

Tin Baby Feeders

By Charles Harris

Through the years we've become so accustomed to the modern conveniences and materials that we look back on the past with a form of disdain, thinking "What ignorant ancestors we had. They had things so simple that they didn't need to know much." We rarely look at their lives and realize that compared to their ancestors, they were living in a very modern world.

"WHaaaaaaaattttt!" you exclaim, glass has been around for ever. Oh, has it? And plastic, it's replacing that old dangerous and heavy glass. "Yes, it is," but guess what, plastic, in many cases, is being re-replaced by glass. Look at the lawsuits that are being brought against some of the manufacturers of Baby Bottles. The BPA (bisphenol A) & formaldehyde and other chemicals that are used in the process of making plastics are creating severe medical problems for some of our children. Recently the BPH has been proven to cause neurologic and behavioral problems in children and it is used in clearing the plastic in the hard polycarbonate bottles. Heating them in the microwave causes BPA to be released into the milk or formula. This also applies to all of the millions of bottles of bottled water that everyone buys at the convenience stores.

Well, I guess that I'd better get off of my bandwagon and get started

to where I intended to go before I got sidetracked from where I was at --- boy that's a mouthful, isn't it?

Before rubber had been invented in 1840, before glass became inexpensive and common, food had to be preserved, babies had to be fed and life had to go on at a hectic pace for the time. On the Frontier of the 1700's --- that, my friends, was in Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, etc., glass was a rarity. If it got dropped and broken, it was gone and could not be readily replaced. Simply said, "You're without!"

The Frontier had a solution for this problem of the unavailability of glass. The solution was the "Tinker," a traveling tinsmith that would literally go from community to community & even door to door plying his trade. The dictionary defines a Tinker as "an itinerate mender of household utensils," but truthfully, he was much more than that. He was also a creator of household utensils upon demand. If you needed it, he could probably make it. With a sheet of tin, a pair of shears, a hammer, a fire heated soldering iron and lead solder he was the utensil making equivalent of the community blacksmith who worked his magic with iron.

For the rest of this article I'm going to "Try" to stay with the Tinker's creations for the feeding of infants, though, I'll

other creations are going to creep into it by way of interesting circumstances --- a.k.a. the gaining of knowledge for this poor little backcountry Southern writer.

Occasionally my wife, Teresa, will be talking to a new-found friend and will almost shyly comment that she collects Baby Bottles. Usually she is confronted with an expression that immediately says, "You collect what?" Words are not even uttered. To this she usually comes back with, "Some women have always had trouble feeding their babies. Baby Bottles are nothing new to the world. It's just your conception of what you consider to be a Baby Bottle." With that said, I'm going to try to take you back to the early 1700's.

The first one that I want to look at dates to the early 1700's and was purchased from Ros Berman in PA. Ros has been a lifelong collector, probably collecting before I was born in 1941. In the summer of 2008 the asking price was \$850 & it is worth every penny of it. It is one of those Baby Bottles for which there are no questions about its authenticity. It stands better than 6-inches tall, has a cork stoppered filling hole on one shoulder and a soldered tube coming out of the top with a lead ball nipple and shield on the end of it. On the lead balled nipple was wrapped a chamois cloth, old rag, or even a pickled cow's teat found at the "drug store" for the infant to suck on.

The next interesting item is one that I bought in an antique mall as an old black powder carrying flask. It is small,



A Tinker in the Hills of Pennsylvania

have to admit right here that some of his



Teresa's Tin Feeder purchased from Ros Berman at the 2008 York PA Convention.

only about 3+ inches high and I only paid \$20.00 for it. As my wife, Teresa, comments all the time, "You are always attacked by tin." I'll have to admit it, I am! Some Baby Bottle collector friends were visiting about 3 years ago & Don commented, "That one needs to be in the Baby Bottle collection, not your Civil War area." So it was moved to the other room. Then this year a friend from Nebraska was looking at it in Teresa's collection and asked, "What is this



Powder Flask to Baby Bottle to Powder Flask.



Inked and partially carved is "PINEH" of PINEHURST. Below is the unreadable date.



