

# MIDWEST GLASS CHATTER

MIDWEST ANTIQUE FRUIT JAR & BOTTLE CLUB

Since 1972

Midwest Glass Chatter  
December 2012

## Club Officers

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- *Joe Coulson, Secretary/Editor*  
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An Index to the Club Lending Library is available online. Please contact Dick Cole about items which you would like to check out.

## Membership

The Midwest Glass Chatter is a monthly publication and is a forum through which collectors can share information.

Membership cost is \$15.00 per year, per family, due each December 31. All jar/bottle related collectors are welcome. Send to MAFJBC, Attn: James Durr, 500 W. Ohio St., Fortville, IN 46040

## Meeting Minutes, December 2nd, 2012

The December club meeting was held at Minnetrista in Muncie, Indiana. Club President Dave Rittenhouse opened the meeting and welcomed 17 members. We had another well-attended meeting!

The nominated slate of club officers for 2013 was voted on and unanimously passed. The 2013 officers are as follows: Dick Cole, President; Dave Rittenhouse, Vice President/Show Chair; Joe Coulson, Secretary/Editor; and Jim Durr, Treasurer.

Dick Cole displayed a special gift for everyone in attendance on behalf of Eli Tribbett. Eli purchased a case of two dozen pairs of Ball-made coin banks at a garage sale in Monticello, Indiana. Each pair consisted of a 1998 and 2003 commemorative Christmas aluminum can (same size as a beverage can, with a coin slot on top). Ball Corporation operates a Metal Container Division in Monticello, Indiana. The cans were given as Christmas gifts to employees in those years. The cans became Christmas gifts once again! Everyone in attendance was very happy to receive a pair of cans. Thank you, Eli!

Dick Cole shared a copy of Dick Roller's list of "Ball Packer Jar Style Numbers".

The information came from 1909 and 1937 Ball catalogs. It was very interesting to see the list of product jars that Ball made at that time.

There will not be a club meeting in January. Instead we will have the Fruit Jar Get-Together the day before the January Show. The Get-Together is Jan. 12th at 1:30pm in the second floor conference room of The Signature Inn (bring an item to share, and don't forget the auction afterwards!). The Jelly Jammers meeting is also that same day at 10:00am in the conference room.



Hope to see you all during the January Show weekend,

Joe Coulson, Secretary



Everyone received a pair of these Ball-made cans at the meeting!

## Club Christmas Party Pictures



There were many Christmas decorations in the Cantina to put us in the holiday mood



Smiling Kay Rittenhouse puts a lot of effort into making our lunch successful



We had a nice feast of noodles, chicken, and ham for our lunch



A table full of beautifully wrapped presents for the "Dirty Bingo" exchange



A chocolate covered cherry dessert made to look like a mouse



Colleen Dixon grabs a "mouse" by the tail and devours the delicious treat



This present was a box of wonderful glass top seal lids



This dark red heavy glass "safety light cover" was the most stolen gift!



Monty Foust smiled and took home this decorative Ball jar lamp



## Club Christmas Party Pictures, cont'd



Dick Cole shows off the two dozen Ball cans donated by Eli Tribbett



The dessert table was filled with goodies, including Wick's cream pie



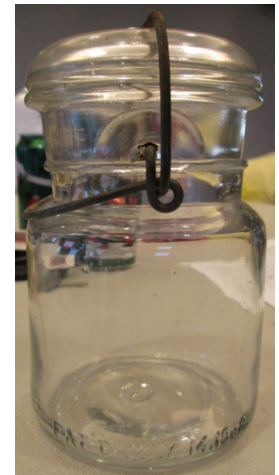
Vanessa Granger brought this entertaining pig that oinked and danced to a Christmas song!



Martin Van Zant brought these wonderful jars for Show and Tell, the middle jar is a deep olive CFJCo



Dick Cole displayed this malformed modern Ball Mason



Monty Foust shared this "Pat'd July 14, 1908" clear pint



A picture of the club members gathering in the Cantina



Anne Szopa received this 1997 Ball Corporation Christmas gift

My Recollections of the Circumstances of  
The Making of the Reproduction

# Amber Ball Buffalo Jar

And If I Don't Remember Clearly,  
I Will Make Something Up As I Go Along.  
So Prove Me Wrong, Already!

