

Eric,

Here's my 1969 write up that should present a more intimate view of Charlie Gardner as the "master of bottle collecting."

My thought as a "go-with" to your article of your pursuit of Gardner labeled pieces, is to recommend to the Fed editor of "Bottles & Extras" that they publish a reprint of my article which should give the many readers a better glimpse into the past of Charlie when he was a collector.

If your editor would consider it, I will grant a one-time re-publication right to the magazine to reprint the article and photos.

Of course, I would need to increase the size for copying the article for the magazine.

It probably would give your article more impact for those readers who know very little of the man's impact on the hobby.

Just let me know if there is interest and I can reproduce a print of the original article as I had published it in "The downeast GLASSMAN."

Let me know what you think ... and the editor ...
Noel Tomas

(For your information, I was the founder/organizer and Northeast Region Chairman and Vice President of the "Federation of Historical Bottle Clubs" when the FOHBC began.)

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Charlie Gardner's Collection Impresses Visitors by Its Size; Its Future Concerns Collectors

By Noel Tomas
in the *Down East GLASSMAN*, 1969

Like a ship's master, Charles B. Gardner sits like the king that he is amidst his special addition to his home which houses the world's most complete collection of ancient, mostly American mouth-blown bottles.

From his desk like a poop deck situated abaft of the midships he can survey his most prized specimens glittering with almost every color imaginable as the New London, Connecticut sun shifts from the east windows to the west.

It is an awe-inspiring collection from the first floor, down the steel circular ladder to the basement and aback of that main room into his sale bottles (mostly bitters) and on to the bar.

Your attention pivots away from his small collection of sarsaparillas (with the remainders of his Warner's medicinal collection on the bottom shelf) to the commanding painting of a brazen, Renaissance-style nude blushing with a smile while Saint Peter looks without hope towards Heaven. Engraved upon a plate at the bottom of the painting is the comment, "God Help Me!"

So it can be said of Charlie Gardner that he likes

Letter from Noel Tomas to Eric Richter who authored the "Letter to a Legacy" companion article in this issue of *Bottles of Extras*.

Noel Tomas





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his liquor and his women. Of course his wife, Nina, is his favorite and he proudly claims that her knowledge of his collection is increasing vastly toward the day when she inherits all 4,500 of them. None are the same.

And Charlie cannot claim to own every specimen known. The man with the most still wants others. His particular designs are upon his favorite specialty, the historical flasks.

Just recently, as the results of an article that appeared in the Hartford Courant, he acquired two "Jared Spencer" pint historical flasks from "Manchester, Conn." These are listed in McKearin's "American Glass" as the second and third rarest bottles. He would also prize a Coventry, Conn., flask with the liberty cap without stars over it on the reverse and Lafayette on the front (McKearin GI-87.)

Other historicals he would like to own are (McKearin identifications): GI-4, 5, 8, 63, 70, 74, 119, 120 and 122; GII-59 and 77; GIV-15, 21, and 33, and GVII-1 and 2 (Tippecanoe.)

There are other pictorial flasks he wants and he will be glad to pull out his McKearin catalog and show you those not marked designating they are in his collection.

Unfortunately, Charlie points out that his reputation makes his attempts to purchase bottles much more difficult because he is viewed with suspicion by a prospective seller.

Not long ago, as time seems to the 79-year-old

authority, George McKearin had inspected a woman's bottles when she asked if their origin had been Sandwich, Mass. He did not acknowledge their source and when he commented to Charlie outside, he exclaimed, "Those Sandwich bottles were beauts. Do you suppose you could find a way of getting her to sell them to me?"

Charlie's library is a vast storehouse of information about the manufacture and marketing of early bottles.

Almost every day that he is not out visiting a bottle show or auction or talking to a group of collectors, he spends time keeping up with his correspondence. He admits that he is tardy in writing. But, he has done a tremendous job providing material and photographs from his library and collection for many of the new crop of bottle writers throughout the nation.

One thing peeves him when he provides this service. All too often no credit or thanks are given him either by answering his letter or in the publication. A large number of discourteous filchers come from western states, Charlie reports.

Still he views collectors as a whole as a most congenial group of people. And he can be most helpful in promoting new clubs and individuals to spread the fever of collecting.

During the depression, when antique bottle collecting fell off from the 1920s, Charlie began his hobby. He used to be an antique weapons collector and the switch in hobbies happened when his old friend, Stephen Van Rensselaer, a noted expert and

He carries insurance, but not for winds and the like. And his insurance does not cover the actual worth of the specimens. It probably does cover what he has tied up in the stock in money.

What's his collection worth? "I wouldn't take a million dollars for it," he has commented. Yet he has told collectors he had an offer less than that amount which he thought quite reasonable.

The fact remains that Charlie's collection is unequalled anywhere in the world and that makes it a cherished place to visit so long as it is open to all who wish to view it.

There has been much speculation as to what will happen with Charlie's collection after he passes on. Many quarters of the bottle collecting New England states have spread the tale that the irreplaceable collection will be put up on the auction block and split up forever.



