

Important American Historical Flask



Front and back of a GI-14 “Firecracker flask”, fairly available in the aquamarine color pictured, scarce in shades of green, and rare to very rare in sapphire blue and amber.

John Adams, Thomas Jefferson and Dr. Thomas Dyott

On July 4, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, before the sun set, two of America’s greatest patriots, our Founding Fathers, would pass away. Were the odds against this kind of event a million to one or more? Well, whatever the odds, on that one day in history, the youthful country celebrated its 50th anniversary, and lost both its second and third Presidents—John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, respectively. Before you read how the name Thomas Dyott fits in with the two Presidents, we should first review a little American history.

John Adams

John Adams, our nation's second President, was born on October 30, 1735 in what is now Quincy, Massachusetts. The Harvard educated Adams was chosen, in 1774, to be a delegate from Massachusetts to the First Continental Congress. When the second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia in 1775, Adams was there, adamantly arguing against all attempts to reconcile with Great Britain.

At the next session of Congress, in 1776, Adams seconded the motion to create a written declaration to proclaim our independence from Great Britain. Adams was appointed as a member of the committee to draw up such a declaration, and he vigorously used his political and personal skills to argue the adoption of the resultant document by Congress.

At War's end, Adams was appointed as the first ambassador to the Court of St. James, but his days in American politics was far from over. In 1788 he was recalled from Europe and elected Vice President of the United States under George Washington. Serving as Vice President again in 1792, he was elected President in 1796 on the Federalist ticket over Thomas Jefferson, the Republican. During Adam's rocky administration, Thomas Jefferson served as his Vice President. With the nation dissatisfied with Adam's leadership, it was Thomas Jefferson's turn to be elected President. After losing to Jefferson in 1800, Adams quietly retired from public office.

Thomas Jefferson

Thomas Jefferson, born in what is now Albemarle County, Virginia on April 13, 1743, attended the College of William and Mary, graduated in 1762, and became a lawyer in 1767. Elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses in 1769, Jefferson was heavily opposed to British involvement in Continental affairs. This sentiment won him a job as delegate to the Continental Congress in 1775 and 1776, during which he, at John Adam's urging, drafted the Declaration of Independence.

Following the American Revolutionary War, Jefferson served as minister to France, and then was appointed by George Washington as the first Secretary of State. Elected President of the United States in 1800 and 1804, Jefferson maintained friendly relations with foreign countries. In 1809, Jefferson retired from public office and devoted the rest of his life to literary and scientific pursuits, living at his beloved Monticello.

“Dr.” Thomas Dyott

Nearly as fascinating as the lives of John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, yet certainly not as far reaching, is Dr. Thomas W. Dyott. Dr. Dyott, born in England or Scotland in 1777, immigrated to Philadelphia in 1804 or 1805. He set up a patent medicine and boot blackening practice soon after his arrival in America. By 1809, he had American made bottles blown in his own mold, which was embossed, “*Dr. Robertson’s/Family Medicine/Prepared/only by T. W. Dyott*”. Soon, claiming to be the grandson of Dr. Robertson, of Edinburgh, Dyott assumed the somewhat honorary title of Doctor.

On September 3, 1811, Dr. Dyott moved to No. 137 2nd Street, and soon expanded to No. 139 as well. His location will forever be known by Dyott collectors as the North East Corner of 2nd and Race Streets. From this location, as his patent medicine business prospered, Dyott began distributing his concoctions across the fledgling United States through various distributorships that he established. By 1810, Dyott had 41 agents in 36 towns in 12 states, and by 1814, in New York State alone; he had agents in 14 towns. In order to keep pace with this expanding demand, Dyott gained an interest in the Olive Glass Works in Glassboro, New Jersey. In 1817, still associated with Olive Glass Works, Dyott also became an agent for Gloucester Glass Works in Clementon, New Jersey and the Union Works at Port Elizabeth, New Jersey. Finally, about 1821, Dyott became affiliated with the “new” Kensington Glass Works, which he called “Kensington Glass Factories”. This glass works produced many of the historical and pictorial flasks eagerly sought by collectors today.

A man of vision, and a firm believer in the benefits of advertising, Dyott chose to create whiskey flasks which were not only appealing in design, but also easily identifiable by the consuming public. Among these flasks was one which made its appearance in 1824, and is designated GI-16 in the McKearin and Wilson Book “*American Bottles and Flasks and Their Ancestry*”. GI-16 is a pint flask with a $\frac{3}{4}$ bust view of George Washington in uniform on the front. The words, “**General Washington**” are embossed in a semicircle above the portrait. The reverse of this flask contains a picture of the American eagle, head turned to the right. On its chest is a shield with seven bars. The wings are partly raised; in its right talon is a thunderbolt with five arrows, and an olive branch firmly grasped in its left. The eagle rests on an oval frame, in which are the initials “**TWD**” (for Thomas W. Dyott, of course). These flasks were blown in abundance, as can be seen by an ad in the “United States Gazette”, published in Philadelphia on March 14, 1825, in which Thomas W. Dyott states that he had 3,000 dozen of these flasks for sale.

The Event

From separate backgrounds, these two men, our Founding Fathers, rose to attain the highest office in the land. Then, fifty years after the new nation was forged, both men lie in the beds, gallantly struggling to survive. Each asked for updates on the other's condition, as the old political opponents tried to outlive the other. In a competition with no winner, they each passed away within a few hours of each other.

