

Happiness for this collector is pursuing Gay-Ola bottles

By Bill Baab

Randy Kiger admits to sometimes getting strange looks during his search for Gay-Ola bottles, but the North Carolina collector just shrugs them off.

Back in the early 1900s when the Gay-Ola Bottling Co., was organized, the term “gay” meant being happy, joyous, lighthearted, lively and merry, according to Webster’s *New World Dictionary*. In today’s world, however, the term is applied to homosexuals.

“I started collecting that brand of soft drink back in the 1990s because they were inexpensive,” Kiger said. “If some folks have a problem with that name, it doesn’t bother me.”

He has amassed a collection of more than 100 of the distinctively shaped bottles, most of which have four embossed “rings” or ribs encircling them. It is believed that the raised ridges helped consumers hold on to the bottles made slippery when pulled from boxes containing crushed ice.

His collection represents 81 cities and towns in 18 states with one each from only Maine (Bangor) and Missouri (Seneca). Oddly enough, while the Carolinas,

Tennessee, Alabama and Florida are represented, there is none from Georgia. There are multiple examples from the rest.

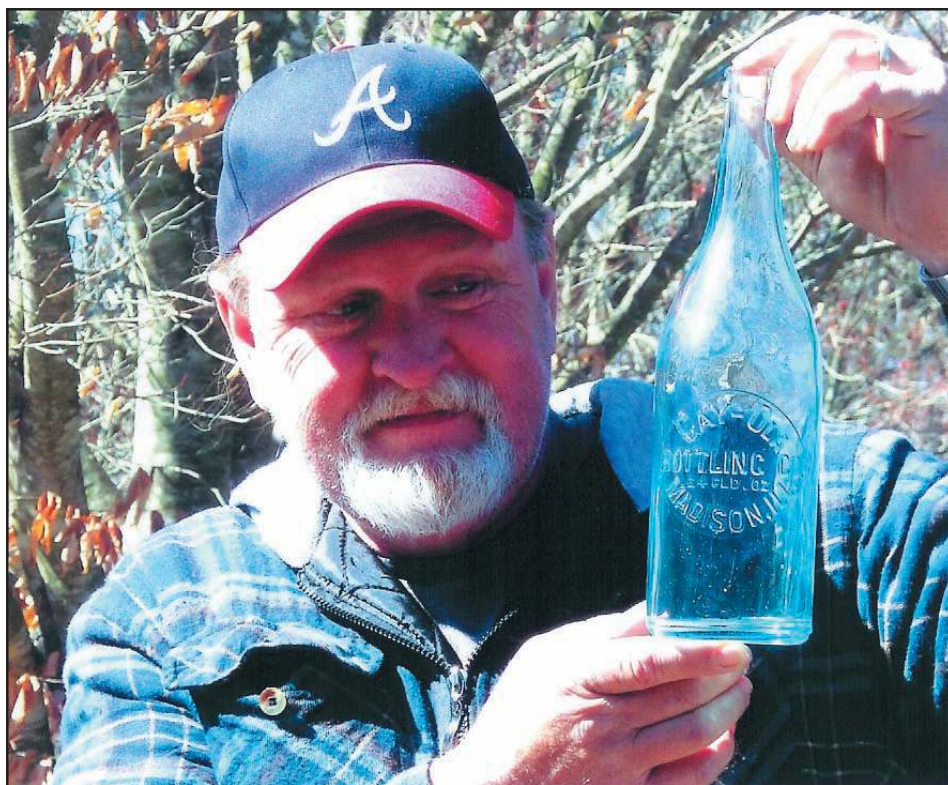
Gay-Ola was born as Gleeola in Birmingham, Ala., in February 1910 as a \$100,000 company. But in October of that year, the firm was split into two \$50,000 companies, according to researcher Dennis Smith of Buffalo, N.Y., in his self-published book, *The Kola Wars: Birmingham*.

Founder J.C. Wells took his Wells Cola Co., to Montgomery, Ala., while the other company – renamed Gay-Ola – moved to Memphis, Tenn.