*By Richard H. Cole, Jr.*

*Former Ball Corporation employee  
Former Curator of Business and Industrial History at Minnetrista  
Presently a regular at Heorot Pub and Draught House*

The reproduction of the so-called “Buffalo Jar” was the brain-child of Bill Brantley, widely known to fruit jar collectors as the author of the seminal book on Ball fruit jars, *A Collector's Guide to Ball Jars*, published in 1975. At the time the repros were made, Bill was employed at Ball Corporation as the Public Relations Manager for the corporation.

Major changes were occurring in the company's headquarters in Muncie during the early 1970s. The old Muncie Central High School in downtown Muncie had been purchased by Ball and razed. A new headquarters building was being erected on the site.



*Buffalo Jar*

Most of the corporate offices would be moved from their old location on Macedonia Avenue. One building on the old site, which still exists, has been the headquarters for Ball Brothers Glass Mfg. Co., Ball Brothers Co., Ball Corporation, Ball Corporation Glass Manufacturing Group, Ball-Incon, Ball Glass Manufacturing Division, Ball-Foster, Saint Gobain, and now Verallia.

Moving Ball's headquarters to the new location required that storage areas that had been undisturbed for years be examined, their contents cataloged and a decision made on the fate each item uncovered – move it downtown, leave it where it was, store it elsewhere or trash it. This process uncovered many interesting items. Among the areas searched were the “corporate safe”

## Making of the Reproduction Ball Buffalo Jar, cont'd

and the “closet under the stairway.” The former was of the large walk-in variety, and it contained lots of historical records, some dating back to the company’s formation in 1880 in Buffalo, New York. The latter was under the main staircase of the three-story main headquarters building. As this staircase was u-shaped, with two landings between each floor, the footprint of the stairwell was significant, providing a large amount of storage space beneath. Headroom in the closet was limited, but this helped to make it a nice place to tuck away three-dimensional stuff like fruit jars. Shelves had been built inside to hold items too large for the safe, and the door to the closet was kept locked, and access to the key was limited.

Bill Brantley decided that the move to the new location downtown and the discovery of long-lost artifacts was a good opportunity for him and his department. He convinced upper management that a “fruit jar museum” in the new building would be a great promotional tool for the company. Since the company, which had not gone “public” until 1973, was still closely held, it was not difficult for major players on the Board of Directors like Edmund F. Ball, John W. Fisher, and Alexander Bracken to agree that honoring the Ball brothers was a good thing to do. All three were “family.” In Muncie, everyone knows what “family” means, but if some readers are unaware, it is any person descended from, or related by marriage to, one of the five brothers and two sisters of the family that founded what is now Ball Corporation. You may have heard of Ball State University, which is also located in Muncie. The similarity in name is not a coincidence.

Thus the new Ball Corporation headquarters building had a room near the front entrance containing a “museum” of the artifacts that had been found or acquired. I have put “museum” in quotation marks, because the room was really just a display, not a true museum. Nothing was ever moved, the signage was stagnant, and there was no acquisition policy, especially after Bill Brantley moved away. But I digress.

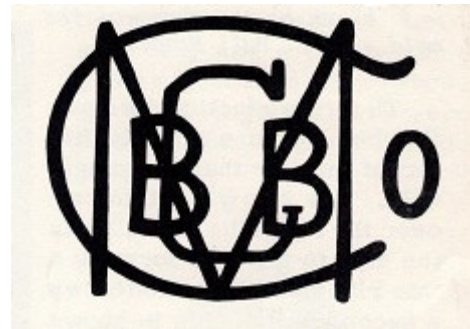
Digging through the years of accumulation taken from the storage areas revealed some treasures – while washing an otherwise unremarkable Ball jar, one of the staff who was helping organize, noticed that it had unusual markings on the base. Thus the existence of the KKK Ball jar became known to the fruit jar collecting community. To this date, no other example has been found, and it survives to this date.

But Bill Brantley was not content to stock the museum with just the items found in the storage areas. Having gotten into the nascent fruit jar collecting hobby, he learned that there were other Ball-made jars that were rare and/or scarce.



