

Bill Agee Tribute

*By Bill Baab
Southern Region Editor*

WACO, Texas – The Rev. William Daniel “Bill” Agee, 80, died last Jan. 24 after a brief illness. Memorial services were held Jan. 26 at Columbus Avenue Baptist Church.

He was well known in the bottle collectors’ world, having authored two books (*Collecting the Cures*, 1969, and *Collecting All Cures*, 1973).

Born Sept. 20, 1930, in Hope, Arkansas, he met his wife, Pat, while at a training union at Beech Street Baptist Church in Texarkana, Arkansas. They married in 1951.

“Brother Bill,” as he was known, served as pastor at many Baptist churches throughout Arkansas and Texas. After retirement, he served as interim pastor at many churches throughout the central Texas area.

He served on the Baylor University board of directors and was a board member of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Waco. He was president of the Waco Dr. Pepper 19-2-4 Collectors Club.

He performed the last marriage service of his ministry for his grandson, Alan Agee, on Dec. 18, 2010.

Survivors include his widow and their children, William Daniel Agee Jr., and wife, Martha; Gaylen Agee Tenberg and husband, David, and Carolyn Agee Chamness and husband, Rodney; nine grandchildren and nine great grandchildren.

Memorials may be made to Columbus Avenue Baptist Church in Waco.

Sharing fond memories of “Brother Bill” are his son, Bill Jr., and cure collectors John Wolf, of Akron, Ohio, and Dann Louis, of Portage, Michigan.

BILL AGEE JR., WACO, TEXAS: When I look back and reflect on the many bottle excursions I had the privilege and enjoyment of sharing with my father, the earliest ones were the most memorable. I was but a junior high school boy who was at times hard to stay focused on the task of bottle digging as we were digging on the banks of the Brazos River.

Half my time was spent fishing and the other half would be spent excavating bottles. Dad was as tenacious at bottle

digging as any other physical endeavor I ever remember seeing him attack. I always enjoyed the moments of a “find” as he would call me over to see the artifact and then begin to expand on the history of the company or the product.

His knowledge of the old cure medicines, medicine bottles, the old bitters bottles, the pottery inks, the old drug stores, as well as those early sodas, still captivate my attention and leave me in awe.



The Rev. Bill Agee was an authority on all things Dr. Pepper.

On one of those funny, yet enjoyable digs, we were at an old farm house about 40 miles outside Waco. I had a very good day digging up several Yochim Bros. Celebrated Stomach Bitters bottles. Dad had not found one at the time so he suggested that I go fishing. So I left and he immediately confiscated my terrain to find him a bitters. After about 30 minutes of the fish not biting, I came back and he now explained that he had been moving so much dirt that the ceiling collapsed on the excavation site and I would have to find another spot to dig. So I moved over about 12 feet and started yet another pit. Within about 15 minutes, I had another two bitters so Dad said, “Let me finish that for you so I can dig one.” I yielded and enjoyed talking to him as he feverishly worked over the hole, advancing the depth another three feet without a find.

Frustrated, he said jokingly, “You could go over to that piece of scrap metal and move it and find a bitters.” When I removed the old tin roofing from the ground, as well as the weeds and dirt that had covered it for 75 years, four more bitters lay exposed. Dad couldn’t believe it so I told him I was just getting tired of finding all those bitters! We celebrated his two bitters he dug later that day. Good times!

Over the years, the trips became less in number as the boy became a man and new responsibilities were on the horizon, as well as the sites of the digs less available. Dad took his knowledge and then employed it “digging” for finds at auction s and on the information highway that opened new opportunities of the modern age.

What never changed was his ability to recall the method of bottle making from old to new, as well as being able to cite historical details of the business and industry. It is amazing to me today as I walk through the vast collection of many different categories of bottles, trade cards and associated advertising materials, I can still hear him in the background talking to me, the student, as we shared a history and an experience we both enjoyed from bottle collecting with the

many friends we developed over the years.

This was one of the more enjoyable aspects which cemented a true father and son relationship.

