

# 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 Mason Bright.]

In 1988, I visited with Mason when I took a four-state trip with my ultimate end goal being the Indy Show. Mason lived north of his current location and I remember at that time I was quite impressed with his collection. Actually, I found it hard to believe what he had vs. me back then so I was not prepared in any way for what awaited me when I finally laid eyes on his collection once again. I can't be sure if Mason has the best Ball jar collection in the country or not because that's a subjective argument but what I am sure of is that he has one of the best overall display environments of any collection I am yet to see and that's saying a lot. He obviously spent a ton of money fixing up his basement from waterproofing to lights, carpeting to shelving in order to display his entire massive 1,600+ collection in just one place and in a museum like atmosphere to boot. I must say he succeeded in a grand way indeed! I was flabbergasted to say the least and I was amazed and astounded at how big, spacious, accommodating and bright it all was with everything laid out neatly and in order for all to see. It was simply dizzying to me at first but also dazzling to behold so many Ball jars in just one place and for the life of me I didn't even know where to start. Eye candy was everywhere and anywhere. Yes, it was without a doubt a Ball Jar collector's dream come true and I was quite literally and happily in the middle of it all.

Mason was born March 4, 1929 in Detroit, Michigan and was raised there also. Mason has worked over the years in businesses for himself. At one time he had a chain of coin laundries, motor cycle establishments and then a real estate business. After selling the real estate business he opened an antique mall in Monroe, Michigan where he currently



**Mason Bright with large advertisement for Ball Mason jar.**

lives. He then sold it in December 2002 upon retiring.

In 1984, Mason and Nancy went on vacation in Indiana to the Auburn Cord Duisenberg Museum. They always enjoyed just going with the flow with no apparent plans and ending up just about almost anywhere. While there and out of the blue, Mason asked the receptionist if there were any other privately owned museums in Indiana in the area and the

receptionist replied: "yes, down at the Ball Office Headquarters in Muncie, Indiana they have a museum in the Ball Office Building. It's free and you can go there and walk around too." So Mason said, "That's only 98 miles away, let's just take the drive down there and take a look." Well, after getting there and looking over all of the jars, he said, "I could find these at garage sales and flea markets." Only as it turned out, that wasn't going to be as easy as he thought after all. Also while there he noticed Bill Brantley's book for sale and in talking to the receptionist about Ball jars she bought his story that he was going to really start collecting and so she gave him the book for absolutely nothing. And that's when Mason started collecting Ball jars for real. And I must say he surely did accomplish his goal over the past 22 years in his never ending quest for the myriad of different Ball jar variations that exist.

The first person Mason encountered at a flea market who collected fruit jars was his now very dear friend, Don Burkett (Mr. Mason.) Mason ended up talking Don's head off at that flea market and bought a whole bunch of Ball jars from him. It was there that he found out from Don that bottle shows existed and



**1984 Ball Progression Chart and Rare Ball Glass Block.**



**One section of Mason's basement museum**

in at which he could find the more scarce jars. So the first show he went to was in Ypsilanti, Mich. There he got information on other shows and so he and Nancy began many a trek to various shows around the country. A thousand mile trip on the weekend to a show didn't even faze them either. They did slip seat driving and were just so excited to go in the first place and be in the middle of all of the exciting action.

One weekend Mason and Nancy decided to go to Memphis, Tenn. Someone there asked him where he was going next and mentioned the next show was in Chicago tomorrow a thousand miles away but that's a long ways away and there's no way he can make it. Mason said, "wait a minute, you're telling me I can't make it?" He thought about it for a bit and said, "I think we can make it." Nancy looked at Mason with a wry look but they left anyway and slip-seated it the whole way and incredibly made it before the show opened in the morning. Many people in Chicago queried him thinking he didn't



**Ball Perfect Mason**



**Milkglass Ball Ideal**

go to the Memphis show after all but after learning he had gone found it hard to believe. Man, talk about commitment...

Mason's first really expensive and stupendous jar acquisition was an RB 195-1 quart BALL BBGMCo FRUIT JAR. He purchased the jar from Bob Clay. This jar is the one pictured in Dick Rollers Standard Fruit Jar Reference. That purchase changed his thinking completely concerning really good jars and convinced him to go after more and he hasn't looked back since.

Very early on in his collecting career Mason wasn't sure of what he was buying and just couldn't bring himself to pay more than a certain amount for a jar. Most likely he says it was because he just didn't know what was what but on one occasion an opportunity came up for him to buy a milk glass Ideal for \$600 and he just couldn't justify that amount of

money for the jar. Twenty years later he ended up finally buying one for \$2,800 which in hind-sight he wishes he knew what he was doing when the better opportunity had presented itself. Unfortunately that's just the way it goes sometimes. You win some and you lose some.

