

LEGENDS OF THE JAR!

By Bruce Schank

[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 extremely long time collector Dick Watson]

In attempting to do this series of articles on longtime, prominent fruit jar collectors, Dick Watson's name came up. So I called to see if he'd allow me a small amount of time to visit. I explained what I was trying to accomplish, and he, of course, kindly agreed. I've seen Dick here and there at different shows before, but I really didn't know him personally or can I say I knew anything about his collecting forte, either. I must say I was a bit disappointed when Dick told me all of his best colored 1858 jars were down at Wheaton Village on display, but he assured me that he still had enough good jars to



Dick Watson

make my long trip more than worth my while.

Of course, I had no idea what to expect when I arrived at Dick's home. But the first thing I did notice when I pulled into the driveway and got out of my car was large windows full of glass. The way the sun was shining through tree branches and with the reflective light, I could

just make out what looked like hundreds of incredibly colored bottles.

My immediate reaction was to rub my eyes and take a second gander just to make sure I wasn't imagining what I was actually seeing. "This couldn't possibly be real now, could it?" I was saying to myself. Of course, from that vantage point, I had no idea what was in store for me when Dick finally opened his front door, and I entered that incredible home chock-full of historical items. I've been to a lot of places in my life including major





I've heard the term "awestruck" used before for certain things, including meeting beautiful women, but never in my life did I ever think it would or could be used in this humble author's experience, especially in regards to glass. As I peered into the oversized foyer with the sun pouring through behind me, all I could see were glass cases on either side, full of an incredible array of bottles. As a lover of old glass and anything historical, too, including fruit jars, I was literally stupefied talking to Dick as I entered the main body of his home.

Simply put, I was completely overwhelmed by the copious amount of eye candy, and it became apparent to me almost immediately that this was no ordinary home, and Dick was no ordinary collector.

Dick was extremely warm and personal towards me as I queried him over and over concerning the cornucopia of stuff all around me. Since my main objective was fruit jars, I finally discovered a small treasure trove of early American jars right in front of me, including an amber oversized Co-hansey.



museums as well as the homes of many friends to see their collections, but this really took the cake.





Now let's start at the beginning. Dick was born in 1932 in Runnymede, N.J., a working class man's town. Dick's grandfather started an electrical business in 1902 which his father took over for a few years. Dick subsequently owned and operated the business for 30 years before turning it over to his sons upon retiring.

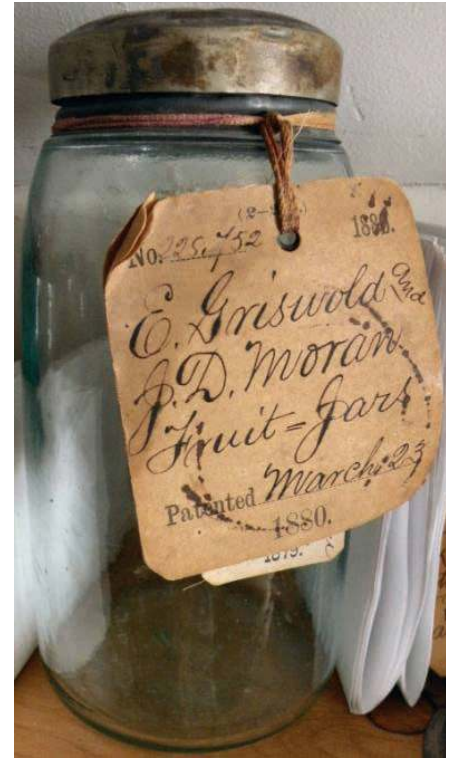
In 1958, Ball Corporation came out with a pamphlet celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Mason jar, and Dick came across that very pamphlet while at a little museum owned by the State of New Jersey in Batsto.

