

The Rebound of a Great City to Bits & Pieces of the Past

By William "Billy" Gonterman

The passage of some of the worst winter blizzards on record in the Midwest has set the making for a prominent showing at the Cross-Roads of America in early Spring.

Creative Promotions has put its best foot forward to promote the best show possible in Indianapolis, Ind., April 2-3 at the Wyndham Hotel and Convention Center located off I-465 West across from the airport. It offers 900 free parking spaces, 24-hour full room service, security around the clock, free shuttle to the airport, porter help loading and unloading, a broad array of categories, special room rates for dealers, collectors and public alike.

Creative Promotions' main goal is to build up this show to become one of the strongest and best shows in the Midwest and turn it over to the Circle Center Bottle Club of Indianapolis.

The goal is to bring back some of the unique characteristics of some of the past shows such as the first Bottle & Jar Show in Indy in 1969 where I assisted the hobby's legendary Charles Gardner and his wife put up a display on the stage in the Farm Bureau building. Jim Cope, from Orange County, Texas, displayed 10 Indian Queens (all in different colors) which he sold and later became known as the Ten Little Indians.

The buyer, I believe, was from Atlanta, Ga. He also bought an E. Longs figural out of the Hooks Drug Store on the Indiana State Fairgrounds that same show.

During that same show, Kenneth Roate and George Walker, both from Cincinnati, displayed 40 or more open pontiled embossed medicine bottles with full content and labels intact in mint condition – just like they just left the drug store. You just don't see this in today's shows. We promise to keep working on getting some of the best collections out for display that are normally not seen by the general collector or public.

We currently have a number of confirmed commitments for displays featuring pottery, early Indiana bottles, sodas, ales and lightning rod balls.

We highly encourage more displays. We are more than willing to offer complimentary rooms for collectors who bring out their high end collections for public viewing. We will also offer porter help if needed. All requests must be approved by the management before the show, with special requests for flasks, bitters and jar collections.

Our hats come off to Ron Glasscock and Martin Van Zant for their help and roles in promoting new bottle clubs in Indiana – a job well done in bringing new interest and collectors into the glass world – a great act of brotherhood.

The second year for the Indy show was 1970 when L & W Promotions moved its show from the Farm Bureau building on the Indiana State Fairgrounds to the Agricultural building with more than 85,000 square feet of space. It held 600 eight-foot tables. The show was sold out with standing room only, and the attendance was unbelievable.

The traffic count was up in the thousands for each day. After the second show in Indianapolis, I left the Hoosier State and ended up staying with C. "Tiny" Kennedy for most of the next three years. If you didn't find me in Anchorage, Ky., the Kennedy residence, or at our shop on Market Street in Louisville, Ky., I would be on a local dig. I have tons of stories and great memories of the club members and especially of "Tiny," who was quite a unique individual.

The year 1972 was the starting point of what became known as one of the premier bottle shows of the South, mostly through the aggressive promotions of "Tiny." He and I traveled to at least two bottle shows per month for the next year promoting this show. Steve Keith and Don Kay were also equally instrumental in the overwhelming success, which drew collectors and dealers from around the country.

I might mention up to this point Tiny had concentrated his collection to mainly Louisville, Ky., sodas of which he had a great collection and a few other prize Louisville bottles. One that always caught my eye was an aqua

bottle shaped like an old Budweiser quart with two men pictured – one fat and one skinny – Fat Man Skinny Man Brewery from Louisville and St Louis. I never have seen another one.

In the spring of 1972, six of us pooled our funds and bought this tract of ground in Shelbyville, Ky., which was the original 1870-1910 city dump site. The property was owned by some backwoods family originally from Mississippi. It consisted of a small shack of a house, one floor cobbled together, a 1940s school bus, used for storage, hens and roosters roaming the grounds, an outhouse, which they still used, and approximately two acres of ground. The family was so happy to sell out because it enabled them to return to the backwoods of Mississippi. They literally looked like the Beverly Hillbillies when they departed. This was a deep dump and in some areas it was 10 to 15 feet deep. We dug just about everything you could imagine out of this dump.

Some things to mention were two dozen or more one-gallon scratch handled jugs from a local Shelbyville liquor and druggist, circa 1860-1880; quite a number of pint aqua graphite-pontiled scroll flasks and one amber one; six or more 11-3/8-inch tall Schroeder's ladies leg bitters from Louisville; three miniature Schroeder's 4-1/2-inch with a motif of a rooster, and 37 Chamber Companion insulators. When the arm of the backhoe knocked over the outhouse, right in the middle an amber Coke was sticking out of the ground. When I pulled it out, it revealed a pocket of amber Cokes from Louisville. I dug more than 250 in an hour. There were a number of pockets of amber Cokes in this dump.

After this find, I started collecting amber Cokes from different cities. I assembled over 50 different towns. Mr. Schmit, who owns the Elizabethtown Coke plant and the Coke Museum, heard about my collection and now they are part of the museum. After digging out the dump, we donated the land to the city to enlarge its park.