

EVERY BOTTLE HAS A STORY

THE HENRY CANER BOTTLE

by Jim Bender

If you attended the FOHBC National Antique Bottle Convention in Chattanooga, Tenn., this year, you may have attended a seminar held by Jack Sullivan and Ferdinand Meyer V titled “*Every bottle has a story.*” This is something I have known for years but many collectors fail to truly understand.

A few months ago I visited my friend Jack Pelletier’s house to gather information on his fantastic Binger bottle collection. While I was there I was overcome with the number of other interesting bottles that Jack has. As I looked over the bottle shelves, I saw an olive-green colored seal bottle. As I looked at it Jack told me it was one of his rarest bottles and had a history to go with it. Well, now here I am and being me I had to know what history? The funny thing about history is as a young guy going through school I could not stand history and felt it was a complete waste of time. How foolish we are when we are young. Bottle collecting made me want to know more and more about the history of this country. Enter “Every Bottle Has a Story.” Now realize the story does not always have to be about history, it may be about how the bottle was found or who the person was you got it from. Either way, they all have a story.

Let’s start off with where the bottle was blown. Jack showed the bottle to the late Richmond (Boo) Morcom of Braintree, Mass. He had done the excavations of the old Germantown site in 1955. Boo, as his friends called him, was considered the most knowledgeable person when it came to American seal bottles. He was sure that the bottle came from Germantown Glass Works in Quincy, Mass., based on the style of the seal and how it looked so close to the seals he had found in 1955. But the date on the bottle is 1740 and the glass works did not start until 1750. So I asked how can that be? The answer I found was simple. The date on the bottles is believed to be the date of the wine put into the bottle. So that answers that question. Next, why is it marked H CANER 1740 ?

Embossed H CANER 1740
black glass seal bottle.
Pelletier Collection



The first thing I needed to do was find out who H Caner was. Jack gave me the starting points I needed and it was off to the internet. As much as I don't always like people telling me I saw it on the internet, it is a tool that used correctly is the most complete source of information available today.

So who was H Caner? Not wanting to create a novel, I will give you a brief history of Henry Caner. Henry Caner was born in 1700 in Bristol, England. He emigrated with his family shortly after his birth to the New England colonies. He went on to graduate from Yale University. In 1727, he was ordained in the Church of England. He was appointed as a missionary in Connecticut and Massachusetts. He went on to become a leader in the Church of New England. In 1747, he was named rector of Kings Chapel in Boston, which was the most important Anglican church in New England. In 1749, Caner started construction on the new Kings Chapel. It was constructed of stone and built over the old wooden church which was dismantled and removed piece by piece and used over at a new location. It took until 1754 to complete the construction. As an interesting side note, in 1772 Paul Revere was commissioned to cast a new bell for the church to replace the old one which cracked. It is believed that it was the largest and also the last bell he personally cast. It still hangs there today and is still used.

Caner was a staunch Tory Loyalist who openly criticized the British Government's handling of the colonies. Caner also stood up publicly against the Sons of Liberty, calling them enemies to their king.

During his time in Boston, Caner became a very wealthy man. He was worth over 10,000 pounds sterling which by today's standard would make him a millionaire.

In 1776 when the Revolutionary War broke out, Caner packed up and quickly fled to Halifax, Nova Scotia and finally back to London. He clearly was running in fear from the Sons of Liberty. He left behind everything feeling he would soon return to claim it all back.

Of course, the Revolutionary War ended differently than Caner thought. All records show that in 1778 Caner had to leave London and went to Cardiff, South Wales to live due to financial problems. He was forced to live out his years on a pension of 100 pounds sterling a year. He died in 1792 nearly broke. So reading this small article you know a little more about history and seal bottles. So now you see every bottle has a story to tell.

