



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Some thoughts on bottle provenance

Almost thirty years ago, I learned the lesson of bottle provenance in person. I attended Norm Heckler's April 1991 auction held in Warrenville, Conn. I have to say, especially after this virus thing, I really miss the live auction scene; what a great time it was.

In that auction was a fish bitters, a yellow amber example. It was sort of run-of-the-mill but very nice, and the catalogue made note that it was once owned by a fellow named Leon. You might know him better by his full name, Leon Leonwood Bean (1872-1967) or L.L.Bean, the fellow who in 1912 started a small business selling snow boots to folks up in Maine. The bottle did not realize huge money. In fact, it didn't even make the high end of the catalogue estimate, but it stuck with me that it might mean something to someone if the bottle was once the property of someone special.

One of our past presidents, Jimmy Carter, is known to have collected a bottle or two. I wonder if someday we'll see a bottle that was once on his shelf at an auction. Will that affect its hammer price? Will it be somehow more desirable?

I think most collectors really like to know the provenance of a bottle and place great value on those small stickers that sometimes are found on examples from famous collections. On the other hand, I know of at least one person who cleans the sticker off asap if he acquires certain bottles, claiming they just get in the way. We'll all have to find a way to forgive him.



The easily identifiable Carlyn Ring Collection sticker.

Perhaps you may wonder why knowing who were the past owners of a bottle is important. I guess for some, it's a bragging point, but I never thought of this hobby as a contest. I'm thinking there are some who might own a bottle that might have been in the collection of a well-known collector of the past and thereby elevate themselves to be included in that prominent list of past owners.

But, the real bottle family I know doesn't operate that way. Those true collectors honor the collectors of the past and this hobby by knowing the bottles provenance. It's not a bragging point, it's just a point in history. If no one has ever told you, let me be the first.

We do not own these tiny bits of glass history. We are merely the caretakers of these bottles. True bottle hobbyists know they are just fortunate to be able to be a part of preserving this beautiful glass. If they are lucky to be a part of that history, my experience is that those collectors are usually very modest; they are always the guys who will invite you into their homes

to share their collections with you and just spend time talking bottles.

The first man who really introduced me to glass was Bill Sackett of Saranac, N.Y. He didn't know me from Adam, but before I knew it, I was getting a ton of bottle knowledge and a sandwich by his bay window filled with great bottles. I'll never forget him and will always remember him as a gentleman and an excellent ambassador for this hobby.

I remember how Dick and Elma Watson complimented my meager collection when I first started collecting bitters bottles. And to this day I remember fondly, and place great value on, the encouragement they gave me to continue on.

Tom McCandless had the same attitude when I met him. There was never the slightest sense of bragging. There was only friendship and camaraderie because we shared a common interest in bottle collecting. That's why these people will always be held in my heart and mind with kind and thankful thoughts.



To be completely accurate, if I personally obtain a “stickered bottle,” I always leave the label in place even though it usually did not figure into my reasoning for purchasing that item. I do, however, recognize that this particular piece of bottle history has importance and was once held by a fellow caretaker who saw the beauty, history and character of the glass.

Also, to be completely honest, I really do enjoy getting a bottle with a sticker from at least three individuals in particular, including Tom McCandless and Dick Watson, my longtime friends and mentors. The third provenance stickers I

really do enjoy adding to the shelf are found on bottles that proclaim they are from “The Carlyn Ring Bitters Collection.” I spent a great deal of time on the road and visiting with McCandless and Watson, but I only met Ms. Ring once, and it was quite the event.

Once again, I was in attendance at a Norm Heckler live auction and was bidding (successfully) on a Zoeller’s Stomach Bitters bottle with contents and full label. When the gavel went down and I had won the bottle, I was greeted with an out-of-nowhere serious whack on my back. I was sort of shocked and turned around

thinking I would see one of my friends fooling around, but I was surprised to see this unknown (to me) woman who loudly proclaimed with a smile, “Nice going, young man, that’s a good buy!” Later on, that woman was introduced to me, and sure enough, it was Carlyn Ring. We only spoke for a few minutes but having studied her book cover to cover, I thought it was an honor to meet her.

Years later, when her collection was sold, I was able to obtain a few bottles from her collection. Every time a bottle comes to market that I’m interested in, I am just a little more interested when I see that



An impressive grouping of Carlyn Ring bitters.

iconic tiny sticker that simply reads
“The Carlyn Ring Bitters Collection.”

I went through the cabinets and assembled the bottles I’ve been able to obtain over the years with that provenance sticker affixed. Let’s have a look and enjoy some bottles that were once on Carlyn Ring’s shelves.

In no particular order, here are the bitters bottles that I have that were once on Carlyn Ring’s shelves:

B-81 BERKSHIRE BITTERS // AMANN & CO / CINCINNATI, O
This is the short thin variant.

E-65 EXCELSIOR / HERB BITTERS / WASHINGTON. N. J. / J. V. MATTISON
Of course, one of my favorites, as it is a Jersey Boy. I actually passed up a fully labeled example of this same bottle to keep the Ring bottle.

