

# The Onion— a Sealed Wine/Utility Bottle

*Sealed wine/utility bottle, c. 1714-25. English. H. 7" Thickness lower neck 6mm. Weight 1100gms. Blown dark olive-green ("black") glass bottle of onion form with slightly marvered (flattened) side. Applied string rim immediately below the tooled rim. Wide base with rounded rim, and prominent domed kick-up. 5.5 cm diameter sand pontil. Applied glass seal: "Edwards/ Benjn & Han:/nah 1714"*



**TECHNOLOGY AND TERMINOLOGY:** The shape of an object can determine its name and this example does just that. Previously featured in this series was the Shaft and Globe bottle. Dating from the 17th century, it was the earliest type of English wine/utility bottle encountered in the Colonies. Circa 1695-1725, the onion shaped bottle developed next—with a broadened base, shortened neck, and the string rim placed immediately below the rim. The bottom rim is rounded and the body is globular with variations including some degree of flattening from top to bottom. In early examples the onion shaped base tends to have rounder sides. The illustrated bottle displays the next major stylistic type—the straight-sided Mallet with the sides of the onion shape becoming flattened, or *marvered* sides. This technique was described in the earlier *Shaft and Globe bottle* panel. The pontil mark also changes from the small glass-tipped of the 17th Century to the broader sand pontil.

**THE OBJECT:** This example is of particular interest as it bears the dated seal of its original owner, a prominent Boston sea captain and his wife:

"Edwards/ Benjn & Han:/nah 1714"

Benjamin Edwards was born in 1685 and died in 1751. He is buried in Boston's North Burying Place. He married his first wife, Hannah Harrod, 10 Dec. 1706, Rev. Cotton Mather performing the ceremony. Hannah died in 1728 and Benjamin had two subsequent marriages. Benjamin's success as a sea captain elevated him to a prominent place among the city's merchant elite.

In England the custom of applying glass seals to bottles with date and owner's name or initials began c. 1650. A molten disc of glass was laid on the bottle, usually high on the body, and immediately impressed with a brass or bronze die, the property of the owner. The dies were expensive and, of course, not simply made for the purchase of one bottle. Indeed, the Earl of Bedford purchased thousands of sealed bottles over the years and even in the Colonies they were obtained by the dozen or gross. By 1800 the use of seals had been largely abandoned. It should be noted that the date of the seal does not necessarily denote the age of the bottle, but rather the year of die construction, and the expensive seals might be utilized over many years. Seals of many important Seacoast families are extant including Frost, Pepperrell and Sherburne.

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