

# The Hunt and the Heady Rush of a Find Turns on 18-Year-Old

By Bill Baab

What's the favorite part of collecting antique bottles and fruit jars for 18-year-old Jonah Mertz?

"Oh, it's definitely the hunt and the emotional rush you get when you find something good from a time in the past," said the budding freshman at Edinboro University in Erie, Pa.

Ten years ago or so, at age 8, Jonah joined his dad, Steve, who was exploring an old foundation of a house that had burned. "A lady told us there were some really rare milks. He dug around the foundation and found eight of them."

The Mertzzes eventually got into collecting fruit jars and now have some 6,000. Do the math. Ten years of collecting. That averages out to 600 a year. Wow!

"We collect mainly numbered and lettered 1858 Masons and we have jars with every letter except 'T'," Jonah said. During the Muncie (Ind.) Fruit Jar Show last January, "Dad found a jar with a reverse 'S' and another with a different style of No. 8."

The psychology major can't pick out a favorite jar from all those thousands, but mentioned the Commodore jar as one of the rarer ones in the collection.

Jonah also collects squat sodas from Pittsburgh, which he purchases from a digger friend. He owns an amber soda embossed W.T., and two cobalt J.C. Buffum sodas, one with an iron pontil. He and friends Dylan Rhodes and Luke Yoos have been hitting the farm dumps near his home in Sandy Lake, Pa., about an hour's drive from Pittsburgh, and also have been digging privies.

"We found an old Sandy Lake drug store bottle, but nothing really crazy," he said. "We did find a merchant's crock marked Strong, Cobb & Co., Wholesale Druggists, Cleveland, Ohio. I once dug a Quaker State Motor Oil porcelain sign. It came from 20 feet down and was in near perfect condition."

If Jonah and his dad have a heart's desire, it's to find a lid for the sky-blue Mason Union Jar which they purchased from a just opened local antiques store.

"It's embossed with a union shield and has two vertical lugs sticking out of the top. This is one of those cases when the lid is harder to find than the jar."

Jonah also loves the hobby because of "all the wonderful people I have gotten to meet."



Jonah Mertz with coveted Mason's Union fruit jar. Has anybody got a spare lid? (Photo by Steve Mertz)



Here's the Quaker State porcelain sign Jonah dug. (Photo by Steve Mertz)



The Mertzzes' basement loaded with fruit jars, stoneware, an insulator or two and blobtop sodas (Photo by Steve Mertz)



Here's Jonah with his precious pair of cobalt, Pittsburgh, Pa., sodas. (Photo by Steve Mertz)