

Columbus Day Weekend In New England

By An Enthusiastic New England Collector



Fall in New England can be a glorious time and each year thousands come to the region to enjoy the blue skies, beautiful foliage and the rambling countryside. With that said, it is the Keene Bottle Show and Heckler Columbus Weekend event that we collectors most often think of when discussing October in the Northeast. Long considered to be one of the premier Bottle Shows in the country, Keene is a “can’t miss” event on its own and through the generosity of the Hecklers, the weekend also includes a tailgate event that has become (dare I say) as exciting as the show itself.

The weekend begins bright and early on Saturday morning as anxious collectors make their way along the stonewalled Northeastern Connecticut roads towards the home of Norm and Liz Heckler. Now in its seventh year, the gates to the Heckler’s hayfield open at 8:30am, although no bottles are to be displayed until the bell is rung promptly at 9:00. It is at this point that the fun really begins, as more than fifty dealers showcase their wares, including bottles of all types and price levels.

If you cannot find something in the fields that morning you are simply not looking hard enough!

The energy last year was palpable and the field was filled to near capacity (with dealers from across the country LOVING the free setup) – this year promises to be bigger and more exciting yet, as the buzz has grown with each passing year and those

who have attended have spread the word.

If you are an enthusiastic collector you simply cannot afford to miss this opportunity, as it is one of the last places in which collectors can gather together, reminisce about good times and “talk bottles,” just like “the old days.”

Once you have made your way through the maze of dealers it is time to preview the walk-around country barn auction that begins at 11:00. Conducted by Norm with ample doses of his famed humor, the sale typically includes 75 to 100 quality items, giving the dealer and collector plenty of opportunity to add to their stock and/or shelves. Collectors can also use this time to preview two upcoming Heckler absentee sales, the first closing on the 19th of October and the second on the 16th of November. Preview is available from 9:00 to 11:00 and again (following the barn sale) from 12:30 to 1:30. Each of the sales will include 96 lots with representative examples of nearly every collecting category.

Of special note is the November 16th sale, which will include objects from Norm’s personal collection. For those of us who have been trying (in vain) for years to buy out of the house, this is a wonderful opportunity to add to our own collections. The sale will be unreserved and the proceeds will be used to fund a land purchase to enhance the already expansive Heckler estate.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the food and refreshments that are available throughout the day, including Liz’s famous New England corn chowder, fresh apple

cider and of course the steaming hot coffee that keeps us collectors on our toes that morning. It should also be added that there is an opportunity to peruse bottles and related objects in a small shop within the Heckler’s Civil War era barn. Again, if you cannot find something to buy that day you are simply not trying very hard!

The day comes to a close at 2:00pm or so, when the last of the dealers have packed out and the entire “bottle caravan” heads North towards Keene in anticipation of the next morning’s show. One of the longest running shows in the hobby, the Keene Bottle Show is truly a “classic” and it remains one of the busiest and best shows of the year.

2005 will mark the show’s 38th year and it will again include most of the country’s major dealers and attract collectors from most every state in the country as well as folks from abroad. With early buying beginning at 8am, Keene is the rare show that maintains strong energy all the way through to the 2:30pm closing time.

Run with expert precision by longtime organizer Creighton Hall, the show is well ordered and held within a beautiful space that offers abundant natural light for collectors to inspect the dealers’ wares. As with the broad selection of bottles showcased in the Hecklers’ hayfield the previous day, there is ample opportunity for dealers and collectors of all interests to find that elusive item for their collection. I have on numerous occasions been asked “If I can only make it to one New England show each year, which would it be?” and without hesitation I have always answered “Keene,” as the weekend offers a unique opportunity to visit with old friends AND enjoy the now rare chance to actually buy (and not bid on) a great bottle for your collection. If you have not yet made the trip to Keene and the Hecklers do yourself a favor and give it a try this year – you will not believe what you have been missing!