## Making of the Reproduction Ball Buffalo Jar, cont'd

Among the items acquired was an amber-colored, hand-blown quart fruit jar embossed with the monogram “BBGMCo,” the initials of Ball Bros. Glass Mfg. Co. Several versions of the logo are known to exist. It dates back to the mid-1880s when the company was located in Buffalo, New York. The jar had a milkglass lid and a zinc band. Talking with local fruit jar collectors, particularly with Norm Barnett, Brantley found that only one other example was known to exist. A subsequent newspaper story about the jar in a Buffalo newspaper resulted in several more jars being quickly reported – all from the Buffalo area.



*Buffalo Logo*

For this reason, any jar with this logo (there are several versions of the logo, and several varieties of jars upon which it was embossed) is called a “Buffalo Jar.” It is known that this logo was used by Ball while the company was in Buffalo, and there was no record of it being used in Muncie. And no original Buffalo jar has turned up in the Muncie area, only in the Buffalo area. But the use of this logo exclusively in Buffalo has never been proven.

As a result of Brantley’s discussions and increasing knowledge of fruit jar history, Ball decided that this would be an appropriate addition to the jars in the new museum. Thus, the jar was acquired from a woman in New York State, and quickly became a highlight of the jars in the museum. Other jars in the collection were more rare, but this jar had the advantage of being old, being one of the first Ball-made jars, and was gorgeous to look at. Deep amber in color, with a milkglass insert and zinc band, the jar lacked little in the way of sex appeal when it came to a fruit jar.

Bill Brantley and Rosemary Martin, Product Manager at Ball, decided that a reproduction of this rare jar would be a marketable item. Ball had released its Bicentennial series of jars with much success. Fruit jar collecting was a newly developing hobby, and the opportunity was ripe for the company to take full advantage of its history. The idea was that the reproduction jar would not only appeal to serious fruit jar collectors, but also to those interested in its decorative aspect. With the coming of the country’s Bicentennial, attention was focused on historical items, and “retro” objects had become the rage for home décor.

Thus, under the guidance of Bill Brantley, Ball made arrangements to produce replica amber fruit jars like the ones that they had made almost a hundred years earlier. Paul Bredwell was in charge of the project. A glassblower by the name of Joe Miller was contracted to make the jars.

## Making of the Reproduction Ball Buffalo Jar, cont'd

He was an employee of Indiana Glass Co. in Dunkirk, Indiana. At least two sets of moulds were made for the body of the jar, likely others, considering the total number of jars that were eventually made. A special base plate identified the jar as a reproduction, and also carried the words "Muncie, Indiana" which was the first time the word "Muncie" had been used on a Ball-made fruit jar.

The milkglass lids, which were made by Ball, were not an exact replica of the original, the lettering being slightly larger on the reproduction. The zinc bands would be produced by Ball Metal and Chemical in Greeneville, Tennessee, which had the world's largest rolling zinc mill at the time. The rubber ring was made at Ball Rubber Division in Chardon, Ohio, and was made in the same color as the original.

