

LEGENDS OF THE JAR!

[Editor's Note: This article is a result of long time collector and author Bruce W. Schank reaching out to longtime collector Chuck Erb, aka AmberJars4Erb.]

Chuck was born in 1946 in rural Derby, Iowa and grew up in Garden Grove, Iowa. Mormons established Garden Grove in 1847 on the way to Salt Lake City, Utah. Eventually, a few smaller towns consolidated into one town called Mormon Trail. When Chuck was a young adult he wanted to be an art teacher, but he could never afford the schooling required. So he started doing art work for a bindery company, doing little illustrations on kids' rebound books meant for libraries. This was part of the printing business (offset preparatory), art work and camera work, strip plate making and getting them ready for the printing press. He worked there and then went to another printing company 20 years later in pre-press and then retired in 2008.

In 1968, Chuck remembers vividly finding a Mason's Patent Nov 30th 1858 jar in an old house and thinking to himself, "what an old thing." Then the very next day in the Sunday paper he read about someone who collected fruit jars in the Des Moines, Iowa area. He thought to himself, "man, someone actually collects those things," and then the writer talked about "amber" jars. Well, Chuck had never seen anything like that so he said to himself, "there lies a quest." Afterwards on the weekends Chuck and his buddies would take off in his 1965 Mustang and look for caves and cellars to explore with their flash lights.

From the very beginning Chuck has always liked old bottles, but his first fascination with fruit jars and colors revolved around teen series Ball Perfect Mason jars. He just loved the beautiful olives, olive ambers and amber colors those jars come in. Not long after Chuck started finding old jars and bottles, he came across an old cave that someone had been in previously and there were shards of amber glass everywhere. He remembers thinking; "these must be those amber jars that article spoke about." He and his friends went back with leather gloves and eventually unearthed two whole amber quart Globe jars plus a whole bunch of amber Globe lids. The metal was all gone from the jars but he was tickled pink to find them. Then he went to a sale in Boone, Iowa that advertised amber fruit jars. There was a pint amber Globe there and he decided to buy it. He remembers paying \$50 for it, which was an absolutely huge amount of money in those days, according to Chuck and to spend that much on a jar was well, kind of crazy. He remembers holding that jar so tight and from then on he was amber-addicted and is so to this day. Good for him!



Chuck Erb



Rare wooden Globe boxes full of amber pint globe jars.



Beautiful colored jars on a window sill in Chuck's Man Cave.

One year, a friend of his told him that if he really wanted to see some good fruit jars, then he should go to the Indianapolis show. So he and his wife Gladys flew out there and couldn't believe their eyes. He thought that he was one of the very few people who were interested in fruit jars. He realized then that this was actually a real hobby, there are lots of people who collect and most importantly the jars are worth real money. Man, did his eyes open! He bought an amber pint Mason's Keystone from a well known collector for \$425 at the show and his wife, seeing the price tag on it, was literally shocked because she had no idea fruit jars could be worth that kind of money.

Once Chuck started visiting other collectors, he quickly made friends with Leon Shores, who helped him out a lot on what to look for and other info on jars in general. Leon also stressed to Chuck that if you come across a good jar you'd better get it because it most likely won't be there when you come back. And Chuck admits that's absolutely true. If it's a good jar and you want it, you better get it right then and there and I couldn't agree more wholeheartedly.

After 7 or 8 years into collecting, Chuck needed money so he sold out. The late John Christianson, from Des Moines, actually bought almost all of Chuck's whole collection at that time. It didn't take very long though before Chuck became interested in jars again. He became good friends with John and would go over to his home and they would look over the jars and talk about jars for hours. It just goes to show you folks that once a person has "Jar Fever," they can never really get rid of it no matter what they try or do. I know...

Chuck had a sad jar story for me. He bought a beautiful amber hg Mason's Keystone Patent at a show in Ames, Iowa back when the Iowa Antique Bottlelers used to have their show there. One day he took it out of his display case in the basement to dust the jar off. He had it sitting there next to other jars and at one point he turned around and hit it with his elbow. That tipped it over against another jar putting a very large crack in the back side. Sadly, that's not the only nice piece of glass he's had the misfortune of breaking, but he says it isn't worth crying over broken glass because it wouldn't do you any good anyway. I happen to cry, unfortunately.

Chuck considers fruit jar collecting a fascinating hobby, but he feels the friends you make are far more important than the value of any jar. Chuck, in my opinion, is an exceptionally generous person. He has given so many people things out of the blue such as T-shirts, business cards, graphic signs and jars for nothing over the years. He'll just walk up to someone at a show and say, "Here, I think you should have this." A few years ago Chuck felt the hobby was in a downturn, but now thinks there's been some positive strides that make him feel the hobby is now on a rebound. He's delighted to see young people at bottle shows displaying interest in the hobby. At Winter Muncie 2011, he gave a very young boy who helped out Mason Bright an amber pint Globe to show his appreciation. It's hard to fathom the depth of the generosity that runs deep within Chuck. That's one of the things that makes Chuck such



Some of Chuck's many jars in the Man Cave.



