



BARBARA EDMONSON
1912 - 2004

I still vividly recall finding my first pre-pro shot glass. It was delicate and pristine and the label intricate, with a monogram, grain stalks and the distillers name "Detrick" emblazoned across the face. I now know Detrick glasses to be very common and that's taken away much of the pride in what would otherwise be considered a prized find. But my first acquisition did set me wondering about who made pre-pro glasses and why. Back in the days before the term "research" became equated with typing a phrase into a Google search box, finding answers to such questions was difficult. I spent much time in libraries and in conversation with dealers at bottle shows, all to no avail. Ultimately, it was Vic Kroll, a dealer in breweriana, who provided an answer by kindly sending me a flyer advertising a new book and price guide entitled *Historic Shot Glasses: The Pre-Prohibition Era*, written by Barbara Edmonson. [Figure 1]

It's difficult to adequately express in words the impact that this "guide" and its successor had — and continues to have — on those of us who collect old shot glasses. As a friend recently wrote me, "did she know how many people hung/hang on her every word?" Sadly, Barbara Edmonson died in November last year, shortly after reaching her 92nd birthday and after a lifetime of career and personal achievements. Those of us who appreciate old glasses lost a great friend. I'd like to use this edition of *Random Shots* to celebrate her accomplishments and legacy.

Barbara Edmonson was born Barbara Ann Turner on October 15, 1912 in Kansas City, Missouri. She was the eldest of three children. Prohibition was enacted when she was seven but even so, she recalled frequent lunchtime visits to speak-easies with her father while her mother was back home brewing beer in the kitchen! I was also

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amazed to learn that as a teenager, Barb became one of the region's first female pilots. After graduating high school, she moved on to college, but quickly tired of it and returned home. She then joined her father at his sporting goods store in the city, working as a traveling sales rep. When the U.S. was dragged into the Second World War, Barb joined the Foreign Economic Administration and was sent to Turkey.

The FEA was a government body established in 1943 to oversee wartime imports/exports, foreign aid, and various other activities such as economic warfare. When her service with the FEA was over, Barb returned home and found herself a position working with young children. She became interested in child psychology as a result and then began a long period of academic training, securing first a B.A., then an M.A., and finally a Ph.D. She also married Milton B. Edmonson during this time (1951), though the couple divorced 12 years later.

Barb's fascination for shot glasses surfaced while living in Columbus, Ohio. After gaining her Ph.D., she joined the faculty of Ohio State University as an Associate Professor teaching Psychology. In her free time, she would scour flea markets for interesting collectibles that she would then resell at antique shows. Paul Van Vactor remembers first meeting her

FOR THE FIRST TIME !

Figure 1

A BOOK ABOUT WHISKEY ADVERTISING SHOTGLASSES
BEFORE PROHIBITION. \$12.95 plus \$1 postage.

225 pages. Gives descriptions of 1500 shotglasses, with many dates, names of brand owners, illustrations, and current prices.

Find out who distributed these and hundreds of other brands.

PURE
Old Hickory



\$60 - \$60

METROPOLE
WHISKEY



\$4 - \$8

(PURITAN) RYE WHISKEY



\$150+

Collectors will pay from \$100 to \$200 for certain glasses. Many others are valued at from \$30 to \$100 apiece. How valuable is your collection?

Are you collecting by state or city? An index lists the glasses by the state, city, and distributor of the brand, and/or where it was sold.

HISTORIC SHOTGLASSES: THE PRE-PROHIBITION ERA also contains a history of whiskey in the United States, and the origin of these interesting and valuable collectibles.

BARBARA EDMONSON, 701 EAST LASSEN AV. #308, CHICO, CA. 95926. (916-343-8460.)
I am ordering **HISTORIC SHOTGLASSES** as follows:

First Name	Last Name	Q'tity	Unit	Total
Street No.	Street	(6 or more at 40% discount)		
State	Zipcode	Postage or UPS \$1 for 1; 50c ea. for additional.		Enclosed No C.O.D.

when setting up a table next to hers at a show in Ann Arbor, Michigan, sometime in the late 60s or early 70s. She had a special affection for pre-prohibition glasses, partly because of the quaint names of the brands that they advertised and perhaps also because they reminded her of her childhood years in Missouri.

