

THE HILLBILLY AND THE JUG

by Jack Sullivan



In May of 2003, CBS raised a ruckus by announcing a new "reality" program to be called "The Real Beverly Hillbillies" in which a multi-generational mountain family would be relocated to the posh California town and furnished with \$500,000, high fashion clothing, Jaguars and personal assistants. Then the cameras would roll on the real-live antics of these rural folks.

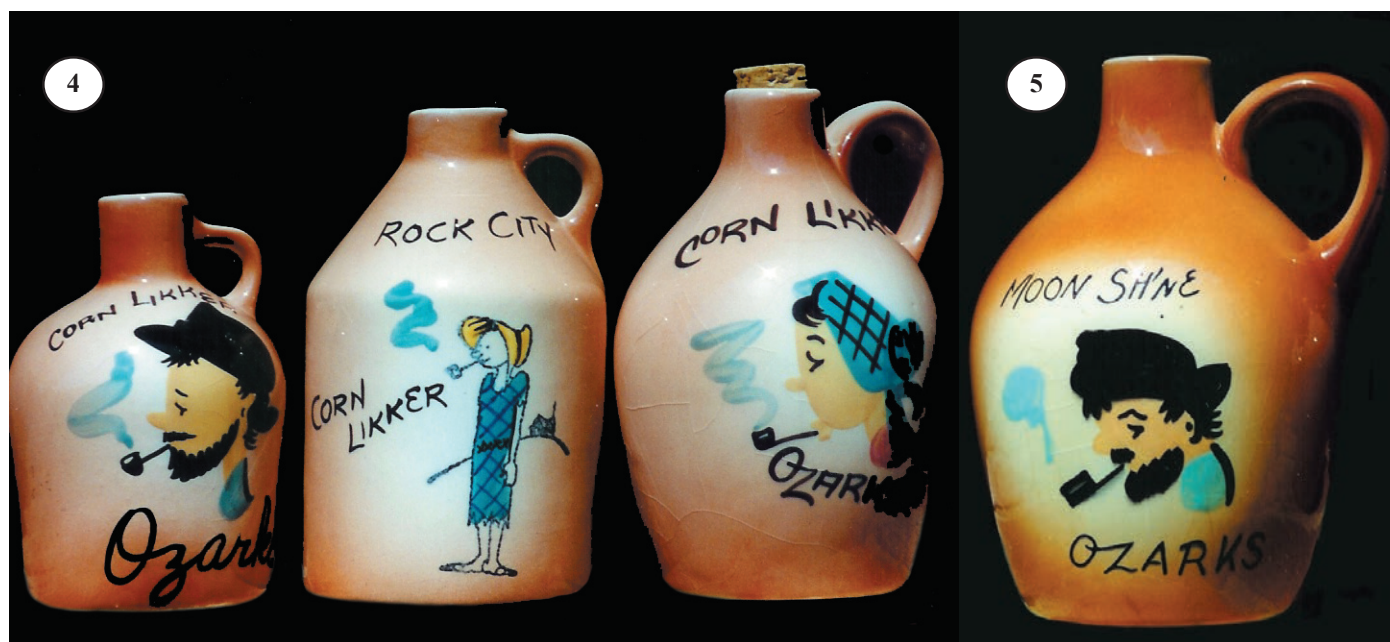
The concept was immediately and roundly denounced from many quarters. Among the most outspoken was Georgia Senator Zell Miller who denounced the

idea as a "hillbilly minstrel show." Miller, who regularly denounced the notion of hillbilly, has said: "...One of the greatest ironies of history is that while the cowboy, another kind of frontiersman, has been glorified, the mountaineer, the first frontiersman, has been ridiculed and caricatured in the image of Snuffy Smith." The show was shelved.

Senator Miller may have a point. The American Dialect Dictionary defines "hillbilly" as "an uncouth countryman, especially from the hills." The term first was coined about 1900 in the vicinity of

Arkansas. Its use subsequently spread throughout the South and became especially common in Kentucky and West Virginia. The New York Evening Journal of April 2, 1900, using a variant spelling said, "In short, a Hill-Billie is a free and untrammled white citizen...who lives in the hills, has no means to speak of, dresses as he can, talks as he pleases (and) drinks whiskey when he gets it...."

