Collecting Washington-Taylor Flasks

by Michael Roberts

To introduce myself, I am 59 years old and live in Akron, Ohio with my wife (of 40 years this June) Sharon. I am a chemist by degree (Ohio University, 1965) and an inventor and entrepreneur by trade. I am founder and co-owner of Rubber Polymer Corporation, a manufacturer of leading edge coatings for high performance applications. We are blessed that our son Mike and daughter Diana work for the company which keeps them, their spouses and our wonderful 2-year old granddaughter Ava, nearby.

I have been given the sobriquet "Mr. Washington-Taylor." There is a reason why: my collection of flasks numbers more than 350. Of these, over 103 are Washington-Taylor, of which 98 are in color. Let me explain my definition of Washington-Taylor flasks. These correspond to flasks G-I-37 through G-I 61 in McKearin. Two of these are actually Washington-Washington (G-I-60 and G-I-61), two are Washington-(blank) (G-147 and G-I-48) and three are Washington-Sheaf of Wheat (G-I-57, 58 and 59). Nevertheless, they were aggregated by McKearin and represent the flasks I specialize in.

Like many I seemed to have been born a collector. A popular term for the "affliction" is "compulsive collector," however, I prefer the more severe term "pathological collector"!

Following 20 years of accumulating stamps, coins, shells, etc., etc., I became a bottle collector. I had acquired a few curious "rarities" over the years, such as an 1846 Ponds extract. (Well, it said 1846 on the bottom!) In 1970, while living in Newark, Ohio, I met my first bottle digger and was hooked. I dug regularly for over a decade and brought home literally piles of bottles for a couple of years.

In 1972, I ran across my first bottle magazine. An article in the publication let me to contact a gentleman named Paul Ballentine in Springfield, Ohio.

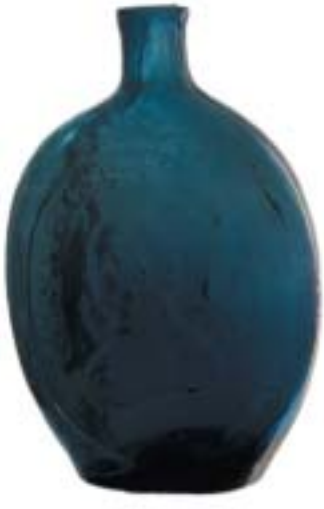
When I stepped into the home of Paul and Mary Ballentine, I took the first step along the route to becoming "Mr. Washington-Taylor". The Ballentines had assembled breathtaking collections of bitters, fruit jars, mid-western blown glass, fire grenades and inks among their collections. Until then, I had never seen a real bottle collection. Paul advised me to collect for color, so I bought a couple of items from their sales shelf, went home and literally trashed 90% of the bottles I had accumulated.

My collection of colored bottles began to grow in earnest. It was eclectic and spanned the gambit from pontiled sodas to bitters to fire grenades to anything colorful. I even had a flask, a stained, chipped, aqua double eagle. My first Washington-Taylor flask was obtained in a trade (cast iron toy) with Alan Spear in 1974. This light blue-green bottle, a G-I-54 quart, became the nucleus of what is now one of the premier collections of its type.

A major attraction of the Washington-Taylor flasks is the breathtaking array of colors in which they were produced. A further attraction (20 or 30 years ago) was the low price for which they could be acquired. Today's prices would make the assembly of a collection such as mine difficult for a wealthy collector, and impossible for one of limited means. Until last month, I had never paid more than $2,000 for a flask and had exceeded $1,000 only five times. I am a collector, not an investor, so I regret the current trend. On the other hand, I appreciate that these ultra-rarities are being recognized for the historic treasures they are.

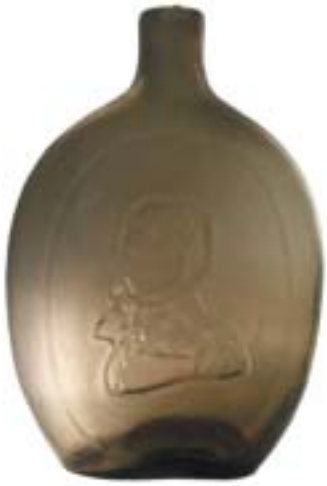
My flasks are on display behind glass in my bottle room. Because of the fantastic range of colors, I backlight with natural wavelength light. While most flasks, including Washington--Taylors, were most often produced in aqua or other natural glass colors, there is no explanation that I am aware of to account for the rainbow tints utilized for them.

