

The Bill & Bea Baab Collection at the Augusta Museum of History

By Bill Baab

I broke into the hobby (pun intended) of collecting antique bottles in 1969 and, thanks to the support of my wife, Bea, the collection of mostly Augusta bottles from 1840 to 1950 ballooned to more than 500 by the early 21st century.

We soon reached the eighth decade of our lives and started thinking about the eventual disposal of the collection.

We were born in the North, me in Glenside, Pennsylvania, and she in Bangor, Maine. While I was mostly raised in Augusta after my father was transferred South to Atlanta in 1937 and to Augusta in 1940, Bea lived in and was educated in Massachusetts. After graduation from Boston University and Sargent College as a physical therapist, she moved to Augusta where she was employed at the Forest Hills Veterans Administration Hospital.

I started my journalistic career at The Augusta Chronicle in 1955 as a 20-year-old copy boy, working my way onto the news staff by 1957. In 1964 after a four-year absence, I returned to the newspaper as outdoor editor / sports writer and retired from that position at the end of January 2000. I continue to edit the newspaper's popular fishing page and write an occasional outdoors-related feature.

What all this boils down to is that Bea and I love Augusta and would not live elsewhere.

So in 2014, we decided on our legacy to leave the city: we would donate our entire collection of antique bottles (and a few pieces of local pottery) to the Augusta Museum of History. A couple of years earlier, we had donated more than 80 embossed Augusta drug store bottles dating from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries.

So in February of that year, I began the transfer of 531 bottles from display cases and shelves in our home on The Hill to the museum. Many of the bottles (all empty) are considered rarities by antique bottle collectors.

Nancy Glaser, executive director of the museum, had two state-of-the-art display cases constructed and installed on the second floor. The cases were well lighted by special lamps that did not generate much heat and many of the bottles were anchored by special collars so they could not be jarred and overturned. A color photo of my wife and I and our Yorkie, "Princess Augusta



Sample of the bottles on Display

Tickletummy" (now deceased), is on the wall and marks the collection's location.

So now a cross-section of the Bill & Bea Baab Collection is available for viewing by the general public, who also can enjoy the treasure trove of Augusta-related exhibits within the museum.

In 2017, the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors headed by President Ferdinand Meyer V, of Houston, Texas, decided to hold its 2019 National Show and Expo in Augusta on Aug. 1-3. Host hotel is the Marriott just a few blocks from the museum, which also is the site of the show's VIP reception during the evening of Thursday, Aug. 1.

This year marks the group's 50th anniversary and coincidentally our 50th year in the hobby. In 2011, the FOHBC inducted me into its Hall of Fame and earlier I was recipient of a pair of President's Awards for my contributions to the hobby.

Ms. Glaser also decided to expand our exhibit cases and the number of bottles on display to celebrate the FOHBC's coming to Augusta.

One case is devoted to the history and artifacts of the city's first major brewery, the Augusta Brewing Company (1888-1921), given the general interest in craft breweries. Augusta now has two – Riverwatch Brewing Co., and Savannah River Brewing Co.

We hope the public in general and bottle collectors in particular enjoy viewing our displays, with individual bottles dating from the 1840s. Bea and I have donated more than 5,000 individual Augusta-related artifacts to the museum over the last several decades, including her 1966 wedding dress.



Lots of Augusta bottles to look at with Baabs' Collection on display

