

Augusta Bottle Collectors' Heaven

By Bill Baab



The River Swamp Chill and Fever Cure bottle in a beautiful yellowish color



Antique bottles have been important parts of the history of Augusta, Georgia because many of the brewers, distillers, patent medicine men, pharmacists and spring water distributors played key roles in the city's development and growth.

That they became prominent is mostly because of the promotion of their products through advertisements in *The Augusta Chronicle*, the South's Oldest Newspaper, established in 1785.

Most of those products were housed in glass bottles, most of which were blown into molds containing the names of the contents, their developers and, most importantly, Augusta, Ga.

Most of the bottles were blown in glass factories in the Northeast, including New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and New England.

Among advertisements in the 18th and early 19th century editions of the newspaper (usually on the front page) were offers of Madeira and other imported wines and patent medicines from New York and elsewhere claiming to cure what ails you and then some.

Among the first locally produced patent medicines was Georgia Sarsaparilla, sold in wholesale amounts in 10-1/2-inch tall, light aquamarine bottles. It is embossed GEORGIA SARSAPARILLA on the front panel with Dr. J(ohn) Dennis and Augusta, Ga., embossed on the side panels. The back panel was designed to hold a paper label. None of the latter are known to exist.

The concoction dates to the mid 1840s, but many of Dennis's medicines were put up in much smaller bottles, including his "Stimulating, or Hot Bitters" (\$1 a bottle), Southern Painkiller

or Anti-Spasmodic Tincture" (25 cents a bottle), "Indian Bitters" (\$1 a bottle) or "Compound Dogwood Bitters, A Substitute for Quinine, for Fevers, Dyspepsia and General Debility." No bottles containing those names embossed in the glass have been discovered so it is likely descriptive paper labels were affixed to the containers.

Perhaps an even more prominent pharmacist was Dr. Edward Barry (1815-1895), one of the founders and original vestrymen of Augusta's Episcopal Church of the Good Shepherd. Coming to the city from Ireland in 1839, he joined pharmacist William D'Antignac and later Dr. Thomas Battey. In the 1870s, he and H.H. Hickman formed a co-partnership under the name of Edward Barry and Company as owners of a wholesale and retail drug business.

One of the firm's first products was Barry's Malarial Antidote put up in large and small glass bottles embossed with the medicine's name and Augusta, Ga. Large (9-1/4 inches tall) and small (7 inches tall) bottles came in various shades of amber, including black glass and clear glass and are prized by collectors.

In 1889, J. Marshall Horsey served as a clerk in Barry's business until at least 1893. Two years later, Horsey established his own drug business and advertisements list him as the manufacturer of Horsey's Antidote for Malaria. Could this be his own formula or that of his former employer who was just months away from death? Horsey's long-necked, amber bottles even duplicate those of Barry in size and shape.



Front of Trade card G. Barrett & Co. Augusta GA., Trade card



A backside of a River Swamp Chill & Fever Cure trade card which are very rare.

Equally prominent with Barry was pharmacist Louis A. Gardelle, who was endowed with lots of imagination. While he was the developer of many concoctions sold out of his drug store on Broad Street, he became famous for a coughs and colds medicine called "RIVER SWAMP CHILL & FEVER CURE," circa 1884.

The main reason his bottles in various shades of amber are sought after by today's collectors specializing in cures is because the large and small versions are embossed with a figure of an alligator laying in a bed of weeds.

Check out his claims (from an 1891 Grier's Almanac): "The Great Chill and Fever Cure! Guarantee: Where two bottles taken and fail to BREAK UP CHILLS, the MONEY WILL BE REFUNDED. River Swamp Chill and Fever Cure is a certain cure for Dumb Chills, Chills and Fever and Chronic Chills. Price 50 cts and \$1.00 per bottle.."

The stuff sold through 1905 and the next year Congress passed the Pure Food & Drug Act, effectively ridding the drug market of cures, including that one.

F.A. Beall and Joseph B. Davenport were the next pharmacists to "hop" onto the Augusta cure scene with their Frog Pond Chill & Fever Cure. But they weren't brave enough to emboss their 1887 bottles with a frog! They also did not emboss their city's name on any of the bottles, causing a bit of confusion among early collectors who thought Charleston, South Carolina was the home base because several of the bottles had been found there.

The writer was fortunate to purchase an 1888 Augusta city directory and in the business section was a Beall & Davenport ad. The listed manufactured products included Frog Pond Chill & Fever Cure. Most of the bottles are small amber examples embossed

FROG POND CHILL & FEVER CURE and nothing else. After the Pure Food and Drug Act was passed, "CURE" became "TONIC" and amber blown bottles gave way to machine-made cobalt blue bottles. The latter are considered rare because the company went out of business following the death of Davenport.

Two more Augusta pharmacists are worth mentioning because of their late 19th century bitters and other medicines. Dr. William H. Tutt (1823-1898) was an 1840s graduate of the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta (he is listed on the official graduates list).

He decided to abandon his practice as a physician and embarked in the drug business (in 1845). The first year a newspaper advertisement extolled the virtues of Tutt's Golden Eagle Bitters was 1870. Early bottles did not have the city's name embossed on side panels, but a later version (quite rare) did.

Yet another Augusta bitters more scarce than Tutt's was the Georgia Bitters produced by the partnership of William Hale Barrett and Robert H. Land in 1871. There are just three of those amber bottles known today. Both Tutt and Barrett went on to play important roles in their city's political history.

There are nearly 90 embossed Augusta drug store bottles in existence, dating from the 1830s through the early 20th century. The aforementioned pharmacists were joined by many others who developed their own concoctions.

And these are just a portion of Augusta's collectible antique bottles, many of which will be on display at the Augusta Museum of History during the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors 50th National Convention and Expo Aug. 1-3 in Augusta's Marriott Hotel and the adjacent Convention Center show rooms.

The River Swamp Chill and Fever Cure bottle with Alligator in the middle from Augusta, GA.