Let me point out that the natural (common) color for these flasks was aqua. As opposed to the greens, olives, ambers and olive-ambers of New England flasks and the ambers and greens of the Pittsburgh flasks, Washington-Taylors are normally aqua. .For the most part they are



G-I-39b
in blue and pinkish amethyst

G-I-54

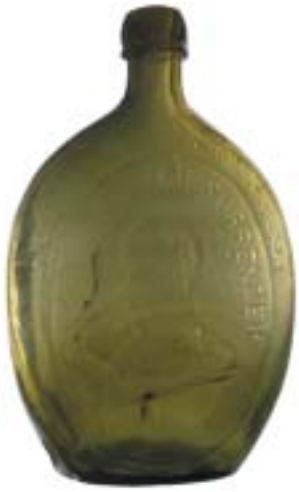


G-I-51
champagne, ex Blaske

G-I-54
yellow green

G-I-54
yellow

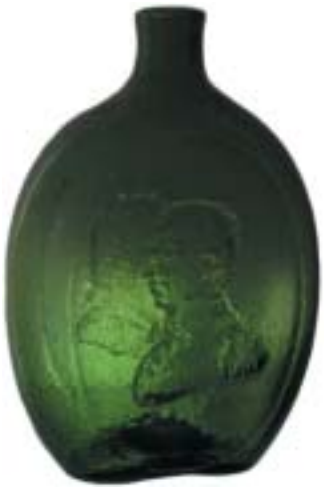
G-I-37
puce ex Roy Brown



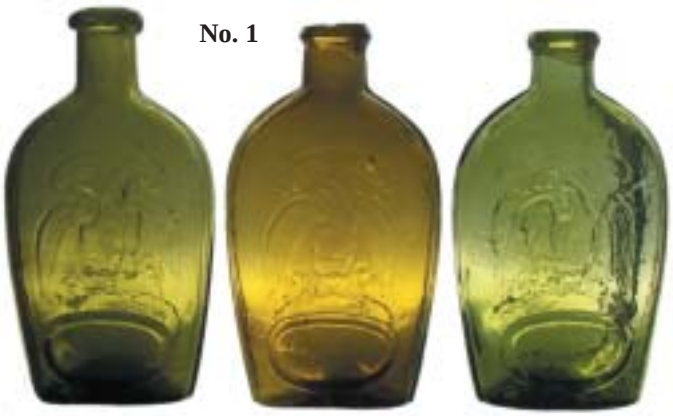
G-L-37
olive yellow with striations

G-L-37
copper puce ex Elvin Moody

pint scroll flask 7-up green
ex Gail Ross



G-L-54
deep yellow green



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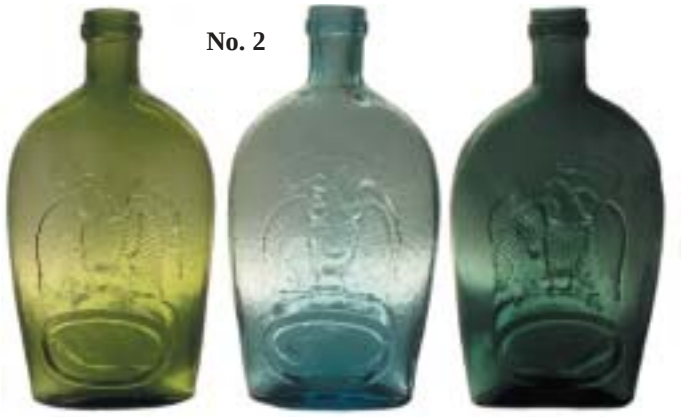

