

Paintings On Old Bottles

By Gary Eichhorn

With Photography by Gordon Laridon & John Sarsfield

INTRODUCTION: Recently while cleaning out some old files I came across a 1972 article written by Gary Eichhorn with photographs by Gordon Laridon and John Sarsfield. Interestingly enough the small manuscript had been submitted on Thermo-fax paper.

[Remember 3M's photocopying technology that was introduced in 1950? It was a form of thermography – a dry silver process. It was a significant advance as no chemicals were required, other than what was contained in the copy paper. A thin sheet of heat sensitive copy paper was placed on the original document to be copied, and exposed to infrared energy.]

The article was certainly readable but the paper had turned brown with age and the copied images – words in this case – faded. The article had to be read with a magnifying glass. My records indicate that article had been submitted to me when I was editor of the old *Western Collector* magazine (1968-1972). Since in 1972 the magazine was sold and merged with another and was about to cease publication, I kept a copy of Gary's fine article for future consideration in another magazine. Then, over time, I forgot about it until I recently stumbled across the old file. I queried *Bottles and Extras* about publishing the article and received a positive response. So printed below is that 34 year-old article – "PAINTINGS ON OLD BOTTLES."

Cecil Munsey

Many artists became famous for painting masterpieces on canvas, wood or wall plaster. Painting on glass is also a time-tested means of artistic self-expression. Such paintings are primarily decorative and the paints used are mostly enamel and glazes.

Use of oils in paintings on old bottles and related vessels became most popular during the 19th century although one can find contemporary paintings on old bottles. Don't be fooled by thinking that a bottle painting hurts the value of and interest in the bottle. And do not scrub off a painted picture on an old or new bottle.

Pastoral and sea scenes were prevalent but simple floral designs were popular as well. The technique used by the artist varied from a few bold brush strokes to very fine detail. Seldom did the bottle artists sign their work.



Figure 1 Paintings made on bottles during the 1820 to 1830 period show good composition and detail. The Bristol [England] glass wine bottle [Figure 1] is a good example of some of this early art work. The featured bottle, in this case, is deep green in color.

Artists used a great variety of bottles

and occasionally painted a set of bottles for use as liquor decanters [Figure 2]. These three hock wine bottles were used for a national theme – Scotland, Ireland, and England. The artist used oil and gold leaf paints for a colorful contrast to the amber bottles. This particular set of bottle paintings has been authenticated 1850.

The artist often selected a glass color that would enhance the particular subject



Figure 2

of his painting. Milk glass was excellent for bright colors such as the bird motif on the flasks in Figure #3. These flasks date from the 1870s and were unearthed in Boise, Idaho. They were once fitted with pewter screw caps.



Figure 3



Figure 4



The bottles most commonly used by artists were ceramic mineral water bottles as shown in **Figure 4** [photo courtesy of John Sarsfield]. Another very popular type of bottle upon which to paint was Chinese rice wine jugs, sometimes referred to as “Chinese Tiger Whiskey Jugs.” Most of these bottles were painted while still filled with the contents, and given as gifts. They were most popular during the 1890s. Charles M. Russell, noted western artist, is known to have painted scenes on mineral water jugs (“gin jugs”).

Miniature bottles did not escape the artist’s brush. With just a few simple brush strokes of bright color the artist made some of the common miniatures worth displaying.

A bottle that must have been a real pleasure to paint on was the pumpkin seed flask [**Figure 5**]. Its flat sides and oval shape allowed the artist a fine surface upon which to work. The particular example shown here is dated 1910.

Art lovers and bottle collectors could find painted bottles a worthwhile collecting specialty. It’s possible that someday a masterpiece signed by a world renowned artist will be discovered on one of them.

Figure 5



ADDENDUM: Bottles featured in this article were painted in America during the 1820-1910 period. Older and newer bottles are very much a part of this collecting category – *paintings on bottles*. Newer painted bottles are seen occasionally in antiques shops and at bottle shows. Older painted bottles are found in museums and art galleries; and some of the finest examples can be seen on 20 plates (Numbers 92-112) in the 2001 book, “*ANTIQUÉ GLASS BOTTLES THEIR HISTORY AND EVOLUTION (1500-1850)*,” by Willy Van den Bossche of The Netherlands. The Antique Collectors’ Club of Suffolk, UK published the 439-page book – in full color. Willy Van Den Bossche is a recent inductee to the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors’ Honor Roll.

Cecil Munsey



Editor’s Note: The photos at the bottom of page 27 and 28 did not accompany the original article submitted to Cecil Munsey in 1972. They were added when the article was submitted to *Bottles and Extras* by Cecil. The remaining illustrations were scanned from 34+ year old slides that did not reproduce well after hours of attempts. I would also like to mention that the slides looked great holding them up to a light - but the scanner saw things the eye didn’t. Even after PhotoShop did all it could do, their age, scratches, etc., affected the overall look of the photos and several had to be completely omitted due to their poor quality. This brings an opportunity to mention to those of you who have archived photographs of your bottles on slides to share some information I gathered in my efforts to get better scans. Many “experts” are transferring slides and negatives to DVD (or at least CD) as high definition digital images and have special equipment to do so. Their suggestion for home scanning was using the highest settings your scanner will support. Good luck!