

# Dairy Collectibles Find A Home

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WESTMINSTER, Md - If you are curious about historic dairy collectibles from Carroll County, Mike Grossnickle is the man to talk to. Born and raised on a dairy farm near here, but no longer a dairy farmer, Mike has channeled his love of all things dairy into a passion for collecting that gives new life to the adage "If one is good, then two are better."

With a collection of about 500 dairy-related items, the Harford County resident is an enthusiastic historian of the dairy industry. And while each charming piece is in itself a fascinating remembrance of the past, taken as a whole, the collection really documents the history of the dairy industry in the county from the turn of the century through the 1970s.

Mike grew up as a farm boy in Carroll County. His father, A.T. Grossnickle, had a dairy farm at Middleburg, and then later the family milked grade and registered Holsteins at Three-Nickels Farm, near Union Bridge. They stopped shipping milk in 1983. Mike now works at the Carroll County Farm Museum in Westminster, and also raises produce at his home in Harford County.

Mike also has another connection to the dairy industry that has influenced his collecting. When he was growing up, his father, A.T. Grossnickle, worked at Western Maryland Dairy in Detour, and then later at Embassy Dairy in Washington, D.C. in the department where they tested the milk. An uncle, A.T.'s brother, worked at Embassy Dairy in the bottle exchange in the early 1930's. So in hearing the stories the two brothers would tell, Mike had a great resource for information on old dairies and on milk bottles in particular.

Probably the first thing Mike acquired was an old can from the Castle Cheese Company that came from his home. He remembers always seeing the can when he was growing up. He can't remember the first bottle he got.

"I used to go to a lot of farm sales and I used to see them around. To be honest, I can't remember the first one I got,"

said Mike, "it's a dangerous hobby. Once you get started, it's hard to stop."

Luckily for Mike his wife, Janet, understands the "danger" in collecting. She, too has the heart of a collector. Instead of milk, though, her passion is tea, and according to her husband, she has a collection of several hundred teapots. The couple both have displays set up at home.

For Mike, the value of his collection lies in its diversity. He started out with milk bottles and cow creamers, and those still make up the bulk of his collection. But instead of concentrating on just one item, he soon diversified and started acquiring all different kinds of ag-related things. Now in addition to the glassware, there are flour sacks, canning labels, all kinds of literature, old herd classifications, and banners from old fairs. Most of the things are from Carroll County.

Hearing Mike talk about his collection is a lesson in history. Not only can he tell the interesting stories of how he came to own each item, he is also an authority on placing them in the context of an evolving dairy industry in rural Carroll County. A perfect example is a group of bottles he has from Swissvale Farms. Swissvale Farms, outside Westminster, was the last processor to bottle milk in the county, according to Mike. They bottled until about 1976. In about 1962, Swissvale absorbed another dairy, Tower Farm dairy. They had milked cows in Southern Carroll County, and the milk was shipped to a dairy bar around Route 26.

Willow Farm, with addresses in Frizzellburg and Westminster, was probably the most prolific in the county in terms of the number of bottles they had, according to Mike. They had round bottles, cream-top bottles in round and square shapes, war bond bottles that were returnable, baby-face bottles, and a variety of sizes ranging from half-pint to half-gallon. They had the only cream-top bottles in the county, and also later had paper cartons. Mike has a Willow Farm cream-top bottle with a cream-top spoon from the late 1930's. The curved spoon nestles just



Mike with some of his collectibles. One of the older items in his collection is the serving platter crafted by the Buffalo, New York artist R.K. Beck. The gilt-edged platter decorated with Holstein, Jersey, and Guernsey cows dated from the turn of this century.

over the narrow neck of the milk part of the bottles. If you wanted cream, you left the spoon in place and poured it off the top. If you didn't, you removed the spoon and shook the bottle.