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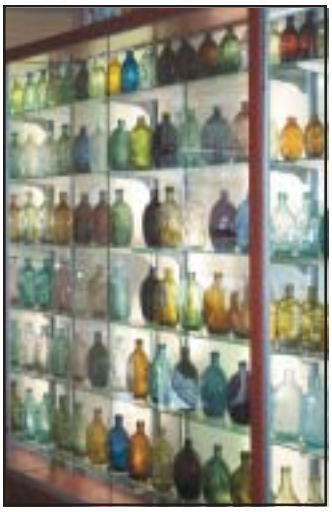

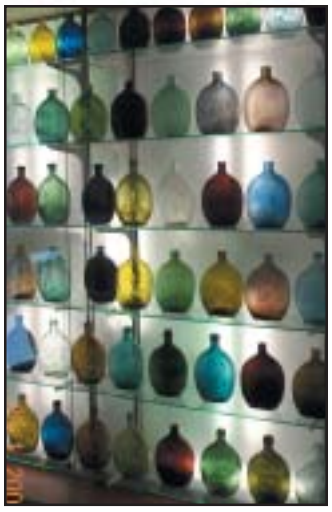

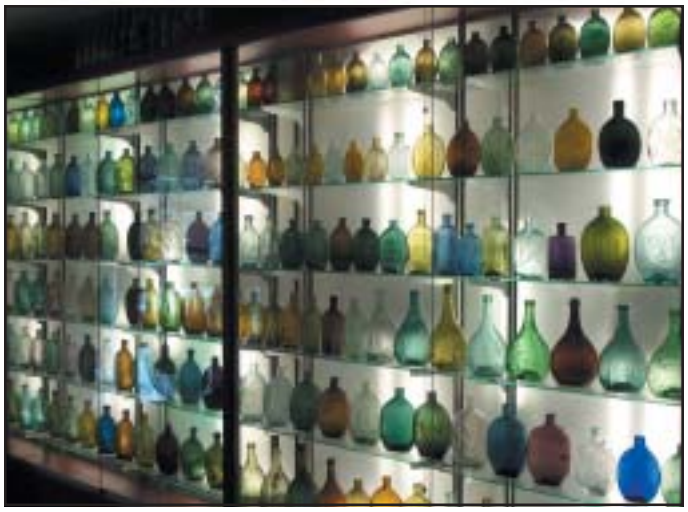

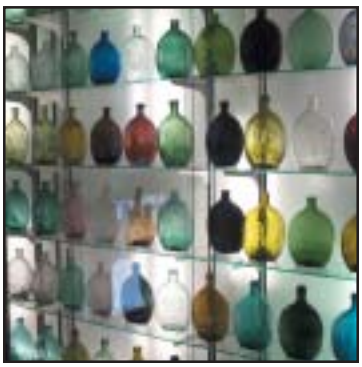

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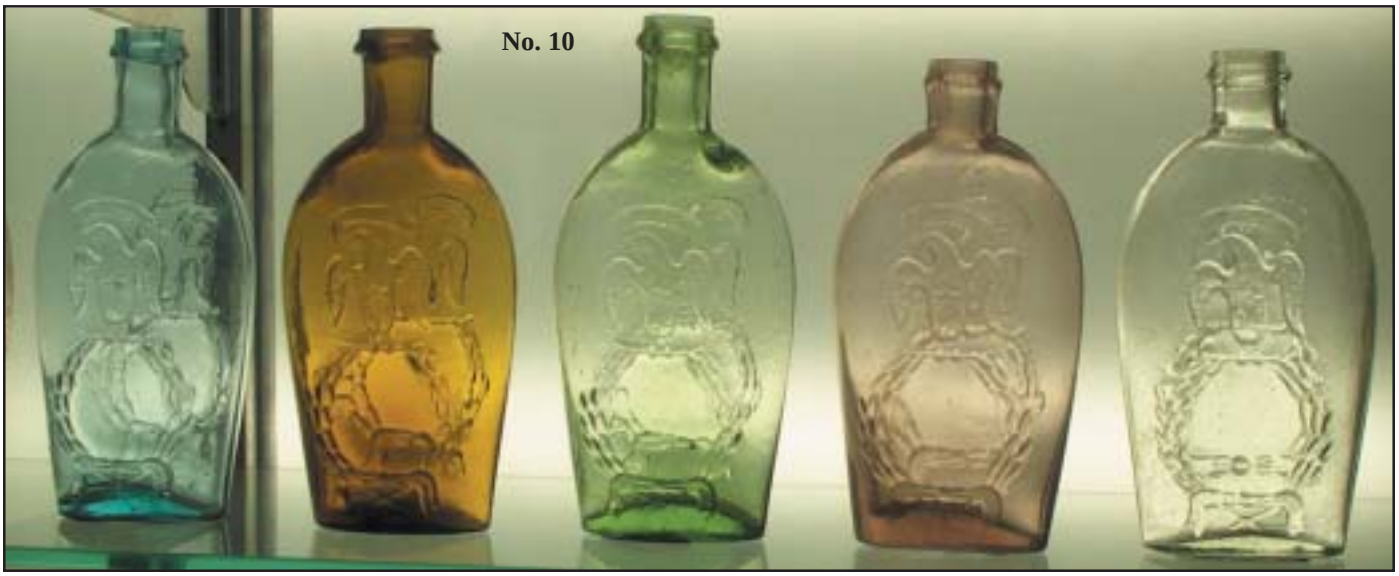

