

Rare Hutchinsons enthuse Georgia collector

by Bill Baab

Tommy Mitchiner doesn't do things halfway.

When he started digging antique bottles in Savannah some 40 years ago, his personal goal was to build the finest collection of John Ryan sodas ever seen. Ryan established his Excelsior Bottling Works in the port city in 1852. During the 20-odd years he was in business, his soda waters and ginger ales were packaged in a vast array of colorful bottles.

Counting the colors and bottle heights, Mitchiner has collected 130 different Ryans.

Mission accomplished!

Today, the Gordon, Georgia man is striving to build the best-ever collection of Georgia Hutchinson bottles, and he's well on his way since starting on that path in 1995.

Hutchinson bottles both pre-dated and post-dated the crown top, and were utilized by many small town bottlers who had jumped onto the soda bandwagon led by the Coca-Cola Company. As short a time as 20 years ago, Hutchinsons were mostly ignored by collectors, who viewed the bottles as "poor relations" to blobtop sodas and many times were left in the dumps.

That philosophy no longer exists, as Mitchiner can attest.

"I decided to collect Georgia Hutchinsons because you rarely see them advertised for sale, and you rarely see them at bottle shows," Mitchiner said. "I've acquired most of mine through deals with other collectors.

"Bob Jenkins of Carrollton, Ga., has a super collection, but I have 15 town bottles that he's never heard of. The bottles hail from Blue Ridge, Helena, Warrenton, Arlington, Donalsonville, Forsyth, Barnesville, Claxton, Cochran, Wadley, Thomson, Tallapoosa, Nichols, Cuthbert and Dawson.

"My favorites have to be from little towns. I dug an H. D. Smith Hutch from Tennille and then I bought a Sandersville & Tennille Bottle Works Hutch from Ken Nease, a collector-dealer from Claxton, Ga.

"After I got that one, I said to myself that I think I'll try to get more."

It's a tossup as to which bottle is his favorite between the E.P.C. Fowler Hutch

of Tallapoosa manufactured by the Dixie Glass Works there (Fowler was a glass works officer), the Forsyth Bottling Works and Mines Bottling Works of Barnesville.

The closure on the Claxton Bottling Works bottle, so far a one-of-a-kind which Nease covets, looks more like a John Matthews gravitating stopper bottle, but as far as Mitchiner is concerned, "I still call it a Hutch!"

Mitchiner has documented his 191-Georgia Hutchinson collection through the use of soft pencil rubbings of each variety's embossings. He includes other information and has it all mounted in a handy holder.



Here's a rare Cochran Bottling Works, a Hutchinson that's one-of-a-kind so far.

Most of his bottles are aqua in color, but his Hart & Moore / Wadley, Ga. Hutch is lime-green, while a pair of E.H. Stuart & Co., Hutches from Macon sparkle in lime-green and blue-green.

He just acquired a Kelley & Alley Hutch from Macon and "it's so rare, I don't have the courage to clean it," Mitchiner said.

He also likes his "error" bottles, such as the "Brainbridge" (instead of Bainbridge) Hutchinson and the O.F. Copeland / "Gainsville" (Gainesville).

The collector is looking for a Benton & Stone Hutch from Dublin and wants it badly enough that he is offering \$500 for it. Others of his heart's desire include Cartersville Bottling Works; J.P. Williams & Bro., of Buford; S. Pagetty of Columbus; Pagetty & Willett of Columbus; Henry Grader Bottler, of Columbus; A.H. O'Neal Bottler of Wsinder, Athens Bottling Works, Covington Bottling Works, Persse & Linder of Savannah; A.J. Allee of Rome, and Dixie Carbonating Co., of Augusta.

Hutchinson bottles came into existence in 1879 when Charles G. Hutchinson of Chicago patented a spring stopper, which eventually replaced the cork and wire closure in use for most of the 19th century. His stopper consists of a loop of stiff wire with a circular metal flange on one end. The flange is rimmed by a rubber gasket that sits inside the bottle just below the neck.

When the bottle was filled, the loop was pulled up, forcing the flange into the neck, sealing the contents. The pressure of the carbonated soda water or beer kept the rubber-sealed flange tight against the neck. To open the bottle, the loop was pushed down, breaking the seal.

The system's usage spanned the years from the mid-1880s through 1920 when the U.S. government banned their use because the bottles were difficult to sterilize.

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< Tommy Mitchiner with a part of his fabulous collection. Some of his John Ryan sodas occupy other shelves.

Most of Mitchiner's ever-growing Georgia Hutchinson collection. >



< Color It Hutchinson: from left, lime-green Hart & Moore, Wadley; light-citron Macon Bottling Works, E.J. Burke; green E.H. Stuart & Co., Macon, and a blue-green Stuart.