



George Skinner McKearin

By Kevin A. Sives

Photo of George S. McKearin by Christina S. Stevens

George Skinner McKearin is a name that should be familiar to most bottle and flask collectors, if for no other reason than the historical and pictorial flask charts and numbering system he devised, which we continue to use today.

McKearin, like many of early 20th century collectors, was able to amass an amazing collection of flasks, as well as all types of blown glass as well. But unlike most collectors of the period, McKearin didn't just collect and display. Instead, he did extensive research into the history of the pieces he acquired. He categorized his collection by type and place of manufacture, and wrote extensively in antique publications of the period, as well as publishing two groundbreaking books (along with his eldest daughter Helen).

EARLY YEARS

George was born on October 22, 1874, in Hoosick Falls, New York. Hoosick Falls is a small town located northeast of Albany, nearly touching the Vermont border. As an aside, Hoosick Falls is in

Rensselaer County, which is named after Kiliaen van Rensselaer, who settled the area in 1630. Stephen van Rensselaer, a descendant, in 1921 wrote *Check List of Early American Bottles and Flasks*, in two volumes, where he attempted to categorize bottles and flasks into "Groups" (e. g. Group II – American Eagle). And under each Group were "Divisions" (e. g. Division I – Corrugated Sides, Division II – Eagle Each Side, etc.). George McKearin would later use van Rensselaer's grouping as a starting point for his own categorization scheme.

Back to George McKearin. His parents were Patrick McKearin (1853 – 1899) and Ella Lucy McKearin (1854 – 1905). Patrick was born in Brandon, Vermont, and learned to become a telegraph operator. In 1872 he moved to Hoosick Falls, New York, to manage the Western Union Telegraph office. He married Ella Lucy Smith on February 23, 1874, and George was born soon afterward. Patrick eventually left the field of telegraphy and started an insurance company in Hoosick Falls. Perhaps he saw the writing on the wall after the telephone was patented in 1876.

Little is known of George's early years. He attended the local public schools in Hoosick Falls, and early on, planned to enter the ministry. Perhaps his father didn't approve of his plans, or, more than likely, real life and the need to make money intervened and George began working at his father's insurance business.

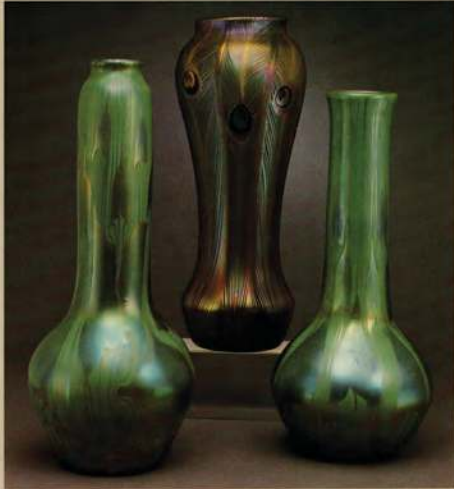
FAMILY MAN AND INSURANCE AGENT

George married a local Hoosick Falls girl, Nellie Richmond Webster (1877 – 1954) on December 2, 1896, soon after his 22nd birthday. Their union would result in five children, four daughters and one son. Their daughters were Helen (September 23, 1898 – October 20, 1988), Katherine Skinner McKearin (born 1902), Ruth Elizabeth "Betty" (born 1910), Mary (born 1912), and George Skinner McKearin, Jr. (born 1913).

Everybody needs a hobby, and George was born to be a collector. Beginning early in his life, it was rocks and minerals, butterflies, bird eggs, stamps, and coins. He became a serious stamp collector and

AMERICAN GLASS

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George S. and Helen McKearin

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THIS IS NUMBER...??...

Helen McKearin
George S. McKearin

SALE NUMBER 3909

EARLY AMERICAN GLASS

The Private Collection of
GEORGE S. MCKEARIN
HOOSICK FALLS, N. Y.