I never saw the early styled Flintlock Rifles ink-drawn on the top of this one. Photo-enhanced for clarity.

doing in the Baby Bottle collection? Look at that top wood surface. What do you see?" There, quite subdued, but very evident were drawn two flintlock rifles of the early 1700's style. How could I have missed that one? After looking at the photos, I know that you are going to ask, "Tin nailed to wood! How is that going to hold a liquid?" Simple, during its period of use the moisture inside swelled the wood tight against the tin, keeping the liquid in or, as in this case, keeping the gunpowder dry. It is a tin and wood gun powder flask.

This next item, a definite Baby Bottle or Feeder, dates from the mid to late 1700's and is valued at about \$450-495. "But," you ask, "I've seen a couple of them on Antiques Road Show and they valued them at \$900-1200." "I know, but those appraisers don't know everything, even in their own field of expertise. It is impossible. They are good, but not perfect." This upside down cone shaped Tin Baby Feeder is relatively common on the very rare portion of the scale. Does that really make sense? These tin feeders or vessels stood about 4-inches high and had a tin lid, either hinged or just pushed on.



Bought as a possible Tin Feeder, but later discovered to be a Tin Oil Can for filling the old Whale Oil Lamps. Stands about 5-inches high.

The tin straw with lead knob on the end pierced the vessel just below the cap and ran all the way to the bottom, forcing the infant to suck the milk and not have it poured into or onto him/her. These were made First by the PA Dutch & are also called "Mammeles." This general design has also been adapted into other period items such as Tin Banks and Oil Cans for filling the Whale Oil Lamps.

This next item still has me baffled. It was purchased from the famous Don Gifford collection after his death for about \$450. It was one of his prize Tin Feeders, but I am still fighting with myself as to whether call it a Baby Feeder or a Gun Powder Flask. It has all the features of both. The whole item is made of tin, all joints are expertly soldered, the neck is medium length and



3 different styles and shapes of Dutch/German Tin "Mammeles" Feeders in the Ros Berman collection. The center one has a flat lid that is hinged. The other 2 are push-on lids.



Bought as a possible Tin Feeder, but later discovered to be a Tin Oil Can for filling the old Whale Oil Lamps. Stands about 5-inches high.

has a rolled lip on it and the opening is sealed by a cork. The body stands about 3-1/2 inches high. I'm going to have to let the Tinker and original user decide the actual use of this one. It's beyond me.

This one was found by me on a Civil War dealer's list. Dave Taylor had it listed along with a few nice whiskey flasks at a reasonable price. When I emailed him to find out if it was still available, I asked him what he thought it actually was. He replied that he wasn't quite sure, but had bought it because he just liked it. It had a nice solid coffin shape, a long skinny snout with a rolled lip and 2 rings soldered to the sides and held 8 ounces of fluid, just right for a Baby Bottle. In design I figured it for the early 1800's and felt satisfied with the \$80.00 price whether it was a Baby Bottle or not. After I received it, I studied it closely, noticing that it had remnants of an old dark green paint in protected places. I photographed it and sent copies to some friends more knowledgeable than myself. After all the discussions of pros and cons, the general consensus seems to be that it is an early gun powder flask, so I guess that it will reside in my Civil War collection.



Powder/Whiskey/Baby Bottle Flask? Most likely a Powder Flask!

Another unusual item that I found in a Nashville TN antique mall is this tin Invalid or Baby Feeder, again from the early 1800's. It, itself, was pretty sick in that the spout was barely attached and the half lid was only about one-fourth connected to the body. On top of that it was slightly bent out of round. I figured that for the \$30.00 price tag that I could at least have some fun with it and in the process I learned how to solder with an old fashioned heavy copper tipped soldering iron, the type that you heat on a forge or with a torch. It works a whole lot better and easier than a blow torch for this kind of tinkering. When I finished playing I had a very respectable tin Invalid Feeder --- the only problem is some of the shiny solder just doesn't match that 200 year old darkened solder. Oh, well. At least I had a lot of fun and am quite proud of it.

This last item was Teresa's Christmas present for 2008. She and I saw it at our national Baby Bottle Convention that was held in conjunction with the Federation's National Bottle



Charlie & Teresa Harris's repaired Tin Invalid/Baby Feeder. Only the shiny new solder gives it away.