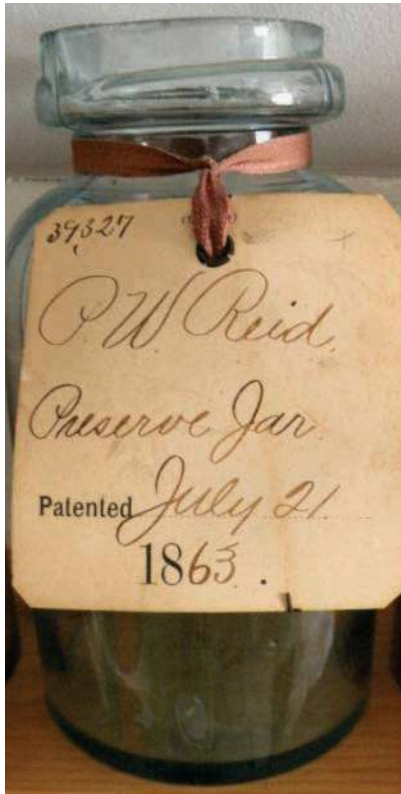
Batsto was an old iron and glass village at one time in the 19th and early 20th century. While visiting there, Dick ventured into a small combination general store and post

office where he came across the pamphlet on the second floor along with all sorts of historic jars and bottles on display. The display was owned by a glass historian from South Jersey named Eddie Pfeiffer, and the next thing Dick knew he and his wife,

Elma, were hooked and off to the races looking for historic glass of all kinds.

Dick has one of the largest and most complete collections of patent models of fruit jars in the country. According to Dick, these models





originally came from O. Rundel Gilbert of Garrison, N.Y. Rundel sold these models to Dick Harris of northern New Jersey who, in turn, sold them to Al Vignon. Al then turned around and sold them to Dick. A very small portion of these patent models also came from Jerry McCann of Chicago. It is just amazing to behold, seeing this fantastic and unique display collection of these truly one-of-a-kind models, and all in one place.

Dick also has an extensive collection of fruit preserve cans from the 1850s and 1860s. He probably has one of the best and most complete set of fruit preserve cans assembled



anywhere in the country. Many of these cans came from the Norm Barnett collection.

It was just so incredibly overwhelming for this humble author to try and absorb the vast amount of fantastic early American glass and other historical items in every room, nook and cranny of Dick's home in the brief amount of time I was actually there. Dick has everything from tobacco cans, advertising, shear cutters, to whistles, decoys, needle work from the very early 1800s, stoneware crocks, biters, Saratoga Spring water bottles, flasks,

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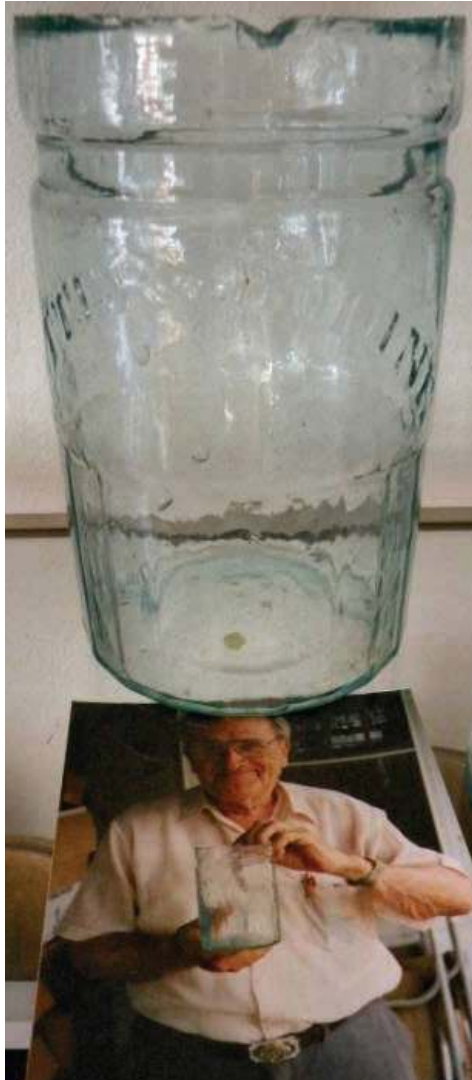
cures, food bottles, political hats, signs, slogans and torches, porcelain and tin plates from the very early 1800s, clocks, pictures, post cards, water bottles, demijohns, moulds, old food cans and so much more. It's just simply amazing.

