

# The Lowly Ball Jar

By Bruce Schank

One of the most prolific fruit jars ever produced in the history of the world is the lowly Ball jar. Historical figures show that from between Sept 1, 1894 until Dec 31, 1961 that 41,256,856 Gross jars had been produced by the Ball Glass Mfg Co. That's a staggering number, to say the least, and what this suggests is that Ball jars should be a readily available commodity and very easy to find.

This makes collecting Ball Jars a somewhat easier venture for many people since more of these jars exist than probably any of the other Mfg's combined. Yet, with all that glass out there to be found, it has become literally a colossal challenge to categorize, date and fully understand the minutia of variants produced by the Ball Glass Mfg Co. Plus, there is literally a sub-minutia of variances in the entire differing genre of Ball jars to make matters even more convoluted.

Now, who hasn't at one time or another, whether at a garage sale, antique store, Grandma's basement or in some hole-in-the-wall come across a Ball jar whether a PERFECT MASON, IDEAL, SURE SEAL, IMPROVED, SPECIAL or one of the myriad of other varieties of jars produced over the last century-plus by the Ball Glass Mfg Co. Incredibly though, many people have failed to recognize the true importance these jars played in our nation's history. And believe me when I tell you, Ball jars are a quintessential part of American history, as much as apple pie or ice cream.

Imagine this, the Ball jar was at one time (actually not so long ago) reviled by the vast majority of the collecting world as worthless and a complete waste of time, money and energy. Yet, a small group of collectors just happened to see the beauty, value and future in collecting Ball jars. So that amazingly, despite all the odds and over many years, Ball jars have now blossomed into one of the most highly sought after collectables in the jar hobby today.

Why is this so? Why the drastic change? Well, coming from a 31-year perspective in the hobby, I can say simply a few things: 1) there are many more collectors now than ever before vying for the few good jars known to exist or being discovered. 2) Most of the highly sought after, truly historical jars are out of reach financially for the vast majority of collectors. 3) Most of the few prized historical jars are already in someone else's collection. 4) The few historical jars still left intact and found are not readily available for the average collector to even consider purchasing. 5) With the advent of eBay, the playing field has leveled somewhat but the ultimate overall cost still is a huge factor for the average collector because overall, eBay is not a bargain.

Now on the other hand, as we have already previously established, Ball jars are a readily available commodity. Plus, the wonderful character of the glass, the myriad of beautiful breathtaking colors and hues, the varying closures types, myriad of embossing styles, re-worked and modified moulds ad infinitum make Ball jars a huge viable alternative to collecting other much more expensive jars.

And yes, there is without a doubt out of all those millions of jars produced there are many one-of-a-kind, rare as well as very scarce Ball jars worth considerable amounts of money. Yet I personally consider some of the \$1 jars in the collection to be just as pleasing and desirable as the expensive ones. The passion that truly drives a Ball collector on is that around any corner is the possibility of a new discovery, a totally different and unknown variation, a possible piece of the puzzle solved or a really crude masterpiece.

I truly consider myself a very fortunate and lucky person that I just happened to be one of those few collectors who recognized long ago the intrinsic value, beauty and history of Ball jars when they were objects





of disdain or simply overlooked by so many others. I'm so grateful I had the foresight to collect Ball jars because despite the fact many of the good ones in my early years were financially and geographically out of reach, I still managed to acquire through knowledge, insight, persistence, patience and hard work a very small but desirable collection.

But, what I have truly gained over the years besides the wonderful jars in my collection is something far more intrinsically valuable, namely the many great people who befriended me, taught me, reasoned and bantered with me, traded with me, sold jars to me and shared their lives with me. For that I am truly ever grateful. I can honestly say that collecting Ball jars has been one of the most satisfying adventures in my entire lifetime and something I will never regret doing as long as I live and in which I will continue to the very end.

Happy Hunting and Most Importantly Sharing,  
Bruce Wayne Schank

