



My Spring Bottle Show Tour

By Elizabeth Lacy (Photos credited to the Baltimore Bottle Club, the Ohio Bottle Club, and Elizabeth Lacy)

Between the months of November and March here in the Midwest, we have adopted a hibernation lifestyle. Snow flies, wind whistles, and icy roads lead us to “hunker down” each winter. Our neighbors to the Northeast deal with the same conditions and same tendencies. This thins the bottle show calendar to only a few shows over those months, in which only the brave and dedicated venture out. So, by the time the temperature inches up the mercury ever so slightly, bottle collectors have their wares priced and boxes packed, itching to meander aisles of glass-covered tables in search of the treasure after being cooped up for all those cold months.

Bottle show season is as anticipated as baseball’s opening day. For many, the start of the bottle show season begins on Daylight Savings weekend in Baltimore, Maryland. Dealers in the hibernating area of the country count down until this highly anticipated kick-off weekend. From then, the season is strewn with weekend after weekend of bottle shows peppered throughout the country. Typically, my husband, Matt, travels the bottle show season with his good friend, Louis. This year, I found myself committed to more than my usual three-shows-a-year because of different situations and obligations. Actually, I’ve already fulfilled my bottle show quota, as I’ve attended three already this spring: Baltimore, Rochester, and Mansfield! Each show is unique in its own right and has its own story to tell. I am going to share each one from my perspective of my (so-far) 2019 Bottle Show Tour.

Baltimore Bottle Show

The Baltimore Bottle Show is unofficially the “kick-off” show of the bottle show season. Each March, on the same weekend as Daylight Savings, collectors from all over the country journey to the east coast to Baltimore, Maryland. The weather is usually inconsistent from year to year, as weather tends to be at the beginning of March, but that does not stop dealers and collectors from faithfully congregating.

This was my first year attending the Baltimore Bottle Show. Matt has attended for years with Louis, but as the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors gathers for their first in-person biannual meeting before the bottle show, I made the trek this year. This opportunity gave me a great reason to experience all the excitement for myself. And, man, does this show live up to the hype!

Co-chairs Rick Lease and Andy Agnew, along with the whole Baltimore Bottle Club, host a very successful and highly anticipated bottle show. The 2019 show was their 39th annual and the 23rd year at their current location of the Essex Campus of the Community College of Baltimore County. The room was full with 307 tables between 240 dealers this year. There was not a single empty space, as the chairmen have a waiting list of dealers anxiously hoping for the opportunity to set-up at this event. Dealers from all over the country set up a variety of glass from



A busy showroom floor on Sunday at Baltimore Bottle Show

early American blown tableware to milk bottles and literally everything in between.

Starting on Saturday afternoon set-up, the energy of the room was high. Dealers are scouring the tables for great treasures as they are being laid-out, stopping only catching up with old friends or greet an unfamiliar face. That energy continued in full force the following morning, as general admission lined up for their turn to comb the packed room for their desired bottle. For the past three years, the admission at the gate on Sunday has presented over 1,000 attendees, according to Rick. This year's attendance was marked at 1,060. I was amazed at the line that started forming over an hour before the show opened to the public on Sunday morning. And the flow continued steadily throughout the day!

The Baltimore Bottle Club does a fantastic job pulling together to help each other and dealers alike throughout the weekend! Many club members were available to assist with locating fellow dealers, keeping the admission lines flowing smoothly, and answer any questions posed to them. There were kids' activities including a scavenger hunt and a free bottle table facilitated by club members, encouraging participation from the youth at the show. Boy scouts were on hand to facilitate parking and unloading/loading the duration of the weekend. The effort and planning behind the weekend were seen in every aspect, and contributed to the success of the show.



