

The Bethesda Spring Water Bottle Story

by Howard Dean

On June 8, 2003, I first saw the S-8-A* quart Bethesda Spring bottle! Until that day, I didn't realize that there was really one of these bottles known to collectors.

The owner, Gerry Strubel, a good friend and fellow collector, said, "I'm going to sell this and if you want it, you can have it."

Well, of course I wanted it! I have never seen a Saratoga that I didn't want, but the price scared me!

I guess I said something like, "I'd really love it, but let me think about it and discuss it with Lillian (my wife)."

This all took place at our annual spring meeting of the Saratoga Type Mineral Water Bottle Collectors Society, which was the day before the Saratoga Bottle Show, so I had time to be excited, and then not so excited! It was a long restless night, too.

I did have Lillian's okay to buy it, "If you can't live without it."

The next morning, I saw Gerry at the show and told him I would take it. Well, the look on his face said it all and I felt an

immediate relief!

His answer was, "Howard, I just gave it to Jim to auction off. I really didn't think that you wanted it!"

As I said, it was a feeling of relief and also sadness, but that didn't last very long because in a few minutes here came Gerry with the bottle and it was handed to me with the words, "Jim says if you really want it, it's okay by me."

That's how I acquired this rare aqua quart Bethesda bottle.

Bethesda Spring is located in Waukesha, Wisconsin and, as with many mineral springs, was known to, and used by, the local residents. The first known use by others was in 1834 when a group of U.S. Topographical Bureau workers became sick and were directed to the spring.

There is a very good article in the *Antique Bottle and Glass Collector* issue of June, 1990 written by John M. Schoenknecht, that gives the history of this

spring along with many photographs to illustrate the article. I will not attempt to rewrite this story except to quote a little from his text:

"— the water was bottled in ceramic jugs as well as wooden barrels. Glass blob top bottles were added at a later date. The author had never seen an embossed "Saratoga" or "Hutch" type of bottle from Bethesda. The labeled bottle featured an angel hovering over the spring. The word Bethesda signifies the house of mercy and was the name of a pool at Jerusalem (John V 2-4)."

Some of this spring water was shipped to New York state (and other places) for resale in draught or in bottles. I have a two-gallon ceramic jug made by the West Troy Pottery Company with Bethesda Water in blue around the jug. We know that in 1886, C.H. Bosworth of Troy was selling this water. This Saratoga bottle came from



a person from Troy.

The bottle is from a retooled mold of an S-17-A Crystal Spring bottle which was owned by C.R. Brown from about 1870-89. Brown sold the Crystal Spring to another Crystal Spring Company, but apparently kept the mold. Then he had the word "Crystal" peened out and replaced with "Bethesda." This is plainly visible on the bottle.

In 1984 or 1985 the owner of this bottle got in touch with Bernie Puckhaber, the Saratoga collector who started our Saratoga Collectors Club about this same time. Bernie referred the owner to Gerry who went to Troy and bought the bottle. He had it cleaned by Wilber Grill in 1985 and in his collection until June of 2003.

Up to this time, it is the only specimen known to exist. This does not seem possible, but until another one shows up, this is it, and I feel my responsibility and am proud to be the present guardian of such a rare piece. There is no known pint bottle although there was one advertised as such.

The original Bethesda Water received many awards. In recent years, the resurgence in bottled water once again opened a big market, and in 1986, the firm bottled more than 400,000 gallons a month.

The Bethesda Spring continues to flow clear and clean at the same rate it did when it was first discovered. I highly recommend that those interested in this spring's history read the article previously mentioned by John M. Schoenknecht.

Howard J. Dean

Reference:

Tuckers Collectors Guide to the Saratoga Type Mineral Water Bottles, Published by Donald & Lois Tucker, Inc., 1986.

March 1, 2005 - Now for the rest of the story.

Since I had John Schoenknecht's address, I decided to contact him and send him a copy of this article.

This I did, and his response was: "I was surprised and pleased to receive your letter today. I'm glad you enjoyed the article I wrote so long ago. It inspired me to write a book! I am enclosing a copy of it for you. — As you can tell, I GREATLY expanded the article on Bethesda. I even traveled to Paris and met Dunbar's great great grandson there!"

Imagine my surprise to receive the book, "The Great Waukesha Springs Era 1868-1918" by John M. Schoenknecht, a beautiful soft-cover, 322-page history of the Waukesha, Wisconsin springs.

Now I can really recommend this book to all who are interested - isn't it amazing what comes out of the woodwork if you look? Thanks, John, for a good job for our hobby.

Another Glass Cap and Jar Inspired by William B. Fenn Continued from Page 55.

Fenn, of Columbus, Ohio. Closing Device for Vessels. No. 843,670. Specification of Letters Patent. Patented Feb. 12, 1907. Application filed March 28, 1906, Serial No. 308,383 and United States Patent Office. William B. Fenn, of Columbus, Ohio. Ring for Sealing Jars and the Like. No. 843,740. Specification of Letters Patent. Patented Feb. 12, 1907. Application filed April 16, 1906. Serial No. 311,904.

² This sealing technique was used on the all grass screw cap which sealed the SIMPLEX in a diamond and FLACCUS BROS. STEERS HEAD FRUIT JAR (smooth lip) embossed packers' ware. However, just after the patent was issued to Mr. Fenn, he lost the rights to it to the Republic Glass Manufacturing Company of Moosic, Pennsylvania. This circumstance probably convinced William B. Fenn to modify his original idea, gain a new patent for the revamped concept and seek revenue from it by having another glass making firm produce and market it.

³ Illinois Glass Company catalog dated 1908, pg. 303. This information was graciously provided to me by Bill Lindsey of Klamath Falls, Oregon.

⁴ The first use was on the SIMPLEX in a diamond packers' container which was made to the specifications of a May 3, 1904 patent. The next was also on a jar used by packers. It was patented on October 24, 1905.

⁵ The one made to the May 3, 1904 patent.

⁶ Although not believed to be of Fenn design, the smooth lipped jar used by the Flaccus Brothers of Wheeling, West Virginia, the one marked on the front with the inscription FLACCUS BROS. STEERS HEAD FRUIT JAR, also had the same kind of finish construction.

⁷ The thread wasn't fully formed on all of my examples. Only one had a thread of the semicircular shape throughout. On the other two, the semicircular style of thread stopped at about one and one-fifth turns. At this point, the bottom one-fourth piece of the thread became flat while the remaining topside one-fourth part was still quarter-circular. This configuration was maintained until the modified thread merged into the top of the neck.

⁸ Illinois Glass Company catalog dated 1911, pg. 218. Perhaps, the number 10 on the under side of the base was a reference to the jar's capacity.

⁹ *Perfection Glass Company, One of Many Glass Houses in Washington, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, 2005, pgs. 32-46.