Most Memphis examples are hardly among Kiger’s favorites. He considers them to be dull in appearance compared to some of the others.

On the earliest bottles, Gay-Ola is embossed in script on the shoulder, but was dropped after the company lost a suit to Coca-Cola in 1911, according to Smith.

In his book, *The Original Coca-Cola Woman: Diva Brown and the Cola Wars*, Smith reported that “The Coca-Cola Company took an immediate interest in the success of Gay-Ola, bringing their new



Randy Kiger holds a 24-ounce Gay-Ola from Madison, Ill.



Gay-Ola fan, front.



Gay-Ola fan, back.

competitor to court in February, 1911, on charges of trade mark infringement. The Gay-Ola Company won the initial lawsuit, but lost on appeal and was forced to change their script trade mark to block letter.”

Gay-Olas come in a wide range of colors, from aqua to bluish- and greenish-aqua to clear to many shades of amber – dark chocolate to honey amber. Among the glass companies cashing in on the Gay-Ola bottlers’ trade were the D.O. Cunningham Glass Co., of Pittsburg, Pa., identifiable by its D.O.C. embossing; the Root Glass Co., of Terre Haute, Ind. (ROOT); the North Baltimore Bottle Glass Co., of North Baltimore, Ohio (N.B.B.G.CO); the American Glass Co., of Richmond, Va. (A.G.W.), and the Crown Bottling Co., of

Muncie, Ind., which employed embossed crowns on the sides and bases of its Gay-Ola bottles.

Two North Carolina bottles are among Kiger's favorites and are among the earliest. An amber bottle is embossed Gay-Ola in script and is from the Gay-Ola Bottling Works, Elk Park, N.C. That community isn't to be found on present day maps.

The other is from Rocky Mount, N.C., which exists today, and isn't even a Gay-Ola. The Gay-Ola wannabe is in clear glass and embossed Drink Gay Kola (in script), It's Better (one of Gay-Ola's mottos), Gay Kola Co., Rocky Mount, N.C. In addition, six arrows pointed upward are embossed around the neck of the bottle, which was manufactured by the American Glass Works of Richmond, Va.

It's oddities like that and another from Summerland, S.C., now called Batesburg,

that keep Kiger's interest from flagging. Historian Harvey Teal of Columbia, S.C., said Summerland was an area located between Batesburg and Leesville.

"I know I haven't found all the Gay-Olas that are in existence, but I just keep looking and hoping," Kiger said. Lists of the bottles in his collection accompany this story and, if anyone has a Gay-Ola not on the list and wants to sell it, he can contact Kiger at his e-mail address of stillimsad@windstream.net, a takeoff on a 1960s song by The Yard Birds.

He started collecting old bottles at the tender age of 12 when, walking down his unpaved, rural highway after a road scraper had smoothed it, he found a Royal Crown Cola bottle stuck in the mud.

"I still have that bottle," said the 52-year-old employee of R.J. Reynolds Co. "I soon discovered flea markets and antique shops where I found more bottles and in

1982, I attended my first bottle show in Nashville, Tenn., and again in 1984 in Montgomery, Ala. I was really amazed at the selection and prices at those shows. I also check eBay listings on a regular basis."

He didn't stop with just Gay-Olas and has amassed huge collections of Chero-Colas, Mint Colas, Royal Crown and NEHI bottles and applied color label sodas, as well as North Carolina bottling works.

Ivy, his wife of 25 years, supports him and has a collection of early Barbie Dolls of her own.

Bibliography: *The Original Coca-Cola Woman: Diva Brown and the Cola Wars*, self-published and copyrighted 2004 by Dennis Smith, Buffalo, N.Y. (Excerpts used by permission of the author).

The Kola Wars: Birmingham, self-published and copyrighted 2007 by Dennis Smith, Buffalo, N.Y. (Excerpts used by permission of the author).

Gay-Ola Bottles in Randy Kiger Collection

NOTE: Not all Memphis, Tenn. varieties listed. Most have Gay-Ola in script or block letters on shoulder. They are identified in the list.

