

July 2013

Send via Message in Bottle

**Mr. Charles Gardner**  
**New London, Connecticut**

Re: **Letter to a Legacy**

# **LETTER TO A LEGACY**

## **BY ERIC RICHTER**

Dear Charles,

My name is Eric and although we haven't met, as a bottle and glass collector I feel compelled to write you. It's been a while since you've gone away, yet somehow I'm sure this letter will find you well.

I was just 10 years old and collecting shark teeth back in 1975 when you consigned to auction what will always be the most unsurpassed collection of bottles and historic glass ever assembled by one collector. It wasn't until my early 20s when I, too, caught the bottle bug. No doubt you had it bad. Some 4,500 bottles and flasks of every type in 46 years of collecting? That's a collector's lifetime dream, especially since you got in on and hit the ground floor running, having acquired your first flask back in 1929.

I've been thinking of you lately as I was astounded to acquire some pieces from your collection. You'll be pleased to know that I've managed to locate and reunite the entire Lot 2606 and also acquire a piece from Lot 2848 of the glasshouse archaeology pieces from your collection sold at Skinner's auction in 1975. It's not just the fact of acquiring them all; what were the chances of me reassembling that entire lot and more from two different glass dealers in two different towns? Assembling the entire Lot took almost two months. I still can't believe my good fortune, yet ironically, it all seemed meant to be.

The first piece I came across was an absolutely wonderful glass gem and I'm sure you thought so, too. One day in early January I had a very strong impulse to visit an antiques store where I've scored on a nice bottle or two in the past. I had been there recently, but on that particular day I felt an urge I couldn't ignore. It was absolutely compelling. I just had to go there. Like someone unseen was tugging on my coat sleeve.

Wow, Charles, did that urge pay off! I scored the most fantastic example of a historic glasshouse fragment I've ever seen. I was so thrilled I don't think my feet even touched the ground walking out to my car with it. I'm sure you remember it well, it's your Lake Dunmore piece, that beautiful grapefruit-sized artifact of deep aquamarine glass. The folks who found it actually engraved their names on it in 1886. It's a piece of glasshouse history with history literally written all over it. Did you wonder, like me, who Rob and Daisy, Gus and Jennie, Floyd and Maud, and Charles Greinnev were? Did you also wonder if they collected old glass, or was it simply a wonderful





Entire Lot 2606 reunited from the Gardner collection that sold at Skinner's auction in 1975





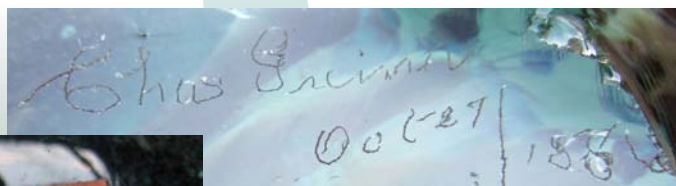
**Lake Dunmore piece, a beautiful grapefruit-sized artifact of deep aquamarine glass**

souvenir they happened across back on an 1886 sunny day's outing or Summer picnic at that beautiful lake?

How far did you delve into the history of that glasshouse? Finding that piece of yours certainly piqued my interest. The Vermont Glass Factory at Lake Dunmore was the first glasshouse in Vermont. It was a most perfect location, with the endless sand and the vast forests for burning fuel for the furnace fires of glassmaking.

