

High caliber bottle designed for Atlanta's Gate City Guard

by Bill Baab

A National Guard unit organized in Georgia four years before the Civil War may be the only one in the nation to boast of its own whiskey bottles.

Longtime collector Tom Lines discovered one of two known examples at the 2005 Knoxville show, while the other was collected by veteran collector Ken Nease as part of his quest to build a representative Georgia flask collection. Nease, from Claxton, Ga., obtained his example from a North Carolina collector, and later sold his flask collection to Ralph Van Brocklin, past president of the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors.

The dark amber half-pint flasks are embossed The Cartridge Box / Gate City / Guard / Atlanta, Ga., and originally were capped with a cork and jigger-type, metal screw-on top. Lines' flask measures 6 ³/₈ inches tall with the lip, 6 ¹/₄ inches without,

and the lip is ground. The bottom measures 1⁵/₁₆ by 2¹¹/₁₆ inches and the flask measures 3 inches wide at the shoulder.

It was first thought "The Cartridge Box" could have been an Atlanta saloon frequented by members of the 80-man guard, but city directories revealed no such place name.

This writer spent an hour or so Aug. 6th in the Atlanta History Center's library perusing a three-volume set of "Old Guard" history housed in one book. He learned that in the fall of 1880, a great fair was planned for the benefit of the Guard in Atlanta.

"The special object (of the fair) being to raise funds for the erection of an armory building in commemoration of the great pacificatory movement that had been inaugurated by the company" during 1879. "The fraternal tour of the Guard through the cities of the North and East had made the company known to the reading public of the United States. The propriety and dignity of their conduct as individuals had won general admiration, and their patriotic object had elicited universal approbation."

The history continued:

"One of the most impressive features of the project was the publishing of a paper by the Gate City Guard called 'The Cartridge Box.' The title-head (masthead) of the paper was composed of a cut showing a stack of muskets to which was suspended a cartridge box inscribed 'G.C.G.' A wreath encircled the box and beneath was the motto of the company, 'In bello pace que primus.' The national flag was displayed in the background and two soldiers – one in blue, and the other in gray – were clasping hands over the cartridge box."



First edition of the newspaper was published May 9, 1880. Editor was Lt. J.H. Lumpkin, later associate justice of the Supreme Court, and Thomas C. Erwin, later cashier of the Third National Bank, served as assistant editor.

The embossing on the bottle contains the wreath encircling what may be construed as stacked rifles and script-type letters G C G covering an even vaguer embossing.

Lines, who lives in Birmingham, Ala., said the metal top and bottle base are marked C. Newman's / Patent / Oct. 17, 1876. Also embossed on the bottle base is Baker Bros. & Co., a.k.a. Spring Garden Glass Works in Baltimore, Md., Lines said.



According to *American Glass* by George and Helen McKearin, the Spring Garden Glass Works was established in 1850 and was operating in 1880. After 1855, however, the company failed and the factory was bought by Baker Brothers & Company, owners of the Baltimore Glass Works. The company began making bottles and flasks and, according to the McKearins, was still operating in 1905.

Unfortunately, no mention of the flask is in the Gate City Guard history book, but since "The Cartridge Box" was in existence only during 1880, it can be surmised that an unknown number of the flasks were manufactured in time for the celebration.

The Gate City Guard was established on January 8, 1857 and named after Atlanta, then known by the nickname, "The Gate City." According to the Old Guard history covering 1858-1917 and chronicled by Henry Clay Freeman, the company never exceeded 80 privates "exclusive of commissioned and non-commissioned officers."

Guard uniforms were dark blue with dark epaulettes and trimmings edged in gold. Hats were of the French shako type, black with drooping white plumes. The service uniform was gray.

The company was on call from civil authorities at all times, once assisting the Fulton County sheriff in guarding a soon-to-be-hanged prisoner whose friends reportedly were going to attempt a rescue. The Guard also patrolled the streets around a neighborhood where buildings had been set ablaze, according to the history published as a 1964 reprint.

Some members of the company fought for the South during the Civil War, others according to their consciences did not. The company reorganized after the war.

Other decades of the Old Guard history were written by Cator Woodford (1917-33) and Frank W. Harrison, Frank A. Kopfe and James C. Wise (1933-63).

Readers knowing more details about the special flasks are urged to contact this author, who is the Southern Region editor for the federation. His e-mail and street addresses are listed in the regional reports.

Thanks to Tom Lines and Ken Nease for contributing to this article.