

# 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 collector "Mr. Hemingray," Bill Dudley]

I have wanted to get over to Bill Dudley's home for quite some time now. It's obvious to anyone who has been in the hobby for any substantial amount of time that Bill of all people is a True Jar Legend! I don't know of anyone alive or gone now who started collecting fruit jars as long ago as Bill did, because he put his first jars on shelves way back in 1956, and that is simply amazing, to say the least. Let's see, what was I doing in 1956? Oh, yes, I was running around in diapers, and believe me when I tell you I don't even remember anything from when I was a terrible 2. There are so many people in the hobby who have a fantastic jar or jars in their collection right now due to Bill. He always found, sold and traded the best jars imaginable.



**Rare Gray, Hemingray water bottle.**

Bill was born on June 9, 1923 in Dayton, Ohio. He served our great country for seven years in the U.S. Navy and during World War II on the USS



**"Mr. Hemingray", Bill Dudley**

Portland. Bill was in the thick of the battle at Guadalcanal, and his ship took two 14" projectiles on one side and a torpedo to the rear. He luckily happened to be directly on the other side of the ship from where it was hit. The ship was only able to turn in a circle after that, and after a lot of work they managed to get it to steer normally and went to Australia for repairs. The next time you see Bill, remember to thank him for your freedom. After leaving the Navy, Bill served as fire chief at Wright Paterson Air Force

Base until retiring in 1974. Bill and Wanda will be married 55 years next March 2012, which is an amazing statistic, if I do say so myself.

When I arrived I was greeted by Wanda as if she has known me for a very long time, only this was the first time I had ever met her. Bill and Wanda's hospitality was simply wonderful. Wanda even went through the trouble of making delicious homemade potato soup. So, being hungry, it was an easy decision to enjoy hot soup and a sandwich. As I sat there eating and talking with Bill and Wanda, the conversation naturally was about jars, and the people whom Bill has known through his many years in the hobby. It was obvious to me listening to Bill that he missed the old days, and who can blame him after all. He had so many good friends and so many good times, and he misses all of those friends who over the many years helped make the hobby a worthwhile venture for him.

Just about every famous big name



**Bill explaining a gorgeous black glass wax seal Fruit Jar.**





**Fabulous lineup of Rare black glass Hemingray Fruit Jars.**

came up in our conversation, and I fortunately either knew many of them, too, to a much lesser degree of course, or I knew something about them. It was such a pleasure talking with Bill and my mind wandered to a time that, simply put, seemed a heck of a lot more simple, genuine and real. As I listened intently to everything he had to say and all of the greats he personally knew, I felt honored that he would invite me -- of all people -- into his home and share with this humble author some of his escapades and a view of his fabulous

jars. Out of all of those hallowed jar collectors, it came out that Bill's best friend all of these years has been Bob Rhinberger.

From what I was told, Bill at one time had a gigantic fruit jar collection, and he was even known as "Mr. Wax Sealer." Bill claims he wanted every fruit jar made (sound familiar?), but realized that wasn't going to be a reality, so he decided to specialize and color was that specialty. I have been told that Bill had the best and the most fabulous colored wax sealers that could be found and money could buy. Sadly, he sold them all as well as many other fantastic jars simply because he didn't have the room and his interests changed. Bill for the longest time now has specialized in Hemingray-made glass, and his collection is simply incredible, to say

the least. Anything and everything Hemingray is on the shelves in his Jar Room. I, being a mere mortal in the realm of fruit jar collecting, was in awe as he showed me many of his favorite jars sitting on the shelves in that hallowed room.

I was fascinated by the sheer raw beauty of all of the wonderful glass, and being a Ball jar collector I soon realized Hemingray glass is just so much different in color and character. The black glass jars were astonishing, and to see a lineup of them, let alone one, was beyond my fruit jar cognitive reasoning capabilities. I believe Bill has an example of every known Hemingray jar that exists, and it was only recently that he finally put in the collection that one jar that had eluded him for so many long years. Surprisingly, it came from a neighbor who lived just down the street. Imagine that!

Bill has a lot more than Hemingray on the shelves in the Jar Room. He has fabulous examples of very rare and extremely scarce jars, tins, wax sealers, stoneware and box ends. Wanda told me about the fantastic Ravenna wax sealer she bought for Bill way back in 1974 from Arleta Rodriguez. The jar is without a doubt a rare and fabulously colored example, and when Wanda told me she paid \$1,000 for it, I was floored. This was the first time I can



**Rare Ohio wax Seal Fruit Jar.**



**Nice Wall Display of very Rare and scarce Fruit Jars.**





**Rare SFGW wax seal jar.**

remember being told about an old timer getting a trophy jar, but not getting it for a song. The price paid for that time had to be just about the top amount anyone had ever paid for a fruit jar, bar none, and if you take inflation into consideration and what the dollar was worth then versus now it might even top any jar sold in recent memory, too.

