

“One way or another, I’m gonna find ya, I’m gonna get ya, I’m going to get me, get me, get me, a Gatch ell.”



ELI M. GATCHELL

Charleston's Briefest Doctor and Soda Bottle Manufacturer

By David Kyle Rakes

The Gatchell surname is as uncommon as the Charleston, South Carolina soda water bottle that bears the catchy name. In the 18th century, a Gatchell family crossed the pond to America and seemed to have settled in Pennsylvania and Maryland. According to others interested in the Gatchell surname, the name came from England, Ireland, or Germany and with no apparent explanation. However, to the enthusiastic bottle collector, the Gatchell name on a bottle is admired for its uniqueness as it sits illuminated on the windowsill or shelf.

The embossed name Gatchell on the bottle is catchy enough for some to want it in their collection. It is almost like having a bottle with a number on it, like the "S. Twelves." Is it me, or do others think the snappy Gatchell name sounds like "getcha" or "catcha?" The Blondie song "*One Way or Another*" comes to mind. My corrupted version of the song might go something like this, "*One way or another, I'm gonna find ya, I'm gonna get ya, I'm going to get me, get me, get me, a Gatch ell.*"

If you gotcha a Gatchell, it would be like others except for maybe the color. Only one mold has ever turned up. The pony-shaped bottle has a gradually sloping neck and typically comes in dark green and rarely in light green. The embossing on the front in arched upward letters reads, E. M. GATCHELL & Co, and below with arched downward letters, CHARLESTON S.C. On the reverse side, in two lines, is SODA WATER. The bottle stands 7 7/8 inches tall, the base is 2 5/8 inches wide, and there is a graphite pontil and a large tapered top. As many know, Charleston soda bottles are superior in color and shape. They are also excellent examples of the thick colored glass made to be reused and put under carbonation pressure.

My mantra of "every bottle has a story" could not be more perceptible than with the following life history of Eli M. Gatchell. Knowing the past events of the man who brought the Gatchell bottle into my world has given me more appreciation for the bottle and bottle collecting in general. Gathering the Gatchell historical records revealed he was Charleston's briefest doctor and soda bottle manufacturer.

[Left] Three embossed "E. M. Gatchell & Co. Soda Water" bottles - Mike Newman Collection

[Background] Engraving of "Old Architecture on The Battery, Charleston" in "*The Great South: Southern Mountain Rambles*" by Edward King, 1874.



Eli M. Gatchell was born June 24, 1814, in Chester County, Pennsylvania. Eli's given name was likely derived from the biblical name Elisha, and his middle initial stands for Martin. After learning his parents were probably Elisha and Martha (Martin) Gatchell of the same place, I made these name conjectures. Elisha, the father, was said to have been born in 1789 and died in 1832 in Chester County.

