

# LEGENDS OF THE JAR!

By Bruce Schank

(Editor's Note: This article is a result of long time collector and author Bruce W. Schank reaching out to long time collector Dick Harris)

I've known Dick Harris for a very long time now. Dick, along with a few other notable old timers, had a huge influence on me when I first started collecting. In all of the years I have known him, I have never been to his home except this one time and I'd never seen his collection before this article.

Dick was born in the town of Franklin, Sussex County, New Jersey in 1928. He grew up in Branchville, New Jersey and has remained there as a Sussex native all of his life. I really can't blame him for that because where he lives absolutely represents nothing but beautiful, spacious and laid-back rural New Jersey at its finest. For those who don't know or only know New Jersey from what they see on the boob tube, the Turnpike is not representative of the entire state at all. There are actually many extremely beautiful rural areas that still survive, Sussex County being one of them.

Dick is a graduate of Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pa. He is retired now from a successful property and casualty insurance career that he devoted most of his life to. Amazingly at his age, he is involved in the investment of hundreds of millions of dollars of shareholder assets in the stock market. Not something for the faint of heart, I might add.

According to Dick, he started collecting fruit jars during the "bottle



**Long time collector Dick Harris**

craze" of the 1960s. He became very interested in bottles and such especially sodas, but he very quickly gravitated to fruit jars. What drew him in were the varying patents and closures and he just found that to be very interesting. Everything back in the 1960s was unknown until Julian Harrison Toulouse came out with his book, *Fruit Jars, A Collectors Manual*, in 1969. Dick read that with fascination and it just gave him even more of an incentive to go wherever it took and spend hours upon hours and day after day driving sometimes hundreds of miles, looking for fruit jars. Dick at that time believes he

was an integral part of and right in the middle, too, of the very inception and initial exploration of the fruit jar hobby as we know it today. And I would have to agree with that.

The first really good jar Dick ever bought was a pint Excelsior with an outstanding original condition lid and band. He found it right in his own backyard of Sussex County. He told me that Dick Roller came to his house 30 years ago (1980) and when he saw the Excelsior pint he was flabbergasted and immediately recognized it as something very special. What amazed me was that Dick not only had that beautiful pint sitting out on his window sill, he had a fantastic Excelsior quart sitting there, too, in the same milk bottle shape as the pint and all original as well along with so many other great jars too numerous to mention here.

I sat there mesmerized as Dick pulled out box after box after box with



**Rare milk bottle shaped fruit jars.**



**Nice grouping of rare and early fruit jars.**





**Rare HM Harris Improved jar.**

nothing but the most outstanding jars imaginable and many I had never seen or touched before. What struck me even more incredulous was the fact he told me that for every box he had pulled out of the barn (and there were at least 12) there were five he didn't bother to

bring into the house. My mind went blank, thinking how he had at least 60 boxes of nothing but fantastic jars that have sat in his barn and haven't seen the light of day for at least 30 years. Without a doubt, Dick is one of those under the radar collectors that hardly anyone even knows about and I am a very fortunate person that he allowed me access.

According to Dick, right at the very get-go he went to bottle shows all over the northeast and that's how I actually met him. He has had a sales table at the North Jersey Antique Bottle Collectors Association Show in Oakland since 1970, with the exception of probably four years. Dick told me in the early years, jars were plentiful at the shows and reasonably priced. Of course the rest of us know what has happened since those days but jars are still a hot commodity.

Dick says the most exciting time for him as well as his

family was attending the 1976 National Show in St. Louis. He remembers how Alex Kerr and George McConnell were there and Dick claims Alex actually admitted George had the best jars (at that time), but then again, Alex was just getting into the hobby and Alex made up for lost time in a big way. Dick claims



**Rare colored Franklin jar along with rare Excelsior pt.**



**Rare half quart Millville left, rare small mouth A. Stone center and rare mold preventer 1858 quart right.**



**Another grouping of very nice jars.**





**Nicely colored unique Salt & Peppers.**

Alex had all of his jars professionally packed and air-shipped to the show. He actually was right there and had the privilege of helping Alex unpack his jars and also setting up his display.