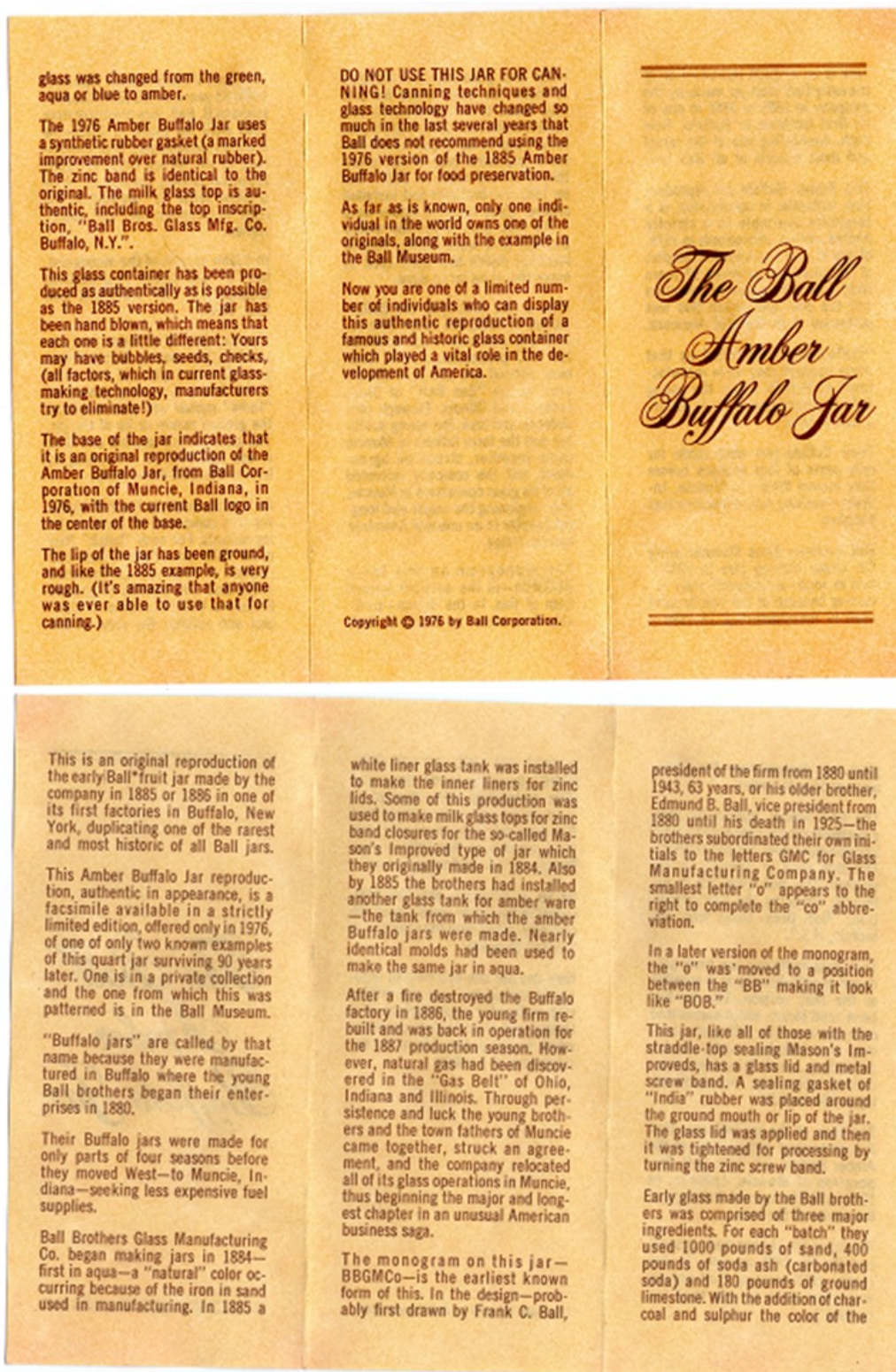
A special presentation box was made for the jar. The front panel, rather humorously, identifies the contents as an "Authentic Re-Creation." (Is there a re-creation that is not authentic? Somewhat like a "genuine *faux* pearl"). The BBGMCo monogram adorned the two sides, while the back had the modern Ball logo and further production information including the date of 1976, as shown here:



Scans of the front, both sides and reverse of the presentation box

## Making of the Reproduction Ball Buffalo Jar, cont'd

An informative flyer:



The two sides of the enclosed informational pamphlet



## Making of the Reproduction Ball Buffalo Jar, cont'd

and a protective outer cardboard carton completed the package. The specific example illustrated below has never been opened—the contents are assumed to be congruent with previous specimens.



*Images of the outer cardboard packaging box*

The “B.J.” on the bottom is an abbreviation of Buffalo Jar, and “8-76” was the date when the package was assembled.

I was an employee at Ball when the Buffalo jar was made and sold, and while I was not involved in its production or marketing, I was certainly interested, as I was a fledgling fruit jar collector at the time. My lowly position in the company, however, did not allow me input to the process. The following information is mostly based on my memories, so it is subject to correction, which is welcomed.

The total cost per jar to Ball was \$4.25. I cannot prove this, but I am relatively certain, as this was the lowest price that the company later would make the jars available to employees when they were trying to dispose of them. And Ball claimed at the time it was making them available “at cost” at that price. I have no reason to believe otherwise. The original commercial price charged to buyers was \$25.00. Ball employees were given a 10% discount. Naturally, this was before applicable taxes. The first plan was for the jar to be available to the public only by mail order. This was different from the

## Making of the Reproduction Ball Buffalo Jar, cont'd

Bicentennial jars, which had been sold through distributors. Presumably, the intent was to maximize the profit to Ball by eliminating the middlemen.

