

American SCROLL FLASKS

When asked to write this article for John about scroll flasks, I could not help but think of my late friend Fred Salisbury. Fred was "THE" true pioneer of scroll flask collecting. Fred resided in Minnetonka, Minnesota and as a youngster delivering newspapers became involved in collecting scroll flasks when he saw a grouping of them in one of his customer's windows. When McKearin/Wilson wrote *American Bottles and Flasks and Their Ancestry*, they called upon Fred to help them catalog the scrolls and update any new mold varieties. Those of you who are scroll aficionados still appreciate his work today. In September of 1990, Fred's collection was auctioned at Garth's Auctions in Delaware, Ohio, where collectors gathered from across the country to have a chance at obtaining examples from the finest scroll collection ever assembled at that time.

Now let's talk about the bottles themselves. The majority of the flasks were blown at Pittsburgh and Louisville Kentucky glass houses and date between 1825 and 1860. They were commonly used to hold whiskey or other spirits and were

blown by the thousands. There is no other grouping in the McKearin's charts that contain such a myriad of sizes and colors as the scroll grouping. They range in size from a mere 2 1/2 inch miniature to a giant gallon size with half pints, pints, quarts and a 2 quart example in between.

Let's briefly discuss the different sizes, their colors and degrees of rarity. The 2 1/2 inch miniature is listed in McKearin's as a GIX-40 and is an extremely rare flask. I know of but one example each in the following colors: cobalt blue, deep blue green, colorless and a deep amethyst reported to me but not seen by me. Don't get confused if you happen to see a miniature cobalt blue example with a rough sheared off top, as these are English. Many people mistake them for the GIX-40, but they are not the real deal. The next size we can discuss are the half pints. There are sixteen different mold varieties charted by McKearin's in this size. You can collect these in a spectrum of colors and, in my opinion, are the scarcest sizes available that are still somewhat attainable. The amber colored examples are the most common color. Pint sized scrolls come in 35 different mold varieties and are the most common of the sizes to obtain in a color. I, being a veteran collector, can remember 45 years ago when colored pint examples in amber and green shades would sell between ten and twenty dollars each and the aqua examples for a few dollars each. Those days are naturally long gone but even today aqua examples are very common and are still

readily attainable for under \$100.00. Colored pint examples are somewhat available but command strong prices especially if found in exotic colors. If you like the colored pints, try assembling a set of the GIX 10 mold in various colors. Over the years, I have recorded thirty-one different colors in that mold alone. I can think of no other flask mold with so many colors. They would truly make a rainbow of colors. Many collectors today collect by color only and are not too concerned about the mold varieties. Counting the star points can be challenging and almost impossible if the flask is weakly blown. However, if the flask is strongly embossed, those star points will match up perfectly with the McKearin numbers in the book. Once again credit Fred Salisbury for all of his hard work. The quart size scrolls are charted in 16 different mold varieties. They also come in a variety of colors and are somewhat still attainable. They usually command a little more than the pints but they too can make an impressive collection in their own right with all the various colors. As with any scroll flask, those coming in exotic or striated colors will carry the highest price tag. The next

size to discuss is the single GIX-29 two quarts + size. This flask is listed as rare in the McKearin charts and deservedly so. The examples that I have handled are all very thin glass and the bottle itself is relatively light weight for its size. This coupled with the fact that they were filled with liquid and utilized can only account for the fact that not too many survived. I have only seen aqua examples



"Hearts & Flowers" Scroll Flask featured on a 1998 U.S. Postage Stamp.



Pictured: (left to right)
Lots 24, Lot 21, Lot 25.

of these but in the 1970's, the very knowledgeable Dr. George Walker of Sedalia, Missouri reported an amber specimen to my late father Charles. If it does exist, it awaits the lucky finder. The final size to discuss is the "Giants" or gallon sized scrolls. The scrolls are the only grouping of flasks that contains a gallon size. There are four different mold variants in this extravagant size with the GIX 30 being the most common of the four and that one is a very rare bottle. The other three variants should be considered extremely rare. With the exception of one clear colored GIX-30, all of the gallon scrolls come in aquamarine as I have never seen or heard of any colored examples. If you want to collect these, dust off a large space on your shelf as they take up some room. As a group, they are REALLY impressive. It is interesting to note that the gallons have a polished pontil and were most likely used for tableware.