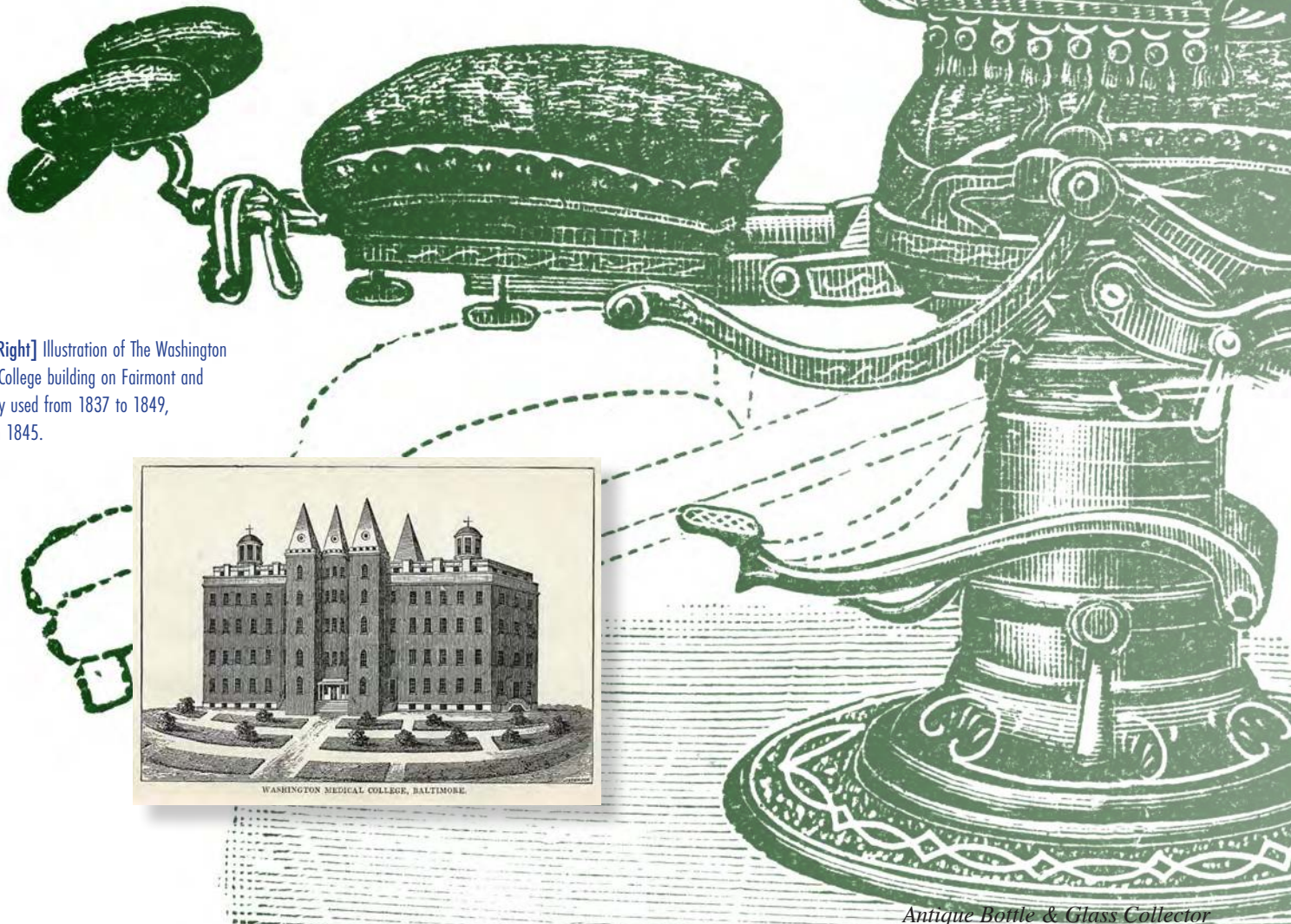
It seems safe to say that Eli was properly schooled while growing up in Chester County. In 1836 at age 22, he moved to Baltimore City and attended medical school at Washington Medical College. The college was new, having been founded in 1827 and chartered as Washington Medical College in 1833. Eli graduated as a doctor in 1840, and his preceptor was Dr. George W. Bailey. Appropriate for the time, he wrote his thesis on yellow fever. Washington Medical College closed in 1851 and was revived in 1867 as Washington University. The school closed for good in 1878. The remains were absorbed into the College of Physicians and Surgeons, later becoming the University of Maryland School of Medicine.

There were other Gatchells in Baltimore City before Eli arrived. Most notably was William H. Gatchell and Jeremiah Gatchell. William was a lawyer and slave owner in the city. He was elected to the city council in 1827 and 1837 and served as clerk of Baltimore City between 1845-1851. Jeremiah Gatchell was a steward from 1811 through 1822 at nearby Baltimore Hospital,



[Above] The paddle steamer *Superb* off Folkstone, William Adolphus Knell

[Below Background] Drawing of an old fashioned dentist chair showing how it moves.



[Below Right] Illustration of The Washington Medical College building on Fairmont and Broadway used from 1837 to 1849, shown in 1845.



formerly known as Spring Grove Hospital, a facility for treating the mentally ill. Additionally, Mrs. Dorcas Gatchell and grocer, Elisha Gatchell, appear separately on Baltimore city directories in the 1830s. So far, no connection has been found between Eli and these other Gatchells.

On August 4, 1840, Eli Gatchell arrived in Liverpool, England, on the ship *Superb* from Charleston. The *Superb* was a British passenger/cargo vessel that operated on propulsion-paddle steam. This ship and others at that time were made of wood, the paddle wheels complementing the sails when there was no wind. Also, beginning in the 1840s, ships began schedules to help connect manufacturers with customers. It appears Eli had already set up a medical practice in Charleston and was traveling to Liverpool to obtain medical supplies. He could have made numerous trips overseas to get the latest surgical instruments needed for a doctor's office.