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attributed to the Philadelphia area (Dyottville, possibly Crowleytown, New Jersey, etc) and Lockport, New York.

Only the Baltimore flasks approach, but can't match, the range of coloration of these flasks. Keene produced some very spectacular flasks of violet/purple and of marvelous striated bottles, but neither Keene nor Baltimore produced the range of colors seen in the Washington- Taylors.

These flasks were produced in the 1850s to sometime in the early to mid-1860s as is evidenced by the presence or absence of pontil marks. Certain molds occur only pontiled, other molds are strictly smooth-based, while some show both pontiled and smoothed-based examples. Neither the presence nor absence of pontil marks, nor type of neck finish influences value to a significant degree.

Color has an enormous impact on value. I have 17 different colors in the G-I-54 mold. At one end of the spectrum the aqua specimen may bring $90-$125. The orange--pink-puce flask (see Ketchum's "A Treasury of American Bottles") might bring $8,000 or more (This is my personal favorite flask).

My favorite mold is G-I-54. This exhibits, in addition to its array of colors, neck finishes ranging from sheared neck to blob to tapered collar, to collar with ring, etc.

If it were in my power to describe the colors represented by these flasks, I would do so. Since the normal color was aqua, why do so many wild hues exist for these? The standard answer is that orders were finished off with glass from a furnace pot containing decorative non-bottle glass when the bottle furnace ran dry near the end of the day. More likely, in my opinion, master blowers deliberately made unusually colored bottles for home window decorations or for curios. How does one explain a pink Lockport G-I-47 flask?

The question arises as to why George Washington and Zachary Taylor were paired on 26 molds and variants (excluding molds where Taylor was absent). The choice of Washington as "Father of His Country" is obvious. He appears on numerous flasks from the 1820s, or before, which pre-date these Washington-Taylor flasks by 30 or more years. Taylor appears on some other flasks that McKearin attributes to the period of 1847-48, which would commemorate Taylor's victory at Buena Vista. This victory helped propel Taylor, old "Rough and Ready," as he was known to the White House in 1849. His term as twelfth President was cut short by his untimely death at age 66 in 1850.

It is my opinion that the Philadelphial/ New Jersey.Washington-TayIors were produced in response to both his military successes and his death in office.

McKearin lists 32 mold forms and varieties from G-I-37 through G-I-61. How many other variants are extant is unknowable. However, I have identified two personally. The first, which I designated G-I-39b, was published in a letter from myself to *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector* magazine a few years ago. The inscription on the variant differs somewhat from that of G-I-39. However, the most obvious identifiers are the shape of the flask and the locations of the bottom of the ovals. On G-I-39, the edges of the flask gently circle to the base and the bottom of the ovals is within 1/8" of the base. On the variant, the sides straighten out visibly near the base and the bottom of the oval is ½" or more above the base.

I have found almost as many of the 39b as the 39 on show tables. I find it hard to believe that it was not previously differentiated.

