

Collecting Bottles by State, The Ioway

Part 6 - Beer Bottles

by Michael Burggraaf

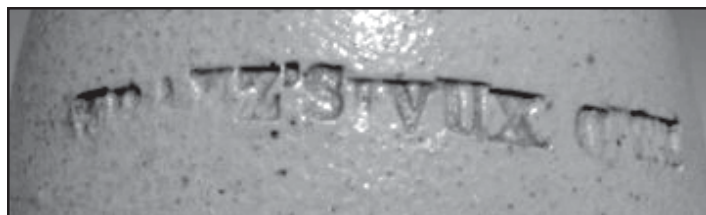
It's been a while since you've heard from me but I'm back with more historical information about Iowa bottles. This is the sixth article in a continuing series of "Collecting Bottles by State, The Ioway." This article will give some history and examples of the bottles used by various breweries and brewer's agents. Like many states, the history of the brewing industry in Iowa can be traced back to the original immigrants that came to the Hawkeye state during the 1840 - 1890 time period. A large percentage of the original settlers in the early Iowa towns and cities were of German heritage, with ties to the brewing trade being a common tradition. Many of the early German immigrants found a ready market in the relatively unsettled state of Iowa and many quickly sent up small "backyard" or "basement" breweries to supply local demand. Beside various styles of beer, they also produced ale, porter and stout at these small hometown breweries. By the 1850s and 1860s, there were several breweries that were prospering and with the growing demand, larger facilities were required as the demand soon overwhelmed their original operations. As expected, the larger Mississippi river towns soon dominated the market with larger breweries, many with an output of ten to thirty barrels a day. The preferred method of selling beer at that time was in kegs or in barrels. It seems that few brewers used bottles for selling their products as difficulties in preserving the beer in bottles had not been perfected at that time.

There is one early example from Iowa that could be included in the beer category and that is an early black glass bottle used by Hornung of Dubuque, Iowa. The bottle is made of dense olive green glass, or black glass, with a large pickup base and what appears to be a refired pontil base. The bottom of the bottle is slightly irregular and the edges are rounded as typical of refired pontil bottles of this type, typically used for ale or porter. The bottle is embossed around the shoulder in large crude letters: HORNUNG & Co / DUBUQUE. The style and shape of the bottle is nearly identical to those used by a merchant in Galena, Illinois that bottled ale during this same time period. Further research lists five different breweries in Dubuque in the 1957-58 City Directory but the Hornung name is not among them. However, he is listed as Hornung & Co. under liquor dealers. He was not listed in any previous or post directories. While the bottle is not a true beer bottle, I've listed it here as it is typical of ale bottles used during this time. Of the two known examples, one was found in Wisconsin while the other was found under a porch of a cabin in Canada. Regardless of the contents, this bottle represents one of Iowa's oldest and most desirable bottles.

By the 1870s and early 1880s, many breweries began to use bottles as a means to sell their products. While many surely used unembossed bottles with paper labels, eventually the larger and more prominent brewers began to use embossed bottles to promote their business and their products. One of the first brewers to use embossed bottles was the firm of A. H. Peaslee & Co., establishing his brewery in 1866 in Dubuque. Advertisements for the company list them as exclusive manufactures of XXX stock ale and porter.

Sales were reported to extend to the Dakotas, Colorado and even New Mexico. The bulk of their trade was in Nebraska, Wisconsin, Minnesota and of course Iowa. Peak production lists the capacity of the brewery at 1,800 barrels of ale and 250 barrels of porter annually. The bottles used by Mr. Peaslee are quart-size with an oversized blob top. Some examples are made of typical amber glass while earlier examples are made of amber glass so dense that they appear black. Examples have been dug in Nebraska, South Dakota and Illinois and usually date in the 1870s.

Another method of bottling beer was the use of stoneware bottles. The Sioux City Brewery, operated by J. Franz & Co., is one of just a few Iowa brewers to use marked stoneware beer bottles. The brewery was established in 1871 and their best production years were listed at 10,000 barrels annually. The small salt glazed bottles look to hold less than a pint as they are just over 7" in height. They are crudely made and the stamp is crude as well as it almost looks like the mark was impressed one letter at a time although this is highly unlikely. The debossed mark reads: FRANZ'S IVUX CITY. The unusual spelling of Sioux City only adds to the appeal of this early stoneware container.



Close-up of the debossed mark on the stoneware bottle for J. Franz & Co. Note the misspelling of Sioux City.