The question arises as to how many of the Buffalo jars were produced. The story, or perhaps an urban legend, that I heard at the time was that Brantley had originally proposed that 5,000 be made. He based this on the number of serious fruit jar collectors, the number of people who had ordered the Bicentennial jars and an estimate of those who might buy the jar as a decorative item. With the profit margin being roughly \$20 per jar (\$25.00 minus the \$4.25 production cost) this would give Ball a profit of about \$100,000 ( $\$20 \times 5,000$ ). Many, including myself, thought that this number of 5,000 was extremely optimistic. Presumably, Bill was counting on the general public buying this special reproduction, along with Ball employees.

As the legend goes (I knew Bill personally, but I did not talk to him specifically about this matter), Bill was persuaded to increase the number to 10,000 jars, which would double the in-take up to \$200,000. The same logic supposedly was used to up the numbers to 20,000 and later to 30,000 with a proportional increase in the profit to Ball.

I cannot say for certain that 30,000 were made. I can believe that 20,000 were made. I base this on two factors. First, it is reported that Ball contacted Rev. Phil Robinson and asked him if he wanted to buy some left-over Buffalo jars. Phil said he was interested and asked how many were available. He was told that he could have 11,000 (the number may have been 16,000). Phil quickly rejected the offer, saying that the only way to make any money would be to break all but a few hundred of the jars.

The other factor is my personal experience at Ball. Working in the Environmental Control Department at Ball, we were conducting a long-term experiment in the warehouse in which the unsold jars were stored. This experiment (the purpose of which I now have forgotten) had to be checked on a regular basis. This gave the department employee (including myself) an opportunity to visit the warehouse

The rest of this large building was occupied primarily by skid-after-skid of boxes of Buffalo jars, awaiting disposition. I don't know how many jars were on each skid, but the skids were about 4 feet by 4 feet and stacked about 6 feet high. The cardboard outer boxes are 7.5 x 7.5 inches square with a height of 9 inches. If my math is correct, this would put at least 288 jars on a skid. Thus it would take 70 skids to hold 20,000 jars, or more importantly, 38 skids to hold the left-over 11,000 jars in the warehouse. To my recollection, there were enough skids in the warehouse to total this amount.

It was Ball's policy at the time to tear down an old warehouse only when the roof collapsed. If the roof just leaked, anything below the leak was moved, if it was salvageable, and the leak was allowed to continue. If not salvageable, items on the skid were trashed.



## Making of the Reproduction Ball Buffalo Jar, cont'd

The entire skid of Buffalo jars in their cardboard boxes was deemed not salvageable once water had leaked on it and damaged just some of the jars on that skid. With so many extra unsold jars, it wasn't worth paying someone to sort them out. So the entire skid headed off to the local dump.

Of course, the Ball Plant Services workers who were in charge of this kind of disposal always took the liberty of inspecting the skid while on the trip to the dump to see if all the boxes on the skid were damaged by the leaking water. But after a while, even the garages and basements at their homes filled up with Buffalo jars which had no particular market value after the collector's markets had been saturated. Naturally, the value of the jars began to plummet as did the price charged by Ball, finally reaching the aforementioned "at cost" price being charged by Ball to its employees. I have no idea how many employees took advantage of this price, but they could have gotten a much better price if they knew a Plant Service worker well enough to strike a deal.

I do not know the final disposition of the "left-over" Buffalo Jars. They may have been taken to the dump, or possibly scrapped. If anyone has additional information, I would be happy to hear from them.

If 20,000 jars were indeed made, it raises the question as to whether Joe Miller, the contracted glassblower, could have actually produced all of them by himself. A story in the January 1976 *Intercom*, Ball's Muncie house organ at the time, says that he made a jar every 35 to 40 seconds, using two moulds, assisted by the following persons: a ball gatherer, a ball holder, a blocker, a mould holder and a carry-in.



*Ball Internal Publication of January 1976*

Assuming that Joe worked eight hours a day blowing jars at the rate of 1 per minute (thus giving him time for the occasional break), he would produce 2,400 per week (60 x 8 x 5), so it would take less than 10 weeks for him to fill the order for 20,000 jars. Even 30,000 jars would not be out of the question.

