



It doesn't take pre-pro collectors very long before they start wondering from where their treasured glasses originated and who made them. Answering the first question is relatively easy given that brand and owner information is often included on the label. The second question proves to be much more of a challenge but, as discussed below, a sizable proportion of them apparently were designed and produced by George Truog, owner and founder of the Maryland Glass Etching Works of Cumberland, Maryland.

Shot-glass blanks were manufactured by many companies in pre-Prohibition times and they came in wide range of sizes and styles. It's almost impossible to determine who molded a particular glass and it's likely that brand information was applied to whatever the etcher had on hand at the time. The fact that many identically-branded glasses survive in several different size variants supports this idea. The labels are distinctive, however, and in many cases highly artistic, and that's made it possible to track the origins of many of the glasses back to Cumberland.

Cumberland and surrounding counties played home to many glass houses in the later part of the nineteenth century. In his early history of the area (*The Glass Industry of Allegany County, Maryland*),

James Bishop tells us that George Truog established the Maryland Glass Etching Works in 1893 and it quickly became renowned for producing etched glassware of supreme quality that equaled or bettered that being imported from Europe. The techniques available for decorating glass were at the time fairly limited but the Maryland Glass Etching Works distinguished itself by producing acid-etched designs that both had a high degree of artistry and would withstand fading through continued use. Popular Truog designs included storks, flowers, and cherubs, and one could purchase complete sets of drinkware, jugs, and dishes all embellished with his naturalistic designs. He also created a series of water glasses etched with patriotic or religious verses, such as the "America", "Home Sweet Home", and "Star Spangled Banner" glasses shown below. He also produced a very popular "Lord's Prayer" glass, examples of which can be found in virtually any antique store, usually for \$10 or less. [Figure 3]

Although details of Truog's operations are sketchy, the artist signed many of his early glasses and that makes it easy to attribute his handiwork. His signature is surprisingly difficult to locate even when one is familiar with his work, but patience and a practiced eye will often lead to the

discovery of a tiny "GT" hidden in one of the details at the right of the design. [Figure 2] It's the presence of a signature that first identified Truog as being involved in shot-glass production, although until recently his output was considered to be very limited.

Among the first Truog shots to be identified as such were a series of "Souvenir" glasses featuring a pair of clasped hands. A GT signature can usually be found on the cuff of the hand on the right, although not all glasses bear one. Truog produced at least two different designs in 1897, one for the Waynesboro, PA centennial and one for a German Baptist conference held in Frederick, MD. The obverse of such glasses features dosage measure lines and the "Victor Liver Syrup" brand name within a frosted crescent. [Figure 4]

The glasses were sponsored by Dr. P. D. Fahrney, an influential member of the German Baptist Church and also owner of The Victor Remedies Company of Frederick. Victor Remedies went on to back annual church gatherings in Roanoke, Va., in 1899 and Bristol, Tenn., in 1905 as evidenced by shots bearing similar clasped-hand inscriptions.

Truog apparently found many customers in his own back yard, including local store owners R. E. Johnson, John J.



Fig. 3

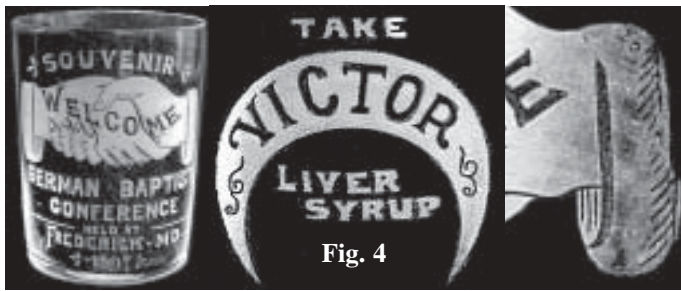


Fig. 4

Stump & Co., and also the Cumberland Brewing Co, but his work advertised patent medicines and businesses from Baltimore and New York in the east to Minneapolis and St. Louis in the Midwest. The “Dr. Petzhold bitters” and “Regulator” and glasses are classic examples and both bear the tell-tale GT signature at lower right. [Figure 5]



Fig. 5

Truog was Italian-born, but was forced his family to flee to Switzerland while he was still very young. He was educated in the arts and completed studies at the University of Zurich before emigrating to the US in 1883. He was by now an accomplished artist and secured a position designing etched glass patterns for the Central Glass Works of Wheeling, WV. He later helped found the Seneca Glass Company of Morgantown, WV but it was destroyed in a blaze in 1893 and he moved to Cumberland to establish his etching company.

Not only was Truog a talented artist, he also had a quirky sense of humor that is evident in a series of novelty glasses. These include two “Don’t Drown” glasses which implore the imbiber to keep the contents at a level below that which might imperil an etched hog or a fly. In the same series is an “Eye Opener” that features a cowled monk (photo: Bill Naglik). [Figure 6]



Fig. 6

Several variations on the hog theme survive. In one, the hog is handsomely portly whereas in another the animal seems grossly inflated to the point where it might rupture! Neither of the latter two glasses are signed, but Truog’s hand in the floral design is so evident that they are almost certainly his. [Figure 7]

Playing counterpoint to the “Eye Openers” are at least two “Nightcaps”. One predictably features a woolly cap embraced by a wreath of flowers, but the cap in the second glass is worn



Fig. 7

by a clock face whose hands tell us that the hour is late and this had better be the last tittle!

