



Seldom does anyone make such an impact on a hobby that their contribution can be called a water-shed moment. Barbara Emonson was the first to bring definition and direction to collecting pre-prohibition spirits glasses in 1985 with the publication of her *Historic Shot Glasses: The Pre-Prohibition Era*. Similarly, Robin Preston brought the hobby into the 21st century with his 2002 breakthrough website devoted to the pre-prohibition whiskey trade

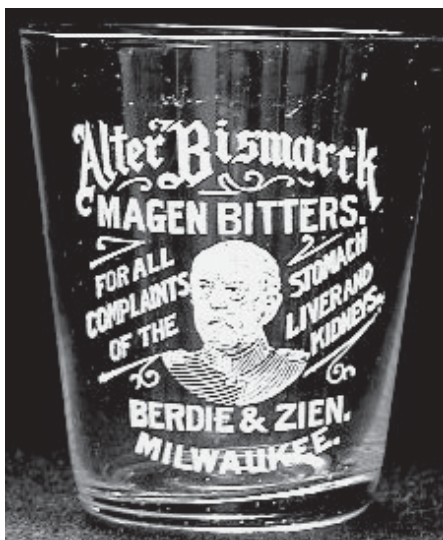
www.pre-pro.com.

It's an eclectic, kaleidoscopic site - a gathering spot - part market place, part research tool and part chat room. A glass repository filled with news, opinions and, most of all, with great eye candy.

Robin's a research professor of pharmacology at Drexel University in Philadelphia. Born in England and educated all over, he's stopped in Wisconsin and Vermont enroute to his current position. The bane of many online

bidders, he may be more familiar under his eBay handle of "oldwhiskey".

He recently acquired copyright to both of Barbara's books and they may be accessed in a searchable format complete with links to his own database on his website. The database is a combined effort of several collectors and all contributions to it are greatly appreciated. At press time, it was at 1200+ glasses. Pay a visit! In this issue, Robin shares some glimpses into his collecting obsession.





So, what started you off on the road to collecting pre-pro shot glasses?

I've been collecting for 16 or 17 years now. Mooching around antique malls has always been fun, but I never found a lot back then because I had no real collecting interests and I was recently out of Grad. School and hence very broke. On one occasion, an old embossed Calvert glass from the 50's caught my eye and that started me on the slippery slope. A couple of months later I found a pre-pro Detrick

glass at an antique fair. I picked it up for \$15 knowing nothing about it except that it had a quality that the modern shots do not. And that was it. Just like that, I was hooked.

Where did you go from there?

I started out trawling every antique store within a two-hour radius of Madison, WI and picked up a couple more. One of the first ones I bought was probably my biggest coup – an enamel

“Elk Club” for \$2. It took me 15 years before I realized that it was a pre-pro and a valuable one at that. Once I discovered them, bottle shows turned out to be the best source. Both Madison and Milwaukee had great bottle shows back then – Madison still does but I think the Milwaukee “Red Lanes Bowling Alley” show eventually folded. I still visit all the local antique stores on a regular basis and attend 15 or so local bottle shows every year and I've found many real gems



that way. But the internet has really revolutionized every aspect of shot collecting and that's where I pick up most.

You mean eBay?

Probably 70% of my collection has come from eBay. But eBay also provided a way of contacting other collectors. For the longest time, I thought that I was the only pre-pro collector and my knowledge on the subject was limited to what I had read in Barb Edmonson's wonderful books. Once I started talking to the competition on eBay, I was amazed to find that there were many similarly afflicted folks out there, and what a wonderfully smart and eclectic group they've turned out to be. I've made many new friends through eBay that I wouldn't have otherwise. That's turned out to be the most valued and least expected part of collecting these glasses.

