



Collecting Essentials

The Bottle Hunt

By Ferdinand Meyer V

I envy the bottle digger and the great stories I read and hear. In another life, if I had more time and knowledge, I suppose I might be a digger and treasure hunter. This takes time and at this point in my life, my business, family and roots in Houston do not afford me this exciting opportunity. My wife and I are certified Rescue Divers, so maybe one of these days, when time permits, we will try to find some bottles in this fashion.

With this deficiency, I have developed the skill and dedication to “find” my bottles and their stories in other ways, which I wanted to share in this article. Using my position and resources, I have put together a few Collecting Essentials that allow me to immerse myself into this great hobby with a 360-degree perspective. Of course, those of you who know me may consider me somewhat new to the hobby (started in 2002), but with passion and dedication, relying on my knowledge as a stamp, toy and antique collector, I have been able to at least keep up with the old-time greats and traditions in the hobby. I am continually broadening my horizons and welcome any other ideas and options to pursue early-American bottles.

The Bottle Show

There may be some truth to what I have heard as far as “the shows are not what they used to be,” but with nothing to compare to historically, I have found four annual ‘must attend’ shows. This includes:

Baltimore Antique Bottle Show and Sale (06 March 2011) www.baltimorebottleclub.org. This is a monster and granddaddy of all bottle shows. Of course, I am biased being from Baltimore and having family history with the club and show, but this is the show of all shows in my book. Try to go. Best yet, get registered as a table helper and get in on the Saturday dealer set-up the evening before the Sunday show. A lot of glass changes hands during this weekend. Lots of opportunities and most of the big east, south and midwest dealers are set up. We also manage to enjoy some Maryland Crab Cakes with bottle friends after set-up Saturday night.

FOHBC National Show (25-26 June 2011) www.fohbc.com. This annual show rotates between regions of bottle collecting and is in Memphis, Tennessee this year. This multiday event has lots of action including the banquet, auction, FOHBC board and member meetings, Seminars and of course lots of great glass and displays. A must in my book. A great place to meet people and talk bottles and glass.

Heckler | Keene Event (8-9 October 2011) www.hecklerauction.com. I can not say enough about how great this weekend is each year. At the peak of fall foliage season, what a great way to have fun with bottle friends at Heckler’s field event in Woodstock, Connecticut. Follow-up with Yankee Bottle Club’s Keene, New Hampshire Bottle Show on Sunday and it’s a double-header of New England glass and antique hunting. All on Columbus Day weekend.

Auburn 49er Bottle Show (December). My newest annual addition is this fantastic show in a historic town northeast of Sacramento. This past year we started at American Bottle Auctions shop in Sacramento and had dinner with the owner, Jeff Wichmann, and headed to the show on Saturday and Sunday. The western glass is abundant here. A group of us even attended the Old Town Auburn Festival of Lights Parade on Saturday night. The floats, vehicles, people, dogs and even goats are decorated with festive, colorful lights!

Of course there are more shows. I hope to one day visit most and usually add a fifth “rotating” show to round out my appetite each year. This past year it was Downieville, California. Wow! What a surprise. This was fun. Centered around an old mining town in the middle of the Tahoe National Forest, this even starts with a great social event at Rick Simi’s historic house which includes a wonderful dinner prepared by the hosts and club members and a wine tasting event held by a local merchant. Rick’s house was Sierra County’s first micro-brewery back in 1854! There is even an old mining shaft behind the house filled with artifacts and bottles. An old-time saloon rounds out the property. So pick out a show and make it an experience.

PHOTOS (from top):

The Baltimore Show. The granddaddy of shows.

Rubbing shoulders with bottle greats such as Bill Mitchell, Bob Ferraro and John Feldmann at the FOHBC Pomona, California National Show in 2009.

The must-attend Heckler-Keene weekend held annually on Columbus Day Weekend in October.

Experiencing the local charm at collector Rick Simi’s historic house in Downieville, California.





Visiting the great, museum quality, Swartz collection in Redding, California. You could spend days here and still not see everything in Ken's collection.

Visit the Collections

One of the first things I did when I joined this hobby and was consumed by the need to know more was to get to know the great collectors and get a chance to visit with them to hear their stories of how their collection was assembled.

I was intimidated at first, but surprised with how gracious the legends of the hobby are. Many open their homes to collectors and will spend a great deal of time talking about their collections. This is where you learn, get inspired and can formulate your own collecting goals.

My wife Elizabeth (usually with me) and I have visited the Albers, Burkhardt, Dywer, Feldmann, Ferraro, Franks, Ham, Henness, Swartz, and Tucker collections, to name a few. Take a camera, spend some time, ask questions and prepare yourself for an experience and memorable event. Many of the collectors annually have invites to their house. I usually plan trips to see collections built around show dates to make a complete, fulfilling weekend.

After the FOHBC Pomona National Show in 2009, I traveled with Bill Ham and Elizabeth to see the Swartz collection. I had always heard about this "museum-like" collection and had seen a few pictures. This was something else. It didn't take Ken long to warm to our visit and start expanding on his many collecting interests. Besides the most extensive Western Bottle Collection in existence, there are stamps, shot glasses, horse buttons, toys, advertising and much, much more. We were amazed. Well worth the trip. You can really learn a lot about a person by visiting with them and talking about their interests. I usually have as much fun with all of these "fringe benefits" as I do at the show itself.

Embrace technology

Collecting and how we collect is rapidly changing. I amusingly watch some collectors, in which I really admire, get befuddled by e-mails, computers, pdfs, jpegs, etc. Why change, they ask. I say we were riding horses a hundred years ago. Technology is changing monthly. Much of this is affordable and very user friendly.

Consider that many, if not most, club newsletters are sent out electronically and the bottle auction houses are putting their entire auctions online. You can now bid on eBay or an auction item from your handheld device. I can not tell you how many times I missed out on an auction item because I was stuck in a meeting or on a plane. Not any more.

Even most magazines and periodicals are now available electronically. There are also great web sites, bottle blog sites and resource material available at you fingertips with all of these new smart devices. We need to save the trees. Something printed is dated as soon as it is off the press. Stay current. I am now in the process of adding my entire collection to my laptop, iPad, and iPhone. This is close to 2,000 bottles with multiple pictures and related information. No more index cards. No more carrying three 5-inch binders to shows. Now this information is with me 24/7.

Participation

As our great hobby is transitioning, I am sometimes disappointed to see things diminishing or staying the same. We need to move and leap forward to better our hobby. We need more of the great East Coast collectors to venture West and the knowledgeable West Coast collectors to come East. We are a union of glass collectors and hunters with the common passion for the beauty of glass. Join your local bottle club and the FOHBC if you haven't already. Become a dealer or helper, set up a display, or conduct a "Bottle Showdown," as often occurs at Western shows. Get creative. We need ideas. Make long weekends built around the shows and introduce new people, particularly the young, to the hobby.



PHOTOS (from top):

A run of the "panel judged" Dr. Henley's Wild Grape Root IXL Bitters at the IXL 'Showdown'. This fun event occurred at the Auburn 49er Historical Bottle Show this past December. A great way to see lots of colors, variants and crudity at one location. There are rumors that next year's showdown will be Phoenix western fifths and flasks.

Example of a recently "found" rare color of a Catawba Wine Bitters in teal green. Heckler Auction 49. Really surprised to see this beauty during the auction preview at the Heckler hay field event this past October.

With quick access, you can now get bottle and glass information anywhere you go and while you are on the go.