§

PART ONE

UNRESTRICTED PUBLIC SALE
April 22 and 23
at 2:15

AMERICAN ART ASSOCIATION
ANDERSON GALLERIES · INC.
30 East 57th Street
NEW YORK CITY
1931

SALE NUMBER 3909 - APRIL 22 & 23, 1931

1	7.00	61	32.50	119	32.50
2	14.00	62	45.00	120	15.00
3	14.00	63	25.00	121	20.00
4	9.00	64	45.00	122	15.00
5	15.00	65	17.50	123	17.50
6	10.00	66	300.00	124	15.00
7	30.00	67	15.00	125	15.00
8	24.00 (2a)10.00	68	15.00	126	15.00
9	8.00	69	15.00	127	25.00
10	15.00	70	35.00	128	27.50
11	15.00	71	12.50	129	12.50
12	15.00	72	10.00	130	22.50
13	25.00	73	10.00	131	20.00
14	15.00	74	7.50	132	45.00
15	22.50	75	12.50	133	22.50
16	15.00	76	7.50	134	10.00
17	30.00	77	20.00	135	7.50
18	15.00	78	15.00	136	25.00
19	15.00	79	32.50	137	40.00
20	12.50	80	5.00	138	20.00
21	15.00	81	10.00	139	17.50
22	450.00	82	20.00	140	25.00
23	50.00	83	12.50	141	35.00
24	17.50	84	15.00	142	20.00
25	8.00 (2ba)12.00	85	7.50	143	12.50
26	280.00	86	15.00	144	20.00
27	27.50	87	17.50	145	25.00
28	22.50	88	15.00	146	45.00
29	170.00	89	15.00	147	10.00
30	12.50	90	15.00	148	10.00
31	17.50	91	7.50	149	15.00
32	12.50	92	20.00	150	12.50
33	60.00	93	200.00	151	12.50
34	14.00	94	20.00	152	15.00
35	15.00	95	22.50	153	12.50
36	35.00	96	22.50	154	10.00
37	45.00	97	15.00	155	170.00
38	8.00	98	17.50	156	7.50
39	22.50	99	65.00	157	15.00
40	55.00	100	40.00	158	17.50
41	20.00	101	60.00	159	10.00
42	25.00	102	25.00	160	10.00
43	17.50	103	25.00	161	7.50
44	130.00	104	190.00	162	5.00
45	300.00	105	160.00	163	5.00
46	38.00	106	10.00	164	12.50
47	12.50	107	30.00	165	10.00
48	125.00	108	25.00	166	15.00
49	80.00	109	12.50	167	15.00
50	10.00	110	12.50	168	10.00
51	40.00	111	15.00	169	12.00
52	20.00	112	20.00	170	7.00
53	30.00	113	17.50	171	8.00
54	10.00	114	35.00	172	12.00
55	200.00	115	22.50	173	14.00
56	10.00	115(a)	30.00	174	10.00
57	35.00	115(b)	20.00	175	20.00
58	125.00	116	17.50	176	17.50
59	125.00	117	35.00	177	27.50
60	40.00	118	30.00	178	22.50

PHOTOS (clockwise from upper left):

American Glass, by George S. and Helen McKearin.

American Glass, signed First Edition.

Early American Glass Auction - Part 1.

Auction Part 1 - Prices Realized - Page 1.

dealer, even attending the 13th Annual Convention of the American Philatelic Association, which was held in New York City from August 23 to 26, 1898, about a month before the birth of his first child, Helen.

George's father died in November of 1899, real life intervened again, and George took over the running of his father's insurance agency. So, with a growing family and a full-time business to run, he had to put some of his collecting interests on the back burner for a while.

George worked hard in the business, becoming the vice president of the General Insurance Company, and Surety Bonds in 1916, and president in 1919. But even during this period, he found time to collect and to research. According to McKearin himself, he became interested in American glass around 1916.

