

Georgian big on collecting mini-jugs

by Bill Baab

When Bill Wrenn of Watkinsville, Ga., decided to branch out from a childhood coin collection, coming up with the right mix wasn't a problem. After all, he is a chemist by trade.

His collecting interests began nearly 40 years ago. The then 7-year-old's father was a coin collector, so young Wrenn decided he'd collect wheat pennies.

That interest evolved into fruit jars, miscellaneous pottery, advertising, tobacco items and primitive furniture.

"I still own 30 or 40 gallons of wheat pennies," said Wrenn, whose current "formula" of collecting interests includes antique bottles, strap-sided whiskey flasks and mini jugs.

Nearly 450 mini jugs — those standing only 3 inches tall — are in his collection arranged neatly on shelves against one wall and on a specially built cabinet in the "bottle room" of his home.

Many of the tiny jugs, which contained whiskey, cider or vinegar and were handed out to customers as souvenirs, hail from North Carolina, although Wrenn admits his very first mini jug was decorated with a



Closeups of some of his mini-jugs, including "Tarantula Juice," third from left on bottom row.

huge stencil reading Jones Bros. & Co./Cider & Vinegar/Louisville, Ky. He shelled out \$125 for that little gem.

The reason Tar Heel state products dominate his thoughts is that he hails from Oxford, N.C., and is a graduate of Barton College in Wilson, N.C.

In fact, strap-sided saloon flasks from North Carolina also are a part of the collecting interests of Wrenn, a chemist with Oliver Rubber Company — a subsidiary of Cooper Tire & Rubber Company — in nearby Athens, Ga. "They must have the word 'saloon' in the embossing," he said.

Be that as it may, he has collected 14 different mini saloons and "only" 17 different North Carolina mini jugs over the past 15 years. His collection also sports a pair of mini jugs from Jacobs Pharmacy, birthplace of Coca-Cola in Atlanta. One

jug is stenciled Moss Rose Whiskey/Compliments of Jacobs Pharmacy; the other, Viaduct Rye, Compliments of Jacobs Pharmacy.

He also has found seven different mini jugs from Athens, while another rarity is Courtney & Co./Pure Vinegar/Aiken, S.C. A selection of territorial mini jugs include items from Oklahoma and Indian territories.

Why collect mini jugs?

"I've always been fascinated by the craftsmanship that went into the making of those little jugs," he said. "I don't understand how potters can turn such a little piece. All are from wood-fired kilns. All of my scratch jugs look like the same left-handed person scratched in all the messages with a nail point. I like to think that there's a little history in every one of those little jugs."

Most of his mini jugs have been acquired by trading with other collectors, while only a few have come from antique stores.

In addition to the "minis," face jugs from contemporary Georgia potters also share shelf space along with stoneware jugs of "regular" sizes.

His latest interest is folk art paintings by Annie Welborn, many of which can be seen hanging from the walls of his home.