Interestingly, one of his helpers was his daughter, which mirrored the practice of 100 years earlier, when "child labor" commonly was used in all glass plants, including Ball. The "carry-in boys" and the "carry-out boys" of the hand-blown glass era were indeed children, some as young as eight years old. F. C. Ball is quoted as saying that boys were used because men "cannot take it. They tire out." But that is another story.

Dick Roller says that the production of the jars began on January 8, 1976 at Dunkirk.

## Making of the Reproduction Ball Buffalo Jar, cont'd

Here are some photos of Joe and his helpers in action, taken from the same issue of the *Intercom*.



The ball gatherer gives the pipe to the ball holder (Joe's daughter).



The blocker adds more glass...



...who completes the shaping, forms the jar, and "blows the straw."



## Making of the Reproduction Ball Buffalo Jar, cont'd

Another aspect of the reproduction Buffalo Jar is the un-authorized production of jars in colors other than amber. No such jars were ordered by Ball Corporation. It is not uncommon for plants to make limited numbers of "special" jars after the official run of a commemorative jar was over, but this usually occurred in Ball plants with at least the tacit consent of the management. However, this usually quickly became common knowledge among the plant personnel, jar collectors and management. But in this instance, the production was at a non-Ball plant, and it was several decades before the "outlaw" jars were reported.

As far as I know, two examples of a blue jar and one of a clear jar were found in a yard sale in the Portland, Indiana area. One blue and one clear jar were loaned to Minnetrista where they were on display for a while. These have now changed hands. Here is a photo of them, along with the first jar made by glassblower Miller replete with broken blowover.



*Known Color Varieties*

## Making of the Reproduction Ball Buffalo Jar, cont'd

The phrase “An Historic Reproduction No.1” is embossed on the base of the jar. Disregarding the grammatical anomaly, the designation of the jar being the first of a series was just wishful thinking. No further jars were produced. However, the same base plate was used several years later on the limited edition Ball 1880-1980 jar, which was blown in the same manner and made in both amber and clear. The designation of Reproduction No. 1 on the base was not updated, thus adding even more confusion to the mix.

Another issue is the “depth” of the amber color of the reproductions. The first jars made matched the depth of color of the original, but later examples were produced that did not have the same intensity of color. See the photo below. I attribute this to the number of jars that were being made. Toward the end of production, the concern about making the reproduction look like the original appears to have dwindled.



*Color Variation in the reproduction amber Buffalo Jars*



## Making of the Reproduction Ball Buffalo Jar, cont'd

The original fruit jar from which the reproductions were made still exists, safely housed in the Heritage Collection at Minnetrista in Muncie. When a group of collectors were given the chance to name the jars that they would like to see during a tour of the facilities at Minnetrista, this jar was the first one requested.

### Photographs and Scans By

Joe Coulson  
Richard Cole

Jars and ephemera are from their personal collections.

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JAR & BOTTLE CLUB

*A jarrific place to share and learn*

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Herb Karcher of Bridgeport, Nebraska sent in this picture of a cast iron Decker's Iowana pig bank. This would be a great go-with if you have any of the Decker's Iowana fruit jars! Decker marketed *Iowana Brand Ham-Bacon-Lard*.

## Announcements

- Our 2013 Winter Show will be Sunday, January 13th at the Horizon Convention Center in Muncie, Indiana (9:00am to 2:00pm). This is the "Big One" for fruit jars. Come join the excitement with fellow collectors for a day filled with fun. There will certainly be great jars for sale. Bring a friend! If you need further information about the January Show, please contact our Show Chairman, David Rittenhouse: by phone, 765-468-8091; or by postal mail, 1008 S. 900 W., Farmland, IN 47340
- Tammy Johnson is migrating her fruit jar ring box reference material to a brand new website. It is in the beginning stages. Tammy would like your input on what features and reference material to add:  
<http://www.fruitjarrings.com>
- The Jelly Jammers continue to put a lot of effort into their website, the "Jelly Jammers Cupboard". New pictures are added regularly, please check it out:  
<http://www.jellyjammers.org>
- The Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors website is a great resource. Our club is a proud member of the FOHBC. Mark your calendar for July 20-21 to attend the National Antique Bottle Show in Manchester, New Hampshire. One of the useful tools on the Federation website is the bottle show listing:  
<http://www.fohbc.org/shows>