DEALER AND COLLECTOR

In 1923, George, with the help of his daughter Helen (who was 27 at the time), opened a retail antiques shop in New York City, called McKearin's Antiques, Inc. The shop did well, selling all types of antiques to retail customers in the city. It might be that they got into the retail business like a lot of collectors do — to sell off things they didn't want, so that they could raise funds for buying items that they did!

In 1929, McKearin loaned examples of American glass from his personal collection to the Girl Scouts Loan Exhibition at the American Art Association, Anderson Galleries, 30 East 57th Street, New York City. The Exhibition ran from September 25 to October 9, 1929.

Almost immediately after the end of the Exhibition, the stock market crashed, and the Great Depression began. Perhaps because of the financial pressures of the Depression, McKearin did two things — he decided to part with a majority of his glass collection at auction (1931/32), and

close his retail store in New York City (1933), and move back to Hoosick Falls.

McKearin's decision to part with his glass collection resulted in a monumental auction, held in two sessions, by American Art Association Anderson Galleries, Inc., 30 East 57th Street, New York. (American Art would become Parke-Bernet Galleries in 1937 until 1964, when they were purchased by Sotheby's.)

The sale was billed as Early American Glass / The Private Collection of / George S. McKearin / Hoosick Falls, N.Y. Part one was held on April 22 and 23, 1931 and was comprised of about 350 lots. Part two was held on January 6 and 7, 1932, with a little over 360 lots.

In the Foreword to Part I, McKearin wrote: "But now the time has come when I feel I can no longer continue the responsibility of private ownership of a collection of such magnitude. My hope has been to see at least a representative and comprehensive portion of the collection go to one of our great museums, where it would be available to others interested in the study and collecting of early American glass. I sincerely regret that I am not so situated as to make such a gift from the collection for this purpose."

If McKearin sounded a bit regretful in Part I, by the time Part II was sold McKearin was ready to engage in a little well-deserved bragging: "I feel warranted in making the statement that not only does this sale, as a whole, represent the finest and most representative selection of Early American Glass ever presented for public sale at any one time but also at no time has there been made available so many unique and superlative pieces representing the best work of our early American glass houses."

It would take another several dozen pages to discuss all the amazing glass that was sold in these two auctions, and the incredibly low (by today's standards) prices realized. Modern readers might be

surprised that of the over 700 lots, only a miniscule amount of them were historical or pictorial flasks. Most of the glass sold was free-blown and mold-blown, and categorized as Stiegel, Wistar, New York State, New England, Ohio and Midwestern, and South Jersey. Let's just all agree, that if they invent a time machine, this would be a good time and place to travel to, with a pocket full of 1930s cash.

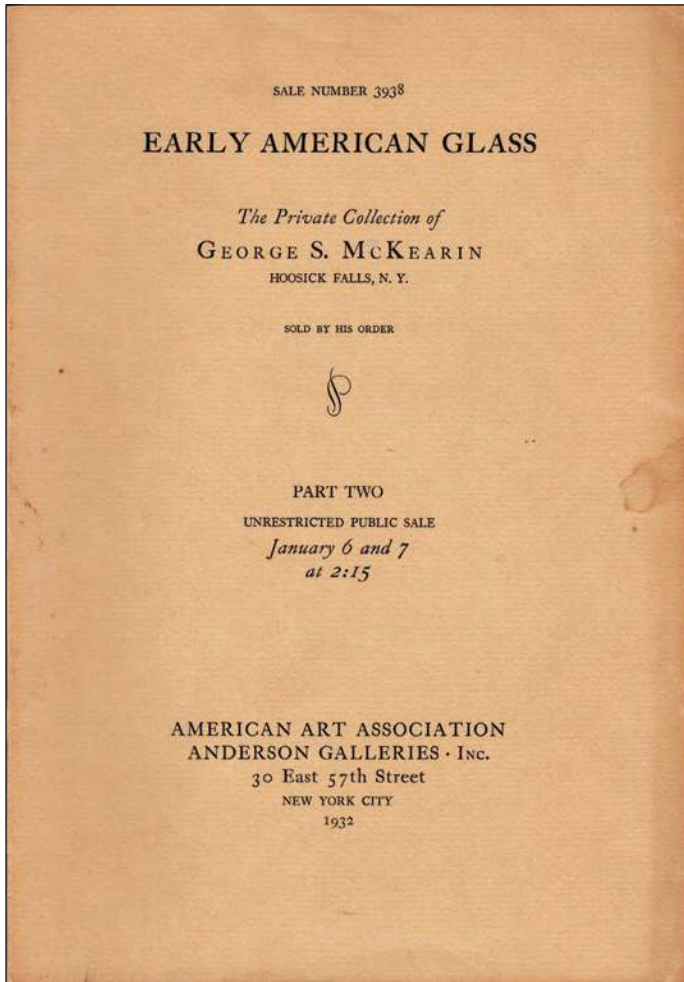
AUTHOR (AND STILL INSURANCE AGENT)

