

# Thomas Martindale and the Hunter's Jugs

*His 'brave' life — and epic death — spanned countries*

By Jack Sullivan

During his lifetime, Thomas Martindale (Figure 1) was esteemed as a big game hunter and civic leader in Philadelphia. He also can be remembered as a merchant whose grocery and liquor company issued three collector-sought American whiskey jugs.

The rarest of the ceramics carries the name “Minnehaha - Laughing Waters.” (Figure 2). It bears an elaborate under-glaze transfer in cobalt blue of a Indian brave in a canoe with a bow and arrow (Figure 3) attacking some sea serpents (Figure 4). The name “Minnehaha” is derived from the poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow called “Song of Hiawatha.” It is a long, epic tale about an Indian brave who does many heroic deeds to assist his tribe. Minnehaha was his sweetheart.

The poem was staple reading in American schools for decades and the characters would have been familiar to most people of the 19th and early 20th centuries. We can assume that the Indian shooting the serpent is Hiawatha. This Indian brave frequently was depicted with a bow and arrow, usually hunting deer. Although I have scoured the poem from stem to stern, I cannot find any reference to Hiawatha besting sea serpents. The encounter depicted on the jug appears to have been the concoction of the artist, identity unknown.

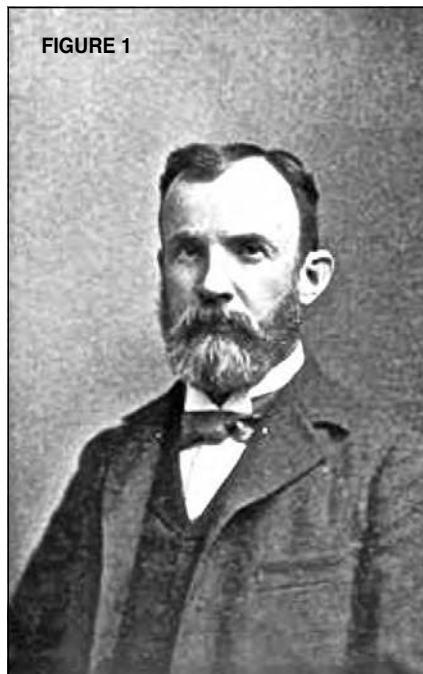


FIGURE 1



FIGURE 3

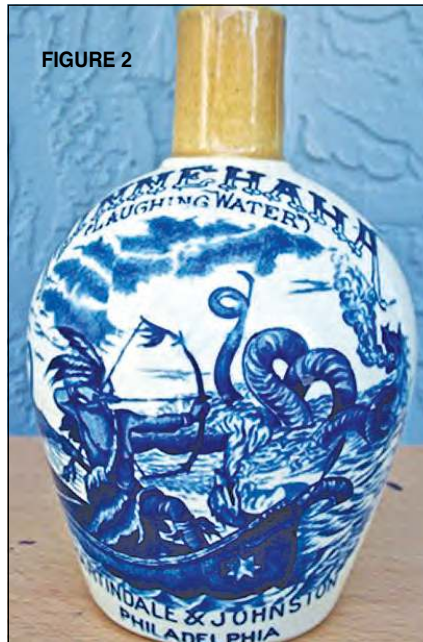


FIGURE 2

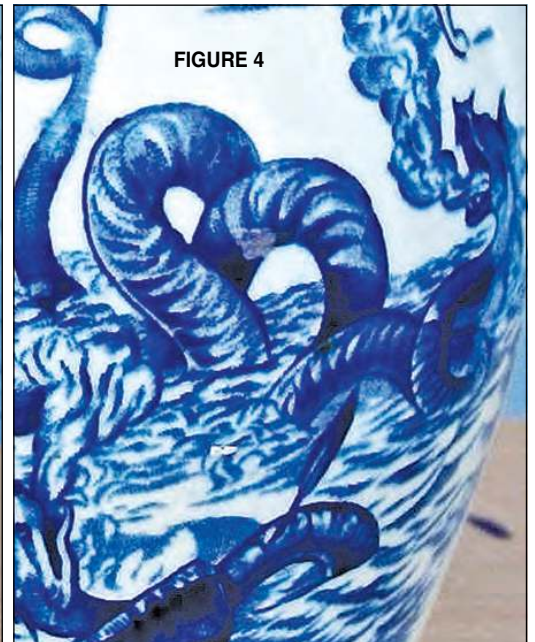


FIGURE 4





FIGURE 5



FIGURE 6



FIGURE 7



FIGURE 8



FIGURE 9

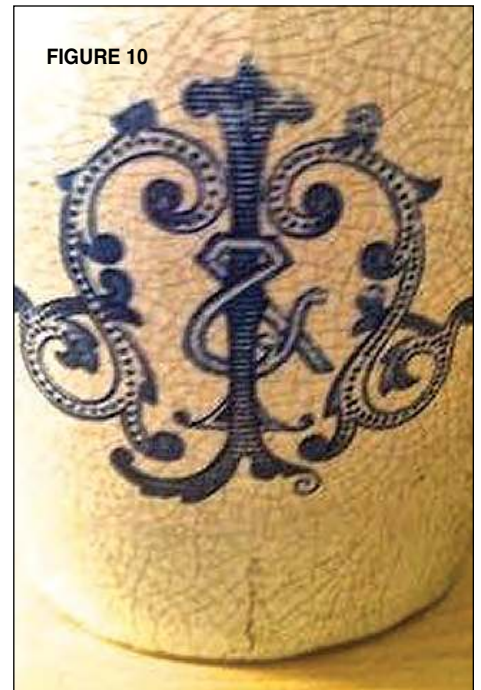


FIGURE 10

The second jug depicts the winsome Minnehaha sitting near a waterfall. In Dakota Indian language her name can be translated loosely as “Laughing Water.” The ceramic comes in two colors. In one version the title is complete and the illustration is a crisp dark cobalt (Figure 5). Other examples come in a lighter blue and some may lack the words “Laughing

Water” or even “Minnehaha.” The basic design also is found in sepia brown on jugs of two different shapes (Figures 6,7).

The third Minnehaha jug has nothing to do with Native Americans. It depicts two sparrow-type birds amidst a floral background that are looking intently at the ground. On closer inspection it would seem that the birds are on an elaborate