The pre-pro glass collecting community is small and disjointed even now, but in the early days a glass collector must have felt very isolated and alone. Little had been written about the glasses. An article on pre-pro shots in a 1979 edition of a collector's magazine laments "the paucity of information about advertising glasses" and that "dealers assure us that they know of no book on this fascinating hobby." The same questions about the origins of the glasses that had frustrated me when I first started collecting nagged at Barb also. The resources available to her were sparse, but she soon discovered the work of Bob Snyder, founder of the Snyder Whiskey Research Institute, who had single-mindedly catalogued and tracked down the origins of many thousands of pre-prohibition brand names and their owners.

Bob had written many articles on the subject for *Old Bottle Magazine*. He also published a collection of letterheads and advertising material in his book, *Whiskey Paper* [Figure 2], which features many of the brand names etched on the glasses. In corresponding with him, Barb began to realize that she had the beginnings of some form of shot-glass guide within her grasp. Further research led her to books on antique bottles by Bill and Betty Wilson and by John Thomas. Both catalogued bottles without a mention of shot glasses, but their text was rich with valuable information on the history of the old distillers and wholesalers whose products filled the bottles and who gave away the old advertising shot glasses.

With the encouragement of family and friends, Barb now started collecting and cataloguing in earnest. Back in those early years, pre-pro shots could be obtained for a dollar or less, much to the chagrin of the modern-day collector who seldom gets change from a ten-dollar bill. Ohio and its surrounding states provided rich hunting grounds for shot collectors and she quickly amassed a collection of over 1,000. She recorded the inscriptions using conventions that the bottle collectors would be familiar with, noting also their dimensions, the thickness of the glass wall, the shape, and the labeling medium. She also copied the pictures and

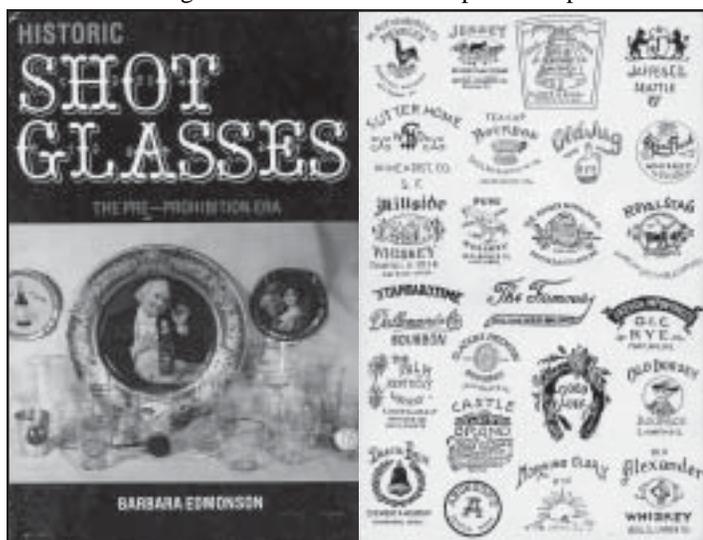


Figure 3: The front cover of *Historic Shot Glasses* featured a photo of glasses in Barb's collection, while the back showed some of the drawings that accompanied glass descriptions in the text.

inscriptions on many of the glasses. When I sat down with a glass in front of me and tried to replicate one of her drawings, the results proved laughable, so I assumed she must have traced them. "No", she replied, "I never tried to trace an image from a glass. I always made free hand sketches of the inscriptions, and measured the glasses. I just figured that a less than perfect sketch, as long as the distillery name and address was fully shown, would allow identification." It was the charm of these sketches as much as anything that made the eventual guide book so endearing. Paul Van Vactor put her in contact with other collectors around the country whom she then enlisted to help catalogue, measure, and draw. Eventually, she had compiled and indexed just short of 1500 glass descriptions which, with introductory material added, amounted to a 224-page price guide. *Historic Shot Glasses* was published in April 1985 by Maverick Publications [Figure 3], retailing for \$12.95, although it could be pre-ordered from Barb at a one-dollar discount.

Maverick was also responsible for publishing *Old Bottle Magazine*, and a full cover mock-up of the book graced its April

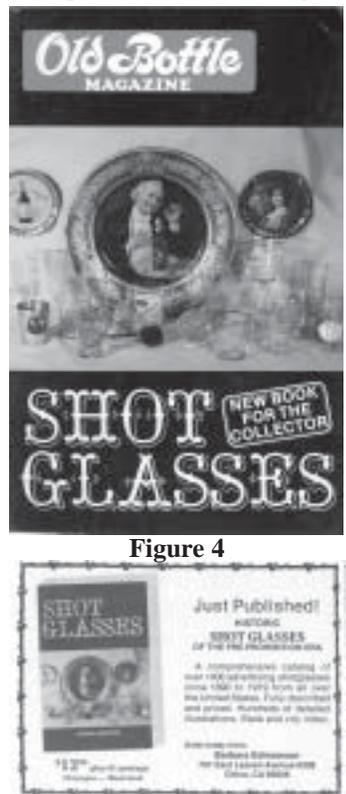


Figure 4

issue and announced its availability to the collecting community. [Figure 4]