Show in York PA. We had both spent more than we should have, so we let it slide. Even so we kept talking about it after we got home. Well, a couple weeks ago we found out that it was still available from Ros Berman and "bit the bullet," acquiring it for \$725. It is one of very few Canteen shaped Baby Bottles known and dates to the 1840's to the 1860's period. It is a masterpiece of a Tinker's work. The body is 4-inches in diameter, 2-1/4 inches thick, holds 14-ounces of liquid and the tin nipple section screws onto the body with fairly fine pewter threads. The other night I took it to one of my Civil War relic club Christmas parties without the nipple screwed on and everyone was guessing it to be some kind of miniature canteen.



Teresa's 2008 Christmas present. After having seen it, we couldn't forget about it or ignore its existence. The Canteen styled Tin Feeder with screw off nipple section.

You should have seen their faces and heard their comments when I screwed the nipple on ----- Total Disbelief.

One of the comments that I continually hear is, "With all of those solder joints why didn't all of those babies die of lead poisoning?" On the surface that sounds like a very intelligent question, doesn't it? I then throw a couple questions back at them that include, "In that case why didn't all of the Civil War soldiers die of lead poisoning? After all almost all of them carried tin canteens for four long years that had the halves soldered together and they drank from them daily." Or, "Look at the copper water pipes in your home. Every single one of the joints are soldered together and you haven't died from lead poisoning yet have you?" What we have here is lead solder joints that are fairly clean. That lead is not poisonous in that the water or milk flows

over it, not picking up the lead ions. Now lead that has oxidized and turned white presents a totally different picture. It is very poisonous to animal and human life. For the old "White Lead" paint, lead was artificially oxidized with acid and heat, then the oxide was scraped off and mixed with oils to make the paint. It is durable but poisonous. The white lead surface on Civil War bullets that have been dug from the ground present the same problems. That is why I always wash my hands after digging and handling them.

I know, I am addicted to the tin ware, the Civil War, Civil War relic hunting, my wife's Baby Bottle collection, writing, photography and just plain Life. You know people look at me with the funniest expression when I tell them that I have never been bored a day in my life. Heck, I don't have time to get bored and I've been retired for 14 years!

Charles Harris
relicnut@comcast.net



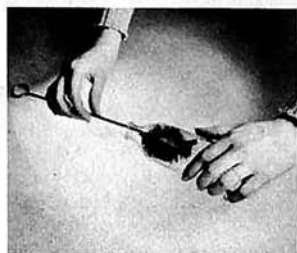
Things Happen When Joe the Dude, a Plain and Fancy Boxer, Learns All About the—

PHENIX NURSER

I AM sitting on a stool in Demble's Drug Store lapping up a double chocolate nut-bit and wondering why I didn't take in the baseball game that afternoon, when in wanders Joe the Dude. Now, Joe the Dude is a plain and fancy boxer who is retired from the ring these days, but who still has a yen for fancy clothes as is plainly evident from the blue and white check suit he's wearing.

Joe the Dude appears troubled more than somewhat and I am wondering if it is because he cannot find a pale blue hat to match his suit, or if something less serious is bothering him. I have not seen Joe the Dude for several years, so I decide to see what he's doing in Demble's Drug Store.

He goes up to the prescription counter and asks for nurser bottles.



Armstrong's Bottle Brush speeds cleaning

That has me. I cannot imagine what Joe the Dude is wanting with nurser bottles unless it would be to feed his bird dogs. He pays the clerk and turns around to leave when he spies me over at the soda fountain. His eyes light up and he comes over to pump my hand. I remark that he's looking fit and he thumps his chest and agrees.

"Yep," he says, "I'm a daddy now." He sees I'm still in a fog, so he enlightens me. I learn that Joe the Dude has become very much a family man what with a pretty wife and a baby boy, Joe the Dude, Jr., not six weeks old. It turns out he's buying the bottles for the baby.

"Yeah," he says, "Little Joe's a tough one. He threw the last bottle out of the crib this afternoon and broke it."

I ask if the baby breaks lots of bottles and I see Joe the Dude's face turn glum again. "No," he says, "not so many. I break most of 'em myself trying to put on them rubber nipples."

