



American Toy Glass Candy Containers

By Jim Olean

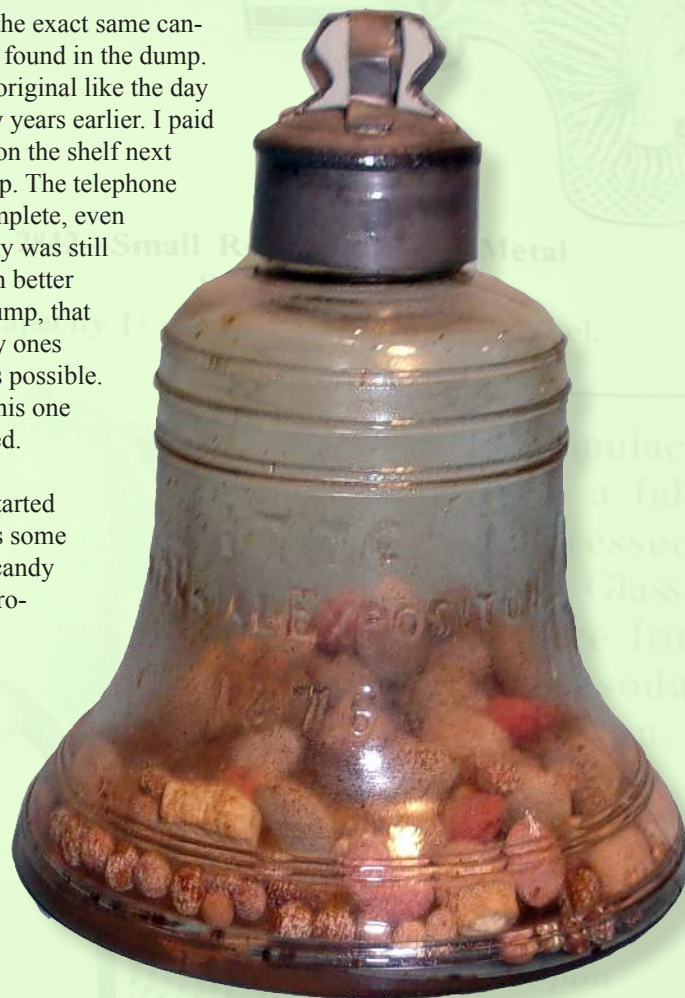
It was a cool autumn day in 1985. I went out into the woods by my home looking for some wild mushrooms. I could not find any mushrooms that day but did come across an old dump. Laying on top of the ground were a number of old glass milk bottles. I knew a guy in town that bought and sold milk bottles. So, I gathered up the ones laying on the ground to sell to him. A very small creek had cut through the dump creating a bank. Sticking out of the bank was a milk bottle. As I pulled the milk bottle out of the ground, the dirt gave way and out popped a small glass candlestick telephone. Then I found a dog, and a Santa body without his head. I took my new found possessions home and washed them. The three small glass toys I put on a shelf in the game room. One day my uncle came over to visit. He was a collector of many old things. I showed him the three glass items that I found from the dump, and he told me that they were made about 30 minutes away and they held candy. He called them glass candy containers. Such a novel idea, candy and a toy in one.

Because they were found in the dump, all the parts that came with them were gone. My uncle told me that if I go to the local antique flea market, that I could find one all original. That next spring when the flea markets opened outside, I went to the best one in

town. That day I found the exact same candlestick telephone that I found in the dump. But this one was 100% original like the day it was made, some thirty years earlier. I paid the \$15 for it and put it on the shelf next to the one from the dump. The telephone that I bought was so complete, even its original colored candy was still intact. It looked so much better than the one from the dump, that I told myself to only buy ones that were as complete as possible. Little did I know what this one little purchase had started.

Where and when it all started is a little vague. There is some evidence that toy glass candy containers were being produced in the late 1860s.

The first documented container would be the 1876 Liberty Bell, a confectioner from Philadelphia Pa., named Wilber Croft. Croft produced candy on the grounds of the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Fair and sold them in a glass



The first documented container would be the 1876 Liberty Bell



Here a few toy candy containers that could also be used as banks.

souvenir Liberty Bell. Many must have been sold as this 144 year old container is not rare and can be found for under \$100 today.