A later passport application for Eli Gatchell of Baltimore City described him as "5-foot-7 inches tall, fair complexion, light hair, low forehead, blue eyes, long nose, long face with a short chin." The passport application said he was a natural-born citizen, born in Chester County, Pa., and shows his signature at the bottom of the document.

Eli Gatchell's doctor's office in Charleston was rather diversified. He practiced medicine and performed dental work, and prescribed drugs. Doctors in the early 1800s were expected to treat everything from fevers, stomach aches, toothaches, to sick cattle. A popular treatment was bleeding. This was done repeatedly on a



[Left] Comparison embossed "E. M. Gatchell & Co. Soda Water" bottle and embossed "Charles Clark Charleston S.C. Soda Water" bottle. - Mike Newman Collection

patient for short periods with a single event of 12 ounces of blood lost. Stethoscopes had been invented, so Eli likely listened to the lungs, the heart, and digestive tract to diagnose a patient. Doctors of his time also used diuretics and enemas for purging and gave prescriptions of anti-inflammation cream or herbal pills, which they made themselves in the office. His office was well-supplied with ginger, Epson salt, and tinctures, with a few mortars and pestles for mixing prescriptions. Anesthetics at the time were opium and alcohol.

Eli had a dental chair in the office with dental instruments. Some doctors performed dentistry in the office in the early 1800s, but mostly it was practiced by the same people who would give you a haircut. They were referred to as barber-surgeons and often caused more harm than good. One crude practice the barber surgeon advised on was telling patients to pick their gums with the bill of an osprey to soothe an aching tooth.

Gatchell's dental chair was likely designed and constructed by himself. Positioning wedges usually modify a rocking chair to put the chair in a recline. Then an adjustable headrest and maybe a footrest were used to keep the patient from moving around. This was an improvement over lying on the floor and having an assistant hold the patient's head in place while the doctor performed extractions or minor surgery.

In 1849, Gatchell diversified even more by starting a soda water manufacturing business at 33 Market Street in the city. This seems to be the same place where he practiced medicine for almost a decade. Charles Clark, a longtime grocer of the city, joined him. Clark had worked as a grocer in the city on Bay and Tradd streets since 1825. The two men partnered, thus becoming Gatchell & Co., and for the first time, Clark started calling himself a druggist. The two used horses and wagons to get soda water to some of their customers.

Their operation consisted of four soda water fountains, one

[Below] Embossed "Sumter Bitters, Dowie, Moise & Davis Wholesale Druggists, Charleston, S.C." - Glass Works Auctions



[Above] Color run of embossed "Charles Clark, Charleston S.C. Soda Water" bottles. - Chip Brewer

forced pump and gasometer, bottling machines, a self-generating soda apparatus, as well as closures, corks, coloring matter, soda water counter, and hundreds of empty soda bottles. The business was set up with two separate windows where business could be conducted twice as fast.

The soda water business may have been more successful than Gatchell's practice. That same year Gatchell made multiple shipments of 50 dozen and 100 dozen soda waters "flavored with a variety of syrups, much superior to any soda water" to druggist Philip A. Moise in Augusta, Ga. The price was 75 cents per dozen if the bottles were returned.

Technically, the person purchasing the soda was buying the drink and not the bottle. Some bottle collectors might remember Moise for his aqua medicine bottle embossed "Dowie & Moise Charleston," and the amber bitters embossed "Sumter Bitters Dowie, Moise, & Davis Wholesale Druggist Charleston S.C." Philip Moise was a leading merchant in Augusta, with other businesses in LaGrange and Charleston.

Unfortunately, Gatchell and Clark were only in the business together for about a year. Gatchell died of unknown reasons on December 3, 1849. He was only 35 years old and was buried in Charleston on Wentworth Street at the Redeemer Presbyterian Church. A headstone still stands, marking his grave.

Since yellow fever was rampant in the city at the time of his death, it is possible that Gatchell died from this virus. At the time, no one knew that mosquitoes spread yellow fever. The tropical viral disease was introduced into South Carolina and other port cities from the African slave trade. The disease affected the liver and kidneys, causing fever and jaundice and almost always death. Ironically, Gatchell may have died from this disease since he wrote his thesis on yellow fever in college and likely moved to Charleston to help those who were stricken with it.

