



# SELECTS

# Got milk bottles?



by Nan Lincoln



It's the sound that's missed the most, perhaps, a cheery tinkling, rattling sound that was as familiar to many sleepy childhood mornings as a robin singing outside the window. A sound that said, for

memories of their milkman days. Mr. Clark is actually too young to recall when his family's Clark's Southwest Dairy delivered its fresh milk in bottles, but he does recall making the milk route every summer morning as a teenager in

John Fernald and John Clark are hoping people will help them find more local brand bottles to complete the collections they are making for island historical societies.

PETER TRAVERS PHOTO

Like the kid who throws out his comic book or baseball card collection when he grows too old for such childish pleasures, Mr. Fernald didn't realize until he had dumped many of his retired bottles

me that these bottles were interesting as both a family and a community history."

Since then he has made it his mission to find at least one representative of all the 32 known island brands. Mr. Fernald has the same goal, and the two have collaborated to help each other fill in the gaps of their individual collections.

Eventually, they say, they plan to donate their collections to local historical societies.

"You hear a lot about the 'heyday' of Bar Harbor and all the wealthy people who built their summer homes on the island," Mr. Clark says. "But you don't hear as much about the thriving service industries that made it possible for

a.m. to start their route, trying to get a jump on the competition — MDI Dairies, a consortium of small dairy farmers including Percy Kief, Frank Andrews, Henry Sweet and Clarence Alley.

"Dad still recalls the excitement of those early years when they felt like they were racing their competitors across the island, on the lookout for new customers," says Mr. Clark. He recalls the MDI Dairies truck, like their bottles, had an Indian logo on the side, and every time he spotted one on the road he'd call out to his father, "Here come the Indians!"

Although Mr. Fernald did not come from a dairy farming family, he recalls his first job as a

youngster, was milking Noble Barrett's cows. Around the same time John Clark's dad was keeping an eye out for "Indians" Mr. Fernald went to work for Ted and Bud Bordeaux, delivering their milk. When the Bordeaux brothers retired in 1960, Mr. Fernald bought the business.

The milk run memories for both men ended when the supermarkets started bringing in cheap milk from big producers, and eliminated the middlemen.

Jack Clark closed Clark and Son in 1980; and John Fernald, unable to expand his business to compete with big boys, retired a few years later in 1987.

"What I miss is the people," says Mr. Fernald. "It was good getting to know people from all walks of life — getting their day off to a good start."

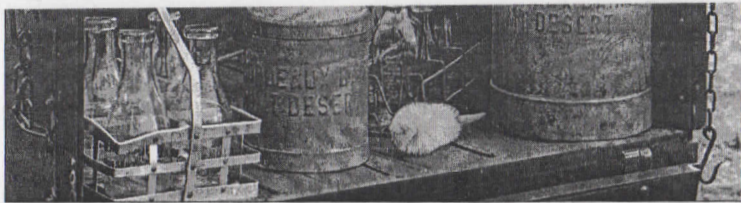
He says the most impressive stop on his route was John D. Rockefeller Jr.'s mansion *Erie* in Seal Harbor, which had an entire room devoted to ice cream making.

Now, both men are asking the community to help them recreate a little of that history by lending them a hand in finding examples of the local bottles, caps, dairy-related photos and other memorabilia.

"We're hoping that the bottles, along with the histories of the farms, photographs and personal recollections will show a side of MDI history that has been largely overlooked, and has all but disappeared," says Mr. Clark. "That of a once-thriving agricultural community."

Anyone who can help out is welcome to call John Fernald at 244-7090 or John Clark at 244-9977. ■





Milkmen used to deliver bottles and jugs of milk to island families and businesses.

PETER TRAVERS PHOTO

city and country folk alike, good morning, all's right with the world and a new day has begun.

That sound disappeared, like the cry of the dodo, when they started putting milk in plastic jugs and paper cartons instead of thick glass bottles, and the milkman stopped bringing it to your door.

Only a scarce few of those who remember the old milk bottles — the sound, the way the cream floated on the top, how easy it was to unwrap the foil tops and pop the little cardboard tabs inside — would say the new, user- and environmentally unfriendly containers are an improvement.

