

# Our hobby has lost a giant:

DENVER, Colo. — John Mathus Eatwell couldn't pass up a liquor bottle – not because he drank, but because he collected whiskey bottles.

And for Eatwell, who died at his Morrison (Colorado) home Nov. 29, 2005 at age 73, they had to be Pike's Peak whiskey flasks, which date to the mid-1800s.

Eatwell, an architect who designed many buildings in Denver, searched high and low for the bottles – sometimes in Denver where outhouses used to be, and sometimes at 10,000-foot-elevation Leadville, said his son, Tom Eatwell of Fruita, Colo. People threw trash including bottles into outhouse holes, his son said.

He married Karen Schepler on Dec. 15, 1956, with his death falling just short of their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. They were the parents of four children – two girls, two boys.

Eatwell and his wife came across plenty of other things in those digs, from perfume bottles to bottles of medicine sold in Leadville drug stores. The medicines or elixirs were always supposed to cure something, said Karen Eatwell, "but the contents of most were about 90 percent alcohol."

The Eatwells' mode of transportation to Leadville was a two-seat Austin Healey which John always drove with the top down, no matter what the weather. The real reason the top was always down was because the diggers' shovels wouldn't fit in if the top was up, according to Jeff Johnson, a longtime friend. Karen said she sometimes wouldn't go if the weather was nasty, but neither rain nor snow stopped her husband.

"John, Chuck Woehl, Mike Sabatos, Glen Preble and myself met for lunch once a month at the same restaurant and ordered the same pizza for many years," Johnson said. "We all looked forward to this event, mainly to listen to John's stories and busy life.

"Since John was an architect, he would share stories about his many projects. He loved to tell us about his many problems with building departments and how picky they were with his design details. John was a great architect and never had to market for work. He had a great reputation which led to much repeat business. I work for an engineering firm and worked with John on many projects. He never changed to computer drafting and still did all his drawings by hand. That was remarkable.

"All of our group were (and are) bottle collectors and, of course, our lunch conversations were mostly about bottles. John's Pike's Peak flask and Colorado whiskey collections were outstanding and he had so much enthusiasm when he added a bottle to his collections.

"We always enjoyed hearing about John's other activities. He kept us informed about how his children were doing in their midget car racing. He was sure proud of how well they competed." Eatwell served as president of the Rocky Mountain Quarter Midget Association and Rocky Mountain Midget Racing Association during the 1970s and '80s.

Johnson said Eatwell dug the Leadville dump during the 1960s, '70s and '80s.

"He told us how he would leave early Sunday morning in the winter for Leadville, load up his shovels in his vintage bright red Austin Healey convertible (with the top down so the shovels would fit). After arriving at the dump, he'd pick through the frost for the first hour or two, then settle in to dig bottles and listen to the



John Mathus Eatwell  
September 4, 1932 to November 29, 2005

(Denver) Broncos game on the car radio.

"We sure are going to miss John, our great friend, but we do have all those memories."

Many bottles the Eatwells found were fancy embossed ones that had been made in glass factories in the East. But Eatwell was particularly attracted to the Pike's Peak bottles because he was a "Pike's Peak fanatic" who knew everything there was to know about the famous peak, his son Tom said.

Eatwell co-wrote two books, one on Denver's early drug stores (*Denver's Golden Days and Apothecary Palaces*) and the other on his favorite subject called *Pike's Peak Gold*. The Denver drug store book is out of print, but the history of Pike's Peak is still available. Eatwell underwrote the cost of printing the book and also provided the illustrations, said his friend, David K. Clint III of Las Vegas, who wrote the text and designed the book published in 2000. It's more than a book about bottles because it traces the famous peak's history from its discovery by Zebulon Pike in the 1800s and deals with the early history of Colorado.

"John Eatwell was one of the giants of our hobby," said Ralph Van Brocklin of Johnson City, Tenn., a former Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors president. "He was the first chairman of the FOHBC, designed the organization's first logo and was the first to suggest the possibility of hosting a national bottle show."

Eatwell's interest in antique bottles led to his becoming a co-founder of the Federation of Historical Bottle Clubs during the late 1960s. He also chaired the FOHBC's inaugural bottle show in Denver in 1969. The FOHBC name later was modified to the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors.

He was elected to the FOHBC Hall of Fame in 2002.