The fabulous Amber Acres Homestead.



Advertising



Super line-up of Globe pints.

a special and unique person indeed.

I've known Chuck for a few years now and at the Muncie show, I kind of naturally gravitated to Chuck's room because, in my opinion, Chuck is not only a very unique person, but it's hard to find someone as bubbly and fun to be around. It was at that time I asked if I could visit with him in Iowa, do a story and see Iowa from an Iowan's point of view. Of course, he said he'd be delighted if I came by anytime, but wasn't sure he merited a "story" but I know he is a true "legend" more than worthy of an article.

I took him up on his generous offer in February, 2011. It would be a trip I was really looking forward to plus it would be my first time to actually be in Iowa. I called Chuck and we made plans since there was a nice break in the weather and I was going to take advantage of it. Besides, I usually have nothing else to do being unemployed, so exploring new frontiers and taking part in new experiences was logical to me and something exciting and fun to do.

When I arrived at his home in Carlisle, the first thing I mentioned was that I had a gift for him. I brought with me a very nicely framed print entitled "The Good Things" by C. Don Ensor.

Chuck was very appreciative and said he knew a perfect place to put it. Naturally, I asked Chuck if I could see his famous amber Globe jars and all he could say was he didn't have any around. I looked at him kind of in disbelief and asked if I could walk downstairs because I didn't see any upstairs. I figured he was just busting my chops. In the basement, there was a teaser amount of jars (two, to be exact) and that was it. I was really befuddled by it all and he explained to me that all of his jars, antiques and other items were now over at "Amber Acres." I had no idea what "Amber Acres" was but I breathed a sigh of relief and focused on the food that was about to be served -- Chuck and Gladys' famous Iowa sausage balls, shredded potatoes and cheese casserole and a vegetable medley. I was hungry, the food was delicious and the company excellent so I figured we could talk over supper about his jars and "Amber Acres."

As Chuck described his new place, which happens to be located in the middle of nowhere in central southern Iowa 17 miles north of the Missouri border, I really got excited about going there. It sounded so pristine, wild and free. He showed me a DVD he made of the entire building process and I was amazed at how wonderful it looked. He showed photos of the animals that have come onto his property including wild turkey, gigantic whitetailed deer, birds of every kind and bobcats. He claims a mountain lion was also around, but couldn't get a photo. The place was a regular national geographic destination and I couldn't wait to get there the next morning.

He then played a DVD he took of the very first Muncie Bottle Show in January 1999. It was so fascinating watching it and seeing how young everyone looked. The prices fetched for jars and odd lots at the auction were kind of surprising to me, too. What a wonderful slice of history Chuck preserved



A nice old Iron Bridge just down the road from Amber Acres



Back of the Amber Acres Homestead with 108' deck.



A small taste of the other side of Amber Acres.



The Man Cave kitchen looking from the retro 1950's Diner area.

for posterity's sake. I have to give him credit and lots of kudos for taking the time to do things like that because not everyone wants to be bothered with that sort of thing. Yet without it, those times would be only in people's memories. We went to bed because the morning would be coming early and there were plenty of things to do, see and experience.

Chuck and I left early for Amber Acres and I studied with fascination the landscape and how open it was and how many of the roads were only dirt roads. I especially liked the iron bridge that was on the dirt road just a short distant from Amber Acres. It was only a short minute or so over the iron bridge when we arrived at our destination and I was without a doubt overwhelmed by it all. What a place Chuck and Gladys have and out in the middle of such a wonderful rustic area of the state. I was a bit envious, to say the least, but I was really happy for them. I can't remember the last time I had been anywhere as remote as we were in Iowa. Ah, peace and tranquility at last...

Amber Acres is pretty phenomenal, in my humble opinion. The detail that Gladys put into it all is clearly seen everywhere you look. Nothing was left to chance and I was definitely incredibly impressed. I can't imagine anyone who has been there not coming away wowed. The smartly styled home nestled on the edge of 14½ acres of prime Iowa real estate is a huge 5,000 square foot ranch built on a massive concrete foundation with radiant heat built right into it. Every detail concerning the home to the smallest nook and cranny was well thought out by Gladys and a real sight to behold and enjoy. The back of the home has a 108-foot deck going the entire length of the home and all I can say is wow!

