



Random Shots

with Howard Currier

Welcome to the first of Bottles and Extras' quarterly columns dealing with the fascinating world of pre-prohibition shot glasses.

Often relegated to the areas of "go-withs" or "extras" by many bottle enthusiasts, shot glasses have a very lively and growing following of their own.

This inaugural column will be devoted to an overview of the topic and recent changes in collecting habits brought about by the Internet and by eBay especially.

It used to be that there were "glass-rich" areas and "glass-poor" areas. EBAY has pretty much changed all that.

One of the things I want to do in this issue is to share some data I've collected on eBay shot glass auctions over the last four years. It may drive home the impact the web has had on collecting.

As we go to press, the number of auctions for pre-prohibition shot glasses on eBay has gone over the 7,000 mark for the time frame covered: i.e. from mid 1999 to now.

This number includes close to 3,000 different brands, distillers, dealers, saloons, hotels, etc. Of these 3,000, the number of different glasses that have appeared once and once only is about 1,600. Now, those are pretty scarce!

From there, the frequency rises all the way up to the 297 Hayner glasses that have popped up like dandelions all over the place. And in between lie the classic shot glasses that cover most collectors' shelves.

This would be a good time to clarify what I mean by a "glass" and what I mean by "pre-prohibition".

The usual shot glass is thin walled and stands about 2" high and about 1 3/4" across the rim.

Many collectors include tonic shaped

glasses and highball glasses, which can run up to 4" tall. And, we're talking "spirits" here. (Beer glasses, soda glasses and dose glasses have their own followings).

The term "pre-pro", when applied to this type of glass, indicates a date range between the mid 1890's and 1919, with the bulk of them falling into the heyday of the sample glass - the twelve year period between 1904 to 1915.

Of course, exceptions abound to all of these standards, and often, distillers and dealers used whatever sizes the nearest glassmaker had on hand or on sale.

So, how many different glasses are out there? The "bible" of the pre-pro shot glass collector, fittingly, is comprised of two books: *Historic Shot Glasses - The Pre-Prohibition Era*, published in 1985 and revised in 1992, and *Old Advertising Spirits Glasses*, published in 1988.

Barbara Edmonson, to whom every pre-pro shot glass collector owes unending tribute, wrote both.

The revised edition of the former title (HSG) is available in bookstores and through amazon.com. Sadly, the second

title (OASG) is out of print. It sometimes surfaces at auction on eBay and is quickly grabbed up.

Together, the two books list over 3,200 entries. Of the glasses I've gathered into my database, 1,700 are not listed in the Edmonson books, so that brings, at minimum, a total of close to 5,000 and that, I feel, is just the tip of the iceberg.

Discovering where they are from

Usually, this is fairly easy. After all, these were given out as a form of advertising, so virtually all dealers, saloons and distributors let you know where to find them right on the glass.

Frequently distillers, laying claim to trade mark ownership, put the name of the distillery beneath the name of the brand. But sometimes they didn't and that's where the fun of researching the information comes into play, much like it does with bottle collectors.

The Edmonson books are the first resort. Quite often, she's already done the work for you. And just this past year, Bob Snyder has made the results of years of research available in his multi-part binder, *Whiskey Brands*.

This is available directly from Bob at 4235 West 13th, Amarillo TX 79106. A good investment for the serious collector.

Geographic distribution

Of those 3,000 glasses I've catalogued, I was a little bit surprised that over a third (1,022) came from just four states: Kentucky, Missouri, Ohio and Pennsylvania, all represented fairly equally.



And two cities alone: Louisville and Cincinnati accounted for over ten percent of the total number.

Glasses fetching the highest prices on eBay:

Using a purely arbitrary and subjective figure of \$75 to represent an expensive glass, I found that 158 sold at auction for that price and above.

California had the most at 23, followed by Pennsylvania - 18, Ohio - 12 and, surprisingly, Colorado with 10. So western shot glasses continue to fetch the highest prices both on eBay and at bottle shows.

That pretty much wraps it up for eBay shot glass trivia. At least as far as my database takes me.

Can I take a look at this database?

To an extent, yes. I'm sharing a modified version of the database on the web. Just type in: <http://12.253.179.109>

When it's open on my desktop, you'll be able to browse through the records.

If you're finding it difficult coordinating times, email me at hecurrier@attbi.com and we'll work out a time to get it on my server. Some fields, like the prices the glasses have sold for and the frequency of listings, are not shared.

That's my payoff for doing this. However, there are close to 3,000 entries and about 80% of them have photos.

It could be just the tool you might need to locate a whiskey brand that's got you puzzled. The particular version I'm sharing is a work in progress but eventually all of the new fields will be filled in. Please be patient.

And while you're on the web, you'll have to visit the new site on pre-pro shot glasses that Robin Preston, a Philadelphia collector, has put together. It can be accessed at <http://www.pre-pro.com>

This is a fascinating site and could easily serve as a template for anyone interested in setting up a page for other collectibles.

It is a breeze to navigate, has great eye appeal and a lot of valuable information on the history of shot glasses. It contains insights into various types of theme collections: bitters, souvenir, novelty and masonic and other fraternal glasses.

It has a great bibliography and other pages cover different types of glass and types of labels. One of the more fascinating features is a slide show presentation — a gallery of shot glasses that will make your mouth water.

This site just opened in early November (2002) and seems to get updated pretty much on a daily basis.

Most importantly, it has a discussion room. The world of shot glass collectors is far-flung and up to now, there's been no common ground or "meeting place". This should do the trick nicely.

Also, Robin is looking for people to contribute data and photos from their collection toward a database he's assembling that will be available to all collectors.

By the time you read this, I will have uploaded the information from my personal collection and I hope that a lot of you will log on and do the same.

At any rate, take a good look at the site and let him know what you think about it.

If it seems that this first column was very heavy into web pages, databases and the like, I do apologize. This one was intended as an overview of what's going

on in the shot glass collecting field and quite a bit of it seems to be happening on the internet.

Future columns will involve individual collections and collectors from around the country.

I certainly would appreciate any suggestions on topics and specialty collections you'd like to see covered.

Howard Currier is an avid collector of shot glasses and breweriana from Boston, Denver and San Francisco.

Visit him at the websites mentioned or email him at hecurrier@attbi.com

