

# Mercer County Dairyman Speaks

COCHRANTON — Ayrshire milk bottles pose a challenge for Mercer County dairyman Arvid Kobosky. To him the bottles represent the gold in a treasure hunt. He has been known to talk to scores of people and sift through dusty, forgotten boxes in search of a prize bottle.

Through these means, plus letter writing and long distance calls, Arvid has collected milk bottles from 104 different Ayrshire dairies and a total of 600 different dairies in the U.S., Canada and England.

Three of these milk bottles rise to the top of Arvid's collection.

Arvid places the most value on a pyroglazed quart bottle from Ardrossan Ayrshires in Villanova. Pyroglazed bottles, bottles with painted lettering, were common in the late 1930s and early 1940s. He estimates the vintage on this bottle to be after 1934 based on a story in a 1934 Ayrshire Digest.

This Digest featured retailers of Ayrshire milk and mentioned Ardrossan in particular, Arvid explained. He notes that Mrs. Scott didn't know the farm retailed milk until he inquired about the extent the farm's retail business.

**"I wouldn't sell this bottle for \$1 million."**

The prize bottle from Ardrossan shows an Ayrshire head and the words — Ayrshire milk. "I wouldn't sell this bottle for \$1 million," Arvid said. Then with a chuckle he added, "But my wife might."

A Christmas gift from John Tutton, a milk bottle dealer and collector in Virginia, ranks second in value for Arvid. This bottle originated from the Penshurst Farm in Narberth and is of the embossed variety, the Mercer County dairyman notes.

Embossed bottles are the oldest type of milk bottles, and Narberth Ayrshires are found in the pedigrees of 90 percent of the registered Ayrshires, Arvid explained.

Adding to the historical significance and value of the bottle is its intact paper cap. Arvid notes that will bottles survive the test of time rather easily, paper caps usually don't fare as well. This fact, he adds, make them a collector's item by themselves.

Rounding out his three most valuable bottles is a Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Ayrshire milk bottle. This is an embossed bottle from the 1920s or 1930s, Arvid said.

What makes the bottle so valuable is that few people know that life insurance company had a farm and they never operated a retail milk business.

The insurance company owned a herd of 50 Ayrshires at a farm in Wilton, N.Y. The company bottled the milk and shuttled it by train to the cafeteria of their office

building in New York City. The cafeteria utilized the herd's entire production, eliminating the need for a retail route, Arvid explained.

He learned of the bottle through the editor of Milk Route Magazine, Tom Gallagher. He read the story in an old Ayrshire Digest.

**"I try for a story on each dairy that I get a bottle from."**

Arvid has a collection of Ayrshire Digests that date back to 1923. "I try for a story on each dairy that I get a bottle from," he said. The old issues of the breed magazine have also enabled him to find some bottles.

It is within the past 10 years that his collection has swelled to its present 1,000 plus bottles level.

The milk bottle collecting fever infected him at an the precocious age of 6. "I guess I started collecting milk bottles from the local area because I knew then I wanted to be a farmer," Arvid said.

**"When a different milk truck would go by, I'd flag it down to buy a quart of milk. I'd drink the milk and keep the bottle."**

He grew up in the Pittsburgh suburb of Belle Vernon. Arvid never missed an opportunity to add to his collection. "When a different milk truck would go by, I'd flag it down to buy a quart of milk. I'd drink the milk and keep the bottle," he remembers.

During the summer when he was 10 years old, his family visited his brother in Nutley, N.J. The caretaker of the apartment building where his brother lived also operated a milk truck for Welsh Farm. Arvid would ride with and help the caretaker on his pre-dawn rounds. All Arvid asked for as pay was a bottle to remember the dairy by.

His devotion to adding to his collection found him working at one farm for a summer for the experience and a bottle as the only type of compensation, Arvid notes. "My parents tried to explain to me that was crazy, but it was worth it," he said.

One summer he worked on a farm to earn his first 4-H project, a Jersey calf. This calf enabled Arvid to meet and form a friendship with Carlton Squire of Bentleyville. This friendship would later help Arvid expand his milk bottle collection and form his own dairy herd.

Arvid's mother destroyed his original milk bottle collection while he served in the army in 1970 and 1971. "Mom didn't like clutter and she thought when I returned from the army I'd forget about the collection," he explained. So, during his absence she cleaned the cupboards and smashed his entire collection of 50 bottles.

In the process she temporarily destroyed his interest in collecting milk bottles, Arvid explained.

When Arvid decided to get back into the dairy business in 1976, he contacted Carlton Squire and purchased half of his herd from Squire.

Squire operated Avondale Farm, one of the top Jersey herds in the state during the 1940s. The Jersey breeder knew of Arvid's earlier

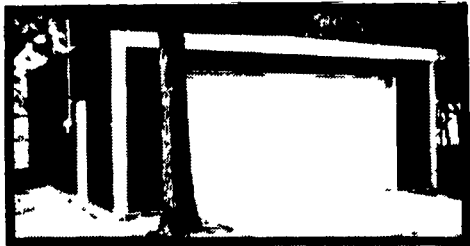


The love of the Ayrshire cow prompted Arvid Kobosky to focus his milk bottle collection on bottles from Ayrshire dairies.

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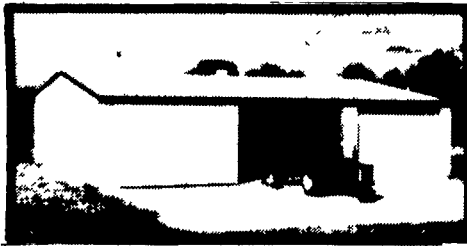
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