

FOHBC

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



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In my inaugural issue of *Bottles and Extras*, I promised a State of the Union Address in the next issue and so here is what I believe faces us as a hobby and a group.

In consulting with Elizabeth and Ferdinand Meyer who are both long time officers and board members, our membership for the past three years is as follows. In 2018 we had a total of 876 members, in 2019 we had 899 members (a gain of 23 members), and in 2020 our membership is 795 (a decline of 104 members) and thus erasing the gain of the prior year and looking at a percentage decline of 11.56%.

Ferdinand believes that back in 2013 we may have had a high of around 1200 members, which if accurate reflects that we have now lost a full third of our membership base. I think we have reason to be concerned about what the trend indicates our numbers will be in future years, unless we try new ways to not only gain exposure to the hobby and the federation, but keep the current membership base interested and find ways to expand to a whole new generation of collectors that must be out there that we are just not connecting with. Ferdinand wrote about the same problem in 2013 and yet seven years later we are probably in a worsened condition. I don't think the hobby is on life support, but I don't think we are doing what we need to be doing to maintain a healthy sustainability of the hobby. We are not facing this problem alone: coin, stamp, dolls, advertising, and similar collectors are facing the same grim statistics. Even the Car Collector market in 2019 cooled off. They are seeing an increasingly discerning market, with a widening divide between good, better and best. Our hobbies are becoming a buyer's market, rather than a seller's market with exceptions for the best of the best. The best of the best always seems to hold value and in many cases increasing exponentially.

Let's talk about what I believe is the number one problem facing our hobby – Age. I have not done any in-depth study as to what age bands that our membership base falls into but it doesn't take Einstein to walk through the bottle shows to look at all the white and gray hair and figure out that the majority of our members and attendees are at least in the sixth inning of the ballgame. I think it would be a shame to see these great collections inevitably come onto market with little interest in them. How about the incredible knowledge base behind each and every collection just sitting idle like the tombs of Egypt awaiting some explorer to unearth them and carry them forward for future generations. Fortunately, we are not

at that point yet. We still see strong successful auction results from Glass Works Auctions, American Bottle Auctions, American Glass Gallery and all the other auction houses that serve the collector.

With Covid-19, the majority (90%) of the Bottle Shows have been cancelled which is a further blow to our hobby. One of the things we as a Board are doing is engaging in some additional assistance from outside providers to promote the FOHBC on a six-month trial basis to get our Instagram page up and running, and enhance our Facebook presence. The scope of services is as follows:

Provide a recurring, month to month service to post frequently on the FOHBC Facebook page. Develop a FOHBC Instagram account and regularly add posts. The goal is to increase the visibility of the FOHBC, spread the word about the importance of membership, push our magazine Bottles and Extras, push the FOHBC Virtual Museum, National Conventions, and Shows and other related news. The FOHBC will provide ideas and visuals for content.

I personally think the electronic medium has been a huge asset during Covid-19 in that it keeps us in touch with fellow collectors and enthusiasts through the Facebook Private Groups that anyone can join. I belong to a number of such Groups and all of them have a following almost as much as the FOHBC and in many cases significantly more. Here are some of the Groups I belong to. California Antique Bottles (608 members), Antique and Vintage Bottle Collectors (18K members), US Bottle Diggers & Collectors (8.3K members), Hardcore Stoneware and Ceramics (2.4K members), Bottle Diggers & Collectors (17K members). I could go on but I think you get the point. The Hobby is not dead, but we aren't reaching who we need to connect with and so if Covid-19 has taught us anything, it is Pivot, Adapt, Survive. My fellow Collector and friend Max Bell said it best, "if anything is certain; it's that the future is uncertain" as he told to me in a phone call about the cancellation of the 49ers Bottle Club Show.

Until we are able to return to our Shows and Sales across the country, perhaps it's time to rethink how we stay connected. I would like to gauge the level of interest in undertaking visits in Seminars via Zoom or visits to collector's homes (again via Zoom) and to electronically meet them and see their collections and learn some of the fascinating history behind the collector and the collection. These could be done regionally or nationally and we would limit them to 30-45 minutes possibly over a weekend lunch hour. I encourage you to reach out to me at my email or my Facebook messenger page and let me know your thoughts on this, but Covid-19 could be as much an opportunity for us to evolve as an organization as anything that has ever confronted us.

So in summation, the state of the Union is Strong when you consider the numbers that have an interest in the hobby, but weak from our membership perspective. This requires us to evolve, it may be forced evolution, but it's evolution nonetheless. Every time some calamity befalls us or a new technology uproots the standard, it forces us to change our thinking of the problem and it's an opportunity to become better for both ourselves, our hobby and our organization.