

The Best Bottle Collection in the WEST!!!

by Charles E. Blake

Every once in awhile, an extraordinary individual emerges from the general population and sets the standard for all others in the arena. One remarkable individual that I have had the pleasure to know is Bryan Grapentine.

Bryan exemplifies the epitome of what all collectors should strive for: obtainment of the most desirable pieces for ones collection while displaying a higher standard of behavior in the bottle collecting community.

I chose to write this article about Bryan to shine some light on this person and his bottle collecting prowess, amassing what I am certain is *The Best Bottle Collection in the WEST!!!*

Bryan first developed his interest in bottle collecting while working at Honeywell. There, Bryan was involved with the organization's Rockhound Club, The Pebble Pickin' Posse, and during one of their meetings was entertained with a program on relic hunting and collecting. The speaker for the program presented a Prescott, A. T. Hutchison soda bottle, which lit Bryan's bottle collecting fever.

Bryan's initial bottle collection sounds very familiar, consisting of examples from every category. His collecting interests evolved, specializing in soda bottles and all types of Arizona bottles.

Later, Bryan's collection again

broadened but focused on glue, magic, Palmer perfume, Royal Ruby Red, Florida Water, Coca-Cola, and Canadian bottles, always adding advertising/'go-withs' of all types. More recently, Bryan has mainly added ink, bitters, and scent bottles to his collection, as well as Sandwich glass.

When asked about the size of his collection, Bryan, at last count, had acquired 2,503 exceptional bottles but quickly added, "I put quality and interest above mere numbers."

Bryan has been a member of the Phoenix Antiques, Bottles, and Collectibles Club for over 20 years. The club in the early years was named Pick & Shovel Bottle Club because many of the club members were active bottle diggers, something Bryan continues to try to do. Bryan has functioned in every aspect of the club's operations, performing every elected official duty, except Treasurer, holding appointed positions, and acting as a member of the club's board of directors for many years.

Bryan also was the Chairman of the first bottle show, held at the Arizona Fairgrounds. Bryan recalled, "We rented one half of the Youth Building for that show," emphasizing the small size of the early bottle collecting community in Arizona. This makes Bryan one of the important founders for organized bottle



Two of Bryan's favorite bottles.

collecting in Arizona.

Bryan is still active in the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors (FOHBC) and has held several positions within this organization in the past. He also has written approximately 22 articles for the FOHBC magazine, winning a Writer's Award twice.

Bryan derives much pleasure from the hobby and likes to contribute to the FOHBC and his local club.

There is never a dull moment when speaking to Bryan about his collection. I asked Bryan about his favorite bottles in the collection and he came up with seven:

"(1) JULES BOURBON JULIUS GOLDBAUM TUCSON, A. T., back bar bottle. This is a beautiful amber bottle with white enameled lettering including six stars and gold gilding.

"(2) HARRISON'S COLUMBIAN INK, my first very expensive bottle. This is the gallon size which has a nice pontil mark and is cobalt blue; a very attractive bottle.

"(3) BRYANT'S STOMACH BITTERS, a rare western bitters, cone shaped, with 8 panels, and 14 ¼-inches tall.

"(4) KELLY'S OLD CABIN



A view of the fifty-state collection of Hutchison soda bottles.



Above and below: Sodas.



Left: J. Boardman soda in pink. Right: Another display case of bottles.



Another wall of bottles.



Small scent bottles.



Bryan and Pearl Grapentine.



Above left: Display case of bitters bottles.
 Above right: A variety of colors to wow the observer.
 Below right: A display of grenades along with some 'go-withs.'

BITTERS, recently purchased from American Bottle Auction. The bottle is one of the classic bitters in a very unusual light teal green color, gorgeous!

“(5) R. L. HIGGINS VIRGINIA CITY. I have one of the two known complete sets of the three ink bottles, a small aqua cone, amber master, and a aqua master ink. The master inks are rather small in size.

“(6) Cobalt skull POISON. These figural skull poisons come in three sizes and I have managed to acquire them all, difficult bottles to find in undamaged condition.

“(7) OLD DR. TOWNSEND’S CELEBRATED STOMACH BITTERS, an amber, pontilled bottle. This is unusual flask shape with an applied handle. Few bitters bottles have a handle.”

