

They Dig for All Sorts of Bottles

By ROBERT LYNCH

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How would you like to spend your spare time digging up an old trash dump, or crawling under an abandoned house or perhaps poking around in an old pit privy?

If you are a member of the rapidly growing legion of bottle collectors, you probably would look forward to these earthy pastimes with relish — perhaps with feverish anticipation.

The uninitiated might imagine these diggers in the dumps to have mole-like hands and calloused noses. This generally is not so.

There are many kinds of bottle collectors. This was pointed out during a recent meeting of the Capital City Bottle Club in the home of Mr. and Mrs. William T. Fickes at 1225½ Duplin Road.

Bill Fickes and other members of the club said many bottle collectors hunt for old bottles because it gives them a glimpse into the past and a sense of satisfaction in having reclaimed something of historical significance.

Some collectors, Fickes said, do not dig, but build their collections by buying bottles from others.

Collectors who buy old bottles keep the ones that fit into their particular collection and trade the rest to other collectors.

There also are commercial bottle collectors who dig, buy or trade bottles strictly for profit.

Rolled Into One

And sometimes all of the various types of bottle collecting get rolled into one. A person in it for profit may at the same time collect, and the hobbyist sometimes sells.

But usually, as club president John Hicks of 5734 Trinity Road explained, those who collect purely because they love old bottles and their historical ties eventually narrow their collection to one or two types depending on their individual fancy.

Hicks, for example, collects only "BIMAL soda bottles." "BIMAL," Hicks said, "stands for blown in mold applied lip." These are hand-blown bottles that have the mold mark extending into the neck, but not through the lip or mouth of the bottle which was applied after the bottle was blown.

In the vernacular of collec-

tors BIMAL bottles are "blob-top" since the mouths were applied in a blob of molten glass and are often not uniform in shape or alignment.

Fickes, who members say has the most valuable collection in the club, collects only old cobalt-blue bottles, not including Bromo-Seltzer bottles. Fickes values his collection at \$3,200.

Mrs. Fickes collects tiny BIMAL such as perfume and medicine bottles. Both Fickes and his wife, Kitty, have won a number of awards with their collections.

Jack Murdock, 1957 All-American basketball player at Wake Forest College and former head basketball coach at that school, collects old bottles that have the name Raleigh on them.

Murdock, who lives at 401 Peartree Lane, said that in 1880, for example, there were some 25 saloons and liquor dealers in Raleigh that had their own bottles. "That's what I try to find," Murdock said, "those and North Carolina bottles . . ."

Don Hall of 606 W. Garner Road, president of European Auto Service of Raleigh, is one of the newer members of the club.

Hall collects old medicine bottles. "I enjoy reading the cure-alls on these old remedy bottles," Hall said.

David Tingen of 4220 Green Road, purchasing agent for Telerent Leasing Corp., collects old North Carolina and Southern beer and wine bottles. Tingen has about 500 of these in his collection.

How does a person get started collecting bottles?

"About three years ago," Fickes recalled, "I was messing around on an old plantation on the coast and saw a pig root up an old Pepsi-Cola bottle.

"I took it to an antique dealer, and he said it was worth about \$8. I kept the bottle, went back to the pig pen and started digging. I found a large number of old bottles and decided to collect them as a hobby." Fickes is a teacher and coach at St. Timothy's Junior High School. Mrs. Fickes also is a school teacher. Murdock, a history major

who now works for the N. C. Department of Transportation, got started collecting old bottles because of his interest in history.

"I started hunting bottles when I lived in Winston-Salem. I liked old things and hunting bottles gets you out in the fresh air. Digging is good exercise. . . ."

Hall said, "I started out messing with old fruit jars and antiques. Then I got interested in collecting bottles."

Antiques

An "old dump" and an interest in history got Tingen started. "I found an old dump when I was 12 years old," Tingen recalled. "It had a lot of antique bottles in it. I've always liked antiques. . . ."

As club members point out, a knowledge of old customs also helps in locating good digging sites.

"Because their wives didn't

like for them to drink liquor in the house," Fickes said, "men used to slip out to the outdoor toilet, pull out a small pocket flask and have a drink. Often they finished the bottle and threw it down the hole. . . . No I haven't dug in any old pit privies yet."

"They dig in pit privies in South Carolina," Tingen said, "and it's extremely good digging."

Club members said that digging in old pit privies of the 1800s or earlier is about the same as digging in dirt.

What do club members do at meetings? Swap bottles and plan digs.



Staff photo by Karen Tam

Bill Fickes, John Hicks and David Tingen compare old bottles