Now, let's not forget the rare molds. As with any grouping, there are always some truly rare molds. Perhaps, the rarest mold of all is the aquamarine GIX-52. There is but one example known and that being in The Corning Museum of Glass. Following the GIX-52, one should consider the GIX-26, GIX-27, GXI-28 and GIX-47 respectively. The GXI-26 is marked S. McKee, the GXI-27 is the example with a slug plate covering S. McKee,

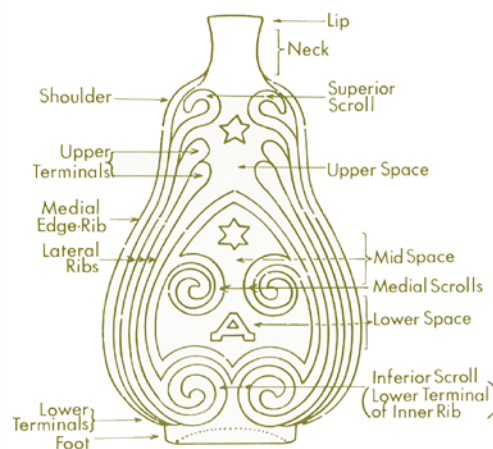
and leaving only the comma after the word McKee, and the GIX 28 having the word ROUGH on one side and & READY on the other side. The GXI-28 is really the only scroll flask that is marked with any historical significance. The GIX 47 is marked R. Knowles & Co., Union Factory, South Wheeling, Va. It is interesting to note that at time of manufacture, South Wheeling was in Virginia as West Virginia was not admitted into the Union until 1863. I have only seen all of the above scrolls in aquamarine with the exception of the GXI-27 with a lone example in smoky amber shading to an aquamarine neck. You will have to have some patience if you want to obtain any of the above molds as they are truly extremely rare examples and it usually takes years to find but one of them available for sale.

Don't worry; I haven't forgotten the collector who cherishes color and rare molds combined. The scroll grouping has a variety of these examples. These scrolls consist of the "marked" glass house examples such as the GIX-6, 7, 8 and 9. These are all marked Louisville Glass Works and come in different colors. The half pints GIX-38 and 39 are marked BP&P signifying Bakewell Page & Bakewell with the 38 coming in several colors and the 39 in a yellow green. Also of note are The GIX -42 and 43. They both come in several colors and

exhibit tremendous eye appeal. One cannot also forget the GIX-48 McCarty & Torreyson in a deep emerald green. Any of the above are true "GEMS" and should be prized by any collector. Some of my favorites would be the GIX-38 in deep cobalt blue, the GIX-43 in amethyst, and the GIX-48 in deep emerald green. Not to get personal but my favorite scroll of all time is not even a marked glass house example. My pick would be the GIX-51 deep emerald green "Hearts & Flowers" scroll. I can't be too far off in my judgment as Dick Sheaf, a fellow glass enthusiast and United States postal stamp designer, chose this flask to be depicted on a US postage stamp in June of 1998.

In finishing, I hope I have instilled some knowledge for the beginning collector and a little more inspiration for the advanced collector. If all those McKearin numbers listed above, have gotten you a little confused, it is time to dust off the book and do a little studying! No matter what, it is still fun collecting flasks and enjoying the camaraderie of other collectors. Enjoy the auction as there are several very nice scrolls for your consideration. Just remember: Knowledge, patience and perseverance will pay off in your flask collecting.

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Scroll Flask nomenclature as conceived by Fred Salisbury, drawing by Frederick H. Smith.

Pictured: (left to right)
Lots 23, Lot 27, Lot 22.