

# Collector owns the cream of the crop of Georgia milks

*by Bill Baab*

The cream of the crop of Paul Irby's collection of hundreds of milk bottles are round, colorful Pyroglazed quarts dating to the 1930s and '40s.

The basement of his Flowery Branch, Georgia home is filled to overflowing with milks, other bottles and insulators which marked earlier interests in collecting.

Pyroglazing, or more simply applied color labeling, was developed in the United States during the early 1920s and a decade or so later had replaced the more expensive embossing process in use since the early 19th century.

"I love the Pyroglazed round quarts with their vibrant graphics," Irby said as he gave visitors a tour of his home. "They are easily displayed and the graphics especially stand out when you fill the bottles with Styrofoam beads.

"There are so many categories that help make collecting milks so appealing: World War II patriotic; rhymes and poems extolling the virtues of drinking milk; Deep South plantation bottles; containers from institutions like hospitals, colleges and universities and military installations, not to mention bottles of various sizes."

Among Irby's favorites is a Pyroglazed bottle saying "Let's Go U.S.A.!" and featuring caricatures of Axis enemies Tojo, Hitler and Mussolini. The bottle also is inscribed "Harms' Dairy/Oakhurst Farm/Milk with that Extra Care/Savannah, Ga."

Stroll into the kitchen of the Irby home that houses himself, wife Tracie, daughter Caroline, 11, and son Christopher, 9, and standing atop the cabinets is a collection of embossed slug plate quarts from Georgia towns and cities.

"I told my daughter that I named her after a milk bottle from Caroline Dairy in Comer, Ga.," he said. "Truth is, she arrived before I acquired the bottle!

"When I was between jobs, I bought a milk bottle from Tom Hicks of Eatonton, Ga., and paid \$75 for it. When my wife found out, she gave me a fit, but that bottle is worth \$300 to \$400 today. Suddenly she claims it's HER bottle and warns me not to sell it!"

Irby's collecting roots go deep, probably from genes inherited from his

father, J.C. Irby, an enthusiastic collector of stamps and coins.

When he was a child living in Cornelia in northeast Georgia, he picked up bottles along the roadside and put them on display. "Mom later made me throw them away, but I think they were just junk. I started collecting insulators in 1988, having formed a liking for their different colors, but at a local flea market a year or so later, I found three milk bottles.

"All were Pyroglazed round quarts: Miss Georgia (Atlanta), Adderholdt Brothers featuring Uncle Sam (from nearby Gainesville) and an Athens Cooperative Cream with a World War II slogan. I thought they were cool and decided to collect milks."

He soon learned it was a near-impossible task to collect ALL the milks, so he's specialized in gathering just the ones from his home state. Be that as it may, Irby will buy non-Georgia milks if they pique his interest.

"Collect what you like because that's where you get the most enjoyment," he said.

Before pasteurization of milk became mandatory during the 1940s, the lighter cream in a bottle of milk rose to the top after the ingredients had settled. Many dairies in the northeastern and midwestern sections of the country introduced "baby tops," bottles with embossed babies' faces in the neck into which the cream rose. They proved popular with the public.

"The only dairy in Georgia that used a round baby-faced top was the Georgia Milk and Cream Company of Waycross. There is a square baby-faced bottle from Springfield Plantation Dairy whose plant was in Savannah, but whose cows were at the plantation in nearby Effingham County."

He owns a Georgia State College of Agriculture Dairy bottle from the 19-teens which a few years later became the University (of Georgia) Dairy. He also owns a half-pint milk embossed State Tuberculosis Sanitarium in Alto, inside a slug plate.

"I buy a lot of milk bottles off eBay, plus there is network of collectors who know I collect Georgia milks. If they find

one I'm interested in, then I've got to find something they're interested in so we can trade."

Irby has contributed photos of his milks for use in John Tutton's "Udderly Beautiful" and "Udderly Splendid" milk bottle books. He also is a member of the National Association of Milk Bottle Collectors.

Other parts of his milk-related collection include bottle caps, milk tokens, dairy calendars, dairy billheads and letterheads, post cards, ice cream "tip" trays and milk crates.

Irby also has collections of Georgia pottery, colorful Georgia peach crate labels, William C. Fisher "real photo" post cards from Demorest, Ga., colored blobtop sodas, applied color labeled sodas and embossed Georgia medicines and whiskeys.

He also has a "mystery" milk bottle about which he knows nothing. He bought it in Flowery Branch. It's a round pint embossed "First Prize Dairy/Mrs. M.C. Gooding/Grand Score 9595" in a 1920s-30s slug plate.

"I'd appreciate it if anyone knowing anything about the bottle, particularly its location, would contact me," he said. His address is 5981 River Oaks Drive, Flowery Branch, GA 30542.

His e-mail is [irbybottles@juno.com](mailto:irbybottles@juno.com).

For more information on milk bottle collecting, write National Association of Milk Bottle Collectors, 18 Pond Place, Cos Cob, Conn., 06807. Yearly membership is \$20 in the U.S., \$22 in Canada and \$25 International.

Tutton, who said the association has about 1,600 members, can be reached at [www.earlyamericanworkshop.com](http://www.earlyamericanworkshop.com). While his "Udder Delight," "Udderly Delightful," "Udderly Fantastic" and "Udderly Beautiful" milk bottle books are out of print, his "Udderly Splendid" book is available at \$28.

Photos by Bill Baab  
2352 Devere Street  
Augusta, GA 30904  
(706) 736-8097  
[riverswamper@comcast.net](mailto:riverswamper@comcast.net)





Paul Irby of Flowery Branch, Ga., with a small part of his milk bottle collection after only 15 years of seriously collecting.



Ice cream trays share space with Georgia pottery; the Sancken's tray at lower right is from Augusta, Ga.



Multicolored milks hail from places outside Georgia. The bottle with the cow is from Torrington, Conn.



Irby shows one of his milks with a golf motif and a Bobby Jones-like figure reading "The Swing is to Sun Shine Dairy"



The collector with two 1940s cardboard cone "bottles" from Augusta's Bryson Dairy and the Butler Island Plantation between Brunswick and Savannah.



World War II patriotic slogans adorn milks on top shelf; lower shelf contains rhyme bottles from Vallotton Dairy in Valdosta, Ga.



The lone Georgia baby tops mentioned in the story are third and fourth from the left.