It was begun and built by Epaprus Jones in 1811 and how interesting that he was assisted by none other than Henry Schoolcraft, son of Lawrence Schoolcraft, the manager of Keene, New Hampshire's Glass Works. (You were pretty keen on Keene glass, too, Charles.) Now, despite a fire or two early on, with Epaprus owning and Henry acting as superintendent, they managed to produce window glass from 1813 until a very bad fire at the Lake Dunmore facility in 1815. They rebuilt the glasshouse by 1816, but then

**Rob, Daisy, Gus, Jennie, Floyd, Maud, Charles and Greinnev scribed their name's in History during a day in 1886?**



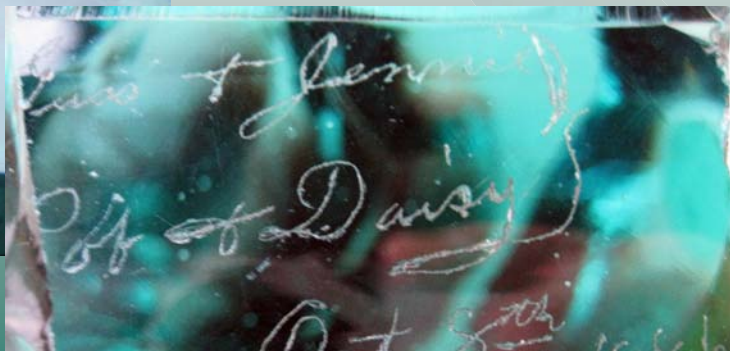
financial difficulties at both sites, their other glasshouse being just five miles down the Salisbury Plains Road in East Middlebury, caused the company to cease all glass production in 1817. Like many glass businesses in those long ago days, things seemed to start with such promise, only to end abruptly due to unforeseen circumstances.

The old glassworks on the lake sat dormant until 1832, when it was purchased by the Lake Dunmore Glass Company. Run by local Vermont businessmen, it opened again for glass production in 1833 and stayed in business until 1842. After that it closed forever. In 1849, the Lake Dunmore Hotel Company acquired the property and Lake Dunmore was to be a glass industry no more, but a beautiful resort area, and it has been ever since.

I've never been to Lake Dunmore, Charles, but thanks to you and your collecting legacy, I have travelled into the past of that lovely historical lake and learned a lot more than if I simply just drove there and took in the scenery. It's more than just holding a magnificent piece of historic glass or flask in my hands, it's always been about the history. You knew that, too. You knew that every bottle, flask, or piece of historic glass is a beautiful solidified moment forever captured in time; the beauty of color and light, combined with history, all so pleasing to the eye and staggering to the imagination. Everytime I pick up and look at the piece of Lake Dunmore glass, my mind is inspired to know more.

And speaking of wanting to know more, here's quite a fantastic story, Charles. Did you know how Lake Dunmore got its name and the incident with the tree cutter? It's almost magical and just so interesting, one would be very hard pressed to make it up.

Back in the 1700s, the Indian name for the lake was Moosalmoo and the state of Vermont had yet to come into existence. During the early 1770s, what's now know as the State of Vermont was simply part of the Government of New York. It didn't officially become part of the Union until 1791. Around 1773, the former Colonial governor of





New York, the Earl of Dunmore, whose real name was John Murray, was interested in seeing the area. Traveling with some companions and with the help of two local Indians, they canoed down a creek to the lake. Impressed with its beauty, the Earl of Dunmore, while drinking spirits from a pocket flask, waded into the lake and poured the rest of the flask's contents into the water, proclaiming the lake to be forevermore named Lake Dunmore. After this auspicious little ceremony, he noticed a small tree with a forked top. He then had the Indians climb and bend it down so the fork in the tree could be split. The Earl of Dunmore then placed his bottle into the split, neck down, and secured it there. The tree was then released to stand upright again. Unbelievably, about 30 years later around 1813, when one of Epaprus Jones' tree cutters was felling trees for his glasshouse furnace fires, he struck his axe on something other than wood while cutting a limb off a felled tree. Looking closer, he noticed he had smashed a glass bottle embedded within the tree which had grown over it.

Now that's quite a historic journey from a single piece of glass, and you had some 4,500 items. There are over 4,500 stories there. Astounding.

