

Reno, Nevada - July, 2003

from Ralph Van Brocklin

July 10th saw the Van Brocklin clan making the beautiful drive through the Sierra Nevada over to Reno for the 41st annual bottle show held by the Reno/Sparks Antique Bottle Club. Great weather and moderate temperatures made the trip an enjoyable one, with the anticipation of adding some new items to the shelves and visiting with old friends driving us along.

The show is a two day affair, with dealer set-up at 10:00 am and early buyers allowed in at 12:00. An affordable early admission brings the majority of the buyers in early and the dealing was intense the first few hours. This years show was in a new venue from the prior several -- instead of the Reno Livestock Events Center, this years show was held in the Reno/Sparks Convention Center. Carpeted... Air Conditioned... Well Lighted... Ahhhhhh! Great facility!!! Just hope that the finances allow it to be used in the future!

This has always been one of my favorite Western shows. Typically there are some nice displays and a great array of bottles/stoneware/advertising items to add to one's collection. And, one cannot ever state too emphatically that the officers and members of this club are just a super bunch of folks! (In other words... You really ought to come to this show!)



It took me five years to get my son, Hunter, back on a plane and this was the show I wanted to get him to. He's a little more into the Game Boy in the photo above (with his grandparents Hank and Bobbie), but he enjoyed wandering the hall and looking, wanting to buy a number of items, but finally settling for a cobalt poison offered by LaVaur Scow when his spoil-sport dad wouldn't let him pop for items that dad felt were overpriced. Good thing that he likes the glass or he'd probably use the familiar refrain "what good is it going with you to a show if I can't buy ANYTHING?!" I didn't pick him up any cylinders at this show, but maybe at Auburn in December!

Friday evening is always a fun one for me, with a visit to Fred and Dee Kille's to view one of the premier Western collections and a heck of a nice assortment of Eastern glass, to boot. Fred does not seem to think a lot of the bitters and other Eastern items he has, but I have to tell you -- there are some nice barrels in that house! Having at one time had about twenty or so barrels and another twenty to thirty cabins, it is fun to fondle those items again. But, the draw is the Western flasks and Bourbons — Wow! Look in the main cases and see most of the rarest of the flasks. Go around the corner and see duplicates of them. Spend a little more time, and you notice Western sodas, medicines and a

variety of bitters you never noticed in your ten previous visits.

I did not stay with them this trip, but what a treat to wake up at 4:00 in the morning (7:00 Eastern!) and flip on the lighted cases and... just... sit there and enjoy the glass!

Of course, it's not just the bottles (honestly, Dee!!!)... the barbeque and hospitality Dee dishes out, and the great company I'm in while with Dee, Fred, John Ronald and others, make the hobby what it is to me — a wonderful focus for my life outside of my practice and family! EBay, online bottle shows, anonymous dealings... may they never replace the great American Bottle Show and the friendships the shows foster!

The show was the mixture of scrambling for the deals, socializing and photography I enjoy so much.

My rounds of the show floor produced one key addition to my collection, a clear pint shoofly from Virginia City embossed: THOS TAYLOR & CO / SOLE AGENTS / P. VOLLMERS / OLD BOURBON / LOUISVILLE KY / VIRGINIA NEV. I have tried for a number of years to add this bottle to my collection of 600+ clear Western pumpkinseeds and coffins/shooflies, but never could stomach the asking price. Well, thanks to Tom Chapman, this one came my way at a price I was happy to pay! Nice items were scattered throughout the hall, with some choice Hostetters and cabins at Richard and Beverly Siri's table, a Wormser Bros Fine Old Cognac flask at Darren Romitti's table, and some freshly dug offerings at the tables of Lou Lambert and Lane Puckett (yes, that's Lane waving to you folks in the photo!) One of the nicest offerings was a board of nine Nevada "Good For" mirrors and 3 miscellaneous Nevada mirrors. A little stronger than I felt I could spring for, but as I write this the urge to call the fellow and see if they are negotiable is wafting over me!

