

Am I a Collector or Investor?

By Jim Bender

I have been a bottle collector for almost 40 years now. I started like many of us digging in an old local dump looking for great treasures and almost every day we found them. Oh, those were the days, huh? Well, times change and so do we. As a kid, any blown bottle with writing on it was a treasure. If you dug a Warner's Safe Cure you were a bottle digging god.

The past five to 10 years it seems bottle prices have gone sky high for good bottles, sometimes higher than the prices reached at the great Gardner or Blaske sales. I ask myself more and more, "Am I collector or investor?" It gets to a point it discourages me as I am sure it does many. Everything today seems to be based on how much it is worth. There seems to be more and people getting into the hobby who just want the best most valuable things they can get. They bid thousands of dollars in auctions and really don't know anything about what they're bidding on other than it is one of the best. In some cases, I have met people who don't even remember what the embossing says on a bottle even after they own the bottle.

As I look back at bottle prices and see some bottles that are just beautiful works of art, yet never went up much in value, I wonder why? Let's take the Warner's Tippecanoe bottle. Have you ever really picked one up and looked at it? They are one of the greatest old bottles ever made. The top is almost unique, the mold work is outstanding. Yes, they are common bottles for sure. Any general collector who does not have one is crazy. They still can be had for a just over a \$100 if you shop around. Twenty years ago, they were \$75. Have they been a good investment? Maybe not like a flask of \$75 20 years ago. So that brings us back to the question, collector or investor?

Let's look at condition issues today and how people view them. Nobody has ever wanted a beaten up bottle.

Today's collectors want most bottles to look better than they did the day they were made. I guess tumbling bottles has pushed this to where it has gotten. I have seen great early bottles picked up at shows and heard people say, "oh, it's got a scratch, or look, a little nick." Hello, it's over a 150 years old! This brings us back to the question, collector or investor?

I find myself being influenced by all of this perfect high priced bottle stuff going on. So I ask myself, collector or investor? Well I guess we all would like to think what we buy is worth what we pay. But in my case sometimes they are not. There are times I buy a bottle with a pot stone, small chip or light stain. There are times I buy a bottle knowing nobody else will ever really want it but I do. I look around

the house and see many bottles I don't even remember what I paid for them. There is no record book or price ledger in my house. When I sit back and really think about it, I am a collector! Yes, I buy and sell sometimes but when it comes right down to it I am a collector. I love cheap bottles as well as high priced bottles. My bottles don't all look brand new and some have issues.

A good friend of mine bought the record-setting Jackson flask from the Heckler sale a few months back. Did he buy it as an investment? I can honestly tell you, no. He bought it for its rarity, color and he needed it for the collection. When people started telling him he set a world record, his reply was simple, "I did not want a world record - I wanted the great bottle." Yes, he's a collector!

A few weeks ago Dick Watson and I were sitting in my living room talking about bottles he had gotten at the Ballston Spa bottle show. Dick said, "I may have paid a little too much, but I needed it for the collection." I knew at that time there still were collectors like me out there. Now ask yourself, COLLECTOR OR INVESTOR?

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

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