

# LEGENDS OF THE JAR

By Bruce Schank

**[Editor's Note:** This article is a result of longtime collector and author Bruce W. Schank reaching out to longtime collectors Norm & Junne Barnett.]

For those in the hobby who know Norm Barnett, they know his name was always synonymous with nothing but the finest and rarest fruit jars available. For those who don't know Norm, just ask any longtime collector and they will tell you he literally had many of the Best of the Best. Norm and Junne were also considered by many to be true pioneers of the fruit jar hobby. They led incredibly industrious and productive lives dedicated to the creation, continued expansion and perpetual existence of the fruit jar hobby in general. That means second, third and fourth generation collectors and beyond can enjoy what they did and what we possibly might even take a bit for granted now.

Both are members of The Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors 2003 "Hall of Fame." Norm is a former FOHBC Chairman: 1979-1980, Director at Large: 1991-2003, Midwest Region Chairman: 1977-1978 & 1985-1986, Midwest Region Vice Chairman: 1975-1976, Show Poster/Flyer Chairman: 1981-1990 & National Show Chairman: 1993 & 2001. Junne is a former FOHBC Merchandising Director: 1993-2000, Midwest Region Editor: 1977-1978 & National Show Chairman: 1993 & 2001.

Norm was born February 9, 1926 and is a graduate of Flat Rock High School. Just prior to graduation, he was inducted into the Army. He was a salesman for his father's business, Oliver's Farm Equipment (which eventually became White Farm Equipment) for most of his adult life, providing Norm and Junne a decent lifestyle.

Norm started collecting fruit jars way back in 1967 and before he knew it his jar collection had grown by leaps and bounds. After church on every Sunday, Norm and Junne would hit the antique shops. Norm had been badly bitten by



**Norm & Junne Barnett**

the fruit jar bug, his old shed was full and running over and there was no turning back.

Norm and Junne had been attending a few collectors' carnival shows in Indianapolis where they met notable collectors Roy Brown and Roger Emery. It was at one of these early shows that he saw a cobalt jar for the first time. As a matter of fact, Roy Brown was holding two cobalt jars in his hands. Norm didn't have any colored jars at the time, but the color bug hit him and he then started

looking for colored jars. Junne one day spied a green Mason quart jar and after waiting for a long time for it to be sold finally grabbed it for \$7 and they still own it to this day. That was their first colored jar. Junne happened to be clerking a household sale one particular time and she spotted a quart amber Lightning jar and motioned to Norm to bid on it. When it sold to someone else she looked at Norm puzzled and asked why? Well, he replied, it sold for \$18 which was a lot of money at that time. Of course, Norm went on to eventually own some of the most fabulously colored jars in the hobby.

The first Federation Bi-Centennial Expo in 1976 had a huge impact on Norm. That is where he met Alex Kerr and George McConnell, who quickly became his friends. He was able for the first time to see some of the most fantastic collections in the country on display. That singlehandedly changed the direction of his future collecting because it was there that he decided instead of collecting every jar known that he would instead focus on collecting "rare" jars and those with unusual closures. The rest is history...

At one time JunJenne was at one of her many various ladies club meetings in



**The Barnett's home with Norm's famous wall of jars.**



**Alex Kerr & George McConnell.**

Flat Rock when an elderly lady in her 80s brought in an R.M. Dalbey's jar that was complete and perfect in every way. She told Junne that her grandmother used to keep Christmas candy in the jar. When Junne went home and told Norm about it he hurried down to see the lady and look at the jar. He told the lady he wanted to buy it but she said, "No, I'm not ready to sell it yet." Eventually the call finally came in that she was ready to sell the jar. Junne and Norm at the time were getting ready to go to Florida on a business trip. They went over and got the jar but didn't pay her at that time. The elderly lady didn't know what to ask and Norm and Junne didn't know what to offer her so the lady said, "when you come back from your trip, just tell me." So they called Laura Brown, who told them, you don't want to give too much and you don't want to give too little either. So Laura suggested \$35 (one must remember that this was back when jars were reasonably priced) so they sent her the check before leaving for Florida. When they arrived back from the trip there was a message from the elderly lady on their phone saying, "Oh no, no, no -- you gave me too much money!" That Dalbey's ended up being one of their favorite jars and when it came time to sell it, that \$35 turned into a fortune because they received a whopping \$'15,000 for the jar!

The idea of forming a Bottle Club

in the Midwest was born at the 1972 St. Louis show. Norm and Roger Emery discussed the fact that no such club existed near Indiana and so on Nov. 12, 1972, 22 collectors and dealers from Illinois, Indiana and Ohio met at the Fire Station in Flat Rock. The name Midwest Fruit Jar and Bottle Club was chosen because most of the attendees were fruit jar nuts. In fact, this club from its inception has evolved mainly around fruit jars and is the only such club in the country to do so. The first "club show" was held in Richmond, Ind., on Jan 13, 1973. Several shows were held at that location. While at that first show, Dick Vanderlaan mentioned to them he wished everyone had more time to visit and talk with other collectors. That thought spawned the Summer Show with an added day of show & tell. This was followed by the now famous "room hopping" where dealers came into the hotel days early and set up their jars in their rooms and began wheeling and dealing. Then the auctions came later where a buyer could sell his jars at the Saturday Get-Together.