About this time, Barb moved to Chico, California to be with her sister. She was selling copies of the book from her home by mail order, at bottle and antique shows, and through smaller book stores who would order half a dozen or so at a time. The book was a tremendous success and sales were brisk; by year's end she had sold the majority of the initial printing of 500 copies. Her fame in the local collecting community caught the eye of a local newspaper, the *Sacramento Bee*, which ran an article on her and her shot glasses. [Figure 5]



Figure 5

Not about to rest on her laurels, Barb was already planning Book Two. I was amused that my copy of *Historic Shot Glasses*, when it arrived, had a plea for help unceremoniously gummed into the frontispiece. "To Purchasers of HISTORIC SHOTGLASSES: THE PRE-PROHIBITION ERA", it read. "Descriptions (measurements & drawings of inscriptions) of additional glasses for a possible second volume would be welcomed. Several collectors have allowed me to measure and draw their collections, and if you are interested and have, say, 5 to 10 that are not included in this edition, let me know so I can keep you in mind for a possible visit to your part of the country."

Book Two appeared in 1988 with the title: *Old Advertising Spirits Glasses*. The format was almost identical to *Historic Shot Glasses* with descriptions, measurements and drawings, but this latest volume included the results of a considerable amount of research into the origins and

history of the glasses. The research started when Bob Snyder sold her his collection of photocopies of city directories from around the country. Bob had amassed these through many years of communicating with reference librarians in his quest to hunt down the owners of pre-prohibition whiskey brand names. Many of the copies were little more than lace work after Bob had clipped ads from the pages, but they still showed the street addresses and years of operation of all the major distillers, rectifiers, and wholesalers and hence could be used as a means of dating the shot glasses.

Barb supplemented this with hours of painstaking work. She took to the road as time and finances allowed, traveling from one side of the country to the other in search of information and collections to catalogue. Her travels took in Ken Schwartz' collection of western glasses and Paul Van Vactor's Kentucky shots. Paul kindly allowed me to photograph his collection during a visit to Louisville two years ago, and he recalled the "Daylight Special" glass shown here [Figure 6] as being Barb's favorite.

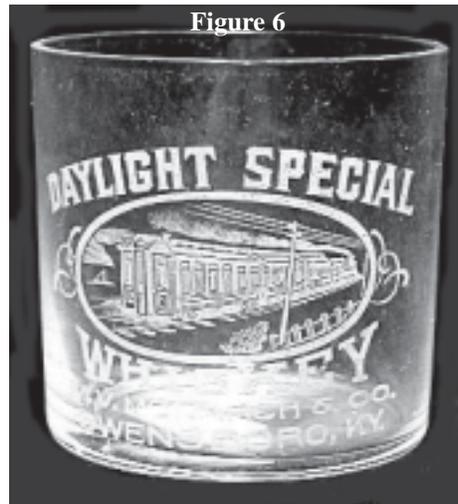


Figure 6

She also visited Barb and Roger Roy in Ohio. Barb Roy turned out to be as talented in reproducing the glass inscriptions as Barb Edmonson, and the two of them fastidiously cataloged and measured and drew over the course of the next few days. [Figures 7]

Out east, she stayed with Sheila Sears who then lived in the Baltimore suburbs. Sheila had a collection of several hundred pre-pro shots and she recalls setting Barb up at a card table and then watching as she sketched her way through the entire collection. She visited other Maryland collectors while in the area, but the proximity to Washington DC meant that she also had access to the Library of Congress

and their vast resources. Barb described many long hours spent in the basement, tracking down information on glass manufacturers and on the history of various liquor companies. She also recalled trying to wrestle New York City directories off their shelves, only to be defeated by their size and weight.

It's difficult to know what drove her. She was primarily a collector who was as passionate about the delicate nature and fine detail of the etching on the old glasses as any individual, past or present. But the time and effort she put into cataloguing and fleshing out their background must have satisfied a greater intellectual need. "Who but some nutty old lady or man would do this, spend all this time for no money?" she quipped to the reporter from the *Sacramento Bee*.