My personal favorite Truog glasses include the whimsical “Going Back on a Friend”, a glass that has sparked considerable debate as to its meaning. Then there is “It’s a Long Time Between”, featuring a character whose lugubrious face leaves little doubt that the word left hanging is “drinks”. Then there is a deliciously lecherous gent in the “Just a Smile” glass. One can only imagine the consequences of filling this particular glass! Finally, there’s the wonderful “I Do / I Don’t” glass, featuring two panels within which we see a child performing (or not) on a pot. [Figure 8]



Fig. 8

One really has to wonder who would have purchased these glasses and why, but clearly they were popular at the time because so many have survived the 100 plus years since their manufacture, most of them in pristine condition. Auction prices on these glasses has risen spectacularly in the past two years as awareness of them grows, from a mere \$20 each to over \$150. If only the stock market performed so well!

Although the Truog novelty glasses have irresistible charm, they probably represented a sideline for the company, with the bulk of his work involving manufacture of branded beer and whiskey glasses. Very few of these were signed so attribution has been difficult, but first inklings that this might be the case came with the publication of Barbara Edmonson’s book, *Old Advertising Spirits Glasses*. In the Introductory material, she drew attention to original designs that appear in a scrapbook that was compiled by Truog and that now resides in the library of Allegheny College, Cumberland. They include sketches of the monk “Eye Opener” and “Don’t Drown the Fly” glasses mentioned above, but they also



Fig. 9





Fig. 10

include designs for several branded whiskey glasses. [Figure 9 - 10]

All but one of the examples shown here are known to have been made into production because the corresponding glasses are in Paul Van Vactor's collection (featured in *Random Shots*, 2003). While the "Jed Clayton" is a classic Truog design that he was obviously proud of since it featured in company advertising, the other two are not. The scrapbook also shows many exquisitely detailed beer glasses that would be equally hard to identify as being Truog designs, which leaves one wondering exactly how many of the thousands of shots that are known to exist came off the Maryland Glass Etching Works production line.

Respect for Truog's talents and productivity has risen several notches with the recent publication of *George Truog and His Art* by Dale Murschell. The author is a respected expert and booster of Cumberland glass and has done much to raise awareness of the area's proud production history. [Figure 11]

The book reproduces pages from the same scrapbook shown in *Old Advertising Spirits Glasses*, but it additionally features a second scrapbook of designs owned by Truog collector Naomi Himmelwright. The designs were sketched on tissue paper for later transfer to metal production plates. Two plates survive in Allegany

County Museum and are reproduced in Dale Murschell's book: most significantly, one of these includes the design for the popular "Lord's Prayer" tumbler. But the tissue designs are a remarkable find for shot-collectors because they indicate the true scope of Truog's work. Unfortunately the original sketches are now discolored with age and hence copy quality leaves much to be desired, but this detracts little from the impact of the scrapbook or Dale's efforts to ensure that Truog receives the recognition that he deserves. I'm very grateful to Dale for making the copies available and granting permission for them to be reproduced here.

Many glasses previously considered mundane now have to be evaluated in a new light. Take the "Fairland Rye" for example. This is a glass from my own collection that I thought little of until I was astounded to discover it was a Truog design dated 9/12/09. Perhaps less surprising was the realization that Truog was also responsible for the trademark Altschul "barrel on A" design (but note the spelling of "School"! ). While Altschul glasses echo a familiar pre-pro theme replete with grain stalks, they've always commanded premium prices that reflects a certain panache than we now know to be Truog.

There are many other familiar labels scattered throughout the scrapbook

collage, a rare treat for the dyed-in-the-wool glass collector. It's also a delight to note that there, buried amidst a jumble of flowers and mercantile slogans on p. 139, is the design for the 1905 German Baptist Conference glass, held in Bristol TN. [Figure 12]



Fig. 12

It's not so much that we needed confirmation of Truog's hand in the design, but rather it provides a reassuring anchor for an impressive body of work that must have found its way onto a table or bar in virtually every home and watering hole across the United States. Truog ultimately died penniless after having squandered a fortune on a lavish lifestyle. Like all great artists, however, his legacy continues to grow unabated: certainly, those of us who find the appeal of pre-pro glass to be irresistible will continue to seek him out and pay a premium for his talents.

For more information on George Truog or any of the books mentioned in this article, please contact Robin Preston at 245 N 15<sup>th</sup> Street, MS #488, Philadelphia, PA 19102, E-mail robin-preston@drexel.edu. Robin is an enthusiastic collector of pre-prohibition shot glasses and maintains the collector's website [www.pre-pro.com](http://www.pre-pro.com).



Fig. 11