JOHN WOLF, AKRON, OHIO: Brother Bill and I began corresponding soon after I bought my copy of his book, *Collecting the Cures*, in 1971. He had started collecting in the late 1960s when he and his son, Billy, had found some old bottles during a walk along his local river.

By 1969, he had published his first cure book, followed by *Collecting All Cures* in 1973. He also wrote a long-running column on cures in *Old Bottle Magazine* during the 1970s.

In 1973, Uncle Sam invited me to spend two years in the U.S. Army Medical Corps in southern Missouri. So not only were we often in touch by letter or phone, we also set up together at many shows including St. Louis, Dallas and Memphis. We lived close enough to visit each other.

His long, rambling stories punctuated by local Southern color passed the time quickly. All those hours of talking bottles stoked my collecting fires and sharpened my sense of what makes a great cure great. We swapped ideas, bottle data and contacts for getting our next new cures. This was the heyday of lure collecting and there were literally hundreds of cure and medicine collectors we were in touch with.

So in 1974, I published a short monograph (*Collecting More Cures*), listing another 400 cure bottles, with the hope and plan of someday doing the final "complete" cure book. In that same year, Bill insisted on sending a letter of introduction for me to Charlie Gardner so that on my long New England trip that fall (including the Bridgewater, Mass., and Keene, N.H. shows and the legendary Langdell auction in New Hampshire), we were warmly received by Charlie and Nina in their (New London, Conn.) home.

At the 1976 Expo in St. Louis, we displayed what we thought were almost all of the best cures known, together with Sam Greer, Gary Cuckert and Ray Weimer. (Burt Spiller showed his French's and Miner's cures separately in a special area for individual goodies).

From time to time, Bill would let some of his prized cures go, as he needed cash for his three kids in college, and I was fortunate to be on the receiving end often. As new cures got harder to come by, and more costly, he branched out into new fields and developed great collections of Texas

medicines, picture pop bottles, large pictorial mineral waters, tins of all types, and especially Dr. Pepper bottles and other items (Dr. Pepper originated in his home town of Waco). He was involved in working on an early Dr. Pepper's book and I think he was the first president of the national Dr. Pepper Collectors Club.

In more recent years, he focused less on cures and with a greater distance between us, we had fewer visits and chances to do shows together, except for the Expos.

Bill was truly the Father of Cure Collecting and I feel privileged to have been his good friend for nearly 40 years. He was definitely one of a kind and I will certainly miss him.

DANN LOUIS, PORTAGE, MICH.: In the first couple of years of my interest in bottles, I happened across an out of the way shop called The Red Wagon Wheel in Parchmount, Mich. had hoped to find a price guide for bottles (few were available at the time) and the shop owner had only one to offer: Bill Agee's *Collecting the Cures*.

The worn paperback guide was to become my bottle bible – still a prized possession and autographed, in later years, by its charismatic author. Bill Agee wrote that first book about cures in 1969, Cures didn't exist as a category until then and that is how Bill became known as the "Father of Cures." I eventually came to own some of the same bottles pictured in Bill's book.

I always enjoyed meeting up with Bill at national bottle shows. He had the gift of storytelling and would discuss the early days of cure collecting in the '60s and '70s. Often, he said, people would come to bottle shows with great pieces to sell and some of those continue to be the rarest cures known to current collectors.

A memorable story Bill shared with me at the Toledo Expo in 1992 was about how he came to own the Tamalon Catarrh and Lung Cure. He was at a bottle show and an acquaintance came into the show with the 10-1/2-inch amber bottle balanced upright on one hand with his index finger in the mouth of the piece. He sold the bottle to Bill for \$20. That same day, I bought the bottle from Bill and have enjoyed knowing the story that goes with it.

It was a pleasure knowing Bill and sharing our common interest in cure collecting. Sue and I will miss him – as will the entire bottle collecting community. He was a fine man who left his mark in this world and on our hearts.

Have something to share, tell us about it? Have you been out finding some treasures? Keep us informed, write to:

mdvanzant@yahoo.com

Martin Van Zant

208 Urban St.

Danville IN 46122