Unlike the Senator, however, some mountain people still revel in the name and the image. In certain locales it even qualifies as a term of endearment. "I don't



mind if you call me a hillbilly," Tim White, a Bristol TN country music DJ and banjo player, told a reporter. "Just don't call me a dumb hillbilly."

The hillbilly, for good or ill, has an age old identification with jugs. This is an obvious allusion to the illicit whiskey that is distilled in "them thar hills." As a result, the hillbilly frequently has been depicted on ceramic jugs that purport to hold strong drink, but actually are souvenirs. Some identify themselves as holding "moonshine," "home brew" or "mountain dew," terms often used in connection with illegal whiskey-making in the Appalachian and Ozark Mountains. Such items usually contain illustrations of mountain folks, bearing familiar hillbilly themes and stereotypes:

- * The men are inevitably heavily bearded, in ragged clothing, with a gun and/or a jug of whiskey at hand and often a dog at their side;

- * The women are puffing on pipes and raising great clouds of smoke; and

- * Everybody seems to be barefoot and wearing odd-looking hats.

Hillbilly souvenir jugs most often are without any identification about their origins. But some can be traced to their makers, either by marks or other characteristics. Research has identified three such firms whose products frequently are seen at bottle shows and on eBay: The Cash Family Pottery of Tennessee; Paden City Artcraft of West Virginia; and Parkcraft/Taneycomo of Iowa and

Missouri.

THE CASH FAMILY

Erwin is a town of about 5,000 in south-eastern Tennessee, on Interstate 181 just above the North Carolina line. In 1910, E.J. "Ted" Owen started a pottery there after several years working in the ceramic trade in Ohio and West Virginia. Owen first called his company Clinchfield Pottery, later changing it to Southern Potteries. But he found it difficult to hire experienced potters and the boys from the surrounding hills proved hard to train. Production faltered and bankruptcy was in prospect.

Just when things looked darkest in 1922, a seasoned potter from Ohio named Charles Foreman took over the operations and made them profitable. As a first step he began hiring women for the pottery, training them to paint by hand on bisque stoneware which was then fired. While most of the painting was done following a pattern or formula, as the women progressed, they were encouraged to use their own artistic imaginations.

The skill of these mountain women were the key to Foreman's success. Because of the low cost of their skilled labor and the potter's ability to change patterns easily, Southern Potteries, under its own name and "Blue Ridge Pottery," succeeded in establishing a market for cheap dinnerware as theater premiums and for chains like Sears and Montgomery Ward. The firm prospered until the early 1950s when Charles Foreman died.

Enter the Cash Family. In the midst of

the Great Depression, about 1935 Ray and Pauline Cash opened a roadside pottery stand on Highway 25, three miles north of Knoxville. It started as a rickety tarp-covered stall but the Cashes were able merchants and the business grew, first to a closed wooden structure and later to a brick building. They called it the "Cash Pottery Stand" and adopted the slogan, "Everybody Buys Here," with a logo of silhouettes streaming into a building. Prominent among their merchandise were Southern and Blue Ridge Pottery items.

About 1945, Ray and Pauline founded their own ceramics business in Erwin they called Clinchfield Pottery, a problematic choice since even today it causes confusion with the earlier Ted Owens pottery of the same name. When Foreman's Southern Pottery liquidated in 1957. The couple purchased its molds and took on many of its skilled women. They continued the tradition of painted stoneware, becoming known for decorative household ceramic items of all kinds. Eventually they renamed their operation the Cash Family Pottery -- by which it is best known today.

Among their products were a line of souvenir jugs with hillbilly or whiskey motifs. They carry the predictable motifs of mountain people, including bare feet, beards, funny hats, jugs marked with xxx's. All were souvenir shop specialties, meant to be taken home to Aunt Gert and Uncle Bart as proof of a visit to the Great Smoky Mountains or other southern locales. Most bear the Cash Family





Pottery mark prominently and often indicate that the jug has been "hand painted."

While most of these items are standardized occasionally the artistic ability of the decorator is evident, as shown in #1. The figure of a mountain man whittling on a stick is similar to #2 but is done in a free hand format that gives it a individualized feeling.