The second variety, which I call G-I-41a, is a possibly unique half-pint. Or perhaps it, too, is sometimes misidentified. The G-I-41 was (previously) the only known inscribed half-pint Washington-Taylor. To identify the variant, check the "G" in "General". If it is even with the third button down it is the variant. If the "G" is even with the top button, it is G-I-41. Likewise, the "S" in "Surrenders" is even with the bottom of the epaulet on the 41a and with the top of the epaulet on the 41.

There are 15 mold forms for the quarts, 14 for pints and 5 for half-pints. This is not indicative of the actual availability of the flasks. In my collection (mostly colored examples) are 68 quarts, 28 pints and only 7 half-pints. This distribution is much more accurate in reflecting the relative abundances of these three sizes.

Quarts are nearly three times as abundant as pints and about ten times more common than half-pints (in colors). Of the 35 mold forms there are 7 of which I do not have an example. These are G-I-39a, 40, 53, 54a, 55a, 55b and 55c. Some of these I've never seen for sale and a few I've passed on. I am interested in acquiring an example, preferably in color, but acceptable in aqua of any of these.

Obviously some mold forms are much rarer than others. Some mold forms are available exclusively in aqua. In all cases for Washington-Taylors, an example in color will be more valuable, often much more valuable, than an aqua specimen. Examples in blues, puces, pinks and "wild", unusual or vibrant colors command higher prices.

I will give my personal opinion regarding the rarity of each mold form. Behind each McKearin number, in parentheses, is the number of examples in my personal collection.

G-I-37, qt. (11): This is a relatively common form in aqua. Examples in green and blue-green are sometimes seen. Scarce to rare in other colors.

G-I-38, pt. (6): One of the more common pint forms in aqua. Surprisingly, probably the second most available color (not the second least expensive) is puce. Rare and desirable in most colors.

G-I-39, qt. (6): Can be found in aqua and occasionally shades of green. Other colors are very scarce to extremely rare.

G-I-39a, qt. (0): One example reported, in yellow green. Possibly unique.

G-I-39b, qt. (3): Possibly a bit scarcer than the 39.

G-I-40, pt. (0): McKearin lists this as common; I would rate it and its 40a and 40b variants comparatively scarce in aqua and rare in colors.

G-I-40a, pt. (1): see above G-I-40.

G-I-40b, pt. (1): see above G-I-40.

G-I-40c, pt. (1): McKearin lists this as rare but I've seen examples around. It is a scarce mold and rare in colors.

G-I-41, ½ pt. (1): This is fairly common in aqua but rare and valuable in colors.

G-I-41a, ½ pt. (1): At present my light yellow-olive example is unique. I suspect that numerous misidentified examples may exist. In any event it will be rare in color.

G-I-42, qt. (4): This is a fairly common flask in aqua. Examples can also be found in a pale, bluish moonstone. Other colors are scarce to rare.

G-I-43, qt. (7): Fairly common in aqua. Occurs in beautiful colors, including an example that is gray with blue striations (Ed and Kathy

Gray also have one and at least one other exists). Rare in deep or odd colors.

G-I-44, pt. (3): A fairly scarce pint. Rare in colors.

G-I-45, qt. (1): Occasionally seen. Listed in aqua and pale yellow-green. Exception to the rule, the colored examples are seen more often than aqua (but are still more expensive).

G-I-46, qt. (3): This is a scarce mold. Can be found in light tints, such as pale gray or pale amethyst. These are rare. Deeper colors would be very rare.

G-I-47, qt. (2): Commonly found in shades of green/blue-green and aqua. It is rare and desirable in other colors. One of my specimens is a vibrant pink, an odd color for a flask known to be a Lockport product.

G-I-48, pt. (4): Occurs less often than for the quart. Again, green/blue-green shades can be found. Other colors are rare.

G-I-49, pt. (1): This flask is rarely encountered. Light colors are known. A deeply colored example would be most desirable.

G-I-50, pt (3): This is a scarce flask. Colored examples are rare and desirable.

G-I-51, qt. (9): This is one of my favorite molds because of the riot of colors in which it can be found. Not uncommon in aqua but it is scarce to rare in colors.

G-I-52, pt. (1): McKearin lists this as common, but I have rarely encountered it, even in aqua. Some examples (such as my black glass specimen) have extra long necks as if intended for use in a woven cover. Darl Pfieffer, noted collector of Ravenna flasks and Midwestern blown glass, believes this flask was made at the Ravenna Glass Works. McKearin attributes it to Dyottville. It would be most interesting if Darl could discover proof of his theory.

