

Is This Flask Incorrectly Described?

By Eric McGuire

Historical flasks are, as a subject of collection, perhaps the most studied group of American bottles known. Aesthetically pleasing and often with motifs that are as patriotically American as one can get, it is hard for any collector who appreciates glass to not hold a special reverence for them, even if one's collecting specialty is nursing bottles.

One sub-category is the fairly large group of cornucopia flasks. The cornucopia has come to symbolize bountiful goodness, and when embossed on a flask, may not be directly historical but could represent the bounty of our great country.

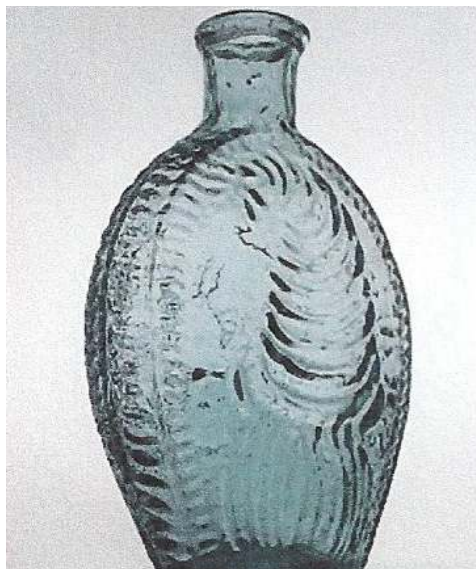
The father-daughter team of pioneer bottles collectors, George and Helen McKearin created an enduring system of categorization of all known historical/pictorial flasks of their time when they published the classic book *American Glass* in 1941. The Latin group number and Arabic sub-number extension has been entirely memorized by a large number of collectors who can talk to each other in a language that sounds like some sort of subversive code.

One such group is "GIII," with a total of 18 bottles represented, having a central motif identified as a cornucopia "filled with produce." The opposite side is described as a large beaded circular medallion with six ribbed points.

With all due respect to the McKearins, I think they may have "got it wrong." Take a good look at the "fruit" that fills this cornucopia. It is unlike any of the fruit that is depicted in all of the other cornucopia flasks that are not inverted. This flask has what looks like a bunch of stringy stuff hanging down from the "horn." It hasn't gone unnoticed that there are several other flasks with descriptions of inverted cornucopias that have the same sort of stringy embossing extruding from the horn and I believe those are also improperly described, but for now I am just focusing on the GIII-1 flask.

Now let's look at another similarly

shaped object that has the same orientation to the so-called inverted cornucopia. The man-o-war jellyfish fits this description exactly. The stringy fruit looks much more like the tentacles of said man-o-war. Then let's take a good look at that medallion embossed on the other side of the flask. Compare it with that close relative of the sea urchin known as the sand dollar. Again, there is an amazing resemblance.



Inverted Cornucopia side



Man-owar



Medallion side



Sand Dollar

While the example shown above isn't exactly dollar-shaped, I can't help but be persuaded by this visual coincidence of two marine creatures on this flask.

Perhaps this flask should be better described as sporting a man-o-war, just as the flasks known by the McKearins as GII-11, GII-12, GII-13, GII-14 and GII-69. All of these latter flasks have an eagle embossed on the opposite side but the inverted cornucopia still looks more like a man-o-war to me than a cornucopia – especially with all that "stringy stuff."

What do you think? Does this idea have merit? I am certainly not proposing the change of McKearin's numbering system, but perhaps we should recognize what these flasks really depict. Of course, a big question looms over this idea. Why would these historical flasks show marine organisms, and how does this fit in with the whole genre of the other historical flasks?