Eatwell became an active member of the Antique Bottle

Collectors of Colorado in 1967, including a stint as club president. Several members of the club's board of directors were asked to share their memories of John.

Barb Sundquist: "John was always willing to help in any way and never said no to any request. He planned and gave many excellent programs for the club."

Ken Watkins: "I never got to see his amazing collection of Pike's Peak flasks. The night of a board meeting at his house, I got stuck in the snow and couldn't make it. I will always regret that."

Mike Hofer: He was an extraordinary person, always willing to share his knowledge and his Pike's Peak collection. A most loving man who shared his thoughts and life, he was a founding member of the ABCC and past president of the federation, but still found time to dig in the Leadville dump."

Rick Sinner: "He was an all-around good guy, always willing to help with anyone's collection. He was the backbone of the ABCC for many years, holding all the offices. He was an outstanding man."

Ellen Jacobson: "The ABCC has lost a very special person."

Eatwell's other passion was race cars which began when, as a kid, he sneaked into the Lakeside Speedway to watch midget car races. He drove in many races as a young man and later did hill climbs. All four of his children learned to race. His son, Andy Eatwell of Phoenix, started at age 4 in a quarter-midget race car.

"It was unbelievable fun," said his daughter, Willow Ems of Littleton, Colorado.

Eatwell's widow said her husband "was a very driven person. He'd make up his mind that something would get done, and it got done." His daughter echoed her mother's statement.

"The way I describe him is passionate. He was passionate about everything," she told a reporter from the *Rocky Mountain News*. "He was a perfectionist down to the last detail. It mattered to him to do your absolute best. Anything else was settling for mediocrity."

John M. Eatwell was born in Denver on Sept. 4, 1932, and graduated from West High School. Before that, the 6-foot-3 Eatwell lied about his age and enlisted in the Colorado National Guard at age 14. He could play the saxophone so he was quickly put into an Air Force band stationed at Pope Field in North Carolina.

After that, he studied architecture at the University of Denver, paying for his schooling by driving a delivery truck at night. When the school dropped its architecture program, he enrolled at the University of Utah and later at the University of Colorado, according to family sources. He never earned his degree, but earned his architecture license after ten years of working in the field.

Eventually he owned his own firm, John M. Eatwell Architects. He was self-employed during most of his career and designed commercial buildings, auto race tracks, homes and more.

He designed the Far East Center in southwest Denver and many of the area's Wendy's, Black-Eyed Pea and Burger King restaurants, as well as condominium offices.

Once his children had grown, he designed a home for himself and his wife, setting the house on a steep slope of scrub oak and rock near Conifer, Colo. He made sure the home was non-invasive because "he was very concerned that the house not dominate the land," his widow said.

The house works on a compost system, said his daughter, Willow, with no flushing toilets or garbage disposal. Completed in 1982, it has won numerous design awards and was featured twice in *Colorado Homes and Gardens* magazine.

"And yet it was a very humble house," his daughter told a *Rocky Mountain News* reporter. "It was not an ego statement."

Her father died of heart complications in his sleep and no one who knew him would be surprised that he worked all day the day he died, she added.

He is survived by his widow; two sons, Tom of Fruita, Colo., and Andy of Phoenix, Ariz., and daughters Willow Ems of Littleton, Colo., and Margy Singer of Phoenix, and five grandchildren.

Memorial contributions can be made to High Banks Museum, P.O. Box 264, Belleville, KS 66395, or MaxFund, 1025 Galapago St., Denver, CO 80204.

*Pike's Peak Gold* can be ordered from Karen Eatwell, 8990 Brandenburger Drive, Morrison, CO 80465. Cost of the regular edition is \$67.50 plus \$6 shipping including insured priority mail. Cost of the deluxe limited edition, signed and numbered by the co-authors and deluxe bound in padded leatherette with a foil-embossed dust cover, is \$97.50. The 250-copy deluxe edition also comes in an attractive slip case. There were only 750 copies of the regular edition printed.

(Virginia Culver, *Denver Post* staff writer; Patti Thorn, *Rocky Mountain News* staff writer; FOHBC Southern Region Editor Bill Baab, Augusta, Ga.; FOHBC Historian Dick Watson, Medford, N.J.; FOHBC Western Region Editor Scott Grandstaff, Happy Camp, Calif., and FOHBC President John Pastor, Ada, Mich., also contributed to this story).

