

In light of my search for knowledge, the office of federation program chairman was offered and I accepted. Listing slide programs, speakers, etc. available to each club helped promote interest.

It didn't seem to be a need for the dates when these things were taking place to be recorded because we were having so much fun serving the hobby.

Attending the different clubs' meetings and federation shows was a real thrill. One time following the Las Vegas show, some of us gathered in our motel room with drinks and jokes. The laughter got so loud and a drink was spilled on the bed to call a halt to the merriment. I don't know if Bob Ferraro remembers the occasion.

My first love for old bottles was the cathedral pickle. I had been out of bottle collecting for awhile when a gift of an Ackers' tea jar in emerald green came my way. I couldn't believe my eyes. Was it real? I'd never seen anything like it. My husband, Ernest, thought I would like it to keep my tea in. I loved it, and it led me to researching and writing another book, "Ketchup, Pickles & Sauces – 19th Century Food in Glass," in 1980.

I introduced the book at the Chicago FOHBC show. Getting everything organized from the West Coast was crazy, but it turned out okay. It was the return of the rental car that was disastrous. Good friend Audie Markota and I volunteered after my Ernie couldn't find the airport return center.

Audie and I got lost, didn't see the sign pointing the way to the center, and wound up in a questionable neighborhood after dark. We were not a little bit scared! Eventually, we made our way to the right place, only to learn the airport had a bomb scare, and that delayed us. All's well that ends well.

Then came retirement and limited income so my collecting suffered, but I have the warmest feelings about the solid friendships formed and recall with great gladness the camaraderie shared during my days in the hobby. Great fun!

Benicia Bottles Were Special

By Richard Hansen

[EDITOR'S NOTE: Longtime western collectors may recall digging in the Benicia, California mudflats nearly 45 years ago, but it's likely newcomers to the hobby have never heard of the area. Richard Hansen authored an article carried in the April 1969 issue of *Western Collector* magazine. Here are excerpts from that story.]

To most Californians, the name Benicia brings to mind a former state capital site, or possible recollections of the Benicia Arsenal. But to many collectors throughout the West, it now stands for bottles. Not just ordinary, simple, hundred-year-old bottles, but beautifully iridescent bottles etched with every color of the rainbow.

They have come in every size, shape and style: cathedral pickles and pepper sauces that echo the colors of the stained glass windows they portray; tall, graceful chutneys with open pontils, flutes and rolled tops that show greens, blues and reds in reflected light; olive amber case gins that glow with a fiery iridescence or show shades of greens and blues, and soda types which gleam with colors so rich they almost seem metallic.

Since early 1968, the site of the old Benicia steamboat landing has been the scene of a new bonanza for dedicated diggers from all over.

Members of the Northwest Bottle Collectors Association have gathered nearly every weekend to slop around in the mud, build coffer-dams and give shouts of glee at every new discovery. Entire families would drive down to the diggin's complete with kids, picnic lunches, waders, hip boots, changes of clothing, shovels, probes, bailing buckets and all the other paraphernalia needed to

properly exploit the mud.

(Coffer-dams were open boxes made of wood and sunk into the mud where probes indicated the presence of sunken glass treasures. The walls of the boxes kept the mud from oozing back into the hole during excavation).

Benicia was established during the late 1840s before the cries of gold echoed throughout the region. The burgeoning city was on the primary land route to the goldfields and many of the Argonauts crossed the Sacramento River at Benicia on Semple's ferry. Most of the river

steamers, sloops and barges stopped at Benicia on their way to "Sac City" or Stockton and it was at the site of the former steamer and ferry landing that the Benicia bottle bonanza was discovered.

The rise and fall of Benicia was just long enough to deposit a wealth of bottles in the peculiar mud of Suisun Bay where they could begin to accumulate the colors which would startle collectors who would come in droves one hundred years later.

(By necessity, all of the digging took place at low tide. Hansen noted that "digging alone is suicidal, since it is all done below the high tide line. Several persons have become so firmly stuck in a hole that it took the combined efforts of several men as long as an hour to get them loose, and this time isn't always available if the tide is coming in.")



Cabinet of Benicia glass that was displayed at the Reno National show in 2006

