



Federation of Historic Bottle Collectors

President :

## President's Message

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For thirty years I have been actively involved in collecting and dealing in antique bottles and stoneware. In that time, one of the most significant things I have noted is the general integrity and honesty displayed by my fellow collectors-- traits which I have found to be unsurpassed by any other group with whom I have been associated. I am proud to be a member of the hobby and the Federation which represents it!

Bearing this history in mind, it is troubling for me to have to indicate to you that incidents are occurring with increasing frequency that point out that we cannot totally avoid the problems of the world around us as we escape into the world of our hobby.

In the past month I have had two separate requests for the Federation to provide some assistance to collectors who have suffered losses to the hands of thieves. Although separated by three thousand miles, the similarity of the cases is one to note-- in each instance, the individuals were known to be away from their residences for an extended period and items were taken that only someone knowledgeable in the hobby would take. For the East Coast collector, the theft was particularly disheartening as the burglary occurred while he was at a bottle show. This collector suspects that the items were resold to fellow collectors.

In the case of the Western collector, it is well-known that at least one rare San Francisco beer that was taken was re-sold. An unsuccessful legal attempt was made at recovery, but with no ability to prove that the current owner knew the item was stolen apparently there is no recourse for this collector. A friend from earlier dealings in western beers and whiskies, I can acutely sympathize with him.

Aside from the significant monetary loss sustained by these two collectors, there is the hurt that comes with realizing that they, personally, were targeted and disappointment that one of their fellow

collectors (and probably someone they know) would stoop to this level. I share in their disappointment.

Alas, I have no answers for these members..... The Federation cannot publicize the names of individuals alleged to have perpetrated the thefts or purchased the stolen items, nor can we go to these individuals and ask that they return the items without direct proof of their knowing involvement. If a court of law does not find in favor of the wronged collector then it is not possible for us to intercede differently.

### So, then, what can the Federation offer????

- We will publish reports of specific items which have been stolen where they have characteristics which would make them readily identifiable (and, thus, reportable and recoverable)
- We will serve as an intermediary for forwarding reliable anonymous tips to the appropriate law enforcement authorities
- We will run factual articles about convictions of individuals associated with thefts
- We will forward lists of stolen items submitted to us to show chairmen so that they can be posted at the shows, potentially assisting with the recovery of the stolen items.

The Federation encourages all collectors to avoid purchasing any items which they suspect might have been stolen and to report any items offered for sale which they know to be stolen to the appropriate authorities or the Federation President. Eliminating a market for stolen items is the most certain way we have of preventing theft-- prosecuting theft is the most reliable way of eliminating it.

As troubling as the burgling (?) of collections is, the theft of items from show tables has become an even more vexing problem. For the first 25 of my years in the hobby, I can report that I never lost an

item -- I'd wander around the show with no-one watching the table and return with the comfortable knowledge that the hundreds to thousands of dollars in sales items would be there on my return. Whether due to the tremendous escalation in value of bottles, stoneware and related advertising over the past few years or to the fact that opportunists always discover (and ruin) a good thing, the fact is that the days of safely leaving your table unattended have disappeared -- thefts are now occurring at virtually every show.

*Again, the Federation is happy to report thefts in an attempt to eliminate the secondary market available to thieves. But, the following is probably more effective....*

*Long-time dealers -- don't be so trusting.*

*New dealers-- watch your table or have a trusted friend do do for you.*

*Consider insurance to help cover any loss through theft. And.....*

Don't do what I did at the Columbia, South Carolina show about five years ago. Advised by the show chairman that the dealer next to me had seen a "customer" place two of my mini-jugs in his pocket and walk off, I confronted the individual and recovered my items.

The error in judgement was in not prosecuting the fellow. Other than being identified as a thief, he suffered no punishment and a chance to teach a lesson that might eliminate future theft was lost. And, the chance to recover items for fellow dealers who later noted additional mini-jugs and colored pontiled umbrella inks to be missing was likely additionally lost.

The lesson -- report and prosecute!

The bad apples are out there. Let's all do what we can to ensure that they do not spoil the hobby!