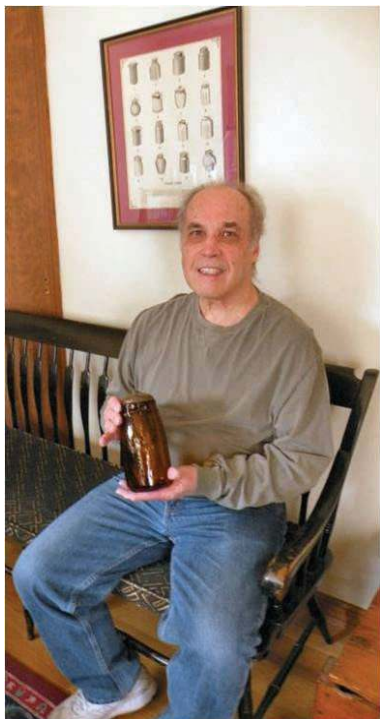


LEGENDS OF THE JAR!

By Bruce Schank



Phil Alvarez

[Editor's Note: This article is a result of a weekend personal visit by author and long time collector Bruce W. Schank with friend and long time collector Phil Alvarez]

I've known Phil for thirty- one years now and the one thing I know about Phil and his incredible collection is this; "it's not about quantity at all, instead it's all about quality!"

Phil was a very instrumental person in helping me get a start as a young collector. When I met Phil he was already a ten year seasoned collector with a huge knowledge base. We first met at a NJABC Show & Sale in Oakland, N.J. and just recently after a long period of considerable inactivity, we have reacquainted ourselves once again.

Phil Alvarez was born in 1935. His parents migrated from Spain after WW1 and settled in Dover, NJ, a community of mostly blue collar immigrants looking for a better life in America. He came from a musical family and his parents encouraged him to study music. Eventually, he pursued a musical career, earning degrees from Oberlin College and Indiana University. He is now retired as a music educator and is very active in his hobbies; primarily collecting fruit jars and classical records.



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started collecting fruit jars in the late 60's approx., 1968. He started going to country auctions and the first jars he bought were for Kitchen canisters; he's to put rice and other items in. At one of the auctions a fruit jar collector asked him if he ever collected jars and Phil said no, so he invited Phil to his house to see his collection. That was the first time Phil ever saw "collectible" fruit jars. The collector had many interesting jars including a Van Vliet, Lafayette with Block Letters, amber globes and interesting closed jars. He led Phil in the right direction by giving him a copy of an Old Bottle Magazine that had Show



Calendars, so Phil started going to Shows. That same collector also showed Creswick's Red Book #1 to Phil. The first show Phil ever went to was Williamstown in South Jersey

which was one of the Best Shows in New Jersey. There are a lot of collectors in that area Phil told me and it was there that he met George McConnell and how he was quite impressed with him. One thing that caught his attention at one particular show was that George had a half gallon Salem jar and he was tossing it up in the air again and again; up and down, up and down and all he could say was someone had brought it to the



show. I suppose George was known for having a cavalier attitude towards jars. It was then that Phil decided he needed to be inside the Show itself too. If George could get great jars such as that one then he could too. So Phil started to inquire about contracts for bottle shows and the first show he attended as a dealer was Yardville, NJ. There he started buying a lot of jars and closures. He also bought many from other shows too and the nice thing according to Phil was this; there weren't a lot of collectors in northern N.J. to compete with at that time.

The main two sources for fruit jars at that time were country auctions in Hunterdon County, NJ and Bottle Shows. There were a lot of things to buy at those two events. Later on He started going to high profile shows. He went to the Guernsey Barn in Lancaster, P.A. and was astonished at the waiting line of people to get into the show the first

time he went there. He remembers well over 250 people waiting six abreast to get into the show and they weren't even early buyers. That was also the first time he came across a lot of dealers from out of his area ranging from the Midwest and northern N.Y. State. At one such show he ran around and picked up every basic amber jar he could find which included globe, lightning, leader and safety jars because in his area he

was coming across rare closure jars but not colored jars. The next year he began selling at that show and it went pretty much like that for the next ten years, buying and selling at Bottle Shows and country

auctions.

The first really good jar that Phil ever bought was an H & S clear quart with no shoulders. He still has that jar by the way. According to Phil, he knew some antique people that he bought jars from and they contacted him about that jar and how it was going to be in an auction and asked whether he would be interested in buying it for the RB price. He told them if they get the jar then he'd be interested in buying it. They called him back to say they had gotten the jar and the woman who bought the jar said that the jar was on the cement floor under a table at the auction house. No one seemed to pay any attention to it and actually many people were kicking it around with their feet. When they put the jar up for sale she got so excited bidding on it that she was trembling and so much so that when they brought it out to her she couldn't even hold it. She sold it to Phil as promised for the Red Book price at that time. Phil noticed many collectors then as well as collectors now use the Red Book as a Bible for pricing.