Old Advertising Spirits Glasses was a remarkable work and it too sold quickly. I was delighted to see the familiar request for information on unlisted glasses pasted inside the cover, because it meant she was already planning a sequel. I immediately dispatched photographs of unlisted glasses from my own collection. [Figure 8]

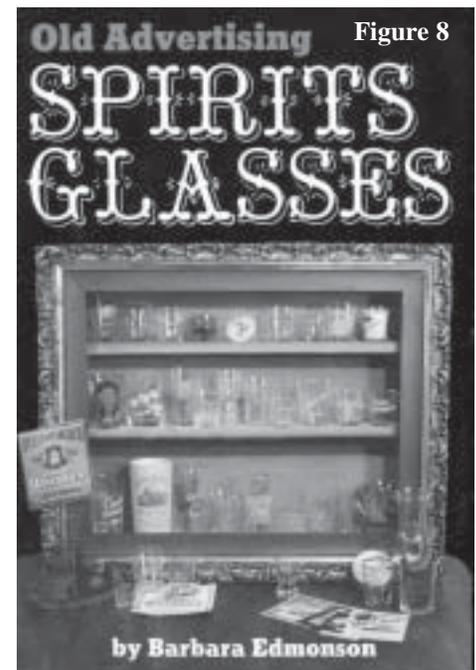
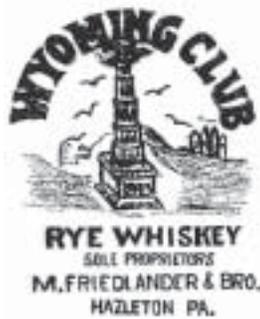


Figure 8

Book Three was to have focused on glasses from eastern states, but ultimately it was not to be so. Barb's sister Janet died in 1988, the same year that *Old Advertising Spirits Glasses* was published. Janet Turner was a talented artist whose works can be found in museums around the world. She had accumulated a massive collection of rare prints and Barb now redirected all of her considerable energies toward finding a



permanent home for her sister's legacy. There was also the issue of how a third book could be financed and distributed. The nineties saw Barnes & Noble and Borders grow into national chains that crushed the smaller vendors who had helped sell Barb's first two books. She was also living on a limited income and the costs of creating a new book from scratch were prohibitive. As a compromise, she re-issued *Historic Shot Glasses* with six new pages of listings added as an addendum. She also updated the glass values. She did this by gluing new price ranges over the old: on p. 70 of the revised addition, you can see where one of these scraps of paper escaped her attention and settled unnoticed over the drawing of a glass inscription! The revised edition of *Historic Shot Glasses* was published in 1992 when she was 80 years old. [Figure 9]

After the revised edition was published, Barb disposed of her research materials and sold all but a few of her glasses via mailings to the collectors who had bought her books. She then settled into researching the history of the Turner family (her ancestors) with all thoughts of pre-pro shot glasses put aside. Eventually her advancing years caught up with her, even though with a wink she placed the blame for her failing health on her fondness for martinis. Ultimately the end came quickly and she died on November 1, 2004. Her ashes were scattered at sea following a service held in

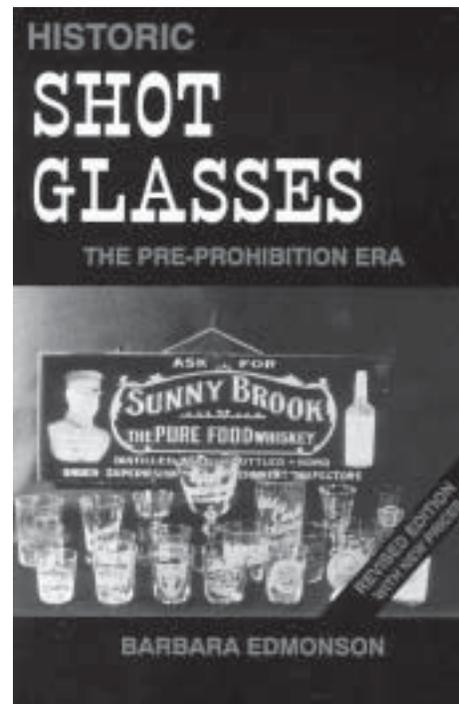
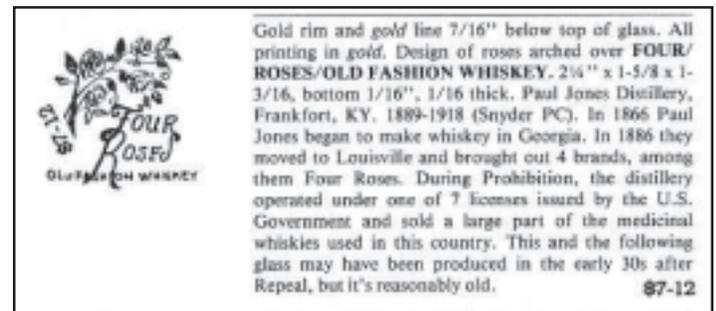


Figure 9: The 1992 edition of *Historic Shot Glasses*. One of the new price-range labels that she used to update values escaped Barb's attention and glued itself over a drawing illustrating a Four Roses shot glass (below).