What fruit jar collector who has ever attended an MAFJ&BC Show, whether originally at Richmond, Indy or Muncie, could ever imagine it any different than what it is now today. In fact, none of us could and the hobby is that much better because of it. That format is what makes the MAFJ&BC Muncie Show the extravaganza that it is today and the No. 1 fruit jar show in the country, bar none.

Junne incredibly managed the club's newsletter, "Midwest Glass Chatter," for more than 2½ decades. Both Norm and Junne dedicated their lives to the hobby and the MAFJ&BC in doing and leading



**Norm holding a ribbon for his unusual closed jar Display.**



**Norm holding Rare HG R.M. Dalbey jar.**

by example.

Norm and Junne also enjoyed attending the now defunct York, Pa. show held outside at the fairgrounds. Dealers used to set up in the cattle stalls and anyone who attended can probably still remember the pungent smells. The jar picking was fabulous, though.

Thinking the 2000 Denver Expo would be their last big show due to their ages, Norm pulled some of the good jars from his collection and put a high price on them. He figured if they sell, it's all right and if they didn't, he could put them back on the shelves. They actually sold and for great prices. He could have sold his HG black glass 1858 Mason to five different collectors. Again, he didn't care if it sold or not but he made the remark openly that if it did sell they would go to England to see Stonehenge, a place he had wanted to see since boyhood. When the black glass HG sold, a collector asked "if he was still going to Stonehenge?" Norm wasn't sure and said he'd think it over.



**Norm in the early days posing with his jars.**



**Junne and Norm in the early years.**

But Junne stood behind him and wasn't having any of that and said, "OH NO, you are not thinking it over! We are going to England!" That spectacular jar, by the way, brought a whopping \$10,000.

According to Norm, selling some of his good jars allowed them to take four trips to Europe and Alaska. The hobby of collecting fruit jars has been very good to the Barnetts. He claims the hobby was responsible for making great friends and great trips. Many of the friends they have now and others made over the years wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for the hobby of fruit jar collecting.

Although most of Norm's collection is gone, he often browses through Jerry McCann's 2010 Fruit Jar Annual and can visualize how his jar case looked at different times in the past. Jars such as: the Air Tight Fruit Jr, Adams & Co., Arthur Burnham and Gilroy, Ball Fruit Jar, Belle, Buffington, R.M. Dalbey, Dalbey's Magic, Doanes Great Airtight, Excelsior with basket of fruit on reverse,



**Norm at one of his Sales Tables.**

Fridley and Cornman, Great Eastern, Huyett & Fridley, Indicator, Ladies Favorite, Ludlows Patent, Mason's flag Standard, Mold Preventor (midget), green Patent Sept. 1860, Prosser, Safety with Cumberland Glass Works on base and so many more fantastic fruit jars. Norm started collecting jars at the right time when they were available and at reasonable prices. Norm's favorite jar was his light blue quart Poque jar.

Norm also claims that at other times when he closes his eyes he can see some of the jars that used to belong to him and the many people who bought them including Dan Corker, Phil Smith, Dick Bere, Dave Rittenhouse, Joe Coulson, Gerry Phifer and many others. He can also see in his mind the collectors he has been so privileged to have purchased jars from years ago such as Alex Kerr, George McConnell, Roy Brown and others.

One particular fond memory Norm has is of Junne trying to scratch off the so-called ugly black pontil mark from the base of a cobalt blue Cunningham and Co. jar that she brought home and had bought for a whopping \$37.

I've known Norm since meeting him in 1988 at the Indianapolis show. I remember seeing his display at that show of his unusual closed jars and I was simply amazed at the incredible jars



**Rare midget Mold Preventor, now in the collection of Dan Corker.**

with original and rare closures.

Sadly Norm is in poor health now, but thankfully still has a good mind. Incredibly,

Norm and Junne have been married for 64 years, which in itself is a feat of gigantic proportions. Despite their ages Norm and June have continued attending as many bottle shows as possible to their credit. Due to health issues Norm has had to dispose of his wonderful collection but considers himself fortunate to have his

good friend Dan Corker to help him with that very sad job.

Norm and Junne say to newer collectors to buy the best jar(s) with whatever money you have and don't mess around with common jars, as he did in the very beginning of his collecting. Norm would finally say, "To all of the friends we have made due to this hobby, it's been great knowing you..."



**Rare Commodore & R.M. Dalbey's jars, Now in the collection of Dan Corker.**