While Mike has bid and bartered to amass most of his collection, some of it he literally stumbled onto. While he was at the landfill one day several years ago, taking in paper for recycling, he tripped over a cardboard box. Kicking the heavy box out of his way, he noticed papers spilling out of it. "I looked down and I said, 'Hey, that's an old sale catalog!' So I started picking up all these catalogs," Mike related, "Anyway, I

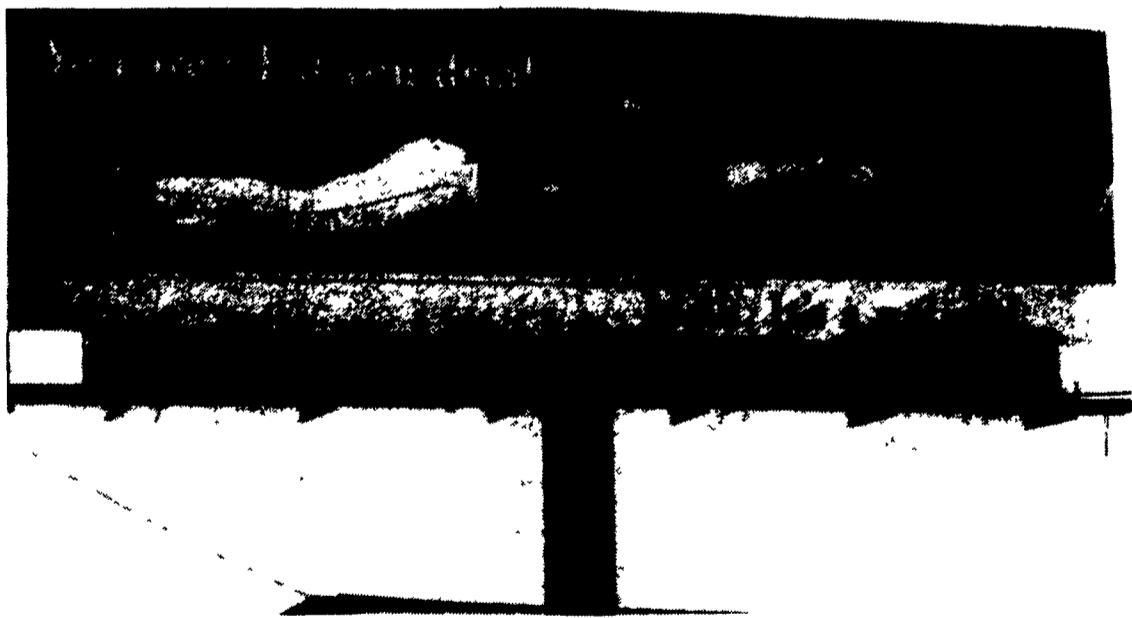
found five or six boxes. I said 'Can I have these?' and the guy said 'Anyone can take stuff out of here, it's just recycled' so I found five or six boxes from the '30s, '40s and '50s."

In this case, one man's trash was another man's treasure. Those five or six boxes had belonged to a family that had bred Jersey cows. In one of the boxes Mike found a St. Louis Exposition book for Jerseys from 1906. In another box was a copy of "The Island Cow", a publication from Jersey, Channel Islands, where Jersey cows come from, dated April 1930. The magazine, at 33 pages, had advertisements for bulls, and

depicted the ideal type Jersey cow.

While his dairy collectibles bring Mike a great deal of pleasure, the prices some of the things go for now have reined in his collecting somewhat. He says he cannot justify paying the price some of the items are bringing at sales these days. "If I'd started about 10 years ago, I'd have oodles of bottles. But I wouldn't even buy them when they cost \$3," he explained.

He says the collectibles are worth whatever someone will pay for them. But for him, their true value is in the pleasure of having the objects and learning about their history.



More than 100 Cal Ripken billboards can be seen throughout the Mid-Atlantic market. The Baltimore Orioles player is the celebrity spokesperson for the new "Milk—It's A Natural" campaign. Iron Man Cal, a lifetime milk drinker, shows people that you are what you drink. Additional "got milk?" billboards, bulletins, television and radio spots will compliment the milk campaign.



While Mike has bid and bartered to amass most of his collection, some of it he literally stumbled onto. This 1930 publication, "The Island Cow", from Jersey in the Channel Islands, was in a box Mike tripped over while at the recycling center. Someone had discarded the items, and they found a new home in Mike's collection.



## Berks Society 6

Berks County Farm Women Group #6 held its June meeting in the home of Linda Youse. Nine members enjoyed a skit performed by Berks County Dairy Princess Alicia Gross.

The county project, "Acts of Kindness" was discussed.

Monetary donations were given to the Memorial Fund for member Sallie Hauseman and the mother of member Marian Gehis.

The July meeting and group picnic will be at the home of Mary Jane Hetrick.