



Revisiting the Group C Listings of Rare Flasks

For those of us who enjoy collecting and studying historical flasks, I think this article will help us learn and understand how important it is to study the rarity of the different molds and their desirability. Desirability is the key word in this article.

Many of the advanced collectors who have studied the book *American Glass* (published in 1939) and the book *American Flasks and Their Ancestry* (published in 1978), are cognizant of the fact that the McKearins made three different groupings of flasks according to their degree of desirability and rarity. For the novice collector, they classified them in Groups A, B, and C.

In Groups A and B are located the "Cream of the Crop" as far as flasks are concerned. Most of these flasks are early, historical, and pontiled. The A and B grouping is concentrated not only with the rare mold of the flask but also with the desirability of the mold itself. There are a few flasks that can be considered unique as far as their rarity, but for eye appeal and "desirability," the desirability supersedes the rarity to make the lists.

Group A contains 42 flasks and Group B contains 40. For the novice collector, study the lists in the two books above.

For the more advanced collectors, review the two groups and you will be amazed as to how much you have forgotten!

In this article, I will revisit the Supplemental Group C list of rare flasks. There are 31 flasks in this grouping, most of which are later in manufacture. By later in manufacture, I mean the 1860-70s timeframe. Many of them are somewhat challenging to locate and at least one remains unique to date.

As one can imagine, since the books *American Glass* and *American Flasks and Their Ancestry* were published, things have changed. Some of the flasks in the grouping may not hold the esteem they once held in 1939 and 1978 when the two above books were published, respectively. However, a few others might have been deemed rare enough to be included in the Group B of desirable flasks.

One has seen technological progress and change over the years in all aspects of life. Flasks are no exception. As a youngster, I can remember waiting anxiously for a Polaroid photo to arrive via snail mail of a flask being offered to my father. Today, collectors have instant gratification by receiving the picture immediately via the internet. As article space allows, I have chosen six flasks to discuss from the



GXIII-32, Sheaf of Grain flask

Group C listing of rare flasks; three that I feel are less rare than charted and three that I believe have maintained both their rarity and desirability.

Let's get started with discussing the three flasks that I feel should be "demoted" in the Group C listings. Not that they are not nice flasks. I feel they are more common in nature than so listed and should not be included in the grouping. These are some of the flasks that have turned up more frequently over the past forty one years since the book *American Flasks and Their Ancestry* was published. Please note that images of these three have been included for your pleasure. All of these flasks are in a color other than aqua,

making them extremely more desirable and harder to locate than their aquamarine counterparts.

The first flask to discuss is listed as Number 11 in the Group C listings and charted as McKearin number GXIII-32. This is a pint-sized flask that depicts a sheaf of rye on each side. It is not really a historical but more of a pictorial flask. I understand that beauty is in the eye of the beholder, but this flask, also being smooth-based, just does not attract my attention and lacks eye appeal in my opinion. It was originally listed as rare but I believe it to be comparatively scarce presently. The pale blue example shown is quite rare because of its color.

The second flask to discuss is listed as Number 15a. in the group C listings and charted as McKearin number GII-142. It is a product of the Pittsburgh District Glass Works of Cunningham and Co. It is a very elaborately decorated flask depicting an Indian, dog, and an American flag, among other things. It is also embossed Continental in an oval below the American flag. Although a very fancy and attractive flask, I would have to designate it as common in aquamarine.

The third and final flask that lacks the luster it once held in the Group C listings would be Number 21 in the group and charted by McKearin as GII-128. This little half-pint was originally listed as rare and depicts an eagle on both sides with pebbled feathering. I still feel it is an attractive historical flask with the stippled feathering and American eagle depicted but just too many have come to light over the years to designate it as rare and desirable. I believe the degree of rarity should be reduced to possibly comparatively scarce. There are two colored examples known; the light olive yellow example depicted and a pale sapphire blue example. Both of these should be considered extremely rare.

Now that I have discussed the flasks I feel have lessened in rarity over the years,



GII-142 reverse -
Indian Shooting Bird



GII-142 obverse



GII-128 Eagle flask



GXIII-62 reverse



GXIII-62 obverse



GI-134 Kirkpatrick & Co flask

let's discuss the ones I feel have stood the test of time and have remained truly extremely rare and much desired. These three in my opinion are "the cream of the crop" of the Supplemental Group C listing of rare flasks.

In numerical order of their listing in the group, we come upon Number 3, charted by McKearin as GXIII-62; The Richmond Glass Works flask. This pint-sized rarity depicts an anchor on the front with Richmond embossed in the pennant above an anchor and Glass-works embossed in the pennant below the anchor. The reverse depicts a folksy glassworks building with a center chimney puffing smoke. This flask is so rare that the last one offered for sale publicly was in 2009 at Heckler's when the Bud Lane collection was dispersed. That may not seem too long ago, but previous to that offering, the very same flask hadn't been offered for sale since 1955 when The Pennypacker Auction Gallery sold it from The Dr. Charles Osgood collection to Warren Lane, Bud Lane's father.

When you do the math, the flask was out of circulation for 54 years before being offered in 2009. McKearin states about two examples known but I think there are four to five known presently, one of which is in a museum. The flask charts state that the base of the flask is smooth with a small nipple at the mold seam. The flask shown in this article has an open tubular pontil making it even more exceptional. This flask is a flask that certainly could have been placed in the Group B listings of most desirable flasks.

Let's move along to my second pick of rarities from the Group C classification. This flask is Number 14 and charted by McKearin as GII-134. This is the quart-sized D. Kirkpatrick & Co flask. The flask is smooth-based and depicts a folksy somewhat large eagle with pebbled feathered breast and wings and a long, broad tail. Above the eagle is embossed D. Kirkpatrick & Co. Below the eagle,

Chattanooga, Tenn. The reverse of the flask is plain. This flask was undoubtedly made as a private mold for the above liquor distributor and dates circa 1865. At the time the flask was listed in Group C (1965) there were two examples known. To date, I can account for at least two more, one of which is in The Corning Museum of Glass. It is a big bold, gutsy flask and perfectly fits into The Supplemental Group C listing of rare flasks.

Lastly, we have the only flask in the Group C listing that is unique to date. It is listed as Number 28 and charted as GXI-54. It is the somewhat famous E. Kauffeld quart Pike's Peak flask. The obverse depicts a prospector with For Pikes Peak above and the reverse depicts a hunter shooting a deer. Below, it is embossed E. Kauffeld. The flask is smooth-based and clear in color with a pinkish cast. According to the Pittsburgh business directories, Elias Kauffeld was a whiskey wholesaler in Pittsburgh with his brother from 1871-1876. For whatever reason, he is listed as a sole proprietor from 1877-1890. The business was later located at 1505-07 East Carson Street in Pittsburgh in a Victorian Renaissance building built in 1881. The building was restored in 2004, in part through the Pittsburgh History and Land Foundation's Preservation Loan Fund. It is interesting to note that it is the only Group C flask depicted with a line drawing in the *American Glass* book. The drawing and description can be seen on page 511.

Considering the later manufacture of this flask, it is amazing it remains unique as of this writing. Hopefully, another example may come to light and be enjoyed by yet another collector!

So there you have it. A small discussion of The Supplemental Group C listing of rare flasks. Hope you have enjoyed it as much as I have enjoyed writing this article!

If you wish to reach out to me for commentary, questions, or suggestions, I can be contacted via email at mark@americanflasks.com



GXI-54 reverse



GXI-54 obverse