G-I-53, ½ pt. (0): Scarcer than the G-1-56, even in aqua. It is quite. rare and sought after in color.

G-I-54, qt. (17): My favorite mold form is, perhaps, the most frequently encountered. Common in aqua, green and blue-green. Examples are also occasionally seen as olive-yellow and yellow-olive bottles. Other colors are rarer.

G-I-55, pt. (5): One of the more common pints. It is scarce to rare in colors.

G-I-55a, 55b, 55c, pt. (0,0,0): These variants are listed as rare (a, b) and very rare (c) by McKearin. I would agree since I've never run across any of them.

G-I-56, ½ pt. (4): Fairly common in aqua. This flask like all half-pints is rare in color.

G-I-57, qt. (2): The Washington-Sheaf of Wheat flasks can be located in aqua upon occasion. Three or four are known in deep yellow-green. Other reported colors would be extremely rare.

G-I-58, pt. (1): My example is aqua, the only color listed by McKearin for this bottle. If someone has an example or proof of existence for one in color please let me know.

G-I-59, ½ pt. (1): One can run across an aqua specimen. Extremely rare in color. The cobalt example is one of the "kings" of the Washington-Taylors.

G-I-60, qt. (1): This and the G-I-61, both Lockport flasks, are to me the most beautiful form of the Washington-Taylors. The G-I-60 is embossed with the Lockport Glass Works name. Contrary to McKearin's "scarce" designation, I feel this flask is rare, even in aqua. Colored examples are extremely rare.

G-I-61, qt. (1): I concur with McKearin's "scarce" rating for this one. It can be found in color but it is rare and desirable.

Among my other flasks are, again almost all in color, twenty-seven scroll flasks, nineteen Union flasks, seventeen urn-cornucopia and a nice grouping of calabashes. I have several sunbursts and a smattering from most form groups. And did I mention the Gail Ross collection of double eagle flasks, the finest grouping ever assembled?

Gail Ross, who passed away in 1998, began collecting bottles in the late 1960s. For nearly forty years, he pursued colored examples of double eagle flasks, Pittsburgh type. When he died, the collection numbered over one-hundred examples including numerous one-of-a-kind colors and unlisted mold forms. His collection included the Zanesville and Louisville (Pittsburgh type) flasks as well. Gail had another fifty or so flasks of other types.

I met Gail in 1973. Soon we became inseparable bottle friends. From about 1977, neither of us attended a show without the other. Soon Gail, divorced and single, became a part of our family. He spent every Thanksgiving, New Year's and 4th of July with us his last twenty years. For the last ten, we and two friends spent a week each summer touring the country.

Upon Gail's death, I couldn't bear to see the magnificent collection dispersed, so I negotiated with the family to purchase it in its entirety. It required me to take a hefty second mortgage but I have no regrets. His family is happy that the collection is intact (although I have added a handful of additional flasks) and come to see it periodically.

Although I was with Gail during a great majority of his acquisitions and learned a modest amount, I probably possess less than ten percent of his knowledge regarding rarity, mold variants, etc.

The Pittsburgh flasks are most common in pints. Quarts and half-pints are nearly as common. Many molds are very common in aqua and a number are also common in shades of green and amber. (Gail put together an astonishing collection with many blues, citrines, blue-greens and yellows mingling with the more common shades. Though absent are the puces, apricots, amethysts and hard-to-describe colors found in the Washington-Taylors - with the exception of the three different shades of amethystine G-I-126 half-pints. This mold form (with the wreath under the eagle) was Gail's favorite. He put together fourteen different colors in his collection.

Photograhps:

No. 1: G-II-89, all iron pontiled, ex Gail Ross.
No. 2: G-II-92 in bright yellow green, light blue and possibly unique deep blue-green, ex Gail Ross.
No. 3: G
No. 4:
No. 5:
No. 6:
No. 7:
No. 8: G-I-43 in a bit off-gray color with blue striations.
No. 9 - 10 : G-II-126 half pint double eagles, ex Gail Ross.