Both Baltimore City, Charleston, and other coastal cities had a long history of epidemics of yellow fever. In fact, yellow fever epidemics in Charleston were said to be common between the 1820s to the 1870s and particularly severe in the 1850s. One

report says that between 1849 (the same year Gatchell died) and 1871, 2,343 people in Charleston died from yellow fever. Another Charleston record says in the summer of 1849, Dr. A. P. Hayne, an almshouse physician, treated 53 patients with yellow fever, 28 becoming victims. Gatchell likely was one of them.

Charles Clark continued as a druggist at the same store on Market Street. He placed an ad in the Charleston Courier Newspaper informing customers: "E. M. Gatchell & Co. and those indebted, are requested to make immediate payment to Charles Clark, surviving co-partner of E. M. Gatchell & Co. The business will be continued by the subscriber, who feels grateful to his patrons for the liberal encouragement heretofore received and hopes to merit a continuance of the same Charles Clark. Soda water will be delivered as usual, at any part of the city, bottled fresh every day. A good assortment of fresh drugs and medicines on hand. Soda water on draft throughout the year, at the old stand market opposite Anson N. B. Orders from the country, promptly attended to."

Charles Clark stayed in business at the same place on Market Street for about a dozen more years. He had at least four different soda bottles, all graphite pontil in a variety of colors. Long-time Charleston bottle collector, Chip Brewer, said the bottles can be found "in the most colors of any Charleston soda."

The oldest Clark soda is considered rare. It has a rectangular-shaped, slug plate, embossed C. CLARK in arch letters and CHARLESTON S.C. straight line below. This bottle stands 7 ½ inches tall and 2 ½ inches wide at the base, coming in various shades of green. Another bottle has C. CLARK on the front and MINERAL WATER on the back. This bottle is more common, stands 7 ¼ inches tall and 2 ¾ inches wide at the base, and comes in various shades of olive green. The remaining two Clark bottles have his full name in arched letters, except one bottle is in small letters, the other in large letters. These bottles are embossed, CHARLES CLARK CHARLESTON S.C. on the front, and SODA WATER on the back. Both bottles stand 7 ½ inches tall and 2 ½ inches wide at the base. The small-letter Clark is considered rare and comes in various shades of green. The large-letter Clark is considered common and comes in various shades of green and very rarely in shades of blue.

Clark was at least 70 years old when he died in September of 1863 in Charleston. No cemetery or burial records have been found. Only an inventory listed the dental chair, soda water machinery, and other accouterments he and Gatchell had when they were in business together. The inventory shows Clark had accumulated some wealth. Personal items such as gold spectacles and a silver watch and "Cash Confederate Notes,

Gold Coin, Silver Coin," as well as shares of stocks from a couple of savings banks, were left to seven heirs, which appear to be his wife and children.

I can only guess what happened to Clark. He was not only old for this time, but he had lived in Charleston during a yellow fever epidemic and the Civil War. Thank goodness Gatchell and Clark left us such beautiful soda bottles to admire. Bottles that not only have a catchy name but show us how difficult life was during numerous epidemics of the past. Now that you know a little more about Charleston's briefest doctor and soda water manufacturer, you might want to getcha a Gatchell.

SOURCES:

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Eli M. Gatchell, *Find a Grave Memorial*, On-line, Cemetery record from Divine Redeemer Presbyterian Church Cemetery, Charleston, Charleston County S. C. Formerly known as St. Andrews Lutheran Church Cemetery, located on Wentworth Street.

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Charles Clark, inventory, court record October 1 1863 Charleston, SC, page 498, 499, Series # L10137, Vol. #F

Charles Clark, 1830, 1840, 1850, 1860. United States Federal Census Reports.

Charleston City census return 1861.

Image of three embossed "E. M. Gatchell & Co. Soda Water" bottles, and Charles Clark bottle - Mike Newman collection.

Engraving of "Old Architecture on The Battery, Charleston" in "The Great South: Southern Mountain Rambles" by Edward King in 1874.

Image "Sumter Bitters, Dowie, Moise & Davis Wholesale Druggists, Charleston, S.C." - Glass Works Auctions

