

# Wendell Short — A

By Wendi Short and Jerry McCann

*In the early 1970s, Wendell Short dominated the fruit jar category at important bottle shows with his knowledge, jar offerings, charm and supporter of the hobby. He generously gave help to fellow collectors; supporting newer collectors with guidance at a time when there were few resources available except for the OBX (a monthly antique bottle magazine out of Bend, Oregon) and the local area antique bottle clubs and their annual shows. Wendell stood out at these shows, a tall confident figure with an amber Perfection jar lid dangling from his neck. This talisman attracted collectors who were in awe of the possibility there was an amber version of this very collectible 1880s jar (at this time yet to be reported in amber). This article will discuss the story behind this historically important fruit jar, rarely seen and one that has eluded most collectors.*

*Wendell was more than a collector, much more. He was a farmer, paratrooper, pilot, upholster, auctioneer, inventor and recycler...friends to many, brother, husband, father...passionately helpful to all. His story shows us that in our hobby we are blessed to be in the company of individuals with complex, interesting lives. If we take the time to know our fellow collectors we may be surprised by their diverse backgrounds and talents. Despite these differences, we all mingle together like the best of fast friends.*



Wendell Short with his daughter Wendi

## 1931-2018

A boy named Wendell, a horse named Dolly and a sister named Linda combined to give Wendell an opportunity to develop his imagination and problem-solving skills. The family homestead had no indoor plumbing with indoor luxuries to match. He plowed, made hay, fixed things, always scrutinizing the different solutions that were possible; often constrained by limited resources, but compensated by his overwhelming limitless amounts of genius and energy...he did not shy away from work.

With this real world background he found school less than challenging, was generally ornery and slacked in school whenever possible. In spite of, or perhaps because of, he seemed popular, was good looking (in that slicked back “duck tail” wavy, gel-set hair way). His sister was the recipient of his good natured teasing (that continued throughout his adult life). As she described him, “he was a good brother, he was always wanting to be funny or aggravate the teachers...ornery, mischievous, but good to me as a brother...never put me down, but teased me constantly, and laughed a lot.” Anyone who met Wendell at the early bottle shows was also exposed to his humor and laughter...not easily suffering fools, but always recognizing others’ feelings. As an entertaining conversationalist he charmed his family and anyone who knew him as a fellow bottle/jar collector. His formal education ended with his high school diploma. His adult career began as an Army paratrooper (enlisted) at Ft. Bragg,

N.C. After his service he was employed at Scott AFB in their material shop. He worked with the larger sewing machines, again on parachutes. Thus he became good at the larger, commercial sewing machines. With this acquired skill he started his own upholstery business in Mascoutah, Illinois.

Apparently his experience as a paratrooper also fueled a love of aviation that worked its way back into his life in later years. He learned to fly and became a private pilot at the mature age of 45. Taking his daughter Wendi for flights to Missouri, Oklahoma and Texas to enjoy the illustrious “\$100 hamburgers,” thus he instilled his love of aviation into his daughter (both she and her dad had over 1,000 flight hours as PIC...Pilot in Command), and supported her career as an air traffic controller for the FAA.

As a born inventor, Wendell could easily create new and innovative solutions that carried him through his business as a “will upholster anything,” followed by a successful career as a licensed Illinois auctioneer. This business involved the whole family using the skills of his wife Darlene and daughter Wendi. These family experiences proved useful for setting up and selling at antique bottle shows. Wendell would scour the room while Darlene held down the table.

Later in his life (during years of illness of his beloved Darlene)

# Life Well Lived



Wendell Short proudly displaying his personal collection circa 1970s

his hiatus from collecting resulted in him selling the bulk of his fruit jar collection and establishing another career as a major recycler of aluminum, turning trash into treasure. Known as “The Can Man” Wendell (as always) worked hard, back breaking days creating Mascoutah Recycle, always getting the job done...and winning the “Quality Recycling Award” in 1995 and 1997. With the death of Darlene in 2000 he sold the homestead in Mascoutah and moved to Belleville, Illinois, finishing his life in “retirement” in a complex in Collinsville, Illinois.

For Wendell, living in Collinsville provided new opportunities to find treasures for free, fixing things for other residents (no charge). He went shopping for those residents who were immobile, driving his friends to doctor visits...and spending more time with his daughter, Wendi.

Finally, all these years later, there he was back attending bottle shows in Belleville, Illinois wearing his signature amber Perfection jar lid around his neck...just like the “good old days” showing the same winning smile, still enthusiastic about the hobby and fellow collectors.

...and now about that lid and the elusive

amber Perfection fruit jar...more than 40 years after Wendell suggested it existed.