One time many years ago Mason went after a gorgeous deep amber swirled 3L Ball MASON quart that was on eBay. At the time he believed his bid was high

enough to get the jar but it didn't turn out that way after all. That surprised him especially in light of the fact that back then he was a very aggressive buyer/bidder. The main problem was Darrell Plank had been spying the same jar and ended up as the winning bidder.

Then to his complete surprise, about a month after the auction Darrell got in touch with him asking if he would be interested in the jar. Darrell mentioned that there was nothing wrong with it and the color was great but that he just didn't want it anymore and he could have it for the price he paid for it. Mason asked him to send him the jar so he could see it first because he always wants to see jars first hand.



**Deep amber swirled Ball Mason**

Soon after it arrived he was convinced it was everything Darrell said it was and what he believed himself too when he originally bid on it. Yep, this spectacular jar was home now to stay and wasn't wandering anymore again. I can clearly see the reason why but all I'd like to know is this; how come I never get any of those kind of calls...hint hint?

Mason does have one sad jar story to share with the rest of us. He bought a fabulous colored 3L Ball MASON quart in which he knew ahead of time that it was cracked.



**Great color Ball Mason cracked**



In fact, the jar was cracked all the way around the neck in the seam area but solid. He didn't think it was too much of a problem being with a lid on you wouldn't even know the jar was damaged. Then one day when he came home he saw the top of the jar lying off to the side. It had



### Oldest Buffalo Trio

just come off all on its own. He felt kind of bad considering what a beautiful jar it is but the pain was tempered by the fact he only paid \$100 for the jar. Because this jar undamaged is such a valuable jar he kept it and displays it "as is" so anyone visiting can see what can happen when "things go wrong with good jars" and of course is something most collectors can relate to.

Mason had a pretty good relationship with Dick Roller when he was alive. Dick used to call Mason because Detroit has an exceptional research library called the Burton Historical Section. Dick would give Mason names and companies and he (Mason) would go on Saturday's along with Nancy to do research. He would get copies of everything on the subjects for Dick and then mail them to him. He also kept a copy of everything he sent to Dick in his own files too. Dick was very appreciative of everything Mason did for him in regards to obtaining research information.

Mason unselfishly gave back to the hobby by doing those jaunts for Dick. Obviously, (Dick) the professional researcher could not be everywhere and due to travel and time constraints it was impractical at times so Mason really was an integral part of some of Dick's continual need of valuable information on certain subjects. One company in particular that was of interest to Dick was Monroe Glass Company because it was reported they made fruit jars. After extensive research it



**Darkest known RB 193 pint example (middle) with Ball miniature railroad cars on bottom shelf.**



### Solid pour Ball Perfect Mason

turned out that Monroe Glass advertised fruit jars but never made them.

While at a flea market in Allegan, Mich. early in Mason's collecting career he met Alice Creswick who was set up there at the time. Alice had an item of particular interest that almost any collector would be seriously interested in. A solid pour 20 series Ball Perfect Mason. What a fantastic chunk of glass this was indeed! Alice happened to have a \$50 price tag on

this fabulous one-of-a-kind item. Mason being the bargain hunter that he is asked if Alice would do better on the price as would almost anyone. This amount of money was a hard pill to swallow back then for Mason who at the time didn't spend very much for any one particular jar or item being a new collector. It was just simply above his thought process that a Ball jar or something associated with Ball jars could be worth that much money.



### Solid glass Crown jar



**Another section of Mason's basement museum**





**Atlas jar section**

Now before everyone's jaw drops in disbelief at the thought of this, one must remember that this was way back in the early 1980s. Pricing and collecting was vastly different from 2009. Ball jars were yet to be fashionable and the serious sought after commodity that they are today. Ball jars as a valuable collectable was still on the far distant horizon of items and not worth much of anyone's attention let alone their hard earned money at least until recently.

Well, Alice wouldn't budge from her price but Mason fortunately had the foresight even as a young collector to know enough that this was his one and only opportunity to have an item of this nature. As far as I know, this is The only solid pour post teen era Ball jar item and a rare piece of glass worthy of the best out there known today. Mason upon returning home with it went to Don Burkett and asked if he had paid too much for it. Don was already an advanced collector and told Mason that he had gotten quite a good deal period. Over the years he has also acquired two other partial solid pours that are nice but can't compare to the Perfect Mason whatsoever in my book.

In the very beginning Mason was like a lot of collectors at the time. He wanted every fruit jar that was ever made (which by the way turned out to be completely

undoable) but it took time and a better understanding to come to that conclusion. Mason subsequently dumped the idea quickly and sold all of the entire non-Ball jars he owned with the exception of his few Atlas jars and stuck solely to collecting Ball jars. He has quite a decent amount of different Atlas jars too and as a matter of fact, enough to fill an entire section of shelves in the very middle of his basement.

