

Augusta National Showtime

By Bill Baab



The Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors will celebrate its 50th year as the leader in the hobby of collecting antique bottles by holding its annual National Show and Expo in Augusta, Georgia August 1-3, 2019.

Host hotel is the Marriott on Reynolds Street adjacent to the Riverwalk along the Savannah River. The show will be held in the adjacent Augusta Convention Center.

The reception for seminar speakers, dealers and other VIPs will be held Thursday afternoon, Aug. 1, in the rotunda of the Augusta Museum of History where bottles from the 50-year Bill and Bea Baab Collection will be on display. The reception is not open to the public. The annual banquet for the membership only will be held on Friday, Aug. 2, starting at 6 p.m.

Seminars will be conducted during the morning on Friday, Aug. 2, followed by the show opening to early buyers. The show reopens Saturday from 8 a.m., to 5 p.m. The seminars are open free to the public. Admission to the show costs \$5. Displays covering many facets of bottle collecting will be assembled around the showroom wall areas.

Collectors and dealers from throughout the United States and other parts of the world will begin arriving in the city during late July.

Among exhibits will be the antique bottles sold by pioneer Augusta soda water manufacturer Edward Sheehan, related photographic material and other Augusta-related artifacts from the collection of Walter E. Smith, of Augusta.

The Augusta Museum of History will mount two special collections from the 531 antique bottles donated several years ago by the Baabs. Included will be the up-close-and-personal display of some of the rarest bottles sold by Augusta druggists L.A. Gardelle, William H. Tutt, W.H. Barrett and R.H. Land, "Dr." John Dennis and J.B. Davenport during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

Gardelle's most famous concoction was a coughs and colds medicine named the River Swamp Chill & Fever Cure. Sold from 1884 to the early 1900s in 50-cent and \$1 bottles, the glass containers sport the image of an alligator resting in a bed of weeds.

Because of the gator, collectors who specialize in cures pay exorbitant sums whenever these bottles show up in public auctions. The large size is much rarer than the small and both can be seen in the special display of rarities. The bottles are in various shades of amber.

It is hard to believe, but a Georgia collector swears he saw a cobalt blue River Swamp at a bottle show many years ago. Baab told the collector that he was mistaken, that he confused another Augusta cure (Frog Pond Chill & Fever Cure) that had a cobalt-colored example. The collector retorted: "It was sort of hard to forget that alligator!"

Not even a fragment of a cobalt gator bottle has been brought to light, but who knows what the future holds?

Dr. William H. Tutt (Aug. 31, 1823 - March 16, 1898) was a graduate of the Medical Department of the University of Georgia (presently the Medical College of Georgia). He followed his profession as a physician until the 1840s when he embarked in the drug business.

Among Dr. Tutt's patent medicines was his Golden Eagle Bitters, first advertised in The Augusta Chronicle in 1870. There are a few variants apart from honey amber and dark amber colors. Most of the bottles do not have an AUGUSTA, GA., panel, but one example does and it is in a private collection.

Pharmacists William H. Barrett and Richard H. Land joined forces in the 1870s and one of their patent medicines was Georgia Bitters sold in large amber bottles embossed BARRETT & LAND / GEORGIA BITTERS / AUGUSTA, GA., on side panels. One panel was left blank so that a paper label could be



Rare John Ryans 1866 from Augusta, GA



Tutt's Golden Eagle Bitters in yellow and an amber bottle base
Newman Collection (Photo Courtesy of Mike Newman)



Two Rare W.H.Tutts & Land, Druggists bottles

pasted on. Less than five are known to exist.

“Dr.” Dennis was in business from the 1840s until his death in the 1870s. His title is in quotes because it is suspected that he was not a licensed pharmacist. However, more than 200 years later, the large bottle containing his Georgia Sarsaparilla is one of the rarest Augusta containers. The Baabs’ example came from an attic in an Edgefield, South Carolina residence and was received in a trade with another collector. Years later, that collector said: “Bill, you got the better part of that deal!”

Augusta pharmacist J.B. Davenport joined forces with fellow druggist Fauntleroy A. Beall and in 1887 produced the Frog Pond Chill & Fever Cure, yet another coughs and colds concoction. Alas, there are no frogs embossed on the bottles, but pharmacists selling the stuff included cotton-padded papier-mache’ frogs, fragile things that did not survive to make it into the present time..

There are a number of different varieties, including some with italics lettering, block lettering and even a cobalt-blue example that was manufactured in an automatic bottle machine in the early 20th century. It is the rarity since the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 forced manufacturers to delete the word “CURE” from their advertising. The blue bottle’s wording has been changed to “TONIC” and yes, there is an amber example. Cures and tonics are in this display.

