

WISCONS

THE WISCONSIN CONNECTION

Why do some of the greatest
bottles seem to show up in
Wisconsin of all places?



1848



[above left inset and below]
F 46, The Fish Bitters, W.H. Ware,
Patented 1866, cobalt blue figural fish

IN

By Michael Seeliger

When you look at Wisconsin, you don't see much as far as population. Wisconsin was made a state in 1848 mainly because of Milwaukee and the lead mines of the southwest along the Mississippi River. Madison wasn't even the first capital. When we began to collect bottles, 1880 was old, and if we found dumps from towns that were before 1900, we were lucky. Sure, Milwaukee goes back a little farther, but, for the most part, Wisconsin in 1880 was trees and open area, with very small towns along streams supporting some agricultural ambitions. Milwaukee became the world's beer capital only because of the Chicago fire in 1876 which destroyed all the breweries in Chicago.

I'm sure every state can claim its share of excellent bottles. Most have very local bottles that are very rare to that locale. Wisconsin seems to have come up with some very rare bottles that are from nationwide collections.

[below] Brothers, Jim & Bill Mitchell holding a Dr. Bells Golden Tonic Bitters, figural bell.



The first example and probably the most famous is the cobalt blue Fish Bitters. I have seen it personally, and it is truly the most beautiful bottle and rarest bottle out there—until a cobalt blue Indian Queen comes along. The history on this one is almost as unusual as the bottle itself.

Although the bottle was known to exist to a few Wisconsin collectors, the \$500 asking price back in the 1970s was more than most of us could come up with. The bottle initially came from a small farm in upstate Wisconsin. A lady used it to give medicine to her horse because the long-tapered bottle would fit nicely down the animal's throat. The bottle went through a couple of hands before Bill Mitchell of Stevens Point finally brought it into the national bottle world. He purchased it to resell around 1971. Like most of us collectors, he couldn't afford to keep it because he was raising a young family. The sale of it for \$1,600 made a lot of house payments. Over the course of 50 years, the bottle has changed hands a number of times. Rumor has it, the last sale price was in the couple-of-hundred-thousand-dollar ballpark.

About the same time, another unique (at the time) bottle appeared. An old doctor in Briggsville, near Wisconsin Dells, had a Dr. Bells Golden Tonic Bitters with an iron pontil. The bottle is in the shape of a large, old school bell. Again, it showed up in the hands of Bill Mitchell and his brother Jim. The boys know this is a unique find, but unfortunately, it has a hole drilled in the back base put there to have a lamp installed. After taking it to several shows trying to sell it for around \$2,000, it finally changed hands for about \$800. Jim and Bill were with me visiting John Feldmann's collec-

[feature image]
US State Of Wisconsin flag with postage stamp illustration

[below]
B 39, Dr. Bell's Golden Tonic Bitters, G.W. Silver & Co., Chicago, Illinois, figural bell



tion a few years ago, and they came across their orphaned bottle sitting on John's shelf.

In the early 1970s, an entire case of twelve Millville Fruit Jars was located intact in a case in a basement near Milwaukee. The unusual thing about these was that they were all amber.

The next odd find is two Warner's "Safe" Cure London (Animal cure or Mammoth size in green) that oddly showed up in Wisconsin antique shops in 1971. You realize what an odd coincidence it is to have these unusual Warner's present themselves to me, a be-

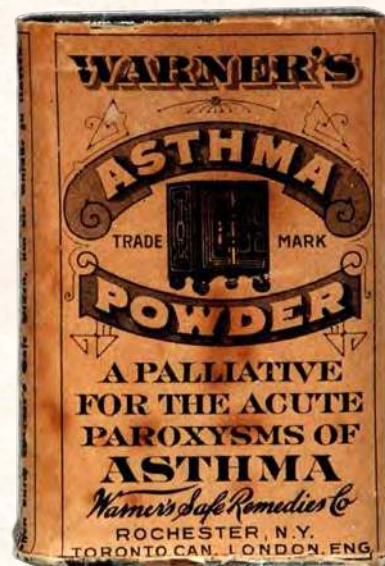


[above]
Amber Millville
Atmospheric
Fruit Jar

based on speculation, down to half. When cleaned up, it revealed a mint Monopole Bitters made by Wm. Frank and Sons glass company with what looked like an iron-type pontil but no iron residue. The bottle sat in Dick's collection for a few years before it reached the hands of Bill Mitchell.

When it comes to barrel bitters, Old Sachem Bitters and Wigwam Tonic has all the nice things you want in a bottle. The bottle has an unusual name, great shape, and

comes in various colors. A very remarkable example was found under a porch in Columbus, Wisconsin. The bottle didn't appear as unique as it was when it was purchased again, by Bill Mitchell around 2008. After cleaning, it now resides in Bill Taylor's collection as a peach



[left]
Warner's
"Safe" Cure
London

[right]
Warner's
Asthma Powder
tin



ginning Warner collector. The purchase price of \$18 and \$22 makes all the better story. Dick Boosted was involved in the purchase of the second one, and we sold it for \$600—again to make house payments.

Dick Boosted also gets involved with the next bottle. Every weekend Dick either dug dumps or visited antique shops searching for bottles. He frequently visited a shop in Columbus which specialized in quality cut glass and high-end antiques. The proprietor assured him she rarely dealt in anything as lowly as bottles, although she did have one unusual example down in her basement. She proceeded to get it and produced a Monopole Bitters bottle covered in 20 coats of metallic gold paint. The asking price was \$20. Dick could barely read the words Monopole Bitters on it and wondered if the bottle was cracked, chipped, or stained beyond belief once cleaned up. He negotiated the price



[left] M 121,
Monopole
Bitters
(embossed on
other side)

[right] S 53,
Schlitz German
Wine Bitters



copper color with pink swirls of color traversing the entire mid-section of the bottle.

Dick Boosted and Mike Schwartz made their way to a small town north of Green Bay to purchase a Schlitz German Wine Bitters in a blinding snowstorm because the guy didn't have a phone. The bottle is a triangular rope cornered bottle that is unique to the bottle world.

The only known example of Warner's Safe Asthma Powder was purchased at a half-price sale from a pharmacy going out of business in Columbus. The purchase price was 37 ½ cents.

These are a few classic examples that we came up with. Let's hear from other areas where fantastic finds have been made!