After seeing Bill's collection, I realized once again it really isn't about the amount of jars you can fill the room with, but about what jars you fill the room with, if you get my drift. Every jar in Bill's Jar Room was top notch, and many with beautiful original closures. It was kind of a reassurance to me that you don't have to have thousands of jars to have a great collection, because it's quality over quantity.

If anyone can remember Frank Thrine, and how he pioneered rare repro



**Pair of extremely rare fruit jars.**

fruit jar closures; well, Mr. Dudley took over where Frank left off, after Frank gave it up. During the mid to late 80s and the early 90s, before Rev. Phil Robinson, Bill was the premier fruit jar closure maker. Bill's closures were fantastic and as true to original detail as humanly possible. Many people prized his closures, because they were so well done. Bill knew a guy who worked in a foundry not far from where he lived. That person, with Bill's help, was able to make sand moulds of many closures, and from those moulds make almost exact perfect replicas. When he died, Bill lost a valuable asset and gave up the closure business, but what Bill gave back to the hobby over that time span was nothing short of phenomenal.

Bill told me his favorite all time bottle show happened to be the now defunct York, Pa., show. I must agree that as a New Jersey boy, I truly enjoyed the York show myself. It was outside, and people camped on the

ground, and it had a really rustic country feel about it that will never be recreated, I'm afraid, now that it's gone. He told me a hilarious story about how one year when Wanda didn't come with him, he was there with his friend Larry Hensen, and how one night when they went to sleep their pants were taken from them. Bill and Larry had the foresight to put their wallets inside their pillow cases before retiring on their cots for the night. They hung their pants over the rail next to them, and when they woke up their pants were nowhere to be found. Bill and Larry were a bit confused and embarrassed by it all, and luckily they found their britches only a few

stalls down. Someone took them and removed the change and other assorted articles they had left in the pockets, and then threw the pants to the side. Bill called Wanda and told her about the incident, and Wanda remembers only being able to laugh out loud about it, because it struck her so funny. Bill was not amused though at all, and was glad he came out of it unscathed and with



**Extremely difficult complete set of Hemingray jelly jars with beautiful original lids.**



**Cabinet of rare Hemingray fruit jars.**





**Rare clear Dalbey's qt fruit jar with complete original closure**



**Rare Dudley food bottle**

wallets intact.

Bill and Wanda can remember how one time many years ago, early on in Bill's collecting career, how they went to an auction out in the country not far from where they lived in Ohio. The auction was in an old barn, and there were some odd jars as well as some nice amber jars, and Bill decided he was going to take them all home. He paid \$5 and \$10 a piece for the jars, and when he got into the car, all Wanda could say was "what were you thinking about?" It's all relative, and was so even back then.

Because of Bill's work schedule having three days off between work weeks, both he and Wanda traveled quite a lot. There was hardly a bottle show that they would miss, and Bill still tries to go to the major shows now if he can.

Bill says to each their own, because everyone has their own peculiar tastes in fruit jars, and that's what makes the hobby so good. Money doesn't matter as far as Bill is concerned when it comes to good jars, because he feels either you're going to pay and get it, or someone else will pay and get it. It's a matter of first come, first serve, especially when it comes to rare one-of-a-kind jars. Bill

always has felt that the friendships he has made over the years are far more important than money.

Bill told me he really enjoyed Jim Chamberlain's company, and they got along very well. They were



**Rare Wax Strings Advertisement**

both Navy veterans, and although Jim was a former commander and Bill a boatswain's mate, both shared the fruit jar passion. Bill told me that just like Jim, if he heard about a good jar, he would drive 500 miles without stopping to go get it. Man, those were definitely the good old days.

I found Bill to be a down to earth, incredibly sincere, warm, engaging and a truly knowledgeable collector. He has without a doubt helped shape the hobby as we know it today. Folks, it's people like Bill that younger collectors should befriend. Ask questions, listen and learn. The day is soon coming when these giants of the hobby will be gone, and who will replace them?



**Photo of rare Globe wooden box**



**Extremely difficult to find stoneware jars**



**rare Xenia baby bottle**



**Mr. Hemingray and your humble author right**