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ONE OF A KIND

Cecil Munsey bottles up a fortune in collectibles

By Beth Weiner

When Cecil Munsey, a Poway resident and former owner of the Rancho Bernardo Spirits Shop, was teaching a gifted children's class at San Diego's Florence Elementary School, some students found a box of old bottles in an abandoned house being torn down.

The youngsters wanted to know more about them, but tracking down information proved more difficult than we realized," Munsey

This was in 1963, and there was no information available about old bottles. I decided if we were going to do anything about them, I would have to conduct my own research." Munsey wrote to museums and sent letters to collectors asking for their bottle collections. His mechanic translated many of the letters he received from Europe. The more Munsey learned, the more determined he was to write a book. And to gather information, he began attending bottle shows throughout the country.

He talked to collectors at shows in Florida, Georgia, Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and Oregon," Munsey said. "I bought their bottles and took

photos of their displays."

After years of hard work, Munsey published "The Illustrated Guide to Collecting Bottles" in 1970. Containing more than 100,000 words and 1,000 photos, this textbook for collectors has sold more than 400,000 copies.

"The Illustrated Guide to Collecting Bottles" was chosen as a club selection for both the Book of the Month Club and the Better Homes and Gardens Book Club. It was also published in paperback form.

"Bottle collecting is a relatively new hobby, yet interest has been mushrooming," Munsey said. "The first bottle collecting club was formed by 17 people in 1959, and 10 years later a federation of clubs was established.

"In 1979, a National Bottle Museum opened in New York, housing its unique collections in an old Victorian mansion."

Munsey said bottle collecting has become the third largest hobby, and every year thousands of visitors go to the National Bottle Museum.

"The museum's primary purpose is to educate the public about the history and manufacturing process of bottles," he continued. "It also



LOCAL COLLECTOR — Cecil Munsey, a Poway resident and author, has at least seven different collections in his home. He has spent years writing and researching books like "The Illustrated Guide to Collecting Bottles," "Disneyana - Walt Disney Collectibles," and the "Illustrated Guide to the Collectibles of Coca-Cola." (Staff photo by Beth Weiner)

has an extensive reference library."

Munsey's own bottle collection numbers in the hundreds and includes rare specimens from the 17th

century. He also has an amber Coca Cola bottle — one of only three left in the world. Another favorite is his
Continued on A8

Collector

Continued from page one

amber Seven Up bottle.

"When I look at this unusual bottle, I think about the company's old slogan which said the drink was a 'cure for the seven hangovers,'" Munsey said. "Advertising messages for soft drinks have certainly changed over the years."

Munsey also owns a bottle made especially for Lyndon Johnson by Canada Dry when he was vice president. The bottle includes the vice presidential seal on front.

Munsey wrote for the "Western Collector Magazine," the "National Bottle Gazette," and "The Bottleneck." He became editor of the "Antique Trader" magazine and "Old Bottle Magazine." In 1975, he had his own radio show on San Diego's KPFD-FM.

Munsey's love of collecting is not confined to bottles, and at least seven other types of collections fill his Green Valley home.

"Wherever I look, there are collectibles," Munsey said. "I have a collection of trading cards dating to 1885, a turn-of-the-century RCA phonograph that plays one-sided records, and an old H.C. Bay player-piano with hundreds of old piano rolls."

Dotting the walls of a bathroom are Lydia Pinkham memorabilia. Pinkham, an ex-schoolteacher who made a fortune selling an almost useless patent medicine laced with alcohol, used numerous gimmicks to promote her products.

Also a wine connoisseur, Munsey had a cellar built into his home to house his extensive wine collection. To complement the wines is a large display of rare wine glasses — some almost 100 years old.

"My wife and I celebrate very special occasions by drinking one of our vintage wines in a handmade glass by Tiffany or Steubens," Munsey said.

Munsey wrote "Disneyana - Walt



ON DISPLAY — Poway resident Cecil Munsey displays just one of his numerous valuable Coca-Cola bottles.

Munsey has authored books on collecting bottles and Disney memorabilia. (Staff photo by Beth Weiner)

Disney Collectibles" in 1974 after amassing a large collection of Disney memorabilia. Included in his collection are handmade Mickey and Minnie Mouse dolls which are about 50 years old.

Munsey, a Coca-Cola enthusiast, published "The Illustrated Guide to the Collectibles of Coca-Cola" in 1972. Purchased by libraries in the United States, Canada, England, Australia and South Africa, this reference book has sold more than 40,000 copies.

The original book contained more than 1,200 photographs and required years of research in archives across the United States. Later Munsey

published several price guides of the collectibles of Coca-Cola.

"Since I wrote the book, people have searched their attics and garages finding valuable items," Munsey said. "Many of these rare and often one-of-a-kind items were considered junk because they had been in storage for so long."

"After my book was published, people realized the value."

Collecting Coca-Cola memorabilia is a big business — a man in Elizabethtown, Ky., has one of the finest collections in the world. It is reportedly worth millions.

"Recently this collector was vacationing in London when he heard a

man in New Jersey found a one-kind Coca-Cola poster," Munsey said.

"He hopped the next plane to Jersey, bought the poster, and back to London to finish holiday."

Collecting is only a hobby Munsey, who is coordinator of Planning, Research and Evaluation the San Diego County Office of Education.

"But collecting has always been my blood," Munsey said. His dissertation for my Ph.D. at U.S. International University was on Personality Characteristics of Collectors."