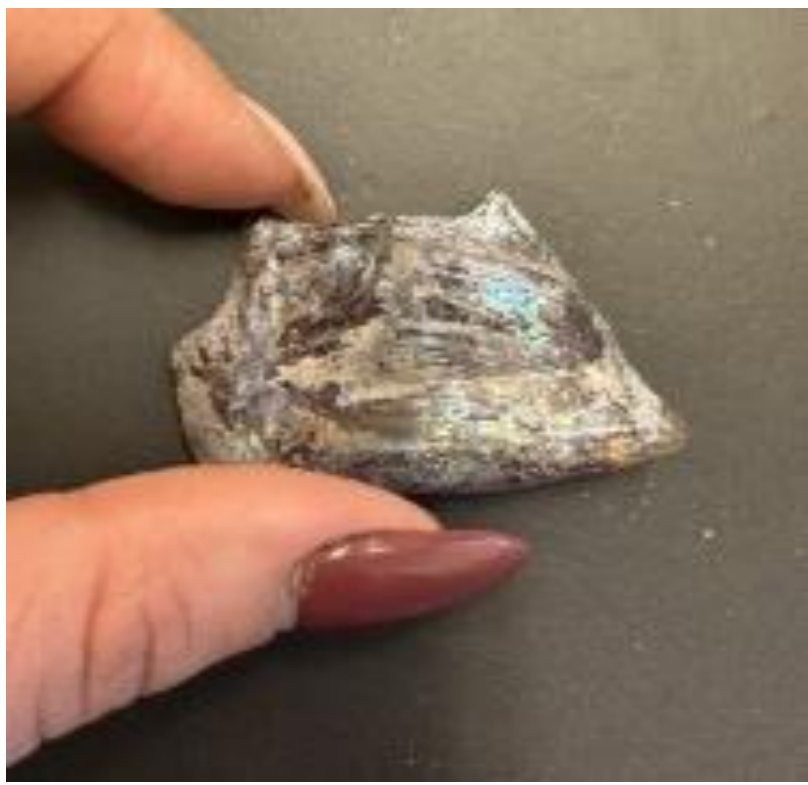


Figure 3 Surface heat alteration



Figure 5 assemblage's bottle



Figure 2 Side of Hops Bottle showing berries



Figure 4 Melting



Figure 8 Image of the midden unit



Figure 5 Back of the Heaven Hill Farm



Figure 6 Base of the hill where the unit was laid



Figure 7 Site map

- *Chronology*
- The fragments of the bottle were found on the surface of the area excavated, as well as in levels 59 cm deep into the unit. Using terminus post quem dating, where archaeologists use the latest possible date in the deepest level to estimate a date for the deposit, I can infer that the deposit dates from after 1872 thanks to this bottle. This date is based on the name of the manufacturer used on the bottle (CITATION). Other dates that were gathered from ceramic vessels indicated that

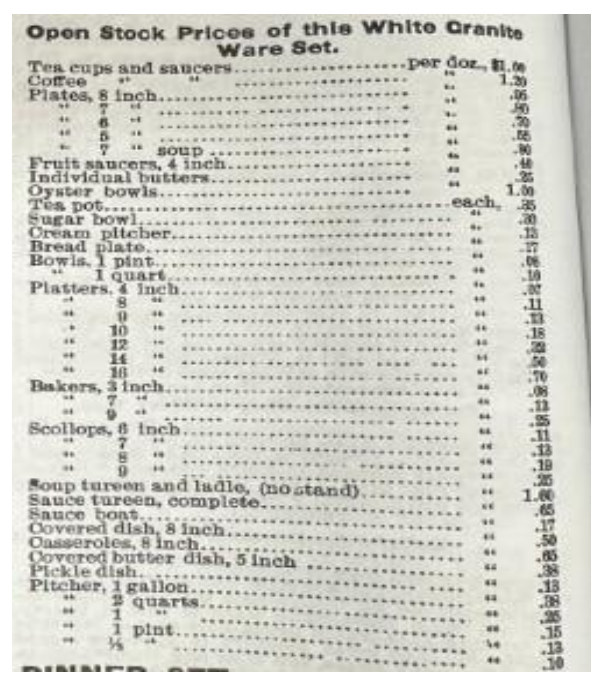


Figure 10 Sears catalog of Ironstone

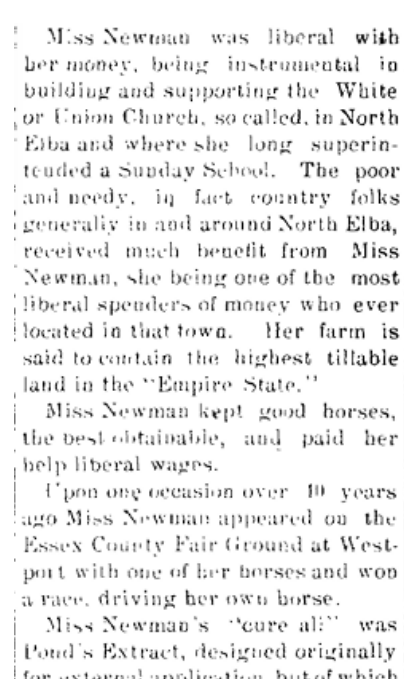


Figure 11 Anna Newman's Obituary