1. 4-ring aqua Harriman Bottling Works, Harriman, Tenn.
2. 4-ring amber Jackson Bottling Works, Jackson, Tenn.
3. 4-ring aqua Martin Bottling Works, Martin, Tenn.
4. 4-ring aqua Gallatin Bottling Works, Gallatin, Tenn.
5. 4-ring aqua Oneida Bottling Co., Oneida, Tenn. Patented 12/18/17.
6. 4-ring amber G.B. Co., of Shelbyville & Winchester, Tenn.
7. 4-ring clear slug plate Shelbyville & Winchester.
8. 4-ring clear Wytheville Bottling Co., Wytheville, Va.
9. 4-ring blue-aqua Wytheville Bottling Co., Wytheville, Va.
10. 4-ring green-aqua Wytheville Bottling Co., Wytheville, Va.
11. Clear Gay-Ola (on shoulder), Steiniger Bros., Wheeling, W. Va.
12. 4-ring aqua Fayette Bottle & Ice Co., Montgomery, W. Va.
13. 4-ring clear Fargo Mineral Springs Co., Ashtabula & Conneaut, Ohio.
14. 4-ring aqua Fargo Mineral Springs Co., Ashtabula & Conneaut, Ohio.
15. 3-ring Fargo Grape Co., Conneaut, Ohio. Gay-Ola go-with.
16. 4-ring aqua Lilly Ice & Bottling Works, Pemberton, W. Va.
17. 4-ring clear Gay-Ola Bottling Works, Belzoni, Miss. M.D.V. on base.
18. Clear Gay-Ola Bottling Works in script. M.D.V. on base.
19. Amber slug plate Gay-Ola in script, Eagle Soda Water Co., Pittsburg (no "h"), Pa. REGISTERED This Bottle Not To Be Sold (TBNTBS). D.O.C. 1176 on side near bottom.
20. Crab Orchard (in script) PRODUCTS ARE BETTER (block letters), Crab Orchard, Ky. Property of Crab Orchard Bottling Co. C.O. on base. Could be a Gay-Ola bottle.
21. Aqua double-outline lettering, Gay-Ola in script. IT'S BETTER. TRADE MARK REGISTERED. Product of the Gay-Ola Bottling Co., Greenville, Ala. around lower sides. T-1 on base.
22. Same as above, except Huntsville, Ala.
23. Clear Gay-Ola, Gay-Ola Bottling Co., Talladega, Ala.
24. Clear Gay-Ola, Gay-Ola Bottling Co., Arkansas Fruit Cider Co., England, Ark., T-2 on base.
25. Clear Trade / Gay-Ola / Mark / REGISTERED / Summerland, S.C. Numeral 8 on base. Town name is now Batesburg.
26. 4-ring aqua John Forthoffer Bottling Works, Mt. Vernon, Ind. GAY-OLA on base. 32LP (Graham Glass Co.) Reg. 7 oz.
27. Glacier Bottling Works, Shelbyville, Ky. Gay-Ola on back. G on base.
28. 4-ring amber 6-1/2 Fl. Oz. / Gay-Ola Bottling Works, Huntsville, Ala. G on base..
29. Amber Gay-Ola / IT'S BETTER / TRADE MARK REGISTERED / Property of Gay-Ola Bottling Co., Huntsville, Ala. This Bottle Not Sold. Small C in a diamond on base.
30. Aqua Gay-Ola / TRADE MARK REGISTERED / IT'S BETTER / W.M.D. & Son / Sullivan, Ind. Return This Bottle. (Could be ROOT Glass Co.)
31. The Sand Rock Mineral Water Co., Canton, Ohio. On back: Gay-Ola, It's Better. Reg. U.S. Patent Off.
32. Amber Gay-Ola (in script). It's Better. Reg. U.S. Patent Office. The Gay-Ola Bottling Works, Elk Park, N.C. Gay-Ola on base.
33. 4-ring clear Warsaw Bottling Co., Warsaw, N.C. Gay-Ola (in script). Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. The Improved Cola. A.G.W. 228 on base. American Glass Works, Richmond, Va.
34. Clear Gay-Ola in script. It's Better. 7 Oz. Jacksonville Gay-Ola Bottling Co. (no state, but it's Florida) TBNS. Fancy G on base.
35. REGISTERED. C. Muller & Co. / Gay-Ola in script / Jacksonville, Fla.. TBNS And Must Be Returned, 23 on base.
36. Amber Corbin Ice & Carbonating Co., Inc. / Corbin, Ky. Gay-Ola near base. ROOT on base and on the side near the bottom.
37. Amber Gay-Ola / It's Better. Property of / Diamond / Bottling Works / Coal Creek, Tenn. TBNS. Fancy G on base.
38. Aqua Drink / Gay-Ola / Refreshes,

