

ONE OLD BOTTLE, A 'NEW' SHIP SINKS IN 1936, AND A YOUNG MOM IS OUT WAY PAST CURFEW.

By Ralph Finch, photos by Janet Finch

The Finches floated a loan, purchased another great bottle painted with a ship, a captain—and a story about my mother being shipwrecked (well, sort of).

Selling January 18 by Meander Auctions in Whipple, Ohio, was Lot 285, described (edited) as a “*European, 19th century, one-gallon demijohn with early paint decoration including a portrait of a naval officer in front of a naval battle, with heraldry decoration on the back. 14 inches high.*”

I missed the auction catalog at first, but thanks to Kim Kokles of Texas, I got on the ship’s wake—and won Lot 285. But who is the captain, and what country claimed the ship? Being very smart (lol), I had already ruled out the *Bob-Lo boat and...
**Captain Kangaroo.

I next sailed across the ocean and asked for comments on our bottle and the Meander auction house. German friend Horst Klusmeier replied: “*I don’t know who the guy is, but the flag looks like the British Red Ensign. Red cloth and in the top left corner the Union Jack.*”

Kim Kokles commented on the bottle and the auction house: “*Not the best looking or earliest, but cheap opening bid. Meander Auctions is Andy and Hollie Richmond—good friends of ours.*”

And I add: “*Kim, I think everyone is a friend of yours. And they are lucky to have you as a friend, as we are.*”

Indeed, Andy Richmond later told me: “*Ralph, We are, indeed, fortunate to count Kim and Mary among our good friends! They are two of our favorite people in the antiques world!*”

Kim also later added: “*I enjoy spending other people’s money.*”

Right now, I’m trying to get information from Willy Van den Bossche of Antwerp, Belgium, the author of several serious books on serious glass. If you don’t have one (or several) of Willy’s bottle books, you aren’t really a serious collector/historian.

And, the Wonderful Willy replied: “*Hi, dear friend Ralph. I am glad that you are enjoying life the same way I am by studying bottles and glass.*”

“*My entire bottle collection will be bought after my death by the Flemish Government and will be exposed in a new bottle museum here in the city of Hasselt.*”

“I am very sorry, but the best address for your question is the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam. I am sure they can help you.

“*Stay well and continue breathing, Willy.*”

And Robert Strickhart of New Jersey commented: “*Congrats on this fine addition to your collection; it is really fun to see!*”

I contacted the Meander people, hoping that information may have surfaced after the auction listing.

Andrew Richmond, half of the Meander auction team, replied: “*Unfortunately, we have no more info on the bottle. I had mentioned to your wife that it was one of my favorite lots in that auction. My wife and I are advanced researchers, but neither of us could determine the battle or person depicted. During the course of the pre-auction weeks, no one reached out with additional information or asked questions that suggested that they might know more. Sorry, we can’t be of more help! Cheers, Andrew.*”

Later, Andrew added:

“*Your kind words about doing business with us are much appreciated! It’s a fun business, made all the more fun by meeting new folks who are as passionate about old ‘stuff’ as we are!*”

(FYI: Sometimes, researching—and emailing—is easy, and sometimes it would turn my hair white—if it wasn’t already doing that. Repeated emails to Amsterdam, etc., have turned up so far...zilch.)

And for more history...

Visit the National Maritime Museum in Amsterdam via the Internet and enjoy its incredible leaden glass, Adm. Nelson’s Trafalgar uniform, and gold watch recovered from the floating body of a passenger who went down with the *Titanic*. “*The rusted hands are frozen at 3.07 a.m., the time the watch was showing when Norman entered the freezing water.*” And a new exhibit on pirates.

And for even more history...

*The Detroit, Belle Isle & Windsor Ferry Co., incorporated in 1881 to connect Detroit, Windsor, Ontario, and Detroit’s Belle Isle Park. In 1898, the company leased Bois Blanc Island (later known as “Bob-Lo”), offering ferry service to the island. Bois Blanc became a popular day trip destination, with picnic grounds, a small amusement area, dancing, and other services.

A similar “party boat” was the *Tashmoo*. My mother remembered often taking the boat, especially for dancing. She was on it when, on June 18, 1936, the *Tashmoo*, carrying 1,400 passengers back to Detroit after an evening of dancing at Sugar Island, struck a rock and took on water. It navigated to a dock in Amherstburg, Ontario, where everyone made it off. But...

I remember my mother telling me that everyone was bussed back to Detroit, and she arrived home about 10 a.m.—before cell phones, remember?—after leaving the evening before on a date! My grandmother didn’t believe my mom’s story about a boat sinking until mom came up with the next day’s newspaper report on the sinking. (Despite that, my mother didn’t believe me when

I said the dog ate my homework...probably because we didn't have a dog.)

And, a coincidence? Four years later, Mom marries a (U.S.) sailor (no captain); a year later, a little bundle of joy (me) is launched, and a year later, the marriage hit a rock, floundered, and sank. So much is life.

** Captain Kangaroo is an American children's CBS TV series from 1955 to 1984.

FYI: This story was 95 percent done when an old friend, David—and at 85, most all my friends are old—gave me some advice. And, since David is a life-long successful editor, researcher, and published book writer, he suggested that my efforts would be more interesting if...

"The next time you tell the story, you start out with: 'I was tending bar in medicine hat.' It never fails!"

I will have to see if he is correct. *But, FYI:

My Janet has, on occasion, said to me: *"You are the strongest person I know. Wait...I know David, too."*

Comments and water balloons can be aimed at rfinch@twm.rr.com.

[Full bottle front] A naval officer in front of a ship battle painted on an olive-green demijohn. Yes, but just who is it?

[Full bottle reverse] Heraldry decoration on the back of this unpontiled bottle. German friend Horst Klusmeier said "the flag looks like the British Red Ensign. Red cloth and in the top left corner the Union Jack."

[Reverse signature] Like a puzzle with a missing piece. Will the painter ever be known?