Despite everything else that he was doing, McKearin continued to successfully operate his insurance business. Illustrated here is a glass paperweight, with a sterling silver band, from my collection. It was presented to McKearin on November 13, 1938 for his 25 years of continuous representation of The Home Insurance Company of New York. McKearin's son, George S. McKearin Jr., ran the business until 1967, when he retired.

Like many of us collectors, soon after selling off a portion of his collection, McKearin began to accumulate more glass. And in his spare time, while running the family insurance business and continuing to operate an antique shop in Hoosick Falls, McKearin put his, and Helen's, research and organizational energies toward writing a book. The result, published in 1941, was called simply *American Glass*.

It's impossible to overstate the importance of this book to anyone interested in collecting glass. At over 600 pages, and profusely illustrated with over 2,000 photographs and 1,000 drawings by James L. McCreery, this book has undergone over a dozen printings since 1941. I have three copies; a reference copy at home, a copy I carry in my car, and a signed first edition that is displayed on a bookcase in my living room.

And *American Glass* was completed when "research" really meant something. In those days, no Google or email could



Early American Glass Auction - Part 2.

SALE NUMBER 3938 - JAN. 6 & 7, 1932

1	7.50	55	27.50	111	17.50	166	10.00
2	5.00	56	15.00	111(a)	17.50	167	30.00
3	6.00	57	40.00	111(b)	12.50	168	12.50
4	4.00	58	17.50	112	15.00	169	5.00
5	17.50	59	37.50	112(a)	Passed	170	7.50
6	7.50	60	20.00	113	10.00	171	10.00
7	12.00	60(a)	20.00	114	205.00	172	10.00
8	5.00	61	27.50	115	210.00	173	15.00
9	6.00	62	55.00	115(a)	25.00	174	10.00
10	11.00	63	17.50	116	17.50	175	15.00
11	10.00	64	12.50	116(a)	35.00	176	7.50
12	75.00	65	22.50	117	10.00	177	7.50
13	8.00	66	17.50	118	15.00	178	7.50
14	5.00	67	15.00	119	30.00	179	7.50
15	8.00	68	12.50	120	35.00	180	15.00
16	25.00	69	35.00	121	25.00	181	12.50
17	30.00	70	17.50	122	25.00	182	5.00
18	12.50	71	17.50	123	12.50	183	7.50
19	20.00	72	7.50	124	17.50	184	7.50
20	Passed	73	12.50	125	22.50	185	7.50
21	42.50	74	100.00	126	17.50	186	7.50
22	75.00	75	60.00	127	15.00	187	5.00
23	45.00	75(a)	75.00	128(a)	22.50	188	25.00
24	10.00	76	17.50	129	17.50	189	7.50
25	12.50	77	30.00	130	20.00	190	17.50
26	17.50	78	10.00	131	15.00	191	25.00
27	12.50	79	40.00	132	12.50	192	12.50
28	17.50	80	15.00	133	10.00	193	30.00
29	7.50	81	30.00	134	17.50	194	12.50
30	20.00	82	10.00	135	20.00	195	17.50
31	37.50	83	30.00	136	15.00	196	12.50
32	17.50	84	17.50	137	10.00	197	10.00
33	17.50	85	12.50	138	10.00	198	50.00
33(a)	55.00	86	36.00	139	190.00	199	10.00
34	10.00	87	36.00	140	15.00	200	50.00
34(a)	12.50	88	25.00	141	10.00	201	30.00
35	12.50	89	25.00	142	12.50	202	20.00
35(a)	10.00	90	15.00	143	200.00	203	7.50
36	17.50	91	10.00	144	160.00	203(a)	10.00
37	17.50	92	15.00	145	30.00	204	12.50
38	32.50	93	20.00	146	40.00	205	35.00
38(a)	17.50	94	12.50	147	17.50	206	25.00