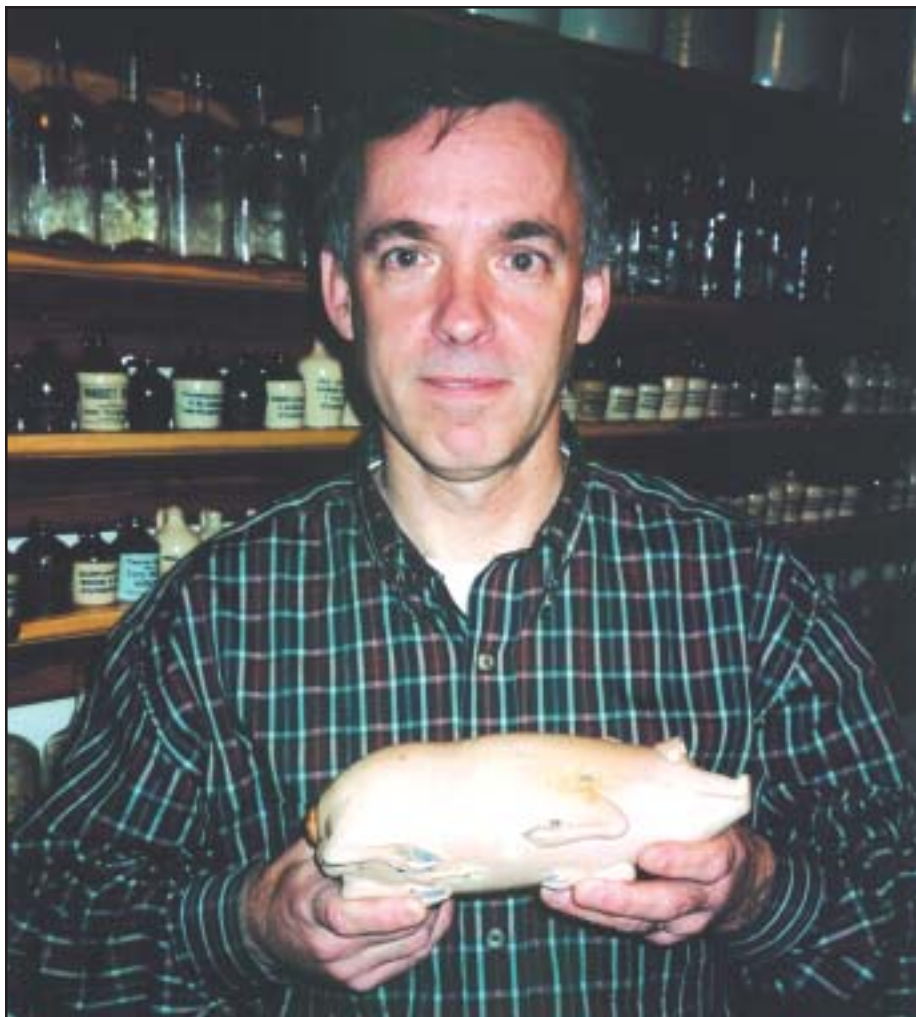
"When you collect, there's always something else around the corner that attracts your interest, including stuff in other people's collections that catches the eye."

Stuff like an Anna (Illinois) Pottery pig.

"A local picker found it in a box lot he'd bought at an estate auction and brought it to me wrapped up in one sheet of very old



Bill Wrenn, seated on a crock, with just a part of his collection, including mini jugs, "normal" jugs and whiskey flasks.



One of Wrenn's proudest possessions: An Anna (Ill.) Pottery pig acquired from a picker.

newspaper," Wrenn said. "It was laying on the dash of his beat-up old truck. The pig was so dirty that you would have thought it came from a dig."

A "pig dig?"

The pig is inscribed with a railroad track from its snout to its tail and the following on one side: Compliments to Louis NaPoleon with a little good Old Rye in a Hogs. On the other side, Illinois (sic) Central Rail Road. Cairo - - - Chicago.

And on the bottom: from Kirkpatrick Anna Ills. (sic) the best drill in use for Boaring for Lard oil. mound city.

The "Kirkpatrick" is either Cornwall or Wallace Kirkpatrick, talented artists in clay (but terrible spellers) at the Anna Pottery.

"As my friend, Pim Woodlief, says: 'Even a blind pig finds an acorn every once in a while,' "Wrenn said.



In this photo, taken after the National Auction in Louisville, Bill poses with a two-gallon Hesdoffer's Saloon, Canton, Miss. jug; a JJ Morrison Lynchburg Va. strap-sided flask and a choice miniature advertising jug, picturing Abe Lincoln, from Elizabethtown, Ky. - all three having just been added to his collection.

He concluded, "I was very glad to see the quality of items listed in the National Auction and to be fortunate enough to be the high bidder."



Here's another view of the Watkinsville, Georgian collection of mini jugs, face jugs and bottles.

Bill Wrenn is also our new *Bottles & Extras* Ads Manager, and can be reached by phone: (706) 769-8995 or by E-mail: ncjugs@charter.net.

Bill Baab can be reached at: 2552 Devere Street, Augusta, GA 30904; phone: (706) 736-8097 or E-mail: riverswamper@comcast.net.

Photos by Bill Baab