P-100 PINEAPPLE BITTERS
This was Carlyn’s example of the pineapple bitters with the J. C & Co. on the bottle. It has a rough pontil and I think it’s much more difficult to find than the W & C N.Y. variant.

O-25 OLD CONTINENTAL / BITTERS
A great semi-cabin; this example in very light yellow amber.

F-91 FRISCO / HOP / BITTERS / COMPANY An aqua square bottle from Australia.

C-165 CLARKE’S / SHERRY / WINE / BITTERS Aqua with full label. I assume this is the bottle in the original *For Bitters Only* by Carlyn Ring and later the *Ring/Ham Bitters Bottles* as in the description, the transcript of the label is included in the description of the bottle.

C-187 COGNAC BITTERS / S. STEINFELD / SOLE AGENT / FOR THE U. S. This is one of the three Steinfeld’s available, cylindrical, green and rare.

S-185 STEINFELD'S / FRENCH / COGNAC / BITTERS // motif of medallion with crown, eagle in center // S. ST in oval PATENT The second of three Steinfelds available and I think very hard to find. It took me a long time to obtain all three Steinfelds.

G-45 GIPPS LAND / HOP BITTERS / CO 1884 Another aqua square from Down Under.

M-58 McKEEVER'S ARMY // BITTERS
The iconic drum with cannonball stack.

The last bottle listed above, the McKeevers, has a small story of interest. I acquired the bottle at the great summer-time Shupp's Grove show many years ago. I met my friend Charlie Dascenzo (aka Big Charlie) as I was wandering around looking for more finds at his sales table. "What you got?" asks Big Charlie. Out of the wrapping comes the McKeever. I hand it to him and Big Charlie says, "Oh, that's Carlyn Rings bottle, it's the McKeever's with the 1/32" inclusion in the drum, great find, way to go!"

Big Charlie knows his bottles, but when he saw the Ring sticker, he knew that particular bottle immediately. Provenance.

Every so often, perhaps every couple of weeks or so, I get a chance to call, or be called, by my good bottle friend Gary Beatty. I always smile when I see his name on the caller I.D. We had a conversation about many things and we got around to a topic which we both totally agree upon. When it comes to bottle provenance and those small stickers that indicate where the bottle has made a stop along the way, we both agreed it's sort of like giving credit where credit is due.

It's not about bragging at all. It's about heritage and giving a tiny bit of credit to those before us who appreciated this glass. Giving credit where it is due is important, it is respectful and it is as it should be.



Old Continental
and Excelsior Bitters.



Frisco and Gipps Land Bitters from
Down Under, as well as labeled
Clarkes Sherry Wine.



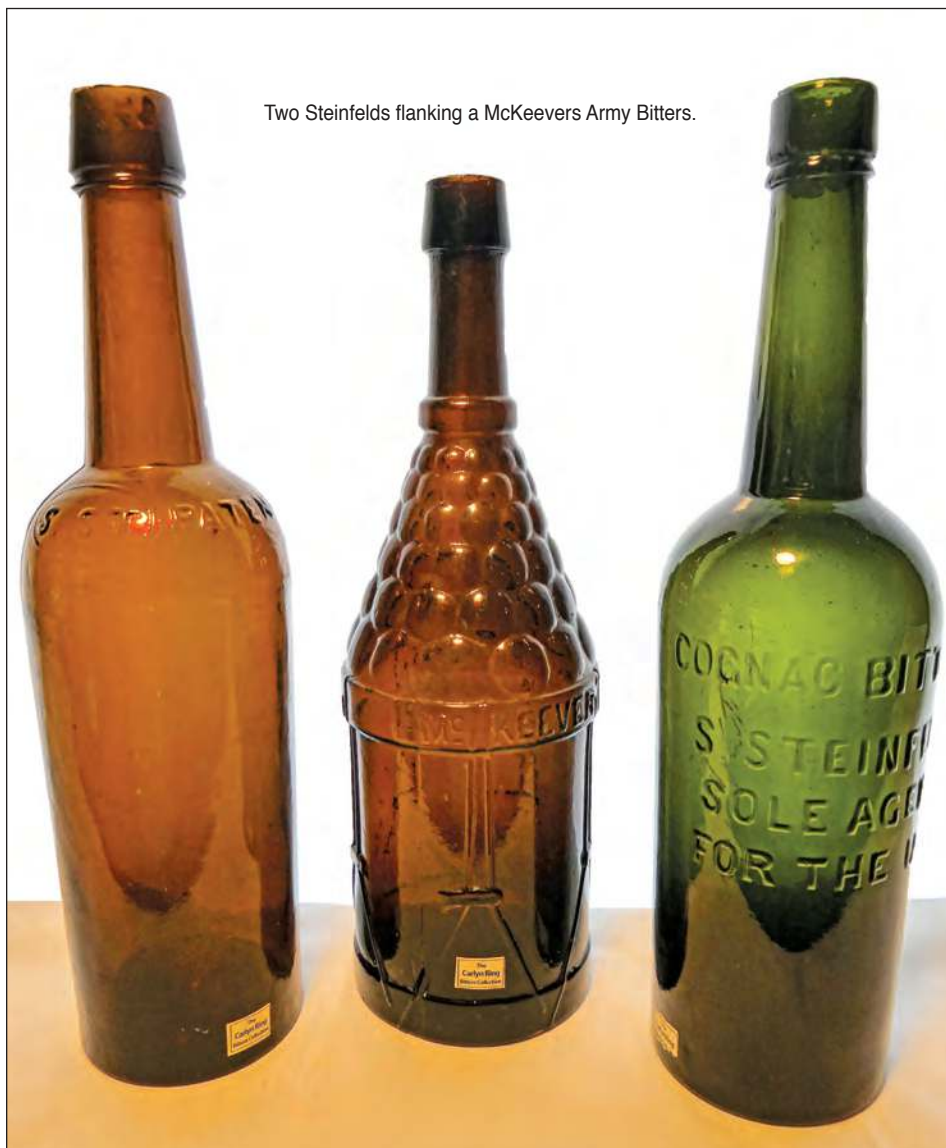
J.C. & Co. Pineapple Bitters and Berkshire Bitters.