The smiling faces of Elizabeth Meyer, Val Berry and Linda Sheppard at the FOHBC table at the Baltimore Bottle Show



Rick Lease enjoying some good company at Baltimore



Baltimore bottle show shoppers and dealers staying busy during the show



Norman Heckler enjoying a rare, quiet moment at the Baltimore Bottle Show

As it was my first Baltimore Bottle Show experience, I went into the show with no prior expectation. I only knew the stories I had heard from Matt's past experiences, and the constant "Will I see you at Baltimore?" question every year. I was thoroughly impressed with the organization from the chairs and club member volunteers. The level of commitment to run a show the size of Baltimore as smoothly as these dedicated individuals do is commendable! Seeing dealers of all areas, interests and ages have the opportunity to meet fellow collectors and handle bottles they have admired from photos is the epitome of what a bottle show should be.

Rochester Bottle Show

Many moons ago, Matt and I would travel to Rochester, New York, for the Genesee Valley Bottle Collectors Association's bottle show and set-up a table for the late-April weekend. I would dutifully sit behind the table with my book or crochet while he hunted the tables for bottles. Then work and children and schedules and, well, you know. He continued to make the trip to upstate New York, either on his own or with friends, but I hadn't been to the Rochester Bottle Show in nearly a decade. This year, he asked me to accompany him as his usual travel-buddy had other familial obligations that week.

What better time to revisit the GVBCA's bottle show than 2019 as the club celebrated the 50th anniversary of the show! The club led by show co-chairs Aaron and Pam Weber pulled out all the stops for this year's show to commemorate the anniversary. The usual 220 table show packed full in the gymnasium of Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, New York, at 235 tables and 12 displays. Dealers from all over the Northeast, Midwest and beyond gathered to explore tables full of bottles, glass, tabletop antiques, advertising and more. Dealers milled the tables and set-up their own area on Saturday afternoon, and then the doors opened to the general public on Sunday morning. There, again, an admission line formed outside the gym door as dealers were making their way to their tables, club sponsored donuts in hand. According to show chair, Aaron Weber, there were about 620 admissions throughout Sunday, including a handful curious Roberts Wesleyan college students. The location and publicity of the show were perfect for hooking new collectors.

A highlight of the Rochester Bottle Show this year was definitely the displays. There were 12 wonderfully executed, researched and presented displays of various topics flanking the entry door. Topics varied from local companies in Fredonia, Mt Vernon, Buffalo, and Rochester to bitters, medicine and Binger bottles. From elaborate display cases to educational posters to excellent examples of bottles and stoneware, volunteers from New York to Michigan to Ohio really outdid themselves on sharing their collections and knowledge. John Pastor's "Merchant's, Lockport, NY Bottles and Advertising" Display won the Best of Show award;



Bustling showroom activity at the 50th anniversary of the Genesee Valley Bottle Collectors Association's Bottle Show



GVBCA's Bottle Show co-chairs Aaron and Pam Weber



FOHBC President Matt Lacy congratulating Vince Martonis on being voted at the FOHBC Most Educational display at the GVBCA's bottle show



A small sample of the wonderful displays at the GVBCA Bottle Show with Vince Martonis's winning display in the foreground



Dealer Dave Olson at his table at the GVBCA's Bottle Show

and Vince Martonis's display "Dr. Fenner's People's Remedies, Fredonia, N.Y." took home the GVBCA's People's Choice and the FOHBC's Most Educational awards.

The Genesee Valley Bottle Collector's Association lost someone very dear to them, as well as to the hobby, this year with the passing of Dr. Burt Spiller. The club remembered him throughout the weekend with flowers, photos and a special display set up at his table where friends and fellow collectors could write their favorite memories and dedications. It was a very sweet memorial honoring a man who is missed greatly within the hobby.

The GVBCA's Bottle Show and Sale is genuinely a fun show. Aaron, Pam and the club are friendly and upbeat the entirety of the weekend, and that energy is felt throughout the showroom floor as well. The club is full of activity and knowledge, with many different collections and glass niches represented well. Collectors from near and far gather at the hotel for hospitality and at the show to catch-up and swap stories. No matter what you collect, there is something for everyone at the Rochester Bottle Show, and this year was no exception.

Mansfield Bottle Show

In full disclosure, my third bottle show review for 2019 is a little close to home. Unlike the other two shows mentioned earlier,



Honoring Dr Burt Spiller at the GVBCA's bottle show



Full aisles and busy tables are a good thing at a bottle show!