"I wish I had more experience at that time," Phil told me because he would have looked at things much differently. He found out down the road that he had lost out on many a



H & S Quart

great jar simply because he stuck to the old rule of using the Red Book as an absolute guide for pricing. He had been told to always know how much you're willing to pay in an auction but use the RB as a guide. The only problem is that's not always necessarily how you should actually go about buying jars. According to Phil, having experience in buying jars makes a big difference when you have to purchase an expensive jar. Making a mistake on inexpensive jars is no big deal but making a mistake on expensive jars



can cost you dearly. Phil's philosophy is simply this; if you really want a jar bad enough you have to bid until you get it. If you have the money you can't put a limit on the jar. A \$300 jar could go for as much \$600 so you

have to make your own decision of how much you're willing to pay.

Phil told me in the early years that when it came to bottle shows he found that the best shows to buy jars inexpensively were the ones in the New England States simply because there weren't any major collectors there at the time. "You couldn't sell a jar in New England but you could buy greatly!" He also remembers doing a show in Wolcott, CT and next to him was Dick Vanderlaan of Brockport, NY. It was a typical New England show because he didn't sell a single jar there but he bought \$400 worth of jars. And in the early 70's, \$400 in New England bought you a whole lot of jars. At one point Dick was talking to him and he was tapping on his foot



telling him how he was a "real" collector. Phil thought Dick was referring to the fact he had bought \$400 worth of





jars but didn't sell anything. "I wasn't really into Dealer mode, I was buying as a Collector" Phil said to me. What Dick was actually referring to was the fact that Phil had a great big

hole in the sole of his shoe covered over with a piece of cardboard and what he was trying to say was he didn't bother to fix his shoe but he was buying \$400 worth of jars.

Phil also related another story to me about an experience he had at a country auction in his area of Hunterdon County and Hunterdon County, NJ many years ago. It was at a twilight coun-

try auction that started at six o'clock at a farm and there were six big boxes of fruit jars there. Most of them were very common

jars except in one box there was an A. Stone and it was the type with the glass lug closure but without the closure. The jar was perfect but it kept playing musical boxes and ended up in different boxes under other jars. People were moving the jar around hoping it wouldn't get noticed so they could get it for nothing. So he approached the auctioneer and told him that there was a jar there that he would start the bidding off at \$75 and that people were moving it around and it would either get broken or stolen. The auctioneer told him to put the jar on the shelf in his podium, which Phil did. After that it was hilarious according to Phil because everyone was looking for that jar and they quickly became frantic since it wasn't there anymore. Fi-



nally they must have thought it was stolen because they all went home. He waited for the auctioneer to put it up and it eventually became pitch black. They had to put spot lights on the auctioneer and all of the bidders were standing in the pitch dark. There were only about twenty people left and the auctioneer had a microphone hanging from his neck so you could hear his bids or comments and he said, "Oh I forgot about that jar, give me that jar" and he puts up the jar and asks for a bid of \$10. Phil put his hand up and get's it for \$10 because nobody bid against him.

Phil doesn't know what year it was exactly but finding jars and closures became increasingly more and



more difficult when the absentee auctions kicked in. There was Hagenbuch's and Heckler's auction so a lot of jars were then being siphoned off and put directly into those auctions. It was also hard to find closures at the shows too and people just weren't selling the better jars as they used to at shows. From what he could tell the jars were just going straight into auction format. Then sometime after that eBay cut in and once people started selling on eBay, Phil saw jars he had been selling at shows going for three times as much on eBay. Between eBay auctions and absentee auctions it became increasing difficult to find good jars anymore or the ones that did show up were just the common ones or jars Phil already had.

Phil told me this too; "I found that

in collecting jars everyone starts off slowly. Being a beginning collector they gather info on jars, lids and desirability but the one thing that seems to happen with a lot of collectors is if they have the money they quickly jump from beginner to advanced collector. They seem to omit that middle range which has so many good jars and at that time there were a lot of really good jars going from between \$100 to \$300 that went ignored. People seemed to gravitate straight for jars \$500 and up and that seems to be the common trend ever since I've been collecting. That is unless people don't have the money then they buy those middle range jars. I just think it's a mistake because so many good jars in that middle range get ignored."

According to Phil, collecting fruit jars has been an exciting experience in his life but he told me what's more important has been his friendship with other collectors. "My advice to new jar collectors is to buy quality jars that they can afford. It is poor judgment to purchase inferior items because they are priced lower. Learn from experience. One will make mistakes, we all do; it's part of the learning process. Most collectors will share their knowledge so don't be afraid to ask for advice. When selling jars, make sure you point out any flaws, repairs, or reproduction parts. Welcome to the jar hobby and happy hunting."

Phil

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