INSPECTING one of his latest acquisitions, Charles Gardner stands before his Connecticut collection. It contains examples from four of the State's earliest and most prominent glass works.

writer about bottles in the twenties, traded him a stock of ancient bottles for a station wagon loaded with his antique guns. Much of his collection was obtained through the Pennypackers brothers of Kenhorst, Pennsylvania, auctioneers.

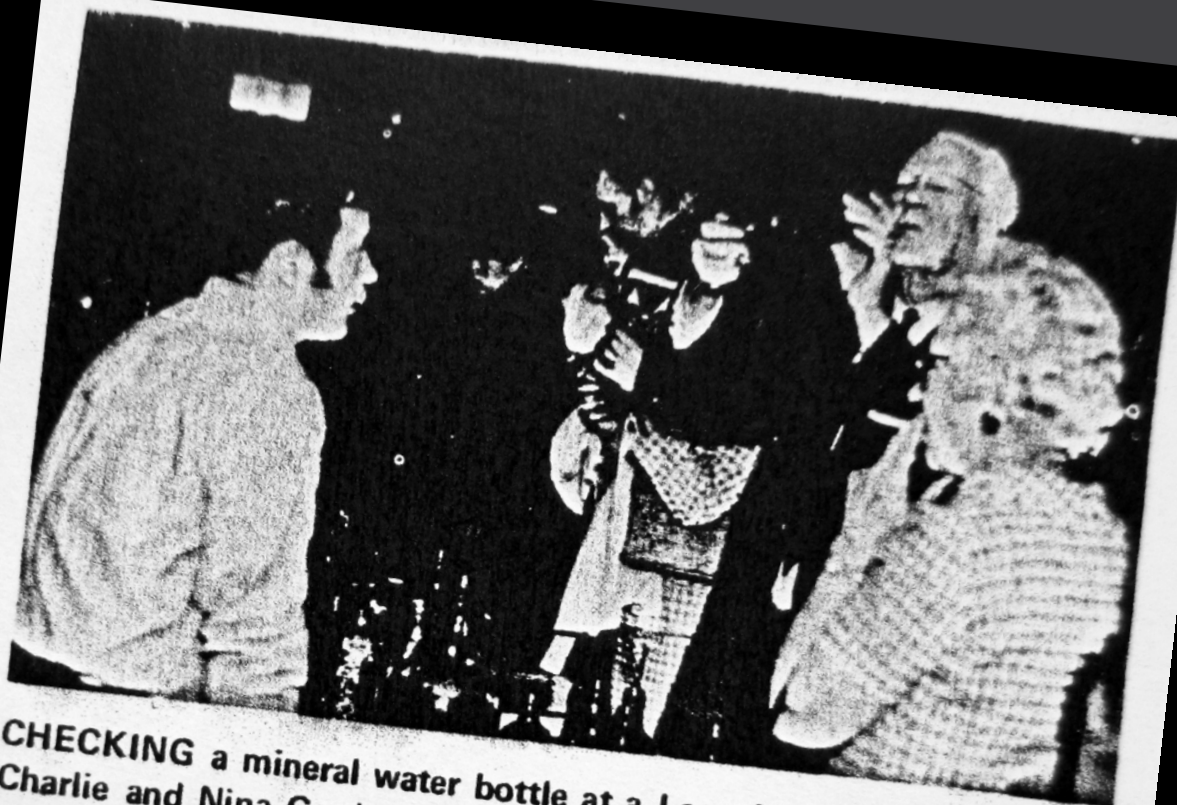
Of course, like McKearin, Charlie also kept a sharp eye on the lookout for bargains in antique stores' backrooms and the many other sources such specimens showed up when they were easy to come by.

A visitor, especially one of many collectors who make it a point to stop at this mecca of bottles, might inspect the window displays with a tremulous hesitancy. What if a Nor'easter were to blow up from Long Island Sound and slap its force upon the windows?

Charlie shrugs his shoulders and notes that the bottles "do rattle a lot," but none have fallen from their perch and broken.



GLITTERING with many embossed designs are three of the dozens of shelves of Charlie's collection. The second row, third and fourth rows of the rarest listed in McKearin's "American Bottles" acquired them.



CHECKING a mineral water bottle at a Laconia, N.H., show and sale, Charlie and Nina Gardner spend a few minutes at the booth of Tom Nolen, Saratoga, N.Y., a specialist in mineral water bottles.



ns reflecting the sunlight, bottles show some very rare th from the right, are two n Glass." Charlie recently

Charlie noted that the Corning Museum of Glass had inquired about purchasing certain items from his collection when they heard the rumor.

A New Hampshire auctioneer said Charlie hinted that he might get the collection for his auction.

The GLASSMAN editors feel apprehensive that a chance might exist that the collection would be dispersed.

It would be a tragic blow to the present and future generations of collectors to have such a magnificent and unequalled accumulation of early American history split up.

Some bottle collectors place greed of possession before the pleasure of many who cannot possess or share such a sight. No doubt they will advocate auctioning the collection.

The editors feel that a foundation, museum, consortium of collectors, etc., will quickly realize what can be lost to the world and impress upon Mr. Gardner that a reasonable offer from such public-minded sources paid to his heirs should be seriously considered first.

After all, when in the next 40 or 100 years will another such collection be amassed for all to enjoy?... Editors