< Figures 7: Barb Edmonson with Roger and Barbara Roy at their home in Ohio (top) and a sampling of the drawings (middle) and photos (bottom) they produced for the second book.

Bidwell Park, Chico. Her friend Susan Murphy related that “It was a beautiful, sunny day in the Park for her celebration of life.”

Her passing left a tangible hole in the fabric of the pre-pro community. Everyone who knew her commented on what a nice person she was and how they’ll miss her, but her loss also left its mark on collectors who’d never met her or talked with her. Perhaps it’s because so many present-day collectors grew up, at least in terms of the hobby, thumbing through her two books and dreaming of the same intricate scenes displayed on their own collection of sparkling treasures. But perhaps also, as one collector wrote to her, “the books are special because of all the wonderful drawings and for the comments that are scattered throughout. I suppose that they are infused with your personality, which transforms them into something more than simple reference works”. Whatever the reason, she’ll be greatly missed.

But the story doesn’t quite end there. Since Barb had never actually announced that she’d given up on a third book, I’d assumed that it was still very much a work in progress. I wrote to her sometime around 1998 to volunteer new listings and ask if there was anything that I could do to help her along with the project because I, like many other collectors, was eagerly awaiting its publication. I was surprised and saddened to hear that she’d abandoned the idea. I was also alarmed to discover that she’d sent all her research material to – well, she couldn’t remember exactly. But she was very excited by the prospect of collaborating on a new project and made suggestions about how the glass database that we have online at www.pre-pro.com might be turned into a glossy showcase for the old glasses. She also transferred copyright of all three of her books so that they could be reprinted with updated prices

and so that some or all of the previously-published material could be used in compiling Book Three.

The latter option now seemed unlikely given the loss of the old city directories because it meant that newly discovered glasses could not be researched. But by a remarkable stroke of luck, I happened to strike up a conversation with Jack Sullivan at the Potomac Bottle Club’s annual show in 2002. Jack is well known to readers of *Bottles and Extras* for his many authoritative articles on the history of liquor jugs. He had been aided in his research by two large boxes full of photocopies that he had purchased some years ago from Barb Edmonson and, even more remarkably, she had also sent him several pages of unlisted glass descriptions that comprised all of her preliminary work on Book Three.

Is a third book warranted in this age of the Internet and online databases? Wouldn’t it be better to compile an electronic guidebook that can be distributed on a CD ROM and updated constantly? That’s a question the collecting community has mulled over for some time now. My personal feeling is that hardcopy wins out over pixels every time, because there’s just no substitute for paging through a book. But in the absence of Barb, producing a third book is a far and lofty goal.

During the past year or so, Barb sensed a growing need to get her affairs in order and to clear out her shelves and closets. Some time in January 2004, a box bearing her return address arrived on the doorstep. At the bottom was a stack of yellowed Cincinnati city directory photocopies that she’d discovered among some forgotten papers. On top, carefully wrapped, were five shot glasses. One was cow-horn souvenir from Scotland. Another was a rare, gilded Shriner commemorative. There was also a tonic glass from Siegelman of New York and a port glass from Des Pres of Chicago. The fifth was an unknown

glass that she attributed to master etcher George Truog, explaining that she’d originally obtained it from Paul Van Vactor. “Am sure I was the only one interested in it as it was not a brand shotglass” she commented. It’s now one of my most treasured glasses – and not only because it represented one of the last in her once-substantial collection. In text and pictures it spells out the message: KEEP YOUR EYE ON THE MOON. [Figure 10]

I like to think it’s a parting message from a dear friend and fellow collector.

I’m very grateful to Howard Currier, Susan Murphy, Sheila Sears, Jack Sullivan, and Paul Van Vactor for their help in compiling this article. Special thanks are due to Barb and Roger Roy for sharing their family memories and photos.

For more information on any of the books mentioned here, please contact Robin Preston, 245 N 15 th St., MS #488, Philadelphia, PA 19102. e-mail: oldwhiskey@pre-pro.com. Robin is an enthusiastic collector of pre-pro shot glasses and maintains the collector’s website, www.pre-pro.com.



Fig. 10