## Search for the Amber Perfection fruit jar

The 1970s were an exciting time for being a bottle/jar collector. Modern antique bottle collecting began in the 1960s on the west coast with organized clubs, digging and unlimited enthusiasm. As it spread eastward, new bottle clubs were formed, antique bottle magazines sprang up (Old Bottle Exchange, Bottle News, Bottle Trader, Antique Bottle World) creating a hunger to know more about the history and availability of known bottles/jars and to search for the many yet to be reported/discovered examples. And there standing tall at the Midwestern bottle shows was Wendell Short fielding all questions, sharing everything he knew about collecting fruit jars; soliciting information about his holy grail of fruit jar collecting...finding an unreported amber version of the Perfection fruit jar.

Wendell had obtained an amber Perfection lid (complete with Perfection embossing and patent date). Thus began his 40-year search for the elusive jar. The first jar to be discovered was an amber quart embossed Phoenix Surgical Dressing Co. Milwaukee, Wis. This jar was topped with the amber lid identical to the one he carried around at the bottle shows.

Near the end of the 19th century after Louis Pasteur’s germ theory was gradually being accepted as fact companies began to



Wendell's Cessna 172



Phoenix Surgical Dressing contained in a Perfection closure patented jar



Amber Perfection pint

market to hospitals and doctors gauze that was processed to be germ free...usually by introducing iodine or other corrosive, anti bacterial agents to the gauze which would be used to wrap up wounds or surgical incisions. Generally these companies used colored glass containers in either amber or more rarely cobalt blue. The reason glass was used was because the chemicals in the contents would harm metal containers. Also you could see through glass and identify the product.

Fruit jar closures worked well since they sealed the chemicals in, and could be resealed if contents remained. Blue and amber colored glass probably was used for easy identification, alerting the user to be careful in handling and using the jars contents. Many different patented fruit jar closures have been used on gauze jars, made in colors not found on the home canning version. So it was assumed that this jar was the dead end for Wendell's search...the fruit jar version was never made.

But the story did not end there as eventually a jar was discovered...an amber pint version of a fully embossed Perfection fruit jar! The holy grail of amber jars did exist, Wendell was on target with his search...well almost. The example shown in the photo is so rare I have yet to see another. It is likely that this jar too was a product container for the Phoenix company's dressings, using a paper label over the Perfection embossing. It would have been easier for the Phoenix Dressing company to place an order with Illinois Glass

Co. to just manufacture an amber version of the Perfection fruit jar eliminating the need to create of a special mold with the embossing for the Phoenix Dressing company.

Collectors are not usually bothered as to why a jar was made since its intended use seems like a distinction without any difference. Most of the rarest colors of known fruit jars were probably made for an intended use other than home canning. One of the most desirable and valuable fruit jars is a cobalt blue Millville Atmospheric Fruit Jar (\$30,000+) which almost certainly was made to be used as a drug container...or even made as a curiosity by an imaginative glass worker to take home. Actually the common aqua version is just as historically important; the home canning version available for a mere \$50-\$75. Collectors have a specialized view of the world not shared by the rational world.

Oh well, collectors are not rational. By the way, chemically-treated dressing gauze was damaging to human tissue, so although it was good that it was "bacteria free," in many cases it may have done more harm than good. Treated gauze eventually fell out of favor, substituted by gauze that was heat-treated to provide sterile dressings that would not harm the patient.

In addition, examples without embossing have also been reported with paper labels for surgical dressings. So Wendell was rewarded for his search...not the amber Perfection fruit jar





So Wendell was rewarded for his search...not the amber Perfection fruit jar that he never owned, but friendships made while seeking his treasure.

Over the years Wendell supported the local bottle shows with his fruit jar displays

In remembrance, Wendi wore Wendell's Perfection lid at the 2019 St. Louis Show

that he never owned, but friendships made while seeking his treasure. He was a true pioneer promoting modern fruit jar collecting and having a life well lived.

**Notes on the history of Gauze jars (surgical dressings)**

The use of dressings to help a wound heal go back several thousand years, when knowledge of the causes of infection, disease and healing were very limited. However it was understood that washing and cleaning was important along with the application of remedies utilizing wine, honey, moldy bread, mushrooms, etc. seemed to forestall infection and aid

in the healing process. By the beginning of the 20th Century "germ theory" was generally accepted and companies such as Phoenix Surgical Dressing Co., Bauer & Black and Johnson & Johnson marketed surgical dressings that were not only sterile, but also were impregnated with known anti bacterial materials.

The problem with this approach was that although initially successful in retarding infection, harsh chemicals might damage wound tissues interfering with the healing process and furthering future infection. The modern approach to surgical dressings focuses on moist, sterile dressings without corrosive chemicals.

