

# Lady Bottles

*There is nothing like a dame  
Nothing in the world  
There is nothing you can name  
That is anything like a dame.*

*Sailors Song from the  
musical South Pacific by  
Rodgers and Hammerstein,  
1949.*

**[Left]** Actress  
Vivien Leigh as she  
appeared in a 1951  
stage production of  
Shakespeare's "Ant-  
ony and Cleopatra"  
which co-starred Ms.  
Leigh's husband, Sir  
Laurence Olivier, as  
Mark Antony.



**[Left]** 1948 was the year that "My Favorite Beverage" was bottled. The soda brand apparently didn't last very long. The bottle contained eight ounces of soda pop and was bottled by Favorite Beverages in Newark, New Jersey. A not-so-enthusiastic slogan on the ACL informs potential consumers that the product is "Worth Trying."

**ONE** of the most popular categories of applied color label (ACL) soda bottles, collected by both women and men, is "Lady Bottles." There are literally hundreds of different bottles depicting the female of the species on the ACL, with some of them common and some of them rare. Let's look at a few.

"My Favorite Beverage" is among my own favorites. It contained eight ounces of soda pop and was bottled in 1948 by Favorite Beverages in Newark, New Jersey. The ACL is made with an unusual combination of yellow and green pigments and depicts a pretty young lady wearing a swimsuit at the beach, with a bottle of pop and a book nearby. A not-so-enthusiastic slogan on the ACL informs potential consumers that the product is "Worth Trying."

*Antique Bottle & Glass Collector*



The ACL is related to the Miss America Pageant in nearby Atlantic City, New Jersey. The pageant began in 1921 on the weekend after Labor Day, as a ploy by local businesses to keep visitors coming to the boardwalk after the summer season ended. The event was popular from the outset, drawing hundreds of thousands of people to what was initially billed as a “Bathing Beauty Revue.” Apart from pausing during the Great Depression, the Miss America Pageant has been held for a hundred years, although the iconic swimsuit competition was eliminated in 2018.

Today, “My Favorite Beverage” is a reasonably available ACL soda bottle that is typically found in very nice condition. Despite the fact that it is not terribly rare, demand for the bottle is strong, and the price has continued to climb since so many collectors want to own an example. In 2022, two mint examples sold for \$550 apiece on the Glass from the Past auction Facebook page, up from \$350 a few years earlier.

Cleopatra, the Egyptian Queen of the Nile, is perhaps the personification of female beauty, at least in the popular imagination. Cleopatra has been the subject of art and literature for centuries and was the focus of over a dozen films since 1899, including blockbusters starring Theda Bara (1917), Vivien Leigh (1945), and Elizabeth Taylor (1963). A new version starring Gal Godot is reportedly being filmed at present.

The real-life Cleopatra was the last ruler of the Ptolemaic Kingdom of Egypt and was the lover of famous, powerful Romans, including Pompey, Julius Caesar (with whom she had a son) and Mark Antony. After Caesar’s assassination, she allied with Mark Antony against Octavian (Augustus), but the pair lost decisively at the Battle of Actium in 31 BC, and both she and Mark Antony committed suicide.

**[Right]** Miss America contestants posing for a pre-pageant publicity photograph in 1948.



**[Above]** Initially, the Miss America Pageant was criticized by some local businessmen and pastors for allegedly promoting loose morals, but the reality was often the opposite. Beatrice Bella “Be Be” Shopp, the 1948 winner, campaigned for abstinence from alcohol and tobacco and said of two-piece swimsuits: “The French girls can wear them if they want to, but I don’t approve of bikinis for American girls.”



**[Left and Above]** “Cleo Cola” soda bottle, 1935. The Cleo Syrup Corporation licensed its brand name, logos and secret product formula to local bottlers (much like the Coca Cola Company does), and obtained a copyright and U.S. patent.

**[Above]** Silver tetradrachm coin depicting the true physical appearances of Cleopatra and Mark Antony, struck circa 36 BC at the city of Antioch in Syria. The coin type is rare and immensely popular with collectors, and a mint example (not

the pictured coin) sold for \$150,000+ at a 2022 Heritage auction. The coin bears two astonishingly lifelike portraits of the famous couple on opposite sides. Every detail of Cleopatra’s elaborate hairdo, her jewelry, the determined look

in her eye are all sharply rendered. Antony has a prize fighter’s profile and a surprisingly modern-looking haircut.





**[Left]** 1867 engraving of Barbara Fritchie's audacious act of defiance, from the book *Women's Work in the Civil War: a Record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience*.

**[Left Center]** Barbara Fritchie House in Frederick, Maryland. The building is reputed to be haunted, with reports that Mrs. Fritchie's empty rocking chair sometimes starts to rock by itself.