In fact, milk bottles have now become valued collectibles, elevated from the back porch to the living room hutch by people with nostalgia for the good old days.

And it appears that it's not only old customers who are feeling a bit nostalgic for the clink of empty milk bottles being carried off in their metal trays, but the milkmen, too — the folks who woke up before the crack of dawn every morning to start their routes.

John Fernald and John Clark are two of these. Both

men have  
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Southwest Harbor. On one memorable morning he received a cigar from a proud, new father. It was the first and last time he ever smoked.

Mr. Fernald, however, who owned C.G. Bordeaux Dairy in the last years of the locally owned milk companies, remembers the old bottles well. He recalls hefting the heavy things out of his truck, then loading the empties to be washed in a series of baths by a production line at his plant in Somesville.

He also remembers being rather pleased to throw the darn things out in the 1960s, when the lighter, waxed cartons and plastic started to replace glass.

"Oh, I could kick myself now, when I think of all the bottles I threw out," he says. "And not just my own bottles, but ones from all the other little dairy farms and grocers on the island, like Fogg's, Thirstane, Butterfield's and Lakeview Farm."

According to Mr. Fernald and Mr. Clark, there were 32 different bottles on Mount Desert Island alone. Some were for actual dairy farms, others for milk processors or for the delivery businesses, and some just for the store where the milk was sold. These would all

have their names and perhaps a logo either printed or embossed onto the glass. Apparently, no one was real fussy back then about whose bottles they put their milk into, and it was common for the different brand bottles to get mixed up, until their owners decided on a time to get together and swap.

that they might be worth saving.

But once the idea struck him, he started seriously looking for the old bottles, especially since he closed his own business in the 1980s. He says he now even uses the Internet to find them.

John Clark's interest in collecting is more recent. In fact, he was visiting on the West Coast a few years ago when the bug hit.

"I saw a bottle from the W.E. Peach Farm of Bar Harbor in a California shop, and it occurred to

those people to treasure them the way they were accustomed to."

His grandfather, O.J. Clark, started his working days as a chauffeur for Atwater Kent, before he was lured away by another wealthy summer resident, William P. Hamilton, who had bought up and was managing a number of area dairy farms. The handsome barns of Hamilton Farm can still be seen on Route 3. Young Mr. Clark started out handing out free samples of Thirstane milk to folks in Southwest Harbor, and eventually was put in charge of the company's entire milk route.

In 1939, when Mr. Hamilton got bored of this entrepreneurial venture, O.J. Clark and the company's bookkeeper, Hugh Kelley, recognized a good opportunity and split up the routes. Mr. Kelley took Bar Harbor and Mr. Clark took Southwest, Somesville and Tremont.

O.J. and his teenage son, Jack, would get up every morning at 2

## Island brand bottles

### Bar Harbor:

Clarence Alley, Andrews Farm, J.H. Butterfield, O.J. Clark and Son, Elm Tree Farm, I.C. Sweet, The Fogg Dairy Farm, L.A. Garland, B.H. Higgins Co. Pure Cream, Hillside Dairy, Pearl McFarland, Hillside Dairy S.M. McFarland, P.H. Kief, Hugh N. Kelly,

Thomas Knowles, King Maple Farm, L.E. Smith, Lakeview Farm, W.M. McFarland and Son, Mount Desert Island Dairies, Old Homestead Dairy, W.W. Sargent, W.E. Peach, Russell, Soper's Market, H.C. Smith, Springvale Dairy, Emery, Thirstane Ranch, Inc., Woodstead Dairy.

Hulls Cove: Elm Tree Farm, E.T. Hamor's Sons, Fair Acres, H.C. Whitney, Old Orchard, M.C. Sweet.

Northeast Harbor: C.G. Bordeaux, W.W. Lunt, M.T. Ober.

Southwest Harbor: O.J. Clark and Son.

Mount Desert: P.S. Richardson.

McKinley (Bass Harbor): Herrick's.



Former milkmen John Fernald (left) and John Clark with Mr. Fernald's 1929 Ford delivery truck.

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