The show always has some nice Nevada collectibles outside of the bottles and stoneware, as well. Loren Love had his usual variety of items and there were signs, calendars, souvenir china, ashtrays, tokens, chips and a variety of paper items for interested purchasers.

I managed to get a little visiting done, sandwiched around Federation business. My fellow flask collector, Gene Baker, brought in his latest acquisitions, many for photographing for the book I am working on about Western flasks and we had a fine time chatting about them. I disappointed him, but made Bill Reeves (see the guy grinning in the photograph at the right!) very happy when I sold an amber half-pint pumpkinseed HILDEBRANDT, POSNER & CO. Bill is a collector of Hildebrandt, Posner & Co items and swirled neck whiskeys.



Also at the show I got the opportunity to discuss the old San Francisco beers with Tom Jacobs and Ken Morrill. Tom has been

continuously after the San Francisco beers longer than anyone I know, with the possible exception of Ted Siri. Newer to collecting them than the rest of us, probably the most enthusiastic about them is Ken Morrill — truly a pleasure to visit with him about them! Too, I finally got the opportunity to get re-acquainted with the “Dean of Western Beers”, Byron Martin, whose text “Here’s To Beers” served as my early collecting bible. Had a nice chat with him and let him know that the collection of splits (half pint beers) I had started as a young teen back in the late 60’s was still intact and ever-growing! He will have a new supplement to his book available in the Fall.

I never did get much chance to visit with whiskey collector buddies Rich Lucchesi, Dennis Eastley, Ken Schwartz, Richard Siri, Denny Bray or Bob Barnett, which was a disappointment. Bob Barnett and I did chat long enough for him to introduce me to someone I had always wanted to meet, though -- Ron Barnes. Ron has a collection of Owl Drug items and miniatures that will blow you away!!! Among the displays at the show was a large back-lighted offering of some of the choice miniatures in he and his wife’s collection. You should have been there for the displays, if for no other reason! The PHOENIX BOURBON whiskey and the PJ CASSIN MILLS BITTERS miniatures pictured are the only known examples of these choice bottles. The miniature HOSTETTERS BITTERS is no slouch, either!

The other displays were equally impressive -- Marty Hall had put together a community display of western whiskey items with the word “Kentucky” embossed, and this took in some of the most desirable of the western cylinders and flasks. Richard Siri displayed his Roth & Co items, which included signs, trays and bottles and Helene Walker had a lovely display of gins for the show attendees. Paperweights in the shape of a star were designed by Marty Hall and presented as awards to the displayers and a special award was presented to Richard Siri for his contributions as a consistent displayer over the years.

The show had an general attendance of 446, with 93 dealers taking 131 tables. Great facility, great friends and a great job by co-chairs Helene Walker and Willy Young, as well as the rest of the Reno/ Sparks Antique Bottle Club!



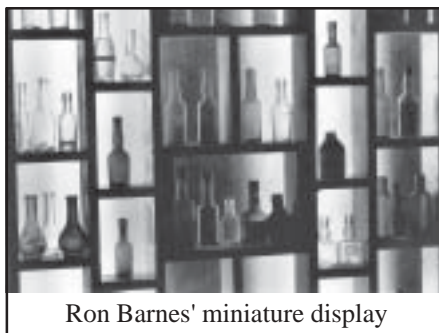
Richard Siri’s Roth & Co. display.



Phoenix Bourbon whiskey and PJ Cassin Mills bitters miniatures.



Marty Hall’s Kentucky whisky display



Ron Barnes' miniature display

- Photos from Ron Barnes’ Collection:
- [1] Extremely rare miniature Hostetter’s Stomach Bitters.
 - [2] Aug. J. L. Lang, miniature beer.
 - [3] Miniature Schroeders Bitters.
 - [4] John Wielands miniature beer.
 - [5] Fredericksburg miniature beer.
 - [6] Very rare miniature beer, Oakland Bottling Co., Oakland, Cal.



[1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6]