

Bottles along the Oregon Trail

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I don't really know for sure when I started collecting old bottles or why. I guess it was the stories in National Geographic magazines about archaeological discoveries that fascinated me.

I know it was finding a number of old jars and bottles in my grandmother's fruit room that started me collecting. Interesting names, colors, sizes and shapes intrigued me. It wasn't long before I went to my great aunts' houses and their next door neighbors' houses and my collection grew.

By the time I was 11 or so, I would do yard work for several elderly ladies in my neighborhood. I soon asked them about their fruit rooms and it wasn't long before I took bottles and jars in trade for my work. If a jar I wanted still had food in it, they would tape a "Save for Wayne" note on it and I would get the jar after it was empty.

Of course, back then I had no way of knowing which jars and bottles were common and today I have only a couple of those jars in my collection. The two jars I still

have in my collection from those days is a very crude Mason patent CFJ November 30th, 1858 half-gallon and a quart cornflower blue Kerr Self Sealing Mason, both common. The 1858 jar is also the first jar I found in the first farm dump I discovered on my own about 1965.

About 1961, as a seventh grader, my social studies teacher Keith Jensen and physical education teacher Bill Blackburn were digging bottles from old dumps. I would often find my way to their houses and look at the bottles and listen to their stories of digging escapades. Boy, did it sound like fun!

Between my eighth and ninth grade years, after prob-





ably pestering them to the point of going crazy, I finally convinced them to take me digging. If I wasn't hooked on collecting by then, the digging trip sealed the deal.

In those days, people were digging their bottles in dumps or finding them in or under old buildings. Some were found in local second-hand stores. To find places to dig, I would often talk to old timers in the community who remembered where some old dumps were located.

There were small dumps all over the mid Willamette Valley. I dug in Molalla, Mt. Angel, Oregon City, McMinnville, Dayton, Lafayette, Hubbard, Salem as well as in Aurora. Some of them had been dug or

The legendary Unkweed Remedy
Rheumatic Cure bottle,
anonymous collection

partially dug. I just went deeper and hit the edges harder. The dump in Aurora had special challenges. It was in an old mill race and water was present year-around.

By this time, I was dating my future wife and her father operated an excavation company. During the driest



Collection of colored glass groups

driest part of the year, I would borrow his portable trash pump with an 18-foot suction line and 50 feet of fire hose to help drain the water into an adjacent farmer's field. Even then, we were digging in stinking, rusty old water, reaching as far as we could to rake the bottom of the dump.

Occasionally, my digging partner, Steve Radosavich, or I would pull up part of a plank and bottles with air trapped inside would come bobbing to the surface. I was slapped in the face by more than one bottle during our digging there. There was great broken stuff in this dump and some good local bottles, too. The nicest part was that the bottles cleaned up to mint condition. On two different weekends, I dug the large size AvanHoboken case gins and both just sparkle.

One of the McMinnville dumps was going to be built on so the owner opened it up with a cat(erpillar) and we would dig 16 hours a day on weekends for about six weeks. He had a time frame he had to follow so we made the most of those weekends until it was covered with gravel and compacted. Today, a housing project is on that site.

Good local bottles were dug as well as others. I broke into a

pocket of Warner's Safe Cures and was able to keep a nice yellow amber Safe Rheumatic Cure. Most dumps I dig were from the 1890s to about 1910. It was hard to find older stuff since Oregon was not heavily populated. Today, it has over 96,000 square miles and less than 4 million people.

I have dug some rare local bottles, but perhaps my favorite is a pint size Fleckenstein & Mayer large slug plate whiskey from Portland. It came from an outhouse in Dayton, my home for the last 40 years. It was protected from breakage by a crock lid and cleaned to mint condition.

Perhaps the rarest of bottles – at least, value-wise – came from a post estate sale. A lady contacted me and hadn't sold many bottles during the sale. I traveled about 45 miles to look at the bottles, hoping there would be something good that someone had missed. Among common western whiskeys was a Miller's cylinder fifth. It turned out to be a really scarce bottle with perhaps only a couple of dozen in collections today.

Personally, I am really just a general collector. If I specialized, it would be in Oregon pharmacy and patent

medicines, dose glasses and canning jars, although I always pick up other types of Oregon bottles I don't have.

Perhaps my two favorite Oregon bottles are an amber Hodge & Davis drug store bottle with the Oregon state shield embossed on the square 14-ounce bottle. I have one in my collection. The other I don't own is the Dr. Loryeas Unkweed Cure, a rare patent medicine from Portland.

While still just a kid, I visited Phyllis and Andy Shimko in their antiques shop in Aurora. I learned from them there were other local people from all over Oregon who were interested in antique bottles and jars. Some early collectors included Bill and Sue Young, Marion Marshal, Harold Hooper, Clarence "Jake" Haynes, Jules Martino, Esther Kemry and Lynn Blumenstein.

The Shimkos carried a few of the early bottle books. I pored over the books time and time again to get as much information as possible. I also purchased bottles and jars from them. (Later, Phyllis Shimko wrote a sarsaparilla book).

During one visit with them, I learned that there was going to be an exploratory meeting about the formation of an antique bottle club in Oregon. In October 1966 at the American Legion building in Aurora, the first meeting of the Oregon Bottle Collectors Association

Grouping of Fantastic Oregon Colored Medicines



Three Amber Oregon Bottles, Scarce and hard to get bottles

was held. More than 100 people showed up.

In the first few months, the club grew to more than 300 members who all shared an interest in this great hobby and today we still have regular meetings, shows and swap meets, a published newsletter and many members who were not even born when OBCA formed.

I was the youngest charter member of the club and once served as its president.