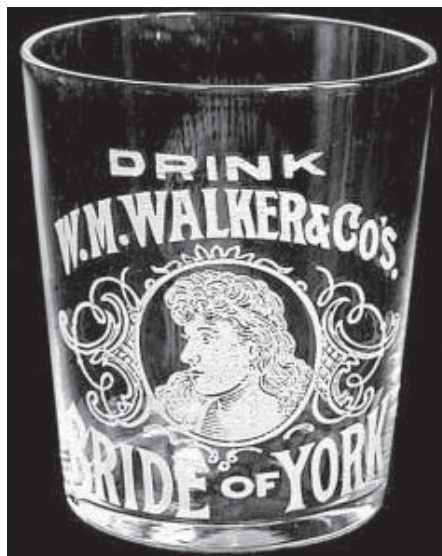
Perhaps there's a need for an internet

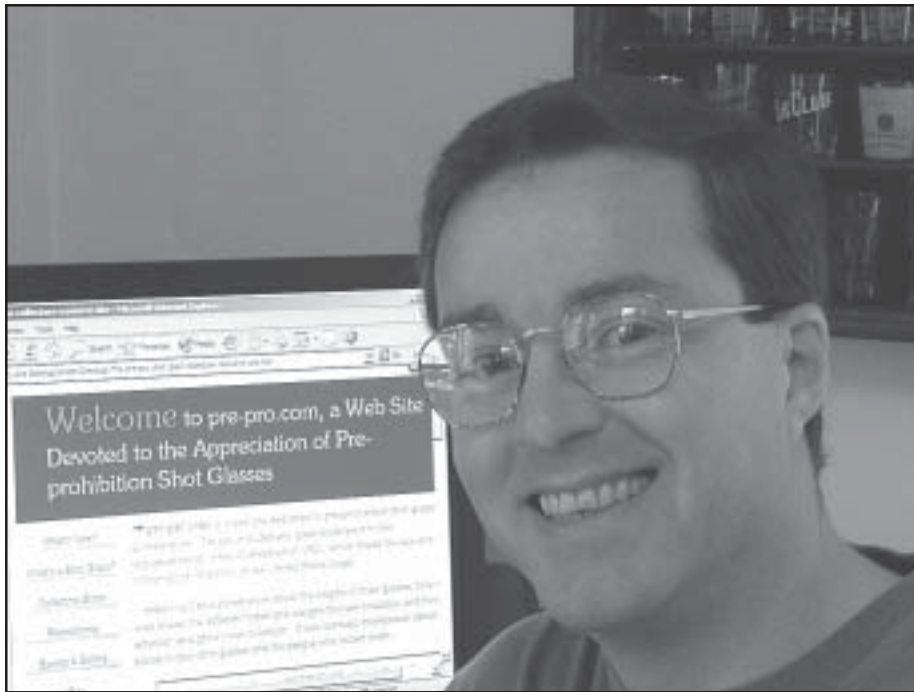
collector's club?

Well, that's partly what www.pre-pro.com is about. Clearly there's not enough of us out there to support local gatherings, so pre-pro.com was intended, in part, to be somewhere for collectors to congregate and communicate. For example, we have "The Circle", a blind e-mail list that can be used to send messages to other collectors (we have about 30 or so collectors in The Circle at the moment) plus there is the Discussion Room for online postings. I'm not sure that this is really the place to go into the details of pre-pro.com – but perhaps it might be interesting to have a conversation about the direction of the site in another column?

It certainly would be. Tell us about your shot-glass collection.

Well, I'm one of those sad collectors who never met a pre-pro glass they didn't like, and my collection reflects that. I





“MANNING THE FORT” - Robin Preston is shown here about to perform some “html” wizardry on the maze that’s become the lodestar of pre-prohibition whiskey aficionados across the country. Just when you thought he had all the bases covered, he takes it to the next level. The most recent wrinkle is a series of regional and local databases on the whiskey trade. As he says at pre-pro.com, “We’re not *just* about shot glasses - we’re about the pre-prohibition whiskey industry. We’re building databases of advertising shot glasses, brand names, distillers and wholesalers and their products”.

have some real dinged dogs in there but some true beauties also. I have a particular passion for the “label-under-glass” types, but they’re rare and many others feel just as passionately as I do. I only have five in total. I also avidly collect the souvenir and novelty glasses. Many of them were put out by master etcher George Truog’s company, the Maryland Glass Etching Works. How can anyone not look at the “Eye Opener” and “Going Back on a Friend” and not be enchanted?! I also have a collection of Philadelphia glasses. Not many are known and the ones that are tend to be scarce but I have around fifty so far. Sadly, two of them have holes in them, but a glass is a glass and until I find a replacement, they’re greatly treasured!

Truog’s work is another great idea for a column. By the way, did you say “holes” ???

Er, yes. One I bought that way for a nominal sum, simply because I’d never seen it before. The other was a sad tale. This was the “one that got away”, although not quite the in the traditional

sense. It’s a rare enamel “Whiskey Whiskey” from James Moroney of Philadelphia. It was a sleeper glass on eBay hidden in a collection of 10 modern glasses I won the auction and specifically requested that the glasses be individually wrapped to protect them, but the seller basically just threw them all in a box with a couple of grocery bags between. The box was tinkling when it arrived – not a good sound. I was really heartbroken at having lost such a rare old glass. Not so much because of the potential value, but because of the lost history, so I glued the pieces together and took a photo. Through the magic of digital technology I was able to recreate the glass as you see here.

Any other glasses that stand out in your collection?

I’m lucky enough to have several exceptional glasses. The two “Black Cats” are an example. The “Grass Widow” is a wonderful pictorial glass, as is the “Old Bard” and the “Millionaire’s Club”. I also like the near-identical Wm Walker (a Pittsburgh glass) and the John Deis (Dayton, OH) glasses.

Do you limit your collection to shot glasses?

I like to pick up old letterheads and other “whisky paper” when I see it at a reasonable price. They’re useful for researching the origins of glasses and the artwork on the letterheads and advertising is very appealing in its own right. I have a small collection of advertising items from Philadelphia companies. A few tip trays, a couple of corkscrews, decanters, and some other bits and pieces. My only other serious collecting interest is mini-decanters. They were used by hotels and railways to take a single serving of whiskey to a patron. They’re a little bigger than a shot glass and they were branded either with an embossed or gilded label. I don’t have very many because they’re difficult to find, which is partly why they’re fun to collect.

Any words of wisdom for a beginning collector, based on your own experiences?

Collecting pre-pro glasses can be a great hobby that one can approach from many different directions. It can link you with this country’s past; the artistry on many of the glasses is outstanding, the glasses are, by nature, ephemeral and hence their value will only increase, and they have considerable intrinsic appeal. It is possible to put together a respectable collection for a relatively modest sum if you bide your time and buy only glasses in good to excellent condition. Patience is most definitely rewarded in this hobby. Although nice glasses may attract a feeding frenzy on eBay, they virtually always show up again and can be won at a bargain price.

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