

Hammered Down

Judy Penz Sheluk

All prices are inclusive of Buyer's Premium

Experts discuss recent auction highlights

Norman C. Heckler & Company

The Thomas McCandless Collection
Session II: Absentee Auction 95
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Building on the foundation laid by many of the great first and second generation scholars and collectors, Thomas (Tom) McCandless (1924-2010) showed an unparalleled dedication and zeal for his bottle and glass hobby. Tom, with the aid of his wife Marion, assembled a landmark collection of bottles and flasks over more than 40 years.

"Every item in the McCandless catalogs came directly from his shelves in Hopewell, N.J.," said Norman C. Heckler, Sr. "Tom loved the diversity on those shelves - all the glass categories and beyond. Flasks, bitters, whiskeys, medicines, milks, sodas, fruit jars, pickles - all had a place in Tom's collection as he had an eye for all kinds of glass. The variety of this collection speaks to the true breadth of Tom's interests, knowledge, insatiable curiosity and love of the hobby."



Black glass handled wine bottle, England, 1680-1730. Squat, cylindrical wine with heavy applied solid handle, deep yellow olive, sheared mouth with string rim - pontil scar, ht. 4 3/4 inches, greatest dia. 5 1/4 inches. Severely cracked with a wonderful stapled repair. Ex Rowland collection. Sold: \$2,925.

"With the exception of the English wine bottle with handle, each of the bottles depicted were made in a two-piece mold, with the mold made to be the reverse of what you see in the glass," Heckler said. "This bottle would have originally been made for whiskey or another alcoholic beverage, a typical use. But what makes this whiskey bottle interesting is the unusual color, which is puce (purplish-red) with a gray overtone. Color is king in glass, with blue being the most collected (the darker the more valuable), puce and amethyst considered important, and as a general rule, aquamarine is the most common.

Tom McCandless bought this particular bottle from the Edmund and Jayne and Blaske collection, sold in 1983, and I actually catalogued that collection, so I happen to know he paid \$1,800 for it.

"Another factor that drove up the price was the condition, which was perfect. Condition is also of paramount importance. A minor blemish can sometimes be overlooked, but there are some who would not buy at all. Regardless, even a 1/4" v-shape chip at mouth would take this example down to one-third of the price. An aquamarine example you'd be hard pressed to give away. Restoration, such as grinding a chip out, used to be done and was more acceptable years ago. That is not today's way. It is better to have an honest thing, than trying to hide something that was once there."

The reference number in the auction catalog, G1-73, refers to a numbering system found in *American Bottles and Flasks and Their Ancestry*, Helen McKearin and Kenneth M. Wilson (1978, Crown Publishers), a scholarly, illustrated reference book which is still considered the bottle glass collectors bible.

"Genl Taylor" and bust "Fells Point / Balto" and monument portrait flask, Baltimore Glass Works, Baltimore, Maryland, 1830- 1850. Puce with a gray overtone, inward rolled mouth - tubular pontil scar, pint. G1-73. Fine condition, extremely rare color, beautiful. Ex Edmund & Jayne Blaske collection. Sold: \$24,750.

"This was certainly not the most valuable bottle in the McCandless Collection, but it was one of my absolute favorites," Heckler said. "The shape would be expected for the time period (1680-1730) when it was made in England, but what is unusual is the gutsy color and the attached the handle. It's a very fancy handle for such a simple bottle. If this bottle had been in perfect condition, it would have brought four to five times the amount.

"As it was, the metal staples really were a conversation piece. Someone must have really loved this bottle to take the time to do such an extensive and unique repair. The entire bottom was separated from the top, and what they did was drill holes, just at the right point, and then put the staples in. There is no glue whatsoever. Very masterful. I suspect it may have frozen and cracked, but that's just speculation."



As of this moment, there is only one other example of this small (6 7/8") plum amethyst cannon barrel figural bottle. The other is cobalt blue, and is in the collection of Dr. Charles Aprill of New Orleans. Both were at the sale of the Gordon Bass Collection in 1971. Tom McCandless was at that sale, and purchased the plum amethyst example illustrated here for \$400. Not a bad return on investment, but according to Heckler, that's not why he selected this particular example to showcase for readers of *NEAJ*.

"The cobalt blue example is the really interesting part of the story. A gentleman by the name of Rick Meyer, from Atlanta, Ga., flew into Boston specifically to buy the blue cannon barrel. His plane arrived late, and when he got into Boston he needed to travel to Bolton where the auction was being held. He ending up driving far too fast, was stopped by State Police, and taken to the local police department. He was given one call, and he chose to call the auction house. He ended up buying the bottle for \$550. Four years later, he sold the cobalt blue bottle to Dr. Charles Aprill.

"Charlie is what we call a 'blue collector,' which means he collects only blue glass, and his collection is the best in the country. I don't know what he paid Rick Meyer for it, but what I do know is that he remembered the purple bottle was in the McCandless sale and he wanted to bring the two bottles back together again. Even though he's a 'blue collector,' Dr. Aprill was the winning bidder at this sale, paying in excess of \$42,000, but he got his wish. The bottles have been reunited."

"R & G. A. Wright / Philada" miniature figural bottle, America, 1860-1880. In the form of a cannon barrel, plum amethyst, tooled mouth - smooth base, ht. 6 7/8 inches. Great condition. Only one other known example, that being the blue barrel in the Dr. Charles Aprill collection. Ex Gordon Bass collection auction, 1971. Sold: \$42,290.

About our expert: In addition to the Thomas McCandless Collection, the "Who's Who" list of bottle collections and important material sold under the direction of Norman C. Heckler, Sr. include those of Maude Wilkerson, Gordon Bass, Charles B. Gardner, Edmund & Jayne Blaske, The Mattatuck Museum and William Covill.

About Norman C. Heckler & Company: Since the company's founding in 1987, Norman C. Heckler & Company has been regarded as one of the most reputable names in the auction business. Their expertise is often called upon for appraisal services to prominent museums that maintain significant antique glass collections

including: The Corning Museum of Glass, Old Sturbridge Village, The Seagram Museum, Wadsworth Athenaeum, The Connecticut Historical Society, The National Bottle Museum, Henry Ford Museum and The Louisville Museum.

In addition to glass items, Hecklers offers other artful antique objects representing aspects of life in the early American experience. These items appear in the glass auction catalogs and general antique sales periodically offered by Hecklers.

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Masonic arch and emblems - Eagle historical flask, probably Keene Marlboro Street Glassworks, Keene, N.H., 1820-1830. Light bluish green with wide profuse amethyst striations, heavy tooled round collared mouth - pontil scar, pint. Probably GIV-8. Beautiful bottle, great color, fine condition. A big, heavy "2 pounder." Ex Sam Laidacker. Sold: \$19,890.

"This particular bottle was made important and valuable by the amethyst striations," Heckler said. "Without them, it would be priced somewhere around \$1,500-\$2,000. Those striations are \$15,000 worth of color. How they got there we can only surmise. It could have been an accident when they blower dipped the blowpipe from one color to another, there could have been some glass remaining on the end of the blowpipe. Then again, there were glass blowers knowledgeable enough to make something different, for themselves, or a family, presentation piece, if it was purposeful."

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