

Collecting Hobbleskirt Coca-Cola Bottles

By Bill Porter

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Bill Porter, of Rockville, Maryland, is an enthusiastic collector of so-called hobbleskirt Coca-Cola bottles. He also published a Coke Bottle Checklist covering Coca-Cola bottles manufactured from 1915 on. Here he tells how he got started)

When I was in high school - in the late 50's - I drank a lot of Coke. I bought Coke bottles in 6 packs at the store. I soon noticed that most of the bottles - but not all - had city names and state abbreviations embossed on the bottoms. Some were written with large letters, some with small letters. I noticed numbers and symbols on the sides of the bottles, and sometimes, various symbols on the bottom. I knew some numbers were dates, and others some kind of series mark.

I knew I had found an fascinating collectible here, but after collecting 431 different bottles, and with no reference to tell me how many more there were or whether anyone cared about them besides me, I gave up on my collecting and sold them all back to the store, for 3 cents each. I couldn't believe no one else had discovered this "secret hobby" I guessed I was the only one in the world who had, the only one who even cared.

Over the next many years, I kept thinking about that collection. How many were there? How many small towns had Coca-Cola bottlers. How far back did they go?

I thought I was alone. but of course I wasn't. During the same years I was in high-school collecting from the grocery store and running out of space, old David Lyon was at Michigan State, trying to collect them, too. At first, he had no room to keep them either, but collected them anyway - in the form of base-plate rubbings - each noting the side information, including the major type, the maker's mark, the date, and the mould number.

Of course, I didn't know that. It was not until 1992, when I met a "dealer / collector" Bob Flippen that I finally I



discovered I was not alone. He knew of several other collectors: Bill Seifert, Richard Selleh, Bill Kendall, David Lyon and Greg Grimes and Arlin Cargill.

Once I realized I was not alone, I dove into collecting. I sold a nice collection of gold coins to finance the purchase of some large collections. People said I had the "reverse" Midas touch. I could turn gold into glass.

But in fact, in spite of many detractors, I knew I had discovered a true philosopher's stone. I knew this collection would bring me wealth. Of course, I cheat on this in a way - I don't measure my wealth in ounces of gold or piles of dollars. I measure my wealth in the enjoyment I get out of life! I had rediscovered my passion. And I set out to enjoy it to the fullest extent possible!

At the time, speaking of wealth, I also collected coins. I began that hobby before I discovered Coke bottles, but it never had the personal connection for me. After all, a great many people collected coins. They were even willing to pay for them! But nobody collected Coke bottles, except me!

As an aside, it is interesting to note that 20 billion Lincoln cents were minted (at 3 mints) from 1909 to 1958. Some are now VERY valuable. And if

copper can be turned into gold, why not glass?

6.58 billion Coke bottles were made between 1916 and 1958. Many are now unique. New ones - previously ignored and unrecorded - are still turning up every few months. And instead of 3 mints, those 6.5 billion are divided into about 1,500 cities, and many different manufacturers, types, and colors! Indeed, this is more than a gold mine, it is a regular treasure house full of rare gems! Then, In 1993, I discovered a new city - a Mercersburg, Pa. I bought it from a knowledgeable collector. His price: \$1.00. There are now (in 2011) 3 Mercersburgs known to me, in 3 different big collections. Even more amazing than that, my friend Greg Grimes bought an unknown at a grocery store in Kentucky and drank it.

Many old time bottle collectors do not value hobbleskirts. I no longer try to educate them! (It doesn't work anyway!) But this is our philosopher's stone. Use this knowledge and you can turn glass into gold. The more you know, the better it will work, and the more fun it will be!

But please - don't be foolish like me and share this knowledge with other people. Keep it to yourselves!