Dealers and shoppers enjoying the updated room layout at the Mansfield bottle show



Finding treasures at the Mansfield Bottle Show



The Ohio Bottle Club pitching in to feed the troops after Friday afternoon set-up at Mansfield Bottle Show

I have been attending the Ohio Bottle Club's Mansfield Bottle Show for years. The first time or two as a general admission and a large number of times as a dealer's assistant. This is the 5th year that Matt and Louis have co-chaired the show, and subsequently, I have volunteered a large portion of time since then as well. What started as the Ohio Bottle Swap in 1978, the 41st Annual Mansfield Bottle Show has evolved with the times but still holds to being one of the biggest bottle shows in the country and a favorite event within the Midwest.

There were a few changes to the layout of the show this year, but the format remained consistent: Friday set-up and early admission entry with a dinner after, and a full day show on Saturday. There were 203 tables set-up between inside and outside spaces, consisting of 132 dealers. The biggest change to the layout was the consolidation of two buildings into all inside tables under one roof without losing table allowances. This led to much a much smoother flow of traffic and interaction between dealers and show attendees, with much positive feedback from both sides.

One of the most talked about aspects of the Mansfield Bottle

Show is the feast on Friday night! Louis's wife, Lindsey, organizes and hosts a fantastic dinner to feed Friday participants. From the buffet of chicken, potatoes, beans, veggies, beef tips, salads, pies and desserts, the Ohio Bottle Club rolls out the Midwest hospitality red carpet. Thanks to many volunteers for set-up and serving, about 150 people ate and mingled the rest of the evening.

Word throughout the showroom floor Friday afternoon and Saturday was a mix of buying and selling well. Glass was passed across tables and treasures were found throughout the whole weekend, as the flow of public admittance was evenly spread throughout the day on Saturday. Between early admittance on Friday and general admission on Saturday, approximately 240 people came through the gate. Even the clouds broke up and the sun came through on Saturday, leading to comfortable shopping for the outside dealers who came to set-up their bottles, stoneware and advertising in front of the main bottle show building.

I was able to walk the showroom floor only a handful of times on Saturday as I was greeting at the front gate most of the day, but the activity and energy was genuine every time I walked down the aisles of the show. When asked about the 2019 show, Ohio Bottle Club President Alan DeMaison said, "What a great show with the new layout. This was a super opportunity to visit with friends, make new ones and share a hobby we all love."

As with most bottle shows from around the country, Mansfield included, format and details have evolved with the times. Whether it be dealers present or table layout or the merchandise on the tables, bottle shows look a little different than they did a generation or two ago. This will be true for future generations of collectors, too. The foundation, though, will remain consistent: friends, new and old, gathering to share their passion for glass bottles. The one attribute that I noticed consistently throughout of each of the three shows I attended this year were the relationships behind the bottles. Old friends congregate between tables to catch up on life events and travels, and new friendships are forged between handshakes and introductions. The thrill of the hunt is shared between collectors passing in the aisles, and treasure stories are eagerly shared once a new find is procured. This is where the passion behind this great hobby is seen.

I hope my recollection of my experiences of 2019 have encouraged anyone who has not experienced a bottle show to look up a local show. It will be an event you will not regret. If you have not been to a show recently, attend one of your past favorites, you may be surprised at what you will find. And to those collectors who chair, volunteer, deal or attend a bottle show: Thank you! Without you these events are not possible. I personally look forward to more travels in the coming months and years to future bottles show, despite all the ribbing I will undoubtedly bestow on my own collecting husband. Hope to see you there!



Co-Chairs Louis Fifer and Matt Lacy at the Mansfield Bottle Show with fellow collector Leonard Luzo, Chip Cable and Ed Gray



Two Mansfield veterans, Sheldon Baugh and Chester Otto catch up at the bottle show



New England meets Midwest as Jim Bender and Mark Vuono enjoy setting up at the Mansfield Bottle Show

