

Dunkard Valley

Antique Bottle Club and Show, the Bottle Barn

and the great people who are responsible for making it happen!

By Jeff Mihalik and Zack Baer

Don and Mary Kelley (and family) interview

INTRO:

Jeff: It seems like I met Don and Mary at one of the Washington Pa. Antique Bottle and Glass Club meetings. I had heard tell of some happenings at the boarder of the Pennsylvania and West Virginia line concerning some sort of bottle barn and new club being formed, so I was interested in meeting the people behind this. After a few more club meetings I remember Don giving me his business card (very professional), and soon afterwards, he brought some really nice color flyers for an upcoming (2019) bottle show put on by the club he started (Dunkard Valley Antique Bottle Club and Show). Yeah, I was really impressed and thought, how great to finally have another local show just south of the border. For various reasons I could not attend that year, but heard many good things about the show and sales. During the next several months, I started to ask Don to clean a few bottles of mine (I do tumble, but not to the standards that Don has). His work was outstanding! I then started to make the 35-minute drive to come see the Bottle Barn and his bottle cleaning operation.

Wow, I was extremely impressed with the walls of bottles and his clever bottle cleaning setup. Don and his wife are the most gracious hosts and always made me feel at home, offered dinner, showed me their collections, and becoming friends was made easy. I then started to sell and trade Don many bottles that I was digging as they for the most part really needed cleaned. His tumbling operation can handle like 13 bottles at once, so he can clean

many bottles for resale without incurring a significant cost (other than the thousands of dollars he has spent on machines, tubes, stopples, compound, copper, etc. to clean about every type and size of bottle). In early 2020, the Dunkard Show was one of a few bottle shows to actually take place and for my part, it was one of the best shows ever in terms of sales and just plain fun and seeing old friends. All I can say now is that the Kelleys are first rate folks and great ambassadors of the hobby. If you're in their area, I'd recommend that you check out the Bottle Barn (when safe to do so).

Zack: Like Jeff, my wife Kate, our three-year-old son Forest and I, first met Don and Mary at one of the Washington Pa. Antique Bottle and Glass Club meetings. I remember overhearing them talking to other collectors at the meeting, and I was very impressed with the knowledge that they had to share. Being relatively new collectors, we were a bit shy at first, but eventually did introduce ourselves. As soon as we started talking though that

nervousness was gone. They were easy to talk to and freely shared their knowledge. Don mentioned that he originally had started collecting jars, and Mary stone-ware, but they had more recently expanded to bottles as well. Don also mentioned that he had a "bottle barn" and had recently started tumbling bottles. When we finally had the chance to visit the



New Sign for the Bottle Barn is ready to be mounted.



This has to be one of the most elaborate cleaning set ups out there.

Kelleys' this year, I was not expecting to see how elaborate Don's operation is. An entire barn filled with bottles, and a tumbling station the size of our kitchen! The Kelleys have some great glass, and stoneware, and were happy to spend hours educating us on their history. The hospitality offered us during our visit was bar none! Even Forest had a good time. I would recommend anyone who can make the trip to the "bottle barn" to do it. You won't regret it.

ing community that the Kelleys have made is the founding of the Dunkard Valley bottle show. The amount of work that goes into organizing and running an event of this size from scratch has to be immense. Yet Don and Mary have donated their time to make this event a reality. I have been lucky enough to be able to attend the show for the past two years now and each year have come away with new items for my collection. I am looking forward to the 2021 show and anticipate it to be the best one yet.

But, I think the most important contribution to the bottle collect-

Bottles from common to rare, waiting their turn in the tumbler.



KELLEY FAMILY INTERVIEW

Question: Your last show (Dunkard Valley Antique Bottle Show and Sale) in the spring of 2020 was a huge success. It was one of only a few shows to actually take place during the Covid crisis. Would you tell us how long you have been planning for this show, how this show was actually able to happen in 2020, and how you initially got interested in running a show in West Virginia?

Don: After talking with many collectors and dealers I met while picking in WV, we realize most never attended a bottle show. So, after bouncing ideas around with my wife Mary, we got things rolling. The bottle show in 2020 was our second show. We have a 3-year deal with Myland Park to use the show building. Our original 2020 date for the show was March 29 (right after the Baltimore show), and all looked good. Just like that, we were shutdown but not cancelled. Luckily, we were rescheduled for June 28 and our fingers were crossed. Things settled down and we were even able to move into a much larger building and the show went on!

