



## Collectors won't believe numbers of 'Show Me' State's bottles, jugs

By Bill Baab

Let's take a look at Missouri from the viewpoints of antique bottle and pottery collectors: Any guesses as to how many sodas, whiskeys, patent medicines, drug stores and milks are out there? How about jugs and mini jugs? 1,000? 2,500? 3,000?

Johnnie Fletcher can tell you. His latest bottle book, "*Missouri Bottles, Crock Jugs and Dose Glasses*," lists more than 5,200 items and yet he admits that many more are not in the book. "I'm always hearing from other collectors who say, 'Johnnie, I have a bottle that's not in your book.' So I am planning to produce an updated version in two or three years," he said.

Fletcher, 77, a Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors Hall of Famer, is a member of the Oklahoma Territory Bottle & Relic Club and longtime (and only) editor of its newsletter, *Oklahoma Territory News*.

He and teams of friends have been privy-digging St. Joseph, Missouri for years and he's been able to build his own collection of bottles from that city and elsewhere in Missouri. But those bottles

and occasional mini jugs are only a drop in the bucket when it comes to figuring what other towns and cities can contribute to statewide listings of those glass and ceramic artifacts.

So he's had lots of help from many other collectors of Missouri bottles and pottery, including super collector Arlin Cargill, whose collection may be No. 1 in quantity and quality in the "Show Me State."

When Fletcher made his first visit to Cargill's home, he saw a bunch of bottles in the living room and thought it wouldn't take long to make rubbings of the embossed letterings. Then his host took him into other rooms with bottles, bottles everywhere and Fletcher couldn't believe his eyes.

It was, he said, "kind of like sitting down to eat a meal and finding out the main course is an elephant!" So he has dedicated his latest book to Cargill who was mighty pleased when the author gave him a copy. "He also was able to give me a history of each bottle, describing where it came from and how much he paid," Fletcher said. "I really enjoyed our sessions."

After rubbing and rubbing and rubbing and photographing sodas, drug store bottles and milk bottles on a half-dozen trips to the Cargill home, his host wasn't through. "He gave me a list of other Missouri collectors. One man had a huge Missouri milk bottle collection. So my wife, Linda, and good friend Ed Stewart (of Paolo, Kansas) helped me make still more rubbings," Fletcher said.

After perusing the copy of the book I purchased, I asked Fletcher to explain his procedures that resulted in bottles containing the embossed letters and designs pictured in the 475-page book.

"I make templates from the bottle photos. It's like cutting out paper dolls," he chuckled. "I often use the same template to do multiple bottles. The ones that give me the most trouble are the 1900 (pre-Prohibition) whiskeys with all of their facets and swirls.

"When I started, there was no way I could see the end and it took me 3-1/2 years to produce the book. That doesn't mean I worked steadily every day during that time. I had to take breaks from time to time."

The book also reproduces what Fletcher calls "crock jugs" used by Missouri distillers, as well as the mini jugs sometimes given to clients as souvenirs. Then there are dose glasses used by physicians, druggists and medical supply houses, all in Missouri, of course.

The Missouri book sells in its soft cover form for \$29.95, while a limited number of hard cover books go for \$49.95. Books can be ordered direct from Johnnie Fletcher, 1300 Blue Haven Drive, Mustang, OK 73064. Books are shipped via media mail so \$5 will cover the cost of mailing.

His 2012 Arkansas bottle book and 2013 Kansas bottle book are still available at \$25 each. His out of print 2006 Oklahoma bottle book will be updated in the coming years, he said.