**[Left]** Portrait of Barbara Fritchie, circa 1862, possibly by famed Civil War photographer Mathew Brady.

Egypt thereafter was ruled as a Roman province. Although Queen Cleopatra's intelligence, political skills and feminine charms are not in doubt, her actual physical beauty is. Readers can draw their own conclusions by examining a silver coin from 36 BC depicting Mark Antony and Cleopatra during an era when highly skilled coin engravers strove to create detailed and accurate portraits.

In any event, the makers of "Cleo Cola" opted for the fabled beauty of legend and Hollywood rather than the one shown on contemporary coins. The bottle was made with green glass (though sometimes clear glass) and contained 12 ounces, with a striking red and white applied color label (ACL) showing a lounging, exotic Cleopatra and the slogan, "*Queen of Sparkling Drinks*."

The ACL states that it was "Bottled Under License Issued by Cleo Syrup Corp., St. Louis, Missouri" and also says, "Reg. U.S. Patent Off." and "Copyright 1935." The licensed product was bottled by various companies in various cities, including Dallas, Texas; Columbus, Ohio; Omaha, Nebraska; and many other places, with several variations in the portrait (for example, with and without her belly button showing) and different wording on the ACL. It is a popular bottle and reasonably priced, typically costing \$100 or less for a nice example.

**[Left]** "Barbara Fritchie Home Style Beverages" honors a brave and patriotic nonagenarian, who passed away three months after her celebrated act of Unionism.

Patriotism and bravery, rather than physical beauty, landed Barbara Fritchie on the front of an ACL soda bottle. Born in 1766, the 96-year-old widowed Barbara Fritchie was living in Frederick, Maryland, during the Civil War when General Stonewall Jackson led a phalanx of Confederate troops through the town in 1862.

As the invaders passed by, Mrs. Fritchie defiantly hung a large American flag from her balcony,





and General Jackson ordered the banner to be shot down. What happened next was memorialized in a poem written by John Greenleaf Whittier, who learned about the incident from a friend:

*It shivered the window, pane and sash;  
It rent the banner with seam and gash.  
Quick, as it fell, from the broken staff  
Dame Barbara snatched the silken scarf;  
She leaned far out on the window-sill,  
And shook it forth with a royal will.  
“Shoot, if you must, this old gray head,  
But spare your country’s flag,” she said.  
A shade of sadness, a blush of shame,  
Over the face of the leader came;  
The nobler nature within him stirred  
To life at that woman’s deed and word:  
“Who touches a hair of yon gray head  
Dies like a dog! March on!” he said.*

The poem was immediately popular when published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1863 and subsequently was reprinted in newspapers throughout the Union. It ignited a fever of pride and patriotism and remained popular for years. Sir Winston Churchill memorized the poem and is said to have recited it by heart to FDR during WWII.

The city of Frederick, Maryland, seized on the fame of the poem (which, according to historians, may not be 100% accurate) and for over a hundred years has held an annual Fourth of July parade (and more recently, a motorcycle race) named in honor of Barbara Fritchie. The nearby racetrack holds an annual Barbara Fritchie Classic thoroughbred horse race.

For our purposes, there exists a “Barbara Fritchie Home Style Beverages” that was bottled in 1952 by the Barbara Fritchie Beverage Co. of Frederick, Maryland. It held nine ounces of soda pop and its front red-and-white ACL depicted a portrait of the brave and patriotic Mrs. Fritchie. Although it is quite a rare bottle, it is not in as much demand as the more common “My Favorite Beverage” depicting the bathing beauty. A nice Barbara Fritchie ACL soda bottle sold for \$200 several years ago.

Bravery, brains, and beauty: as the sailors in South Pacific knew, there is nothing like a dame!

We’ll look at some other interesting “Lady Bottles” in a future installment of ACL Corner.

**[Left & Below]** The allure of Lady Bottles is underscored by these two ACL sodas: “Rainbow Beverages,” a 6-½ ounce bottle from the small town of Brownsville, Tennessee, 1947; and “Nectar,” a 7 ounce soda bottle from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1943, immodestly touted as “Drink of the Gods.”



**CREDITS:** Marsh, Thomas E., *The Official Guide to Collecting ACL Soda Bottles*, Youngstown, Ohio, 1992, Sweeney, Rick, *Collecting Applied Color Label Soda Bottles*, 3d ed. 2002, PSBCA, Tim A.C.L.—Miller, a Facebook page showing hundreds of rare ACL sodas from Tim’s collection, [VintageSodaCollector.com](http://VintageSodaCollector.com) by FOHBC member Tom Pettit, “Weide’s Soda Page” ([ca-yd.com](http://ca-yd.com)), by Chris and Catherine Weide, Wikipedia entries for Barbara Fritchie; Be Be Shopp; Cleopatra; Miss America Pageant; Newark.