Moreover, among Cash Family jugs is a real whiskey container. Holding Jack Daniels Tennessee Whiskey, the jug apparently was commissioned by the Hoover Ball and Bearing Company, a Michigan firm with a factory in Erwin. It probably was meant as a holiday gift to clients and employees. Using its standard "fifth" size jug, the Cash Family obliged the roller bearing company with a white stoneware container with a black and blue label (#6). The misspelled "Tennisee (with an "n" reversed for effect) apparently was to be part of its country-style allure. It is one of the more interesting post-Prohibition whiskey jugs to be found.

After more than 50 years in business, the Cash Family pottery operation closed about 1989, in part the victim of cheaper foreign ceramic imports. Today its products are considered highly collectible. In 2000 the first reference publication appeared. Written by Allison Burnette, it is entitled *"Collectors Guide to Cash Family Pottery/Clinchfield Artware"* and contains photos of most of the pottery's hillbilly souvenirs.

PADEN CITY ARTWARE

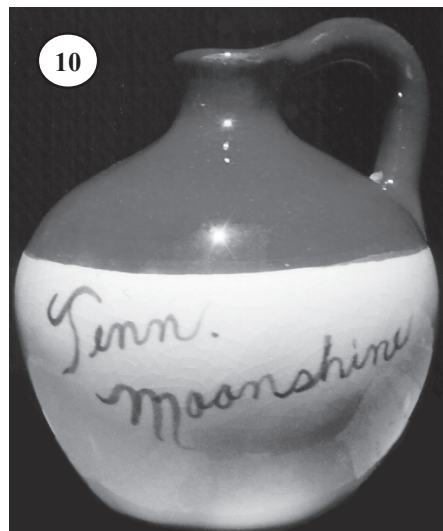
Hardly a flea market or bottle show goes by without a small ceramic jug showing up with the label "Mountain Dew" or "Pure Corn." Many bear a P.C. A. mark on the bottom. The initials are those of Paden City Artware, a West Virginia pottery operation. The firm was in business for about 45 years and produced assorted specialty stoneware items including ashtrays, bells, vases, pitchers and - above all - jugs.

Although some advertised themselves as containers of mountain-made liquor, they actually held nothing more intoxicating than air. They frequently bear the names of resort towns that often were far from the mountains. Aimed at the tourist trade, these minis, half-pints, and pints were meant for souvenirs or gifts to the folks back home. Most P.C.A. jugs are heavy stoneware with cream bodies and brown or green tops. Their special distinction is gold lettering and other gilded decoration. Some boast on the base: "Hand Decorated - 22 K Gold." All - though empty - were corked.

The pottery was located in Paden City, a town of about 3,000 on the east side of the Ohio River and up river from Marietta, Ohio. It was founded in 1940 and owned by William Ford and Lyle Mitchell. At first they called the company "F and M Artware," using their initials, but in 1956 changed its name to Paden City Artware. The change may have been motivated by commercial advantage. There already was a Paden City Pottery, founded in 1914 at nearby Sisterville, West Virginia. That firm was a successful producer of high quality dinnerware and enjoyed a national reputation as a brand sold through Sears stores. Undoubtedly some confusion resulted from two potteries with Paden City in their name. But that may have been what Mssrs. Ford and Mitchell had in mind.

Whatever the rationale, under its new name P.C.A. appears to have been successful for almost three decades. (It outlived Paden City Pottery by some 22 years.) A handicraft shop with only about 15 employees, the firm produced good quality, if simply designed, stoneware. P.C.A.'s market was an expanding one during the boom years of tourism that followed the end of World War II and the opening of the Interstate Highway System. As the American people visited new places, they wanted memorabilia. The West Virginia firm was ready to oblige.

P.C.A. jugs shown here are from resort towns located nowhere near the Appalachian and Ozark Mountains that added "mountain dew" and "corn whiskey" to our national vocabulary. In fact, many were from towns on the seacoast where a hillbilly was as unlikely as a rock slide. Nevertheless, the identification of souvenir jugs with hillbilly "likker" apparently helped sales regardless of the point of origin. The common



denominator among all these P.C.A. items is a place name, often in script and always in bright gold.

Whether the cause was cheaper foreign imports or the increasing sophistication of the touring public, P.C.A.'s stoneware jugs and other souvenirs eventually lost favor. The firm closed its doors about 1985. Nothing more will ever be added to its product line. Yet because of the modernity of its products, P.C.A. items often can be purchased at flea markets and antique malls for just a couple of dollars.