Now speaking of giving credit where it is due, I am of the opinion that Gary Beatty is not just a great guy, but I also think he has one heck of a nice collection of bitters bottles. Recently, we had a chance to visit and being the great guy he is, he was so kind as to add a couple of bottles from his collection to this article. He places great value on these bottles, not only because they are fantastic bottles, but because they have great bottle provenance.

Gary has, what I believe, the finest example of an R - 125 Russ' St. Domingo Bitters. The bottle is commonly found in amber, and is sometimes found in puce or bright yellow. Rarely, you will find one in green, and in this case, I mean green! It was Gary's good fortune to find this beauty and it is his kindness to share it with us here now.

What really makes this bottle more fun is its provenance. Gary was able to obtain this beauty from Howard Crowe, but it was once on the shelves of the aforementioned Cris Batdorff. If you look at the bottom of the bottle, we learn it was once on the shelves of Elvin Moody. But ask Gary and he'll be able to chronicle even more of the bottle's history.

It also turns out that I'm not the only bottle collector who values bottles with provenance, especially those bottles from the Carlyn Ring collection. Gary has, on his shelf, one of the bottles that I believe Carlyn would have agreed upon as one of the best colored bitters bottles ever. It is a super example of Dr. Gilbert's Rock and Rye Stomach Bitters in a spectacular blue green color, and I think you'll agree that it is one beautiful bottle. I can't help but think how Ms. Ring must have felt when she encountered this bottle and was able to add it to her collection. I know Gary was over the moon when he became the caretaker. I am sure that someday, long down the road, someone else will also get that same jolt of excitement and joy to behold such a beauty.



Two Steinfelds flanking a McKeevers Army Bitters.

I was prompted to write this article when I recently added a Tom McCandless bottle to my collection and shared it with Ralph and Janet Finch, who then encouraged me to share it with you. Ah, that bottle family. For the record, I'm not just a bitters collector. It is a topic for a future article perhaps, but for now let's just say I have a flask or two. While it isn't a bitters, I think you will enjoy taking a look at this superb example.

The flask is a GI - 26 Washington - Eagle quart from the Baltimore Glass Works. Manufactured between 1825 and 1835, it has a nicely formed sheared lip, a great open pontil and is, as you can hopefully see in the picture, light amethyst in color, sort of rare for this bottle. I remember seeing this bottle on Tom's shelf and always thought the bottle, and especially the color, was fantastic. Here again is where the provenance pays off. We know this was Tom's bottle, and it sold in his three-part sale back in 2011 and 2012. But if you look back a bit further, you will find that the heritage of this bottle goes further back. Tom made note that it was once in the collection of Sam Taylor. I didn't know or ever meet Sam Taylor, but I'm sure there are some who did know him and will smile when they see his name in print and remember him.

This is exactly the point of provenance, when we remember those previous caretakers of these pieces of historical glass and appreciate the fact that there were others who looked at this particular bottle and saw its worth, its value, its place in history. Perhaps you might even muster a bit of praise to them for taking such good care of this individual piece of glass.

So, on behalf of all of us, thanks, guys!

Questions? Comments? Don't hesitate. I would sure love to hear from you at strickhartbob@aol.com.



ABOVE: Reverse of the GI-26.

RIGHT: Front of the GI-26.



RIGHT: A close-up of the Dr Gilberts Rock and Rye Stomach Bitters.

BELOW: Gary's Russ' Bitters with the tale of provenance.



ABOVE: Gary Beatty's Gilberts Bitters with the iconic Ring sticker.



Gary Beatty's spectacular green R - 125 Russ' St. Domingo Bitters.