I am also thrilled to have acquired your two Henry William Stiegel glasshouse pieces as I live not far from the site of his glassworks. Did you dig those yourself? I



**Photograph of Charlie and Mrs. Gardner at the local bottle show held in the Lancaster barn in 1972.**

know that aside from acquiring glasshouse pieces from others, you did go to many historic glasshouses and do your own digging and discovering. I also know you've visited my hometown of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, as I have a couple of old photographs of you here at the local bottle show. Those were taken back in 1972 when the show was held at the Lancaster Barn. Then the show moved to York, just across the Susquehanna River. Now it's held every July in Shupp's Grove in Adamstown just north of me. I wonder if you did any collecting at Shupp's? It's a great tradition that continues, Charles, as I go there frequently and I never miss the July bottle show. That's a show I know you'd like. Aside from the annual bottle show, Shupp's Grove is a beautiful place to pick. It's an outdoor spacious grove of trees and is open from late April to October. It's been a favorite of many a collector and has been a great weekend antique and collectors' haunt since it opened in 1962. Well-known collector Thomas McCandless used to go picking there. At the annual July bottle show there's still some old time collectors set up at tables in the shade, including Dick Watson, to share bottle stories with. You'd also get to meet the newer, younger generation of collectors, too. That's the great thing about our hobby, Charles, it's as timeless as the bottles themselves and it never ceases to grow.

And speaking of bottles, I also have a most unusual and quite beautiful fiery opalescent flask. It was commissioned from Pairpoint by the Somers Connecticut Antique Bottle Club in 1973. It's definitely your bottle Charles. It has your signature embossed on it: Charlie Gardner, and, most unique of all, above that is your portrait forever in glass. The embossed banner above your head reads:



**Two Henry William Stiegel glasshouse pieces**



“Connecticut’s Dean of Antique Bottles.” Looking back now, I think that might be an understatement, but still quite a title to be given at the time. You must have been very pleased and proud. I think nowadays collectors see you as a legacy. I know of many serious collectors with fantastic collections, yet I can’t think of anyone whose portrait has appeared on a commemorative flask. Charles, you were a very unique and special collector indeed.

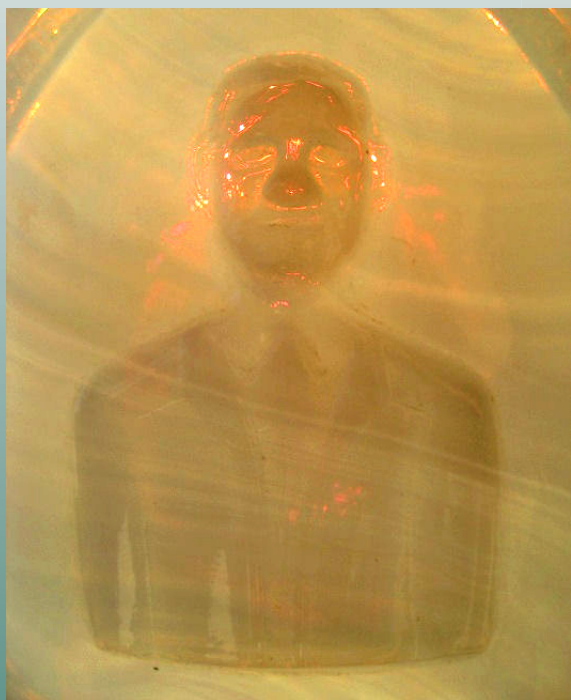
You continue to and will forever inspire the glass collecting hobby. At the rate I’m collecting, I’m sure I won’t make your Dean’s List, but I sure am having fun, and most importantly, the history lessons never end.

Cordially yours,  
Eric Richter



**Charlie Gardner in 1972 in the Lancaster barn.**

P.S.: I’ll never really know if it was you urging me to go that day to the store where the Lake Dunmore piece sat waiting for me. But if it was, feel free to tug on my coat sleeve anytime.



**Charlie Gardner flask was commissioned from Pairpoint by the Somers Connecticut Antique Bottle Club in 1973.**