I nod sympathetically and Joe the Dude seems to relax. We chat about this and that and pretty soon he looks at his wrist watch and says he has to run. I am just finishing my double chocolate nut-bit, so he suggests I come along and meet the little woman and see the baby, and

maybe spend the night. I do not think much of the latter because I am very fond of a good night's rest and I know how babies can keep you from getting it, but I cannot resist the temptation of watching Joe the Dude fit nipples to nurser bottles with those big hams he calls hands. So I say I'll go.

When we get to Joe the Dude's apartment, I see that he has very good taste indeed. His ever-loving wife is really a doll and the baby is cute, although I don't know much about such things myself. Pretty soon the baby goes to sleep and everything is peaceful. Joe the Dude and I talk about the old days when he was king of the light heavies and every now and then his wife adds a word or two. When I begin to yawn, they both suggest I stay all night. I am a practical man, so I say "Yes" and wander off to the guest room.

It must be nearly two o'clock, for I am dreaming about that double chocolate nut-bit, when I hear a loud yelp. It's the baby, and it has good lungs for the noise it makes rattles my door. Pretty soon I hear Joe the Dude get out of bed and stumble out to the kitchen. All is comparatively quiet for a while, and I am almost getting used to the baby's yowls, when I hear a loud crash which makes me think that maybe Joe the Dude has gone in for safe cracking. I investigate and find him in the kitchen in his night-shirt, standing in a pool of milk. Over on the wall is a big dent, and I see pieces of glass all over the room. I ask what the trouble is.

Now, Joe the Dude is generally a calm man for a fighter, but I can see he is having a hard time controlling his temper now. He tells me the baby's bottle slipped out of his hand while he was trying to put the nipple on it. It seems his ever-loving wife fixes up lots of bottles filled with a special kind of milk for the baby and leaves them in the refrigerator. When it's time for the baby to have one, Joe the Dude gets a bottle out of the refrigerator and warms it in a pan of water on the stove. That water makes the bottle about as slippery to handle as Benny the Eel who's noted for his jail breaks. I understand the trouble, even though I don't know much about such things.

"It wouldn't be so bad," Joe the Dude says, "if these bottles didn't cost two bits apiece, but it's getting



Armstrong's Phenix Nurers with Tu-Tab Nipples and Tu-Tab Caps

to be expensive the way I break 'em. What this country needs is a good five-cent nurser bottle."

I agree and by this time the baby has stopped yowling and gone back to sleep. So Joe the Dude cleans up the mess and retires and I do likewise.

Next day I am in Demble's Drug Store again and I see a blue card displaying some nurser bottles. I investigate to see what makes them tick, for maybe I can help my pal. The blue card says they won't slip out of your hands. That sounds O.K. to me, so I phone Joe the Dude to come over right away. He does and we ask the guy behind the counter to tell us all about these new bottles.

"Why," the guy says, "these are Armstrong Phenix Nurser Bottles. They have little ribs, or ridges, all around them to help you get a good grip. They won't slip out of your hands when you put the nipple on."

"Maybe so," says Joe the Dude, "but how about heat. I'll bet they crack when you warm 'em in water."

"No, they won't," this guy comes back. "If they break from thermal shock, which means breaking when you warm them, you come back and we'll give you new bottles free. That offer is good for two years."

Joe the Dude seems satisfied but is a bit afraid of what these super bottles will cost. Imagine his surprise when the guy says they cost only a nickel. He is so happy he buys a dozen and is just ready to leave when the guy stops him.

"How about taking along some of these fine Armstrong Bottle Brushes," he says. "They make it easy to clean nurser bottles because the brush handle is on a pivot so you can swing the brush right up against the shoulder of the bottle. You can also use them to clean milk bottles and other bottles."

It sounds like a good idea so Joe the Dude buys one and goes home happy as a guy who's just collected a hundred to one on the ponies. For myself, I make a mental note to buy one of those brushes to clean other bottles. I see no more Joe the Dude until two months later when I bump into him on the subway. He is smiling and happy so I judge the bottles are still O.K. and I am not wrong.

"You know what," says Joe the Dude, "America has a good five-cent nurser bottle. I mean those Armstrong Phenix Bottles." I think they must be good to make a guy like Joe the Dude remember a word like "Phenix."

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