



The Dalbey Jar

By Jeff Wichmann

So Old and So Perfect

Once in a while people get lucky. So do auctioneers, once in a while. While American Bottle Auctions has had good fortune shine upon it this year, some other reasons to smile have come our way. The Dalbey Jar shown here is one of them. After receiving a couple emails from a woman in Ohio, I dismissed them as newer bottles with little value. I had not yet come to the end of the second email. As I scrolled down and looked among the many screw top, clear bottles, I noticed a jar, a canning jar that looked pretty old. I emailed the woman back and asked her if she could identify the jar a little more. She said it said Dalbey and had the date 1858. I told her I would get back to her soon. As I scrolled through *The Redbook* and Jerry McCann's *Fruit Jar Annual*, my jaw dropped. Surely I was reading this wrong. Not being a jar collector, and as much as I appreciate these wonderful containers, I was astonished to read that the jar was valued at around \$7,000, but more amazing was that no known original closures had been accounted for. Or had they?

I called the woman and asked her what the story was, in other words, where did you get the jar? She answered that the woman's husband, age 69 inherited a farm that's been in his family since 1842 and there was a cupboard in the house that contained a number of different items including some glassware. The house and its contents were pretty much the same as it was when her husband was a child. The Dalbey jar, as it turned out, was in the back of the cupboard behind some other lesser Mason jars and such. For all she knew, the jar had been sitting around for years, decades, but over a century and a half?

I called Doug Leybourne, the source of all sources on issues like this. His *Redbook* is the Bible of the jar-collecting world and if anyone knew more about this jar, it was

Doug. I told him the story and like many similar stories before, the jar was an amazing find, but the closure was most likely a reproduction. The odds were astronomical that it was an original top. I emailed some photos to Doug and he wrote me back in obvious excitement. The real McCoy was one term he used. It was apparently the real thing! I called the woman again, giving her the good news. The truth was, I had a good feeling from the start that it was right. Why would an elderly woman who lived in this house (which by the way was built in 1842) go to the trouble of having a reproduction lid made for a jar that was probably used by her and most likely her mother? The odds would seem that it was used, maybe once, maybe more, but soon replaced by the likes of a newer and much easier to use Mason or Lighting jar. This is how unique, priceless objects are found. People just had them, didn't think much about them and they eventually came to light at a yard sale or antique store mercilessly before they were tossed away forever. Remember the copy of the Declaration of Independence that was found behind a drab painting, which was purchased, simply for the frame?

The jar was shipped to me and I immediately knew Doug was right. The jar, in mint condition, still had it's leather guides, everything, perfectly intact. It appeared as if it had been used once, and set aside, forgotten for a century and a half. Sitting



through the Civil War, endless presidents and, finally, the 21st Century.

The Dalbey jar will be presented in our upcoming auction in March. It is so primitive, but like all things so old, yet so perfect. A jar that held preserves sat in front of me, preserved as well as the contents it likely once held. How someone long ago thought this jar would catch on was beyond me but history prevailed and now I think how luck found both a woman in Ohio and a bottle auctioneer in California.