I then asked Bryan, which five bottles he most desired for his collection. He replied:

“(1) CASSIN’S BITTERS, with the recessed or indented panels;

“(2) DR. WONSER’S BITTERS, in green color;

“(3) An embossed fruit jar in cobalt or sapphire blue;

“(4) STEINFELD’S FRENCH COGNAC BITTERS FIRST PRIZE PARIS EXHIBITION 1867; and

“(5) HARRISON-TIPPECANOE early pontilled ink in any color.”



Another display, this one is toiletries.



Assorted colors, shapes and sizes of bottles cover the east wall.

Bryan related that bottle collecting has been more than just a hobby; it has been a way of life. Bottle collecting has made his life more interesting and often more exciting. He stated, “Some people get their excitement from gambling, I get it from acquiring another bottle for the collection.”

Bryan related several more interesting and important landmarks in his bottle collecting history such as recalling the many digging/camping trips with the club; purchasing a 32-ounce EAGLE DRUG CO. PHOENIX, ARIZ., after many years of negotiating; finding six mint historical flasks at a yard sale for little money and selling two for \$25,000; his first antique bottle show in Las Vegas, he was amazed at the number of bottles for sale; finding a scarce ARIZONA SODA WORKS PRESCOTT ARIZ. hutch in a small antique shop; completing his 50-state hutchison soda bottle collection; completing his eleven territory hutchison soda bottle collection with the acquisition of Idaho (I.T.); buying several collections which had many intriguing bottles; attending his first really big quality show, The EXPO, in Montgomery, Ala. in 1984; buying many

great bottles from a collection dug in Colorado; and the list goes on and on.

Bryan always is willing to give others advice on their bottles and collections.

Bryan's advice to the beginning collector, "Start out as a general collector and later specialize on one or two categories. Buy items in good condition and from an investment standpoint, it is important to understand that one \$100 bottle is better than ten \$10 bottles. Buy all the good bottle books you can find, not price guides, and subscribe to the FOHBC's *Bottles and Extras* magazine to enhance, keep up to date on the hobby and general bottle collecting information you have obtained."

Bryan's principles and classy attitude are what helped form my bottle collecting hobby and hopefully yours too. Bryan truly is a special person with an unbelievable collection. See the pictures included with this article and you be the judge of what I know is *The Best Bottle Collection in the WEST!!!*



Rotating display of ink bottles.



Canadian bottle display.

The Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors Membership Benefits

Individual Membership

Open to any individual that has an interest in bottles, flasks, jars or related items, some of the benefits of membership are:

- A full year subscription to our quarterly 84-page publication *Bottles and Extras*, which contains specialty articles, regular columns, classified advertising, show reports, reports pertaining to our clubs and a listing of bottle shows nationwide.
- Quarterly newsletters detailing news of the Federation and the hobby.
- Free advertising of "For Sale" items in *Bottles and Extras* (a trial period of 1 year duration, beginning with the Summer (July) 2003 issue. Restrictions apply - ads may be up to 100 words, items must be of \$25.00 or greater value, and free advertisements are limited to the first 100 received, based upon date mailed.)
- One free ad of 60 words each year for use for items "Wanted", trade offers, etc.
- Advice on publishing your book / manuscript, and a forum for your articles.
- The opportunity to obtain "Early Admission" to the annual Federation shows.
- Access to the informational FOHBC Slide Show Presentations.
- Individuals holding full membership may additionally request Associate membership for their spouses and children up to age 18. The costs for this is \$5 per individual.

Affiliated Club Membership

Available to any club, association or organization which has ten or more members and has an interest in bottles, flasks, jars, or related items, some of the benefits of affiliated membership are:

- A full-year subscription to the quarterly magazines and newsletters, plus...
- A 50% reduction in the cost of display advertising in the magazine and the newsletter.
 - In addition to this, there is a free ¼-page advertisement in the newsletter and free posting of the ad on the Federation website, www.fohbc.com, as a part of the advertising package when you advertise your show in the magazine.
- One complimentary individual membership per year is provided to Affiliated Clubs for their use as an honorarium, raffle item, door prize, etc.
- The Federation will post links from our website into your clubs website free of charge and will assist with creation of a web page for you, as our webmaster's time allows. You supply the photos and general text and we will do our best to get you up and running!
- A show ribbon for Most Educational Display at your show.
- Access to the informational FOHBC Slide Show Presentations.
- Each year, the Federation elects members to the Honor Roll and Hall of Fame to recognize their individual contribution to the hobby of bottle collecting. Our clubs are encouraged to sponsor individuals for these honors.