Inigorates. People's Ice & Mfg. Co., (No city). 287 in diamond on base. 4 rings stop for label space. Trade / Gay-Ola in script / Mark. Registered. Net Contents 7 oz. Charleston, S.C.

39. Clear Trade / Gay-Ola / Mark / REGISTERED. No town name. 8 on base.

40. Aqua The Gay-Ola Co., Owensboro, Ky. (all in script). REGISTERED.

41. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola / Hopkinsville Bottling Works, Hopkinsville, Ky. 7 FLUID OZ. Gay-Ola on base.

42. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block lettering) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / Adams-Wilson Co. Clarksville, Tenn. Gay-Ola on base.

43. 4-ring amber, same as above.

44. 4-ring dark amber Indiana Bottling / Works / Indiana, Pa. The Improved Cola. I on base.

45. 4-ring aqua Hickman Bottling Works / Hickman, Ky. Cap. 7 OZ, Gay-Ola (block letters). Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

46. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. The Improved Cola. Gay-Ola Bottling Co. / 6-1/2 Fluid Ounces. Madison, Ill. Gay-Ola, 19S1 on base.

47. Amber Homer City Bottling Works, Homer City, Pa. Net Contents 7 Fl. Oz.

48. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.. / The Improved Cola / Oxford Bottling Works, Oxford, Miss. 0 in square on base.

49. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / The Delta Mfg. Co. / Greenville, Miss. Gay-Ola on base.

50. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Durant / Bottling Works / Durant, Miss 6-1/2 Fl. Oz. on shoulder / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

51. Clear Drink Gay Kola / It's Better / Gay Kola Co., in script / Rocky Mount, N.C. 6 upward-pointing arrows around shoulder. A.G.W. 116-1 on base. A Gay-Ola wannabe.

52. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / The Improved Cola Fancy S intertwined around B and W. Woodlawn, Pa. Contents 7 Fluid Ozs. 5-pointed small star on base. D.O.C. S 5-1 on side near bottom.

53. 4-ring clear Gay-Ola (block lettering) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / The Improved Cola. Wurzbarger / Ginger Ale Co. / Portsmouth, Va. A.G.W. 228 on base.

54. 4-ring clear Berkley Bottling Works / Capacity 7 Fluid Ounces / Berkley, Va. A.G.W. 228 on base.

55. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / The Improved Cola Fordyce / Bottling / Works / Fordyce, Ark. Fordyce on base.

56. Aqua Gay-Ola (in script) . Trade Mark Registered / Vicksburg Bottling Co. / Vicksburg, Miss. V on base.

57. Clear Gay-Ola (script) / Registered / Spartanburg, S.C. 8 on base.

58. Clear Gay-Ola (script) / Columbia, S.C. 8 on base.

59. Same as above except Orangeburg, S.C.

60. Clear Gay-Ola (script) / It's Better / Trade Mark Registered. Spartanburg, South Carolina (all in script) T-2 on base.

61. 4-ring clear Gay-Ola (block letters) / 6-1/2 Fl. Oz. on shoulder / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. Gay-Ola Co. / McMinnville, Tenn. G on base.

