

LAHBC Club Member's Visit to the Robert Frank Museum

By Dave Maryo



Last March, a group of Los Angeles Historical Bottle Club members took a trip to Lompoc, California to visit the Robert Frank Museum.

They learned that Mr. Frank was at a sale looking for more unusual items to add to the museum collection. They embarked on the self-guided tour of the place, with curator Brian Shull available to answer questions.

The back-lighted wall loaded with rare bitters and whiskeys grabbed everyone's attention as we walked through the entrance. Although the rare bottles could support a museum on their own, there were many other interesting items to be seen.

We slowly moved on from the draw of antique bottles to find Native American baskets, pottery, dolls and some unusual arrowheads. I had never seen arrowheads like these in brilliant colors and such pristine condition.

I was surprised when Brian told me they were not old and he'd made them by chipping the flint and glass to produce perfectly shaped arrowheads and other tools. He said he had learned how to do it from his father and Native American tribal leaders. But the chipped stone items he produced are not just reproductions of early stone tools, but works of art.

Moving on, the next thing to catch my eyes was a huge, round fossilized shell. It was as large as a small dining room table and had a glistening opalescent surface that sparkled like a piece of carnival glass. Next to the shell was a group of crystals larger than any I have ever seen.

By now, I had almost forgotten about the bottles that had drawn me to the museum in the first place. Just beyond the fossilized shell were groups of fossils hanging from the wall. They looked like stone pictures. The flat stones showed the fossilized remains of fish, birds and other animals.

While distracted by the ancient art, I heard a commotion and turned around to see club members surrounding Mr. Frank who had returned from his buying excursion. Everyone as gathered around to hear him talk about some of the items in the museum. Of course, our group was interested in bottles so he focused his attention on some of the items he had found interesting.

One group of bottles was not as old as most of the examples, but they were highlights of his collecting experience. The bottles had a curious design of painted beads around their insides. Each had a tag indicating the length of the string of beads. If you added up the lengths, I am sure it would be miles of beads filling the interesting art bottles.

Many years ago, when Mr. Frank was a member of the Santa Barbara bottle club, he met a man who brought large bottles in unusual shapes to fill with beads. Mr. Frank told

us that this Mr. Bean was a club member, but did not have the same antique bottle collecting passion as did most of the members. Instead, Mr. Bean would buy the newer bottles other collectors did not want and filled them with strings of beads.

Mr. Frank often would find Mr. Bean at flea markets, buying old beaded bags and purses, only to remove the beads so he could paint each individual bead. He also would use strings from the bags and purses by tying the short lengths together. The artistic touch to Mr. Bean's bottles was the way he placed the stringed beads into the

bottles by carefully using a stick to guide the strings of beads and filling the inside with uniform spiral layers of beads.

Many years after Mr. Frank had last seen Mr. Bean, he found the bottles filled with beads at an estate sale. He had tried to buy these works of art from Mr. Bean years ago, but they were not for sale. So he purchased them all to place in his museum with the other wonders to be seen and enjoyed by visitors.

If you ever have a chance to visit the museum, you will not be disappointed even if you are not a bottle collector.



The Federation of
Historical Bottle Collectors

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