The center of the toy glass candy container industry was a small town outside of Pittsburgh Pa. called Jeannette. Jeannette became home to many glass companies because of the clean burning natural gas that was found there in the late 1880s. Westmoreland Glass was the first one to build a plant in the area.

The candy container industry did not take off until George West got involved. In 1906, West, then president of Westmoreland Glass (1900-1930 years producing candy containers), started to patent toy glass candy containers for production. These early Westmoreland containers were simple in design with a metal closure. Trunks, suitcases, clocks, horns and others were made in milk and clear glass. Many were decorated with paint and sold as souvenirs, marking a year or place. A few years later, the souvenir containers were replaced with more intricate toy like containers. Toy planes, trucks, buses, plus many others, were produced using metal parts along with a glass body to hold the candy. These con-

tainers were labor intensive, as each glass body was hand blown in single molds. Metal had to be sheared, bent, painted, assembled, packed and shipped. All for a 10 cent toy. This time frame of 1912 – 1930 marked the pinnacle of the glass toy industry.

Glass candy containers can be as small as 1.5" or as big as 6". Many candy containers reflected American history and culture at the time. New inventions like radios, cameras, phonographs, and carpet sweepers. Popular cartoon characters like Amos and Andy, Felix the Cat, Flossie Fisher, and Barney Google. People like Jackie Coogan, and Charlie Chaplin were featured in glass toys.

Charles Lindbergh's Spirit of St Louis and Spirit of Goodwill were also made.

Success breeds competition, as other glass companies nearby jumped into production. T H Stough (1913-1962) produced many candy containers for many years and it was the company's sole product. Victory Glass (1919-1955) also produced many good candy containers.

Charles Lindbergh and the famous Spirit of St. Louis and another war themed candy container





Here a few popular cartoon characters, Barney Google and Felix the cat

L E Smith (1911-1931) produced some very fine early Halloween candy containers. Cambridge Glass (1913) produced a few early containers, some more common and some very rare.

By 1940, J H Millstein developed the first fully automatic blown molds producing glass candy containers. Much like in the beginning, containers became simple in design again. This only proved to be the beginning of the end. Millions could be produced and sold. As sales softened and cost rose, plastic began to overtake the glass industry. Around 1962 the last company closed their doors, thus marking the end of the American toy glass candy container industry.

For almost a hundred years, some 550 different glass candy containers were produced by no fewer than 13 companies. Many containers are very common (dogs, cars, lanterns, guns and Millstein's containers) and some very rare with only a few known to exist. Current prices can range from \$5 to \$4000. Condition and completeness of the container will also play greatly into the pricing.

For 35 years, I learned and collected these glass toys. I have most of them but not all of them. There is no collector past or present that has acquired every example. A few collectors came close but it's just too difficult.

Prior to the internet, finding glass candy containers locally was hard. I would travel miles around the East Coast to flea markets, bottle shows, auctions and antique stores and some days not seeing a one. Yet, I lived just 20 miles from where 95% of them were made.

A collector from Pennsylvania, in 1981 started a group devoted to collecting American toy glass candy containers. The group is called Candy Container Collectors of America or CCC of A for short. I joined in 1989 and have been an officer for over 20 years. An annual convention was held every year along with a swap meet. I will never forget the first swap meet that I attended. As I walked into the room and saw thousands of candy containers for sale, all in one place. Currently the convention has been suspended because of the Covid situation. More info can be found at candy-container.org

Prices increased over the years, peaking around 2006. With the advent of the internet and Ebay in particular, prices have come down.

The internet has made many containers available for sale instantly. What was once scarce is now common, and what was rare is now scarce. The flood of items for sale online was overwhelming to many collector groups. The market for antiques and collectables has readjusted. Most transactions happen over the internet now. Markets like Ebay and liveauctioneers are good sources for current and past sales results.



Ad for The Cambridge Glass Co.



A few candy containers were made of milk glass



A nice selection of truck candy containers