62. Amber J.C. Menhardt & Co. / Cincinnati, Ohio Gay-Ola in small script. ROOT on base.

63. Aqua Gay-Ola in script on side / It's Better / Trade Mark Registered. The Olney Bottling Works, Olney, Ill. T-2 on base.

64. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / The Improved Cola / Q. Vonderheide / Batesville, Ind. / 7 Oz. ROOT on side near bottom.

65. Amber Gay-Ola (script) / It's Better / Property of / Gay-Ola / Bottling Co. of Memphis / TBNS. Fancy G on base. One of several variants.

66. Aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / The Improved Cola / Columbia, S.C.

67. Amber Gay-Ola (script) / Newport Bottling Works / Newport Tenn. Large C inside a diamond on base.

68. Amber tall Gay-Ola on base. Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. The Improved Cola. Coral Bottling Works, Coral, Pa.

69. Aqua Gay-Ola in script / Southern Phosphate Co. / Columbus, Miss. Never Sold / Return When Empty. B on base.

70. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / Crystal Ice Cream & Bottling Works / Tupelo, Miss. ROOT on side near bottom. Gay-Ola on base.

71. Aqua Gay-Ola (in script) / It's Better /



Circa 1900 pocket mirror / watch fob, "Drink Gay-Ola, sold on eBay for \$191.

Trade Mark Registered / Property of the Gay-Ola Bottling Co., Brookhaven, Miss.

72. Clear Glacier Bottling Works / Shelbyville, Ky. G on base.

73. Aqua Crown Bottling Co.. / Gay-Ola (block letters) / Contents / "Crown" / 7 Fl. Oz. / Muncie, Ind. Embossed crown on base.

74. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Bottle Pat'd. Dec. 18, 1917 / 6-1/2 Fl. Oz. / The Improved Cola / Dixie Bottling Co. / Clarendon, Ark. Chatt. on side near bottom. Small g inside 5-pointed star on base.

75. Greenish-aqua, Drink Gay-Ola (in script) / It's Better / Shubuta Bottling Works / Shubuta, Miss. C.G. Co. 73 on side near bottom.

76. 4-ring clear Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / The Improved Cola / Lumberton, N.C.

77. Clear Trade / Gay-Ola / Mark / Registered / Bushnell Bottling Works, Bushnell, Fla.

78. 4-ring amber Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. pat. Off. / The Improved Cola / Canonsburg / Bottling & / Ice Cream / Works / Canonsburg, Pa. Contents 7 Fl. Ozs. S on base. D.O.C. 65-1 on side near bottom.

79. 4-ring aqua, same as above.

80. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / The Improved Cola / Chas. Krzykwa Jr. / Shamokin, Pa. / Contents 7 Fl. Ozs. D.O.C. on side near bottom.

81. Aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / The Improved Cola / Junior Soft Drink Co. / Dover O. JR on base.

82. 4-ring amber Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / The Improved Cola. P. Voelker / Registered / Cleveland, O. 4 on base.

83. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / Bottled Pat'd. Dec. 18, 1917. Mound Bayou Bottling Works / Mound Bayou, Miss. G in 5-point star on base.

84. Same as above except Gay-Ola on base.

85. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / The Improved Cola. Akron Bottling Works / Cap. / Akron, O. / 7 Oz. / Property. G.R. on base.

86. Same as above, except clear.

87. 4-ring amber Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / The Improved Cola. Mont Hall / Seneca, Mo.

88. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Registered / The Improved Cola. Gay-Ola Bottling Works / J.C. Wiesner / Proprietor / 7 Oz. / Hagerstown, Md. D.O.C.

Continued to page 38.

with three diamonds. On the latter example, two diamonds topped this W-shaped separator. Thereafter on each version, the single oval followed by the single diamond design continued one after the other throughout the course of the Ws top central spine until two diamonds completed the design at the bottom.

⁶ *Perfection Glass Company, One of Many Glass Houses in Washington, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, pg. 57.

⁷ "Patents Issued to William Beach Fenn (Part 1 of 2)," Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, January-February 2007, pgs. 30-32. For patent and advertising facts on the spherical and cylindrical models of a separating cruet, please consult the above reference.