39	17.50	95	12.50	148	20.00	207	15.00
39(a)	5.00	96	15.00	149	70.00	208	40.00
40	35.00	97	12.50	150	17.50	209	30.00
40(a)	17.50	98	12.50	151	50.00	210	30.00
41	8.00	99	12.50	152	40.00	211	40.00
42	6.00	100	25.00	153	12.50	212	22.50
43	20.00	101	22.50	154	40.00	213	7.50
44	12.00	102	22.50	155	20.00	214	12.50
45	13.00	102(a)	12.50	156	30.00	215	40.00
46	42.50	103	22.50	157	25.00	216	375.00
47	15.00	104	15.00	158	15.00	217	90.00
48	40.00	105	12.50	159	25.00	218	20.00
49	12.50	106	17.50	160	30.00	219	12.50
50	20.00	107	17.50	161	7.50	220	12.50
51	25.00	108	320.00	162	5.00	221	300.00
52	12.50	109	40.00	163	7.50	222	65.00
53	15.00	110	75.00	164	30.00	223	15.00
54	10.00	110(a)	30.00	165	35.00		
		110(b)	100.00				

Auction - Part 2 - Prices Realized - Page 1

help you. If you wanted to find out something, you wrote a letter or telephoned a library or historical society. Or else you hired a local researcher, or you travelled to the library or historical society yourself. You looked over original source documents, interviewed descendants of glass workers or other collectors and researchers, and in the end, all of this work might result in just one sentence in the book.

It was in *American Glass* that the McKearins first published what they called "The Charts," where they divided flasks into "certain groups and have given description of the design and other details, accompanied with line drawings of most of the flasks." For example, Group I, Portrait Flasks – Washington, where GI-1 through GI-36 are "Early Monongahela

and Pittsburgh Districts and Early Kensington." GI-37 – GI-61 are "Dyottville Glass Works, Phila, and Lockport Glass Works, Lockport, N.Y." and so forth until Group I ends at GI-122. Followed by Group II, "American Eagle Flasks" until we get to GX-31, the 31st flask in the tenth Group, "Miscellaneous Flasks."

Historical and pictorial flasks comprise just a portion of the book. Other section deal with free-blown glass, mold-blown glass, and early pressed glass including lighting and cup plates. And if blown-three-mold glass is your collecting interest, *American Glass* has all the known patterns at the time, drawn, documented, and categorized by Helen McKearin.

After the publication of *American Glass*, the McKearins spent the next ten years or so continuing to collect, research, and

write. The second book they wrote (although this time, Helen gets top billing) is *Two Hundred Years of American Blown Glass*, which was released on January 1, 1950. At over 350 pages, *Two Hundred Years* is described thus: "This beautifully designed book traces the development of blown glassmaking from colonial days to the modern industry it is today. Moreover, recent and extensive research by the authors has uncovered new facts and documentary evidence never published anywhere before."

"The hundreds of illustrations, including 105 full-page plates in black and white and 10 pages in full color, contain many outstanding examples of articles made in each period."

The first 140 pages of the book contain a history of American glassmaking, from