



BOOK REVIEW

Local collector taps Internet to write price guides

Minnesota collector and author Ron Feldhaus wrote "Candy & Display Jar Price & Identification Guide" by himself.

Dozens of jars are illustrated and identified. His daughter, Britt Albrecht, worked with Feldhaus on the illustrated "Fire Grenade Price Guide, 2002 Edition."

Both books are available from the author.



These days, Ron Feldhaus doesn't consider himself the serious bottle collector he once was. Thirty years ago, Feldhaus was known to dig half the night away during the coldest of winters, six feet down in an old dump in search of early bottles and jugs.

While the bottles don't generally keep his full attention these days, Feldhaus is most certainly a collector. He loves early photos and stereo views. Real photo postcards and fine old advertising cards also grab his attention. Items from South Dakota, and especially Dakota Territory items, stir this collector's heart most deeply. Whether it is a nice old etched glass or a beer tray from Sioux Falls Brewing and Malting or a liquor jug from a small town Dakota Territory saloon, Feldhaus is interested.

The South Dakota native got into e-bay a couple of years back, and he enjoys going out on the hunt to find items he can sell on line. He brings an engineering background to his computer-related activities, and he is often the guy his friends and family call with their computer conundrums. This part-time e-bay vendor has also helped more than a few of his friends and family get started selling on e-bay.

Back in the 1980s, Feldhaus took charge of a project which Minnesota's two antique bottle clubs were attempting. The idea was to gather up all of the Minnesota antique bottle, advertising, breweriana, and stoneware research which had been carried out by numerous bottle club members. Once the material was gathered, the clubs hoped to publish a book. Feldhaus helped get the book

organized and visited dozens of collectors to take photos and make rubbings of their collections. He then found club members willing to work on making rubbings and drawings of embossed Minnesota bottles. Others volunteered to do paste up, typing, and copy editing. The project grew into two volumes, published in 1985 and 1986. The books remain the standard reference books for Minnesota bottles, and Feldhaus is named on the front covers as editor and co-author.

Although antique bottles are not the focus of his collecting these days, Feldhaus does still follow the hobby. Two types of old containers which interest him are store display jars and fire grenades. In keeping tabs on collecting activity related to these two specialty areas, Feldhaus realized that no price guides were available for either bottle type. So, though such old bottles occupied little or no space in his own collection, Feldhaus decided it would be fun and interesting to write store jar and fire grenade price guides.

I asked Feldhaus why he decided to publish guides in areas which he did not collect? "I saw it as a way to learn," Feldhaus told me, "not only about the topics, but also about computer software and the processes of researching and publishing."

The first thing Feldhaus learned was that book publishing has changed dramatically since the two bottle books were published nearly twenty years ago. "Those books were labor intensive. Each page was pasted up by hand and that ate a lot of time. Using today's software for the first time, I was able to assemble the

first page of my store jar book in about 20 minutes." Lest he make it sound too easy, Feldhaus hastened to add that he had spent 500-600 hours on the project before the book was completed.

With two self-published price guides to his credit, Feldhaus has advice to share with aspiring authors and publishers. "First, decide if you want to be an author, publisher, or both. Publishers like Collector Books will publish for you if you put a good book together. I prefer to do it all myself."

Feldhaus also advises that the Internet has changed the rules for researching a book topic. It's easier now, and he suggests that writers take advantage of the readily available materials. "The inter-library loan system, through which one can even access materials from the Smithsonian and Harvard, is as close as your local library. You can even order the books on line."

Feldhaus continued, "United States Patent Office records are all available on line as well. And photo collections. The Heinz Company has a huge collection of historical photos relating to its history, and many will soon be available on line." A photo of an early Heinz display featuring dozens of old store jars is found on page two of Feldhaus's "Candy & Display Jar Price Guide & Identification Guide."

The internet also allowed Feldhaus to access other collectors. By monitoring e-bay, the author was able to contact active buyers and sellers, most of whom were willing to share information with him.

A good part of the research for the fire grenade price guide was gathered by

Feldhaus's daughter, Britt Albrecht. Internet auctions and hard-copy auction catalogs were used to assemble prices going back several years. Feldhaus researched the jar book by himself using the same auction price sources. Nearly two years of auction prices, dating from January of 2002, are included in the store jar book, as well as jar design patent dates, jar illustrations taken from early glass house catalogs, and manufacturer information. Anticipating the possible publication of an updated version of his price guides, Feldhaus continues to monitor on-line auction prices.

In discussing the tools and equipment necessary to publish a price guide, Feldhaus first mentioned Internet access. Next on his list was a digital camera and photo-processing software. Once the material is gathered and saved, publishing software is needed. Feldhaus found the Quark software to be user friendly and pointed out that many books are available to help beginners navigate publishing software.

Once a book is assembled, Feldhaus said finding a printer was as easy as making a few calls. Many printers were willing to work with him to print 300 copies of each book. For the jar book, he found a smaller printing firm that was able to print the book and deliver it perfect bound for less money than he had paid a big franchise copy center to print the fire grenade book in spiral-bound form.

Pricing the book is all about the profit motive. Feldhaus says it's a good thing he isn't in it for the money. He sells the books on e-bay, wholesales them to book dealers, and personally sells the books at bottle shows.

Feldhaus advises writers to include author-contact information in their books. In doing his research, Feldhaus too often found he was unable to contact an author when he had a question .

Want to get in touch with Ron Feldhaus? Contact him at vrfeldhaus@aol.com or call him at (952) 835-3504. He will happily sell you copies of his price guides, and he is more than willing to share his book-publishing expertise with aspiring writers.

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