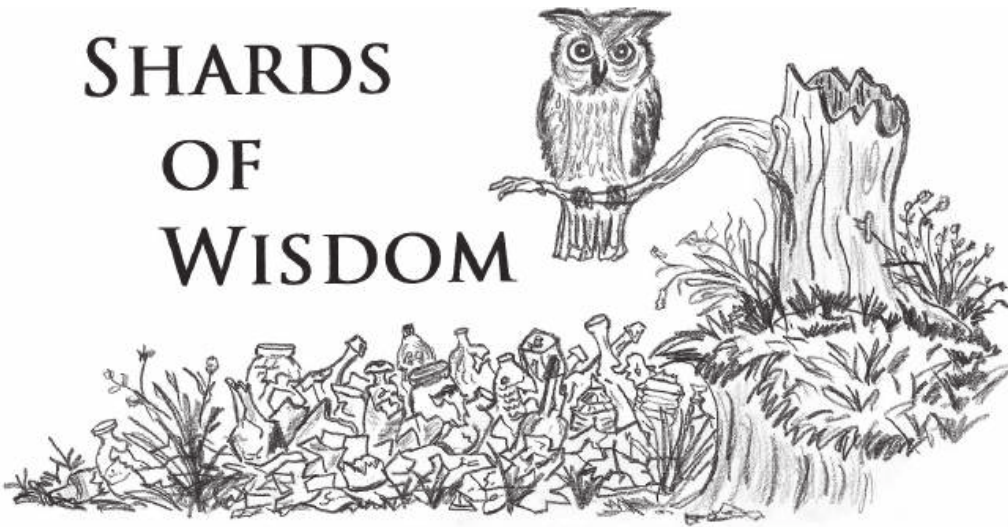


SHARDS OF WISDOM



Where and how bottle collecting got its start

By John C. Tibbitts

AUTHOR'S NOTE: On Oct. 15, 1959, Mr. and Mrs. John C. Tibbitts called the first meeting of what became the Antique Bottle Collector's Club of California at their home in Sacramento. It is believed to be the first such club. Tibbitts was elected the first president of what eventually evolved into the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors. The Federation of Historical Bottle Clubs, as it was first called, was organized in 1969. Tibbitts began reminiscing about his California club in an undated story carried in an early FOHBC newsletter. Thanks to William "Bottle Bill" Herbosheimer for sharing.

A Washoe Zephyr helped blow up the enthusiasm which started the Antique Bottle Collectors Association (of California) back in 1959.

A Washoe Zephyr is a very strong, cold wind that blows down the eastern slopes of the Sierra Nevadas, crosses a valley over another mountain and down into Virginia City, Nevada, with full fury.

My wife Edith and I were scratching for old bottles on one side of the big Comstock tailing pile just below town during one of those furious blows. The current trash dump for the town was just upwind from us and we were continually bombarded by cartons, tins, ashes, sand and dust.

It was miserable, but we had struck a spot with a lot of old miniatures, Jamaica gingers, Hostetter's Bitters, etc. Any bottle digger knows what we did; we braced ourselves against the zephyr and kept on scratching. Later, we just had to get out of that wind so we climbed the sloping side of the tailings and into the car, wiped our hands and faces off somewhat and drank coffee from our Thermos.

While in the car, we noted another car clear down on the far end

of the tailings. The hood was up and there were two people standing there. We assumed car trouble and walked down to see if we could help.

We were surprised to see find the car running and a man and a lady heating two cans of "beanie-weinies" on the hot manifold. We were more surprised to find they were dyed-in-the-wool bottle collectors and had been so for many years.

The couple were "Toot" and Dorothy Garten of Carson City, Nevada. We spent the rest of the

day talking bottles, bottle digging and where and when and how and why. We and they were extremely happy to find we were not the only crazy bottle diggers in the world.

Before leaving for home, I vowed I would do what I could to form a club for bottle collectors if there was enough interest. Thanks to the zephyr for blowing us into the car!

After we returned to Sacramento, I wrote to five people I had heard of who were digging in "old" Sacramento, asking them to come to a meeting at our house to see if we could form a club for bottle collectors. The next meeting we had about 30 people and at the next slightly over 50.

About this time the Sacramento Bee newspaper called us about the hobby and then came out and took photos and picked up the article they had asked me to write.

A color photo appeared on the cover of the Sunday Magazine section with the article inside. Whoo-eee, did that pick up things where that zephyr left off! We had visitors and phone calls and letters like you wouldn't believe. The crazy bottle collectors came out of the closet.

They wanted to know how to start a bottle club and get a copy of our constitution and bylaws. They came by to see our collection and sometimes to show us what they had. It was terrific and wonderful.

Many county and even state historical societies had us give talks and show our bottles. Many good, hard-working club members and Charlie Gardner, Helen McKearin, Dick Watson, Grace Kendrick and many others made our club a success. Over the next few years, we grew to about 3,000 families from coast-to-coast.

'Tis an ill wind that bloweth no good. Have fun!

Bottle extraordinaire Matthew Levanti will assist the Editor with Shards of Wisdom, so send in your news or bottle updates to: Matthew T. Levanti, 5930 Juarez Road. Placerville, California, 95667
m.tigue-levanti@hotmail.com