⁸ I've seen similar size cruets with embossing on the bottom edge of the flange as well. The inscriptions were usually some minor variation of two root phrases: PAT^D MARCH 30-97 or PAT^D MARCH 30 97 OTHERS PENDING.

⁹ In addition to the 91 error, I've seen other examples with an 8 or 0 instead of the number 9.

¹⁰ On the other example in my collection, there wasn't any embossing on this feature.

¹¹ The longer edition of a paneled neck was the only one shown on the squirt bottles with a spherical bottom in the Perfection Glass Company brochure. Why two different lengths were manufactured for the smaller capacity version is anyone's guess. If you have a thought on this issue, I'd like to hear your supposition.

Happiness for this Collector is Pursuing Gay-Ola Bottles, by Bill Baab Continued from page 30.

89. Aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / The Improved Cola. Reinhard / Bottling / Works / Cumberland, Md.. Contents 7 Fluid Ozs. D.O.C.

90. Same as above except chocolate amber and no Cumberland, Md. 5 on side near bottom.

91. 4-ring honey amber Hopkinsville, Ky. Gay-Ola on base. Similar to No. 41.

92. 4-ring Gay-Ola (block letters). Gay-Ola Bottling Works, Owensboro, Ky. Gay-Ola on base.

93. Clear Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / The Improved Cola. Rapides Bottling Works / Alexandria, La.

94. 4-ring clear Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / The Improved Cola. A.P. Moresi / Jeanerette, La. NTBS.

95. Aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / The Improved Cola. W.B.W., Wynne, Ark.

96. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. / The Improved Cola. Marvell Bottling / Works / Marvell, Ark.

97. 4-ring amber Gay-Ola (block letters) / Registered. Section / Gay-Ola / Bottling Works. No state, but it's Section, Ala. N.B.B.G. Co. (North Baltimore Bottle & Glass Co.) and 1917 on side near bottom.

98. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) / Registered. Prattville / Bottling Works / Prattville, Ala. G on base.

99. 4-ring aqua Gay-Ola (block letters) Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. 6-1/2 Fl. Oz. Gay-Ola

Bottling Works, Huntsville, Ala. Big 5-point star with G inside on base.

100. Same as above, except Greenville, Ala. Small star with g inside on base.

101. Same as above except amber.

102. 4-ring amber Gay-Ola (block letters) / Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. Whiton Gay-Ola / Bottling Works / Crossville, Ala. G on base.

103. Clear, tall Art-Deco Gay-Ola (block letters) / The Improved Cola / with 8 panels. Bottle Not Sold. 7 oz. Capacity. E.E. Bottling Co., Bangor, Maine

104. Aqua 24 Fl. Ozs. "REGISTERED" Gay-Ola Bottling Co., Madison, Ill.



Gay-Ola bottled by the Salvo & Berdon Candy Co., Natchez, Miss.

The Panama Canal, by Cecil Munsey Continued from page 33.

The molds were in two, three, four or five pieces. The glassblower blew a few puffs lowering a glass lump into the hollow mold and then continued blowing into the tube until the glass was forced against the sides of the mold. Raised letters were whittled in the molds and the molten glass took the shape of the container. Ninety percent of the bottles made before 1904 were not embossed. Before the Civil War, instructions for taking a medicine or the name of a firm was written on a piece of paper and tied to the neck of the bottle. Molds were replaced by semi-automatic machines and then in 1903 as automatic bottle-making machine came into existence. But it was 10 years before machinery replaced hand blown mass production of bottles.

The fascination of searching for these bottles that reveal what our Isthmian forefathers drank, ate and used to cure their ailments has captured the fancy of several other Canal Zone collectors such as Alwyn Sprague, Carl Glass, Kenneth Manthorne, Al Chandler, Robert Stewart, Edward McFarland, Charles Rheberg, Gustave Bliss, Karl Longley, Lois Harrison, and Judy Williams [most of whom were members of the original club – ABCA of Sacramento, Inc.].

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