It seems odd to consider that this unfortunate event would be memorialized with a souvenir, but that is exactly what happened. And the marketing genius who capitalized on this event is none other than Thomas Dyott. When Dyott heard of the death of Adams and Jefferson, he quickly sent his mold for the GI-16 flask out to the mold maker, with orders for a light modification. The flasks which were produced from these altered molds have their own McKearin number, GI-14, and they have inherited a new name by the modern flask collector-**The Firecracker Flask**. The Firecracker Flask is identical to the GI-16 flask except for these modifications. Although the front of the flask was unchanged, the phrase "**E PLURIBUS UNUM**" was added in a semi-circle above the eagle's head on the reverse of the flask. In addition, around the edges of the flask, where before were vertical ribs, is now embossed two lines of text. One line reads "**ADAMS AND JEFFERSON JULY 4 A.D. 1776**", while the other says "**KENSINGTON GLASSWORKS PHILADELPHIA**".

Thus, with a few simple modifications, Dr. Dyott brought together the memory of George Washington, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and the symbol for the United States, all on one whiskey flask. The other thing he did, however, was to make sure no one forgot who made these flasks, by including not only the name of the Kensington Glass Works, but also retaining the TWD initials on the reverse. Not being satisfied with this, Dyott did another interesting thing to help spark sales – he began making the flasks in a rainbow of colors. The original, unaltered, GI-16 flask is found in either aquamarine or light aquamarine color. But once modified, Dyott had the Firecracker blown in deep sapphire blue, deep green, dark amber, golden yellow, clear emerald green, pale green and even red-amber, in addition to the more plentiful aquamarine. Although the colored glass was much more expensive to create than aquamarine glass, the colors certainly increased the desirability of these flasks, as can be attested to by today's demand.

In 2006, a green GI-14 Firecracker Flask was sold at auction for over \$12,000.00.

Summary:

There is no record of how many of these flasks were created, or for how many years Dyott continued to produce them. But it is fair to say that these flasks, although common by flask collecting standards, aren't encountered very often at places besides bottle and flask shows.

Although the unaltered Washington flask, GI-16 was only produced for about two years --from 1824 until 1826, its prices are not as high as the altered GI-14 flasks, because of the enhanced historical significance of the modified GI-14 flask.

So you can see that the creation and collection of souvenirs is not a modern manifestation. There are certainly stranger events which are remembered with souvenirs. But there aren't many more that are as highly historical, nor as greatly sought after, as the **"Firecracker Flask"**.

Great References:

"American Bottles and Flasks and Their Ancestry", 1978, McKearin, Helen and Wilson, Kenneth

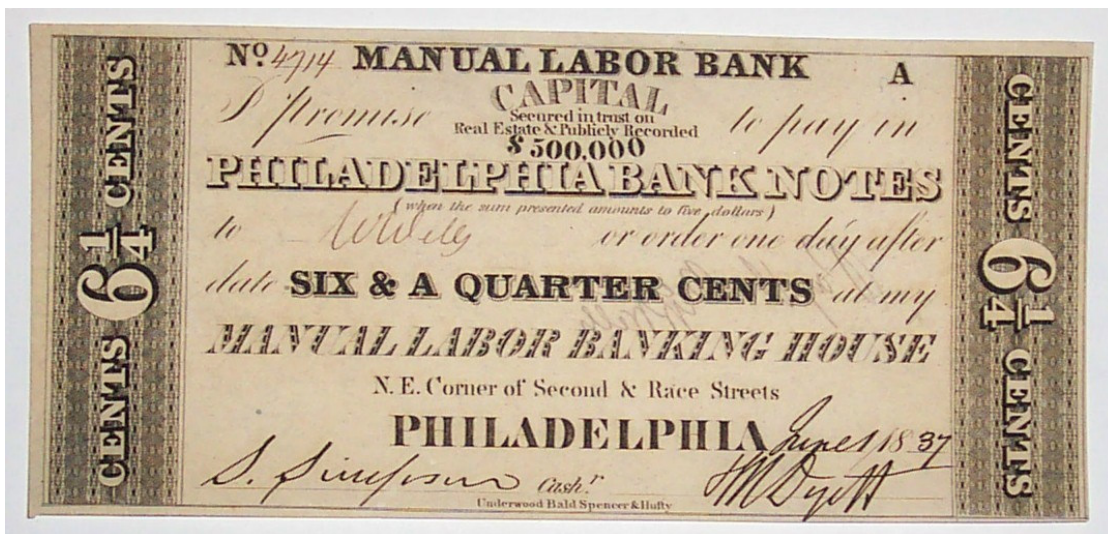
"Bottles, Flasks, and Dr. Dyott", 1970, McKearin, Helen

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**The Directors of the
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The Manual Labor Bank

Another interesting story concerning Thomas W. Dyott is that he established a bank in Philadelphia known as the Manual Labor Bank. His bank issued bills of many different denominations. The \$1.00, \$2.00, \$3.00, \$5.00, \$10.00, \$20.00, \$50.00 and \$100.00 notes all had the picture showing the interior of a glassworks. The \$3.00 note shown below was hand signed and dated and on the right side of the note is a picture of Thomas W. Dyott. Mr. Dyott also issued fractional notes and a 6¼¢ specimen also appears here. The Manual Labor Bank failed in 1839 and Dr. Dyott, who had extensively issued notes against his bank, which he did not redeem, was imprisoned for fraud, but afterward pardoned.



The GI-14 “Firecracker” in three rare colors.

