

# Fencer Repairman Owns Fantastic Collection Of Chargers



Kevin Blase has a collection of some 50 old electric fencers. Photo shows a Coburn One-Wire electric fencer, invented by a Wisconsin dairyman.

When Kevin Blase turns on the juice to his wall of old fencer chargers, bulbs light up, marbles roll, and a cacophony of clicks fills the air. Blase runs a business fixing fencers and occasionally adds a "new" old fencer to his collection of more than 50 antiques.

"My collection started when people couldn't justify the cost of fixing an old charger and just told me to keep it," says Blase. "After a while I started going on the internet and looking for interesting models."

Blase learned the fencer repair business from his grandfather, who fixed fencers from 1973 until 1990. What started as a hobby for Blase grew into a full-time business. He runs

an authorized service repair center for Zareba and Parmak but regularly works on more than 30 different brands.

"I've repaired fencers from New York to California and Texas to Canada," he says. "We keep a large inventory of parts on hand."

Blase suggests FARM SHOW readers give him a call if they are having a problem with their fencer. He may be able to diagnose it over the phone.

"If it's clicking, but there is no charge, it's often the transformer," says Blase. "If it's not doing anything, it's probably the circuit board, which I can often rebuild for half the cost of a new board."

Blase warns that turnaround depends on the time of the year, with summer being peak demand with up to a 3-week wait.

His collection has many unusual chargers, including an early one that sold for \$1.50 and used a coil from a Model T Ford. He even has the wooden box the coil came in.

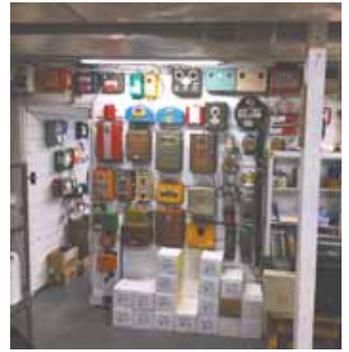
He also has a Coburn One-Wire electric fencer, made by a Wisconsin dairyman. According to a great grandson, Orrie Coburn saw a homemade fencer when visiting Europe in the early 1920's. When he came home, he built his own. By 1925 he was selling the first mass-produced electric fencer under the Coburn Company brand. While no longer selling fencers, the company continues serving livestock producers.

Early fencers often included very visible components that told the user the fencer was working. One included a marble in a glass tube. Each time the transformer magnetized, it would push the marble up the tube. When the marble returned, it would hit a point and break the circuit.

A fencer from Leitner Electric Company, Dalton, Ohio, had 2 bulbs inside a glass jar. If one was lit, the fencer was working. If a short occurred on the fence, the other bulb would light up.

Blase says nearly all the fencers in his collection still work.

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Blase learned the fencer repair business from his grandfather, and what started as a hobby grew into a full-time business. Charger below used a coil from a Model T Ford and is shown with the wooden box it came in.



## Milk Bottle Collection Spans One County

Butch Shoemaker has milk bottles from 98 dairies in his collection, all from a single county in New Jersey. Shoemaker has made collecting tidbits of local agricultural history his pastime. About 10 years ago, he started collecting milk bottles.

"I collect bottles and anything that goes with them," says Shoemaker.

That includes signs, bottle carriers and any information he can gather. When he started, he thought there were probably 40 dairies that used to bottle their own milk in Warren County. He was surprised to discover there were 103.

Many bottles were given to Shoemaker

once word got out about his collection. Some were recovered from a local canal that was abandoned in the 1920's and served as a garbage dump for years.

His interest in dairies and locally bottled milk started long before he started collecting. As a young boy he delivered milk to 2 neighbors as he walked to the bus. On the way home, he picked up the empties. Eventually he worked for a local farmer who bottled his own milk and had a milk route.

"If I was lucky, at times I could go along and help deliver," says Shoemaker. "While some farmers in the 1930's and 40's used any old bottle, washed it, filled it and capped it,

others had their own bottles with the name of the dairy on it."

Shoemaker previously self-published "White Township Farms, The End of An Era." It is a collection of stories gathered from local farmers that he wrote down by hand and his sister Sandy typed up. Initially they had 100 copies printed. He also did a 3-part DVD, "A Journey Through the Fields", a narrated description of the farms and their stories.

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About 10 years ago, Butch Shoemaker started collecting milk bottles. He now has 98 in his collection, all from dairies in a single county in New Jersey.

## He Collects Milk Cans From Around The World

If you collect milk cans, Ian Spellerberg of Christchurch, New Zealand, would love to hear from you. The semi-retired professor has more than 250 cans from 20 different countries and recently published the first known book about milk cans, *Milk Cans - a Celebration of Their History, Use, and Design*.

We saw a photo of him recently in *Antique Trader*, standing in his largest milk can (25 gallons) holding his smallest milk can (1/8<sup>th</sup> of a pint), and decided to get in touch with him.

"Overall, I think we have not done justice to the humble milk can," Spellerberg says. "We should celebrate milk cans because they have played an exceedingly important role in the history of the dairy industry."

Unless a date is stamped on it, dating milk cans is difficult, he admits, but old trade catalogs, photos and paintings help.

"The design of the spherical Guernsey milk cans, for example, goes back more than 1,000 years," he says. Guernsey is one of the Channel Islands situated just off the Normandy Coast of France. The spherical shape of those cans was said to reduce slopping of milk out of the can.

In researching his book, he discovered how excited early farmers were to receive

their first milk cans and ways they were instructed to maintain cleanliness. There were also many ideas about how to keep the milk cold - from keeping the cans in a cold stream or water trough, to insulated jackets.

Before refrigeration, milkmen made their rounds frequently. Milk cans like his tiniest 1/8 cup can from around 1900 were used to hold enough cream for a few cups of tea. Among his other rare cans is a China can used in stores to transfer milk or cream into a customer's container.

Spellerberg believes there are more stories to gather about milk cans. "There should be a museum dedicated to milk cans. I think many people in different countries would be interested in learning about milk can history, use and design. In the U.S., for example, there were 543 patents issued between 1859 and 1919 for milk cans and dairy can accessories. That's an extraordinary topic in its own right and well worth exploring further," he says.

His book was published by Astragal Press and can be ordered at 800 462-6420 or on Amazon.com.

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Ian Spellerberg of New Zealand has more than 250 milk cans in his collection, which includes cans from 20 different countries. The smallest milk can (left) is only 1/8 of a pint.



Spellerberg recently published the first known book about milk cans, and says there should be a museum dedicated to them.

