

# Old Bottles of Every Shape, Color Shine at Batsto Village Show

By Sarah Watson

Most of the vendors at the New Jersey Antique Bottle Club's annual show in Washington Township, Burlington County, sold antique glass bottles of varying shades of blue, green and occasionally purple, some of which dated to the 1700s. There were medicine bottles, ink wells, soda bottles, poison bottles, mineral water bottles and even snake-oil bottles.

"I always come to all the events here, but this is my favorite one because you have all antiques and the bottles," said Susan Pelszynski, 52, of Mullica Township. Pelszynski said her favorite aspect of the glass was the variety of colors.

Southern New Jersey has been a center for glass production since before the Revolutionary War, said Frank Stubbins, a volunteer from the WheatonArts traveling glassblowers. The industry was aided by the presence of numerous waterways for transportation, trees that could be cut to fuel furnaces and naturally occurring, glass-quality sand, he said.

A good number of the antique bottles on sale at the show likely were made in southern New Jersey, based on their aqua green color, which glass connoisseurs call Jersey green, he said.

Stubbins was at the show as part of a glass-blowing demonstration that went on throughout the day, showing attendees how bottles and mugs came to life from molten sand heated to about 2,100 degrees Fahrenheit inside a portable furnace.

But the main draw were vendors from across the Mid-Atlantic states, who sold bottles of all shapes, sizes and colors, some costing hundreds of dollars. George Anderson came from Bucks County, Pa., to sell several dozen bottles, many of which once held mineral water or soda.



The darker or more unique the color on the bottle, the higher the price, he said. On his table were aqua green bottles that had the faces of dead presidents embossed on them and cobalt blue bottles that once held mineral water from Easton, Pa. "Almost every town had their own. The smaller the town, the scarcer they are," Anderson said of the soda and mineral water bottles. Those became rarer in the 1910s as municipalities began purifying local water, he said.

Rich Peal, 58, of Brick Township, Ocean County, was selling dozens of bottles of varying sizes. He started collecting when he worked for a phone company installing poles. When workers dug a hole for a new pole, they often brought up pieces of glass and sometimes whole bottles in pristine condition, he said.

Among the dozens of bottles and jars on his table were ink wells, large ink bottles and poison bottles, which typically have more embossing in the design to denote their contents. A bottle of rat poison, for instance, has a picture of a rat on it. "People may not realize it until they come here and say, 'Oh, I've got one of those at home.' Then they buy another one," he said. Now that he's retired, Peal said he is much more involved and that many of the smaller bottles he was selling were ones he found. "If it wasn't in someone's basement, it came from the ground," he said.

Contact Sarah Watson: 609-272-7216 • [SWatson@pressofac.com](mailto:SWatson@pressofac.com)