Dick told me another very interesting story concerning some really good jars and bottles he acquired for the collection some 25 years ago. Once a month, Dick and his wife used to set up at a flea market in Rancocas, N.J. There he met some doctors' and lawyers' wives who had time on their hands and so became involved in antiques, and all of them liked both Dick and Elma a lot. A few of them had shops in Mt. Holly, and one of the ladies was approached



Dick does have some very nice early American fruit jars on display, some of which include Arthur's Patent, A. Stone, Potter & Bodine and Dalbey jars. I was amazed to see an Arthur's and A. Stone jar in half-pint size. I didn't even know these jars existed in the smaller size.

Dick was a very good friend of George McConnell. He related to me how George was over at his house one day and spied a Crowleytown jar in a size he didn't have, and asked Dick if he would sell it to him. Dick went to his glass cabinet, took out the jar and gave it to George. Dick then told him it was a gift. George was thrilled to say the least, and it's moments such as those that make collecting what it's all about -- the people.



George McConnell

by a woman who said she had many fruit jars and bottles she was looking to sell. Well, since she didn't know much about fruit jars she told her to get in contact with Dick.

The woman lived about ten miles away from Dick, so he went there as soon as possible to look over the items. When he got there he saw that she had many boxes of jars that she wanted to get rid of due to lack of space. As Dick looked through the boxes he found a green H&S quart, a full set of Haller's with stopples and other assorted early glass fruit jars with stopples, too. It turned out her husband was a Philadelphia fireman and there was a fire in a building there. According to Dick, during the Civil War, the government used to commandeer many buildings and use them as makeshift hospitals. Well, this was one such building.



So after the fire was put out, the husband was up in the attic to vent the roof and saw all kinds of glass everywhere. He wanted to take a closer look at it, but



couldn't at that time. Then he heard the fire marshal talking about the building having to be taken down due to structural damage. The building was right at the edge of the street, and most of the bricks had been cooked by the intensity of the fire, so it was very dangerous. Well, he went back that night and cleaned all of the glass out of there.

woman told him she had someone else already look at them, and she wanted to take bids. Dick told her he just didn't want to get into a back and forth deal and asked her to get the other party's highest bid that they would pay for the lot and after that call him. Then he would give her his highest bid, but he didn't want to know what the other bid was at all.



According to Dick, everything was super clean. If a jar was supposed to have a closure then the jar had the correct one, and all of them were perfect. There were also olive oil and some pickle bottles in the mix. Dick said there was just a bunch of nice jars including three pint Haller jars with stopples that were all whittled. So the

So she called Dick back, and he went over again to give everything another look over. At that point Dick told her he'd give her \$1,500 for the whole works. Well, the woman stuttered and said "you would, \$1,500 you, you got them." She was so excited she couldn't contain herself.

Dick happens to be one of those

very fortunate and blessed collectors who just happened to be alive at the right time and also live in the right place. But it was also his insatiable passion for history and historic Americana that drove him on. You wouldn't know though by talking or looking at him that he has probably the most complete and diverse collection of truly historic Americana in the entire country. Dick is just a warm-hearted, down-to-earth person who loves to share his collection, life experiences and wonderful stories with whomever would give him the time.

Dick claims what really helped spur him on was the fact that his wife was also into collecting many historical items too, and she didn't mind him spending money. Dick's thinking is very simple: once he's bought and paid for something, he doesn't worry about what it's worth. Dick claims he isn't just a jar collector, but I'd say he has some pretty fantastic stuff.



Notes:

Dick Watson is currently the Historial for the FOHBC and has served on the board since approximately 1986 in some capacity and has been in the current position since 1988. He and his wife, Elma, joined the Federation of Historical Bottle Clubs (now Collectors) as Life members in the early 1980s.

Looking for jar collections / jars to report on, contact:

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This is just a small sampling of the untold variety and numbers of items to be found at the "Watson Museum" in addition to fruit jars. Hope you enjoyed this glimpse at the collections.



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