

Bottle Collecting in the United States:

Overview of The History

By Bill Baab
Southern Region Editor

In the beginning, late 20th century explorations of once-thriving communities built by precious metal prospectors yielded neither gold nor silver, but glass treasures long forgotten and buried in trash heaps and outhouse holes called privies.

Much of this exploration by curious folks took place during the mid-1950s and throughout the 1960s, uncovering previously unknown landfills and resulting in the hobby called bottle collecting.

Next came urban renewal and massive interstate highway projects that uncovered landfills as well as strings of privies. Bottles began popping to the surface behind the blades of bulldozers and other heavy equipment. Word soon spread and soon such projects were invaded by hordes of bottle seekers.

It was (and is) like digging for buried treasure.

As the hobby began to expand from California eastward (and westward to the Hawaiian Islands), knowledge of just what the glass and ceramic containers held and who manufactured them began to be placed in books and magazine articles.

Modern day bottle collectors soon learned, for example, that they were not the first to enjoy the new hobby. Pioneers like Charles B. Gardner, Edwin Lefevre, George McKearin and others had begun forming collections during the first half of the 20th century.

These pioneers were soon being emulated by thousands of men, women and children wielding shovels and the occasional backhoe, prompting one surprised individual looking over a dump peopled by diggers to declare "they look like a bunch of gophers in their holes!"

Hobbyists in every state in the union became enthusiastic diggers. Collectors soon discovered Sanborn Fire Insurance Company maps showing outhouse locations. Applying rods of varying lengths called probes, they determined the privies' locations and have since enjoyed building up sweat equities.

Little knowledge of the hobby's start had made it past individual or club records into the public domain. This writer felt at least a start to document it had to be made before such facts disappeared forever in the mists of time. I started contacting key

people during 2008 and contacts continue to this day. Many acknowledged this ambitious project was doable; getting them to cooperate was another story, but *Bottles and Extras* subscribers will begin to see results in the July-August issue.

Each state's history is by no means complete. Bob Ferraro's recollections cover only a small portion of Nevada. Contact was made with collectors in other parts of the state, but none were forthcoming with histories of their own. My plans do not involve re-contacting those collectors so any voids must be filled by future researchers.

My own projects include the histories of bottle collecting in Georgia and Florida.

I have found that all the histories that have been sent to me are fun reads and bring back memories of my own early days in the hobby. I hope that *Bottles and Extras* readers enjoy them, too.

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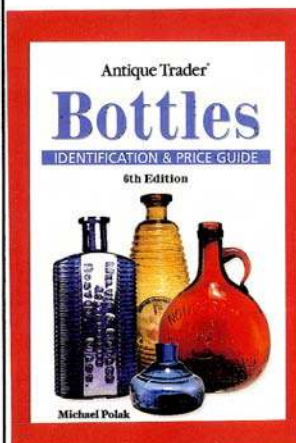
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