There is a small hill falling off to a stream behind the home and every animal that one can imagine comes up the yard to feed on the copious amounts of corn Chuck throws out in the back yard. While there we saw wild turkeys and many beautiful birds. I was so enthralled by it all and enjoyed myself so much that life seemed for that far too short of a time period, a little slice of heaven. I was truly at peace there.

Chuck was very excited about showing me around the place and I was just as excited to see it all. I finally got to see Chuck's jars and although he doesn't have a large collection, what he does have is superb and extremely desirable. I must admit I've never seen as many amber Globes in one place at one time before. Of course, Chuck is a huge Globe fruit jar fan and amber is his thing. After all, his aka is "AmberJars4Erb." So Amber Acres is the perfect name for that place. His "Man Cave" hide-away, a part of Amber Acres, is truly awesome. I can only guess, but I figure it's approximately 1,500 square feet. It comes complete with a beautiful fireplace living room area, fantastic kitchen with large built-in LCD screen TV, a middle island from which to watch it, a retro 1950s diner area and a scaled down but true to life movie theater that seats eight people extremely comfortably. I could have easily been happy for the rest of my life just staying in the Man Cave section and forgetting about the rest of the chaos in the world. And best of all; jars, bottles, glass and antiques

are everywhere.

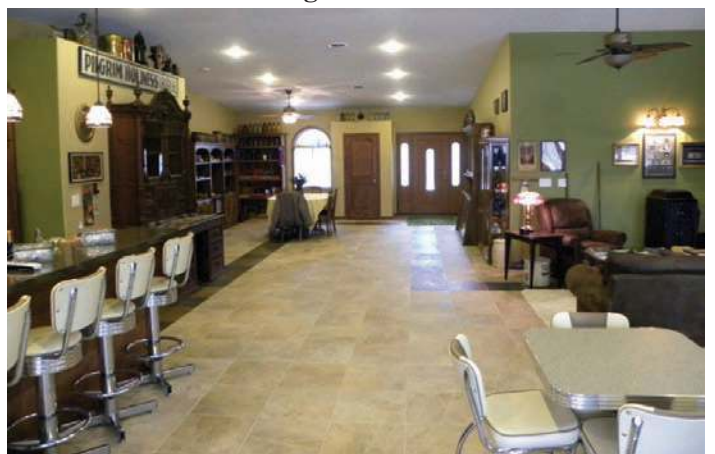
As I looked over the place, I noticed and mentioned that there was empty shelf space and why no jars? He told me that area was reserved for Christmas and I said, "That's way too far away, let's put jars there now." So he pulled out a plastic bucket full of amber pint Globes and I unwrapped all of them just like a bright-eyed little kid. I stacked them up one after another on a shelf with a mirror behind them and it looked so good I had to take an angled close-up of them all. On the opposite side of the room I put the remainder on a beautiful huge antique



Entrance to Movie Theater.



Chuck Relaxing in the Movie Theater.



The Man Cave is a truly cavernous fabulous place to hang out.



Fabulous cabinet displays of great colored bottles, glass and jars.

desk. Incredibly, Chuck had yet another container with just as many amber pints in it packed away for another future resting place. That's 64 amber pints in both buckets...once again, all I can say is Wow!

In-between all of the fun we were having at Amber Acres, Chuck also took me to a friend's home where I was able to buy some beautiful wooden fruit jar boxes and a few really nice Ball jars. Later that night, he grilled two fabulously tasty hand-cut filet mignons wrapped in bacon along with a baked potato and some hot pickles. Later, we watched a great movie in the theater and then a 50s du-wop concert DVD. I'm not sure what I did to deserve such fantastic treatment, but it was obvious to me, Chuck was one heck of a great host.

Chuck has many extremely nice old bottles, a nice cobalt Owl Drug Bottle collection, wonderful antiques and assorted nice odd old stuff too numerous to mention. Chuck is an extremely talented person. He can write poetry and his graphic artwork is fabulous. It seems many things come totally natural to Chuck and he enjoys life to the fullest. Bravo for him!

Chuck doesn't go to many shows anymore so his primary sources for jars are Muncie and online auctions. Chuck's thoughts to newer collectors are to get a Red Book and study it.

Buy what you like, but consider color a serious choice and Chuck ought to know. He says buy one decent jar instead of buying 20 cheap jars. I had nothing short of a great time visiting and spending time with Chuck and Amber Acres was a sweet bonus. So much so, I've been there twice since then. I also enjoyed talking with Gladys, a character indeed and a fabulous cook.



The Globe pints looked great and I just loved how they appeared as a mirrored image.



Nice old desk that looks better with amber pint Globes.



**Home Sweet Home
Amber Acres...**



**Chuck with his equally
talented wife Gladys.**



You just have to love a run of colored fruit jars and what a fabulous green lightning pint.