

A row of corn almost lost to the grim reaper

By Michael Seeliger



Alice and I, along with Bill and Kathy Mitchell, just returned from a whirlwind trip to Portland, Oregon; Auburn, California, and San Jose, California. We were thrilled to see the collection of Bill and Kathy Taylor in Portland and enjoyed visiting with them. Bill Taylor joined us as we then traveled to Auburn to see the 49er Historic Bottle Assoc. "Best of the West" Antique Bottle Show, where Mike and Kathie Craig joined us. After the show, we said goodbye to Bill Taylor, and the six of us continued to San Jose to see Mike and Kathie Craig's massive Warner collection.

(If you are counting, that is three Kathys, two Bills, two Mikes, and one Alice)



An outstanding row of the figural ear of corn National Bitters.



Greeley's Bourbon Whiskey Bitters figural barrels.

But back in Portland, while looking closely at Bill Taylor's collection, we could not help but notice that the row of National Bitters (figural ear of corn) seemed to be on a shelf that was uneven and listing to the right. Further inspection revealed the left side of the shelf was resting on the top edge of the support clip. The clips on the right were almost entirely pulled out of the right wall. It was late, and we decided to tackle the problem in the morning. After all, the shelf had been that way for several weeks, one more evening would be okay.

That night I awoke several times worried about a calamity that was to happen if we did not remedy the situation immediately in the morning. I kept thinking about the failure of the shelf. Would the bottles below be close enough to the shelf that they would support the shelf when it fell? What would the run of corns do as they fell together in a heap? Could we open the cabinet doors without causing that calamity to happen?

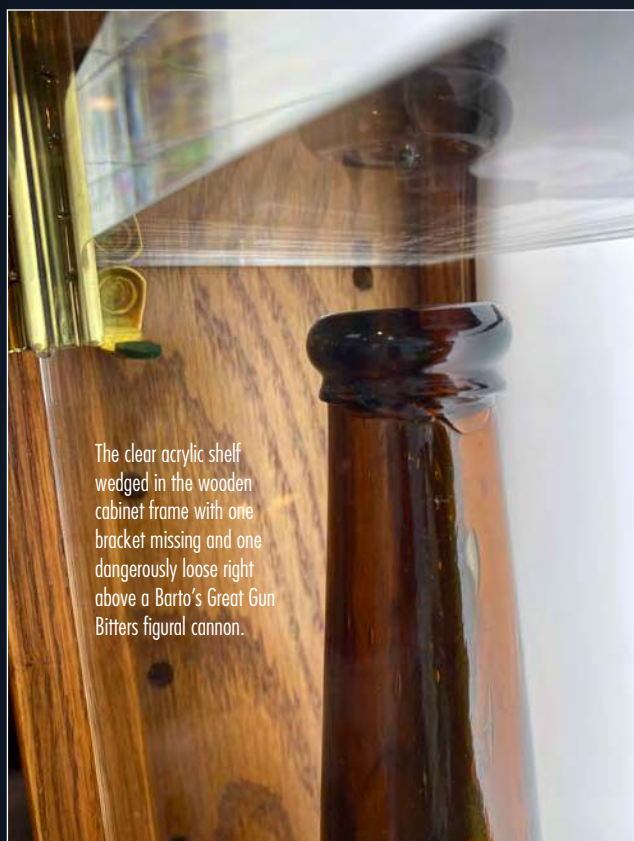
Well, morning came, and we all decided to visit the Evergreen Aviation & Space Museum in McMinnville, Oregon, to see Howard Hughes' "Spruce Goose." I told Bill Taylor of my nightmares and demanded that we do something before the row of corns ended up in a corn shock.

Now, this is not just any row of corn bitters, as you can see from the shelf picture. The value of these and the possible loss to the hobby was something that I hated, especially since we could remedy the situation. We set about carefully removing the corns two by two. Finally, the last corn was out of harm's way. Notice that the row of pineapples below was a full six inches below the shelf. If the shelf had given way, it would have easily crashed into the pineapples below. "Oh, the humanity!"

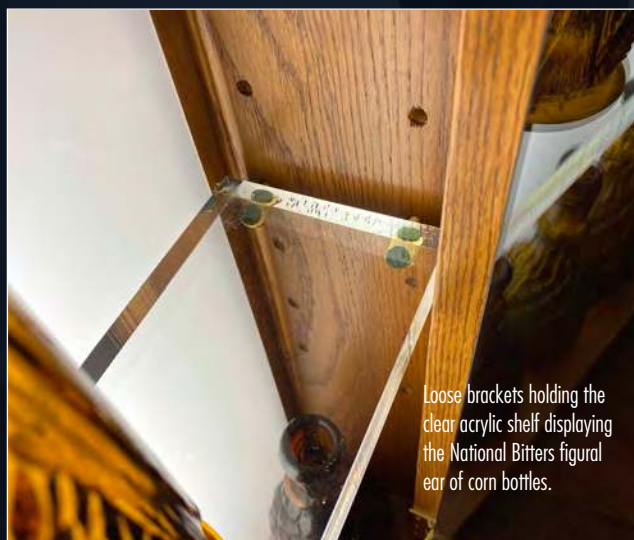
The two shelf brackets on the right were being held in place by about the width of a toothpick. The bracket on the left was also out, and the shelf rested above the bracket. Calamity averted; pegs in place, shelf secure, we all felt relieved.

We decided to check the other shelves to see if they were all secure. To our amazement and surprise, we found a shelf containing eleven Greeley's Bourbon Whiskey Bitters figural barrels in a similar situation. This one had the left bracket in worse condition. One had fallen out and sat on the shelf below. The other bracket had fallen out of the hole only to be caught by the shelf and pinned against the wall. Luckily, the bottle below was only $\frac{1}{4}$ inch shorter than the space between the shelves, and it was wedged against the shelf holding the shelf up. Another crisis averted.

Bill had recently had the bottles removed for pictures by a professional photographer and, while this occurred, decided to dust and clean all the shelves. He reinstalled the shelves, but as our older eyes can attest, we do not see as well as we once did. The shelves looked square and seemed okay at the time, and the bottles were replaced in their original positions. So let this be a warning to us bottle collectors cleaning off shelves and in areas where earthquakes often occur. Shelves move, and it is important to check them occasionally to ensure the "grim reaper" does not take down a row.



The clear acrylic shelf wedged in the wooden cabinet frame with one bracket missing and one dangerously loose right above a Barto's Great Gun Bitters figural cannon.



Loose brackets holding the clear acrylic shelf displaying the National Bitters figural ear of corn bottles.



One bracket had fallen out and sat on the shelf below. The other bracket had fallen out of the hole only to be caught by the shelf and pinned against the wall.