



Bottles in colors ranging from light aqua to olive green and dark amber crossed the block.



More than bottles crossed the block. This reverse painted glass advertising sign for Allen's Lung Balsam went out at \$585.

Buyers Uncork Pent-Up Enthusiasm As Bottles Take Over Springfield

SPRINGFIELD, MASS — A year's worth of anticipation for the yearly convention of the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors was released when the convention kicked off its four-day run, August 3. Bottle collectors from all over the United States came to the federation's convention in Springfield (a first in this city), at the MassMutual Center and Sheraton hotel. The convention takes place in the Northeast once every four years as the convention alternates between the

Northeast, the South, the West and Central US locations to make travel fair to all its members.

It is no surprise that in our interviews, several people noted the bottle-collecting community is a close-knit one. Without diminishing the importance of that statement, the same can be said for most of the subgroups in the collecting community. Collectors are just that way. Though the main reason to attend this convention could center on the

chance to acquire a rare bottle, the camaraderie and friendships made and rekindled here year after year are equally appealing draws.

This year's events featured an auction conducted by Glass Works Auction, a 100+ table glass show, meetings and seminars on bottles and glass, a room-hopping session, a banquet and club contests, including a Battle of Springfield bottle competition in which dealers vie to bring the best bottle. The winner

(Rick Ciralli this year) receives a trophy (glass of course) and bragging rights for a year.

Collectors and dealers gather yearly and share news of their lives outside the bottle world: babies, weddings, travels, and sometimes the group gathers to remember their own. Longtime collectors Timothy and Christine Hill were remembered at the convention. He collected historical flasks and she sought out veterinary bottles and advertising. This year's convention auction featured part one of the Dick and Elma Watson collection, described as a powerhouse couple among bottle collectors.

Recalling his first visit to the Watsons' home, Bob Strickhart, convention co-chair, said in the auction catalog foreword which included a full page of remembrances of the couple, "Oh yes, the glass was truly breathtaking, but more importantly, I knew immediately I was among friends and was truly welcomed. I quickly recognized that it was never just Dick Watson or Elma Watson, it was always Dick and Elma Watson. Together, two normal everyday individuals built a world-class bottle collection and contributed to the bottle hobby in unaccountable acts of support... Together they made a remarkable team, and they quickly became key members of what I call my bottle family."

"If growing up with bottle collecting parents is not unique, it is certainly unusual. After all, how many kids in the neighborhood had a "bottle room" in their house?" recalled the couple's four children in the catalog write-up. "Their interest in an old bottle embossed with grapes quickly blossomed into what could be described as a slightly less than all-consuming passion. Hundreds of times throughout the years, we have witnessed the joy that accompanied their latest find. All those in the bottle collecting world know the same exhilaration."

Jim Bender, who co-chaired the convention, said the first thing he did was to tell Bob that they should pay tribute to the Watsons at the convention — an easy sell. A banquet was immediately arranged and on display were many photos of the couple with many collectors sharing stories. With the family's blessing, the co-chairs also figured an auction here of the couple's collections would be the icing on the cake.

Just over 100 lots of the couple's famed bottle collection made their market debut at the

convention. Crossing the block were Saratoga-type mineral waters, foods, bitters, medicines, inks, flasks, blown glass and whiskies. A couple of lots went over \$5,000, but the couple would have been pleased that there was plenty for the average person to buy here.

Jim Hagenbuch of Glass Works Auctions, based in Lambertville, N.J., opened up the auction Saturday morning with a story of his first interaction with Dick Watson. Jim had gone to an auction and bought some bottles and missed out on some others. Afterward, he found a book Watson had written and called him to talk where they discussed bottles, specifically the ones Jim got that day and one he missed out on. "That's the one you should have bought," Dick told Jim. The two got to be close and Jim recalled being invited to the house to see the Watsons' collection, which numbered more than 4,000 pieces. "It was astounding to see what was in there," he said, telling the audience gathered for the auction, they will never again see such an iconic collection assembled.

Jesse Sailer, who began working for Jim when he was 17, called the auction. Among the top lots were an eagle Masonic flask in a pale, almost clear olive amber color, Keene (N.H.) Glass Works, that went for \$9,360 to a floor bidder; a Pitkin flask, circa 1790–1815, in a light to medium green with a 36-rib pattern twisted to the left, \$4,972; and a Dandelion Bitters Co. bottle, circa 1880–90, with 95 percent of its original label intact, perhaps the only known labeled example, \$8,190. More offerings will come from the Watson collection in later auctions.

John Keating and Iwona Smith traveled to the convention from Olympia, Wash., and have been longtime collectors. "It's fun, I love it," she said, noting her husband began collecting first and that she just "tags along." They both seemed to be enjoying the festivities equally.

Diane and Wes Seeman of Charlestown, R.I., have been part of the bottle world for more than 40 years and love coming to the conventions. "That's where the cream of the crop is going to show up," she said. They started out collecting rocks and soon got into bottles and today have an extensive bitters and back bar bottles collection.

Next year's convention will be August 2–5 in Cleveland.

For additional information, www.fohbc.org.



The auction was short and sweet, selling just over 100 lots in about 90 minutes, and gathered a good-sized crowd.



Review and Photos by
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Jim Hagenbuch (left) and Jesse Sailer show off the auction's top-selling lot, an eagle Masonic flask in a pale, almost clear olive amber color, Keene (N.H.) Glass Works, that sold for \$9,360 to a floor bidder.



Bidders check out the auction offerings before the sale got underway Saturday morning.



Buyers check out the offerings from the more than 100 dealers set up here.



Norman C. Heckler & Co, Woodstock Valley, Conn.



Bob Strickhart, who co-chaired the convention along with Jim Bender, holds up a Canadian bitters bottle from the booth of Dave Olson, Conway, S.C.



Jeff and Holly Noordsy, Cornwall, Vt.



Said to be a "never-failing remedy for all impurities of the blood," a bottle of Whitcomb's Bitters was on display at Andy Lange, Plymouth, Mass. The cost when it was manufactured? \$1 a bottle.



Showing off a George Washington flask for sale, Rick Ciralli, Bristol, Conn., specializes in antique and historical bottles.



J.R. Gibson, Monee, Ill., and Bill Vanderveen, Orland Park, Ill.



Bob and Cathy Barenski, Baltimore, Md.



Milk bottles often had themes. Promoting the war effort was this World War II-themed bottle in the shared booth of Jim Burns, Oneida, N.Y., and Mike Melanowski, Albion, N.Y.



Among the educational displays at the show, set apart from the selling floor, was the Rick Ciralli collection, Bristol, Conn., with a fine grouping of olive green flasks.