

# The American National Bottle Exhibition 2008

## (An Aussie's Perspective)

By Rex and Joanna Barber

This year, Joanna and I were able to attend and, as members of FOHBC, were able to exhibit at the American National Bottle show which was held in York, (Yorktown) Pennsylvania. It was our very first trip to the USA and from the very beginning of our holiday we were amazed at how big everything was, in highways, train systems, bridges and buildings and even food portions at restaurants, so we should not have been surprised by the



massive size of the chosen exhibition hall.

The Australian Nationals of 1975 held in the Perth Showgrounds is the closest that I personally could even compare it with. There were millions of dollars of bottles for sale as



can be seen in the photographs with one bottle alone priced at \$56,000.



The stall that I am standing at looking awestruck had bitters bottles ranging from \$2,000 to \$12,000, and the one I am carefully inspecting was a figural Indian Bitters at \$3,800.

The people at this exhibition had travelled from all across America to attend with some from as far away as San Francisco which, West to East, is farther than Perth to Sydney. Warren Roberts was there from New Zealand, Graham Lancaster was there from Queensland and James and Sandra Bell from Sydney had a stall, as did Iain and Hilary Gosling from Scotland.

However, Joanna and I were the only "aliens" who set up an exhibition



of our quack cure pot lids. They had taken up all the space in one of our suitcases. Instead of the well established one-metre of display space, we were confronted with exhibits that ran out to twelve feet or plus in the case of one exhibit that included a full-size backyard privy, or dunny in our language. We both agreed from day one that although we had seen the majority of American bottles in magazines before, in reality we knew very little about them.

Their exhibits did not contain our section A of twenty items, or section B of 10 items, but upwards of a hundred items for each display. Some exhibitors had actually hired large glass-fronted, locked-up display cabinets from York businesses. They had either filled their display tables, or filled

these cabinets with the most wonderful displays we had ever seen.

One four-metre-long display table from Terry Gillis was covered with cathedral bottles dating from the mid 1840s and of the type that some of the older collectors might have recovered from the mud at Port Augusta in South Australia in the early 1970s. A great practice which perhaps could be adopted at our shows, Terry also had a platform stand in front of his display, with a front and back, one-page hand-out for the general public or other collectors to take away that I hope will be published in the next issue of the *Little Bottler*.

We all are familiar with one bottle and its written history; well, the following bottle certainly would be a blue ribbon winner at any show. Four-year-old Charles Brewster Ross was the first recorded kidnap victim in the U.S. way back in 1870 and over the next twenty years his father tried every available method to locate his son, even producing a glass bottle with his son's image cast on it.

Bill and Rae Herbolsheimer had a wonderful display on the above and amongst all the actual prints of the time were three of these poignant bottles. The terrible story is well worth a read on Wikipedia.

In the main hall, there were 400



dealers from all over America, and in the display area there were 28 exhibitors. Security was provided by a professional service that guarded the total area all weekend and this left both dealers and exhibitors free to enjoy the weekend.

By far the greatest amount of bottle types for sale was the American (historical) flask, followed by a multitude of bitters. One dealer's table was

roughly valued at \$300,000. Sadly for both of us, we saw only a total of nine English lids for sale, including only one American lid, and only seven American lids in the display area from Philadelphia.

One highlight of the weekend was meeting and talking to Ben Swanson, the internationally famous pot lid collector. Ben told Joanna and me that there was not the same volume of pot lids in the USA as there was in both England and Australia, and that there certainly was never the amount of quack cure lids that we have in Australia.

The American show is not only understandably huge by our standards but radically different in the setting up of displays and the judging of the same. There is no charge for display space, or no limit in what length of trestle you can apply for. One young man in his mid-twenties and an enthusiastic bottle collector spent the whole weekend in front of his twenty-four-foot-long display talking to the general public and fellow collectors about his wonderful privy-dug collection.

Another fantastic privy-dug display ranged in date from the late 18<sup>th</sup>



to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and included the internationally famous egg soda bottle which was of such historical importance that the digger was able to publish a book on this gem. Most of our outdoor dunnies without pans in Australia consisted of a long handle shovel-dug hole under the small out-house. However in the case of the big display in the photograph they dug a huge hole and then planked it over so that they moved the building along the planks after a good dose of lime.



Some privies contained four seats.

Many years ago, Joanna's uncle in Ballan, Victoria showed us a four-seat, convict-built dunny that was still in use when he was a small boy, which supports what we were told in the U.S.A.

Also in the display area was the most fantastic display of 168 T-Kettle inks of every imaginable colour of which I have enclosed two photographs to show how beautiful the collection of Lynn and Don Carroll really is.

Please do not cringe when I say



the following, **Telegraph insulators**. I did when I was told about them, but after seeing these massive collections on display, the Wild West history associated with them and the vast range of colours and shapes they came in, we are now converts. One display was complete with the very first poles ever used after the Pony Express finished, and poles that survived from the Civil War. This was amazing research and history that we could again both relate to as Joanna's great grandfather Edmund Stirling was responsible for the construction of the telegraph line linking Perth to Fremantle.

Just as an aside, we had also gone to the Nationals in York because it is



where Harley-Davidson motor bikes are manufactured and we both went on a plant tour. Also it was only 30 miles from Gettysburg Battlefield



which we also visited while in York.

Back to the insulators, of which there was a fantastic display shown in the photo, and several dealers had full trestles stacked high with beautiful colours and patents.

In the dealer area was a huge display of applied colour label soda bottles, like our "Fanta" bottles of a few years ago. These came from all over America and went back to the 1930s. The display was supported not by one seminar, but two and both were addressing a packed and enthusiastic audience. Personally, I prefer the Colonial period of bottle production and lids.

The judging of all the displays came down to two votes from the collectors/dealers, the other people participating in the display area, and the general public. One award was for best display and the other was for the most informative display, hence the pamphlet podiums. This pitched bottle collectors against insulator collectors, etc, etc. There were no categories, no limit on displayed items, no limit on length of display or height.

The best display deservedly went





to Rusty and Cindy Mills (first-time exhibitors) for their mind-blowing display of The Californian Perfume Company, 1886 to 1939, when it became the Avon Company. Not only did these guys have all the bottles from this period, all the bottles were complete with original labels. The bottles in turn had the original coloured cardboard advertising, plus all the advertising paraphernalia associated with the product.

The most informative display went to the wonderful display of cathedral bottles, as the type of bottle most associated with the great wagon migrations across America.



There were many displays of this type from Mason's preservative jars, Pennsylvania canning jars, pickle bottles and early American fruit jars. They ranged in age from the earliest migration to the Mississippi River in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, to the main migration of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, pre-Californian gold rush, including the infamous Donner party who did not take enough food jars!

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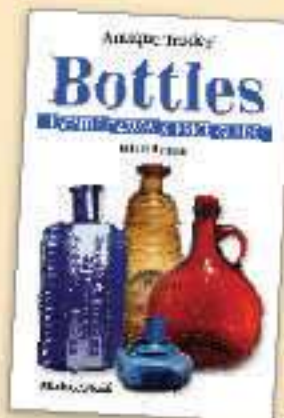


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