Victorian stage, illuminated by rows of footlights. The jug comes both in dark brown and cobalt blue (Figures 8,9). Each bears an elaborate M&J monogram at the back (Figure 10).

Thomas Martindale, the man responsible for these attractive containers, was born in 1848 to poor parents in England. He emigrated to the United States at the





FIGURE 11

age of eight with his family. After trying several occupations in his early years, in 1869 he entered the grocery business in an area of Philadelphia known as “Old City.” He bought a half interest in a small store there but in a short time had built it into a leading Philadelphia grocery and eventually bought out his partner.

About 1883, Martindale teamed with a local named William Johnston to open a new grocery at 10th and Market streets. Ironically, given his reputed prejudice against such food items as coffee and sugar, Martindale had no compunctions about liquor. His company was listed in business directories as “Importers, Grocers, Wine and Spirits Merchants.”

Whiskey was a mainstay. Martindale’s flagship brand was “Dirigo,” a Latin

phrase meaning “I lead.” (Figure 11). “Weardale” was another Martindale proprietary label and also “Minnehaha.”

Martindale’s passion was hunting, but not with bow and arrow. He favored shooting expeditions into the Canadian Northwest and Alaska. A photo of his home showed a sample of his trophies (Figure 12) that included caribou antlers, polar bear skins and the fleece of mountain sheep.

As Martindale prepared for a 1916 hunting expedition in Northern British Columbia, friends urged him not to go because of signs of bad health. His doctor disagreed, believing that the open air would be good for the businessman. About one month into the trip, however, Martindale was beset with “boils and carbuncles and a facial disorder that his friends believe to have been paralysis.”

Failing rapidly, Martindale died far from civilization. His body was carried by his companions on a woodland trail to the nearest railroad line. A special train was dispatched that carried him on to Skagway where his body was embalmed and shipped to the U.S. by steamer. Following funeral services in Philadelphia, he was buried in Westminster Cemetery.

When Prohibition was imposed in 1920, Martindale alcoholic products disappeared forever. They are remembered still, however, through the fancy ceramic jugs that Thomas Martindale decreed for many of them.



FIGURE 12

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