Besides the many great jars Dick has in his collection, he has also bought and sold many fantastic jars to other collectors over the years as well. Don Burkett came to his mind and he said, after reading Don's article and seeing how ugly the solid 1858 quart looked he knew he sold it to the right fellow. He also claims he mistakenly sold a Collins & Chapman Wheeling, W.Va. jar to Jon Vander Schouw, oops!

I'll never forget how back in 1985 Dick allowed me to come up to his area and look in one of his barns. He knew I collected Ball jars and he had been given hundreds of them. I spent the good portion of an entire day going through them and coming up empty. I asked at that time if he had any other

jars I might be interested in and he told me about his honey amber Christmas Mason. So he goes away for a minute and comes out with what at the time was the most gorgeous jar I had ever laid my eyes on. He wanted \$500 for the jar and I about busted a gut. I wanted that jar so bad I could taste it, but back then \$500 was like coming up with 15k now and for me. I just couldn't do it so sadly I had to walk away without the jar. In retrospect I should have sold everything else I owned and did whatever it took to get that jar. It ended up with David Byrd and no one seems to know where it is now.

Dick had a sad jar story about how he had a deep bluish jar in the basement that the oil man hit with the hose one day when filling the tank. Claims the bottom fell out of the jar. Moral of this story, I suppose, is don't leave good jars lying around.

Besides the myriads of fantastic fruit jars Dick has accumulated over the years, he also collects other types of old glass. He and his wife collect salt and peppers and probably have one of the top collections in the country. His living room has a massive display cabinet chock full of them and he also has one side of his dining room wall with them, too. And I must say, the colors and different varieties were really eyecatching and appealing to me. There is no way I could even come close to counting how many he had and I wondered how he knew himself, but I'll tell you, he knows exactly what he has and where. He rattled off the ages of some of them, places they were made and what glass houses and I



**More Nicely colored unique Salt & Peppers.**



**Incredible wall of Salt & Peppers.**



**Black glass plate from Bridgeton, NJ circa 1881 – 1883.**





**A Couple Colored Mason's**

could see he had an intrinsic knowledge, understanding and passion that went well beyond the pale. Simply put, I was stunned by them all. Besides the wall shelves, salt & peppers were everywhere, on tables and the like. I innocently asked him if he had "The" best collection and he told me straight out no. In fact, he said he didn't want to have the best collection. I asked him in a quizzical way why? He said to my surprise "when you're on top, the only way to look is down."

Dick also likes black glass and had a spectacular Bridgeton, New Jersey 1881/1883 plate that I had never seen before. Dick feels a lot of people don't seem to appreciate black glass and that it goes unrecognized for its beauty and rarity.

I found it truly remarkable that this man hasn't added a single jar to his collection since 1980. What he showed



**Rare half pint Millville Improved.**

me represented just unbelievable stuff that collectors across the country would love to get their hands on at almost any cost. What he amassed in a short 12-year period of time is truly remarkable, but in retrospect, he told me for the most part jars were much more readily available back in the early years and they cost a lot less money than they do today. Of course, money then vs. now is a huge difference. Dick claims he stopped populating his own collection when the prices became in his opinion far too high sometime after 1980. Because of space limitations he never displayed his jars and instead focused on displaying the salt & peppers for his wife instead.

Dick mentioned that he never really went after colors when it came to fruit jars, yet he does have a few beautifully colored examples. In a weird sort of way I felt a bit melancholy that he had such incredible jars and most with fantastic original closures, yet he really has no place to

display them and has never displayed them. A visit by a few collectors the week before I showed up along with my visit gave him at least a nice period of time to temporarily display many of his wonderful jars once again. One jar in particular caught my eye but alas it had a "not for sale" sign on it. I could see how he looked at and talked about his jars that he was extremely attached to them and they weren't going anywhere anytime soon.



**Rare Mason's Shield unlined cap.**



**Rare set of Arthur's Patent jars.**



**Scarce Mason's Shield Union jar., Rare OVGCo Jar 1881, Very Rare West Virginia jar, Rare color 58 (only) midget**



**Beautifully colored Keystone pints.**



**Super grouping of Crowley town 1858's all with original caps.**