PARKCRAFT & TANEYCOMO

Parkcraft was another family affair, one among several product names used by the Ahrold Family of Burlington, Iowa, for specialty ceramics they produced at their own facilities or commissioned from other





potteries.

Today Parkcraft is known particularly for its salt-and-pepper shakers. Their ceramic sets commemorated days of the week, months of the year, famous cities, and other topics. The firm is perhaps best known for its state series of S&Ps in which the salt shaker was fashioned in the shape of the state itself and the pepper was an object reminiscent of the character of the state, e.g. Kentucky has a small whiskey jug pepper shaker.

The Parkcraft also merchandised hillbilly jugs of a wide range of sizes from half-pints to quarts. In correspondence to me, Bob and Marianne Ahrold, now retired and living in Florida, have indicated that although the jugs are widely credited to their firm, Parkcraft did the marketing only and the production was the

work of Taneycomo Pottery of Hollister, Mo., a town not far from the Branson music center. The proprietor of this company was Sam Weaver.

Like the Cash Family, Weaver relied on, as the Ahrolds put it, "deft-fingered Ozarks ladies" for hand-painting the faces and figures of mountain folk. They used free-hand techniques that give each jug some individuality. Parkcraft/Taneycomo sold these items to whole-salers, gift and souvenir shops and through ads in newspapers and specialty publications to collectors and the general public.

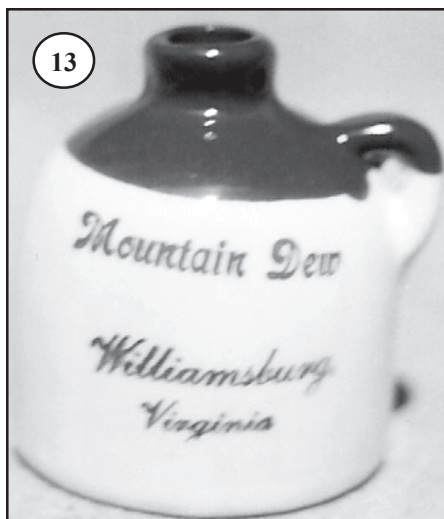
Unlike items from the Cash Family and P.C.A., Parkcraft/Taneycomo jugs almost never have pottery marks. However, they can be readily recognized by their distinct dusky rose color and the character of the drawing. A few carry a mark on the base that says "Parkcraft...Burlington, Iowa...around a "C" in a circle. Parkcraft was in business from 1949 to 1965.

These three firms were among a number of outfits that produced hillbilly jugs for the tourist trade during the decades 1940-1970. Hillbilly items are still on sale at places like Mountain Village - 1890 at Bull Shoals, Arkansas, but those ceramics are made in Asia. They lack an authenticity I find in the American-made jugs described above. After all, the jugs shown here were fashioned and painted by real people from the hills. These ceramics may be characterized by some as "Southern Tacky," but, nonetheless, they are genuine Americana.

Material for this article came from a number of sources, among the most important being Lois Lehner's *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF U.S. MARKS ON POTTERY, PORCELAIN & CLAY* (Collector Books, 1988).

Photos:

1. A typical Cash Family quart hillbilly jug.
2. A similar Cash Family hillbilly, but done in a free-hand style.
3. This female mountain woman appears on a quart-sized jug from Parkcraft/Taneycomo.
4. A lineup of three Parkcraft/Taneycomo pipe-smoking hillbilly souvenirs.
5. A male counterpart from Parkcraft/Taneycomo.
6. This half-pint sized Cash Family jug featured a multi-colored mountain



man.

7. (Front side) This "Tennessee Sip'n Likker" jug actually held real whiskey.

8. (Back side) The familiar Jack Daniels label on a speciality item made for the Hoover Ball Company.

9. One of several pottery marks used by the Cash Family on its ceramic items.

10. A round Cash Family half-pint jug of pretend "Tenn. Moonshine."

11. A PCA "Pure Corn" jug from Cape Cod, Mass.

12. PCA -made "Pure Corn" souvenir of Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.

13. Mini-jug from PCA advertising "Mountain Dew" from coastal Williamsburg Va.

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