Question: Not sure how many people outside of the local area are aware of the Bottle Barn and your bottle cleaning business, so would you tell us some history on when you first opened the Barn for selling bottles and the background on your learning about bottle cleaning.

Don: The Bottle Barn as we know it today is only a few years old. The Barn was built by my sons and I in 1996 to be used as a motorcycle engine repair shop. Around 2005 my fruit jar collection pushed the motorcycles out and in 2010 my bottle collection and inventory pushed my fruit jars to my basement! The Bottle Barn is not advertised and only known to local collectors and friends.

I had many jars cleaned by Rick Lease and Rodney Sprouse over the years, and was fascinated by what they could do to glass! I got interested in trying to do my own bottle cleaning about 5 or 6 years ago and purchased my first of 3 machines from Wayne and June Lowry "The JAR Doctor." I've been tumbling my own stuff for 3-4 years now, and with the help of Rodney, Wayne and Rick I evolved from cleaning soda bottles to historical flasks and everything in between (giving much credit to Rodney).

Question: How is the business of selling and cleaning going? Would you give us some insight on which areas of the bottle hobby are most active as far as getting items cleaned. Also, what types of bottles do you primarily sell?



The Mylan Center show room was extremely large (over 100-foot ceilings!) and allowed for a lot of space between dealers, buyers, and browsers.

Don: The old saying is true! "Watch what you wish for." What started out as a hobby and something to do has taken on a life of its own. There is generally someone visiting us every day. I deal in local (meaning southwest Pa. and W Va.) items the most. The most work I see is soda and milk bottles, second would be medicine and perfume type bottles. I sell a lot of soda, beer and milk bottles.

Question: I believe your initial interest in glass bottles was centered on fruit jars. You have one of the most complete collections of Ball jars that I have even seen. Please tell us about how you got started in collecting glass bottles and what your interests have been over the years.

Don: My Ball Jar collection is my collecting pride and joy. However, it seemed to grow stagnant. So, I turned my interest to bottles when I noticed my wife Mary getting interested in certain bottles and with a new interest it was on! We enjoy picking stores, estate collections, flea markets and shows. Mary is drawn

to colored bottles of all types. The small-town embossed bottles, pontiled and pre-Civil War bottles, are my favorites.

Question: I am very curious as to where you see the hobby going as far as young collectors, people expanding their collecting interests, etc.

Don: I am confident the hobby is and will continue to grow. I see many youth and younger folks interested in bottles, stoneware, and antique smalls in all our travels. I also get to meet many new collectors wanting their finds cleaned at the Bottle Barn. The internet is alive with information and young collectors are quick to research with the iPhone!

Question: Your beautiful wife Mary also collects bottles and stoneware. Maybe she can let us know how she first got interested in glass bottles and how she got the collecting bug for stoneware.

Mary: My attraction to bottles goes back to the 70's when my mother was collecting Avon Bottles. It was fun and interesting to watch the collection grow. My grandmother also had a stoneware collection that I always thought was amazing and growing up only 10 miles from Greensboro Pa., it seemed like everyone had stoneware anywhere you went! I guess, you could say that I was born into it!!

Question: I have to ask, Happy Wife Happy Life.. so what part of keeping you happy revolves around bottle collecting?



The grandkids London and Jaden (and friend) at the 2020 show. Looks like they were having fun!



Mary: Bottle collecting is a large part of our lifestyle these days. Collecting allows me to be spend quality time with Don because we both enjoy it. We also are fortunate our granddaughters enjoy many parts of our collecting and spending time with them is great! The Bottle Barn being a stone's throw away, keep's us all close and that also makes me happy.

Question: You both also have many other interests and responsibilities outside of bottle collecting. I know about your love of canning fruit each year, and how much you love spending time with your grandchildren. I've seen your grandkids at the bottle shows and at bottle club Christmas dinners. Would your grandkids please let us know how your family has managed to tie together all of these various diverse interests?

By approaching these events as a group, we all get involved and that keeps us all interested which makes things fun! We all enjoy travel and picking. We all have our own canning recipes, we make candles, and we all cook and bake. But we do it all together!

Don and Mary Kelley (Mary loves pickle bottles!)