Mason's method of collecting obviously differs from other Ball Jar collectors around the country. He's not worried about having every RB number but instead is simply interested in having at least one of every Ball-made fruit



**Decker's Iowana cast iron pig bank**



**Rare RB 229-5 with Hahne Star on base base.**

jar. He has a pretty thorough sub-series of product jars but he isn't interested in having them all either. His main focus in this genre of jars is the so-called "contract" fruit jars. Another words, those jars made for varying companies across the country that sold them in their stores only or distributed them to the general public.

Mason in addition to his super Ball jar collection and smaller Atlas jar collection has some of the most incredible and fantastic go-withs imaginable and mind boggling in scope to say the least. His Decker's Iowana cast iron piggy bank is a truly remarkable and interesting piece that adds such flair to his Iowana jars.

Ken Dipold mentioned to Mason one time that he could have a bead seal 3L Ball MASON quart jar he owned. He shipped it and as bad luck would have it the package got lost. Ken didn't put any identifying packing slip in the jar and most likely it will never show up. What a sad story indeed!

In addition to the masses of fruit jars he has on display, he has a great grouping of oil jars, as well as jellies, caps, lids, lid boxes, jar ring boxes, hats, cups, glasses, advertising, blocks, Blue Books, pens, rulers, and just about anything and everything that came with a Ball Logo on it and just far too numerous of differing items to mention them all here. He also has a small but superb wooden box end collection that rivals the best out there. I stayed with Mason for a very short



four day period and that was not nearly enough time to grasp everything he has or assimilate into memory the scope



**Fruit jar box end example**



**Oil jars**



**Ball mugs**



**El Monte & Special Run jars along with corporate cans.**



**Rare intact modern Ball Mason mould.**

of different items stored in that great basement museum of his. For a Ball jar collector such as me it was a fascinating and exciting view into what I love and collect myself. I was able to see, touch and photograph items I have never seen in all of my years of collecting. I was simply amazed at what he has accomplished over his collecting career. I can think of only two other collectors that can rival Mason in the scope and grandeur of his Ball jar and go-withs collection period. He also has tons of Kerr, Atlas and other paper items and go-withs too.

Mason has some real opinions about things and he feels the bottle/jar clubs across the country fall short in promoting the hobby to the beginning collector. He feels there are too many people who have been in it for a long time who are telling beginner and newer collectors to buy only expensive jars or colors and things of that nature which are hard to get. In order to get someone actually started in the hobby you need to have them start with regular ordinary lower priced jars. He looks back at his own experience and if he had to have started collecting with colors and scarce jars he might not even begun collecting because he couldn't see investing \$100 into a jar in those days. He admits he probably passed up on a lot of jars he wished he hadn't but the high prices were more than he wanted to part with because of his overall lack of knowledge and understanding. If you start people off right they'll progress on their own terms.

Clubs need to be reaching very young people and getting them interested and excited about the hobby. Mason's example of this is the grandson of John Nestleroad, John Harris. John used to set up at Muncie all of the time until his death. This boy is starting out very young and extremely interested in what his grandfather did and taking up his love for the hobby. At The Last Summer Muncie Show he came with his grandmother Ruth on Friday and sold jars in a room with her. Mason talked to this young boy like a grandfather and told him he could help him bring his boxes in on the day of the show and also help him set up and thus get in early. Ruth was very enthusiastic about Mason doing this for



**Ball Store advertising sign**

him and no doubt that experience will last with him for a lifetime.

Mason would say to newer collectors the following: The main thing is to not try and do too much. If you try and think too broadly you'll have to make an adjustment sooner or later and end up pitching a lot of stuff. You need to collect what you like and give yourself certain parameters so you won't have goals that are unachievable. There's nothing more devastating to a collector than having goals that are unachievable. You need to have realistic goals that are achievable.

I asked Mason if he felt he accomplished most of his goals and he thinks he has done pretty well. There are still a number of jars that have eluded him over the years. He noticed when visiting with other collectors that they always seem to have something that he doesn't have or can't seem to find. It's such a numbers game trying to locate every different kind of jar and the vast variations that it coincides with them. It's just the nature of the beast that others will find examples you cannot.

Mason is a very engaging person and loves company and showing off his marvelous collection. He enjoys swapping jar stories with people. So people should contact him and pay him a visit. It's an experience well worth it in my book.



**Your humble Author with Mr. Balljars.**





Rare one-of-a-kind RB 261



Outstanding colored Ball Standard



Rare colored RB 229 pint.



Rare Stippled fruit Ball Mason.



Inside of rare Ruby lid.



Rare experimental thread 20 series BPM with packer lid.



Grouping of enhanced jars...