The early 1880s introduced a newer style of bottle for Iowa breweries to use. The pint- and quart-sized bottle with the typical bulge neck and a crude double collar neck were used by a limited number of Iowa brewers. The double collar examples usually are very crude and often display crudely hand-cut embossing. Examples of this style bottle were used by Burghart & Fischer of Council Bluffs; H. Frahm of Davenport; A. Potthoff of Des Moines; Mrs. M. Eigenmann of Muscatine; Henne & Schleifer of Mt. Pleasant; the Kraner, Hoffman Brewery of Ottumwa; and the firm of Bensburg & Cheadle of Ottumwa.

The few examples that exist are all of amber glass, except for the Council Bluffs and Muscatine bottles, and all typically date from 1879 to 1888. There are other pre-1888 Iowa beer bottles from Iowa but they employed the use of the typical single blob top. Examples of early blob top beers exist from C. Magnus of Cedar Rapids; Geise & Linder of Council Bluffs; M. Hollenfelz of Dubuque; F. W. Anschutz of Keokuk; J. Auwerda of Keokuk; Leisy Bros. of Keokuk; and the Kraner, Hoffman brewery of Ottumwa. Iowa enacted a major prohibitionary law in 1886 and by 1888 that law shut down much of the brewing industry in Iowa for a short period of time. This is a major reason for the lack of early beer bottles from Iowa. There are undoubtedly other merchants



1850s black glass ale
Hornung & Co., Dubuque.



One of the first brewers to use embossed bottles was the firm of A. H. Peaslee & Co., establishing his brewery in 1866 in Dubuque. Black glass example is on the left.



Trio of Magnus bottles from Cedar Rapids with closeup of the Magnus trademark in the inset.



Early 1880s double collar beer - Kraner - Hoffman, Ottumwa, Iowa.

that used this style of bottle in Iowa but until further examples from other breweries turn up, Iowa collectors can only wait.

By 1890, many of Iowa's breweries were back in business and several new breweries would be established during this decade. Nearly all of the embossed beer bottles used during this time frame are relatively plain with plain block style embossing within a round slugplate. Most used the common blob top lip and most were made of aqua glass with amber being used infrequently.

One brewery that strayed from the plain embossing was the Eagle Brewery operated by Christian Magnus of Cedar Rapids. The Eagle Brewery had been established in 1859 but it wasn't until 1868 that Christian Magnus became the sole proprietor of this large and highly successful brewery. Beginning in the 1890s, Mr. Magnus had his familiar trademark embossed on many of his bottles. The trademark displays a large wooden keg with an eagle perched on top. There is a male worker tapping the keg into a stoneware jug. This makes for attractive embossing and one that would become very familiar in Iowa.

All of the Magnus bottles used during this era are aqua with either blob tops or Baltimore loop style blob lips. Sizes vary from quarts to pints to the hard to find split or pony beer size that is embossed only with the trademark. There are also Hutchinson sodas embossed with the trademark and base embossed C. MAGNUS, CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA. When Christian Magnus sold his interests in the brewery in 1898, the new owners renamed the company as The Magnus Brewing Company and used only crown top beer bottles without the use of the familiar trademark embossing. They did use a Hutchinson style bottle embossed with only block letters: THE MAGNUS BREWING CO., CEDAR RAPIDS, IA. All bottles with the embossed trademark can easily be dated to the 1890-1898 time frame.

The Magnus Brewery, like all other breweries in Iowa, was shut down at the end of 1915 due to a state wide prohibition law strictly enacted in 1916.

The 1890s also introduced the use of embossed bottles used by brewers agents. A brewers agent was usually a liquor dealer or saloon operator that sold beer from one of the larger nationally known breweries. It was also common practice for some of the larger soda bottling works in Iowa to also have a brewing agency. Schlitz, Pabst, The Fred Miller Brewing Co. and Anheuser



H.J. Witt, Weiss Beer, Davenport, Iowa in deep green.



Quart beer from The New Vienna Brewing Co., New Vienna, Iowa [Photo courtesy Bruce Mobley]



Labeled only blob beer from the Ottumwa Brewing & Ice Co.

Busch are just a few examples of major breweries that sold beer through smaller agents in Iowa.

Typically, the bottles used are the same as those used by the larger breweries with slug plate embossing and blob top closures. For some unknown reason, most examples from Iowa are the pint-size with very few quart-size examples. The main difference is the embossing which usually represents the name or establishment of the brewing agency as opposed to having the name of the brewery embossed. Burlington, Iowa seems to have the most examples of brewers agent bottles with no less than five different individuals that used embossed bottles. Of course other Iowa towns had embossed bottles used by brewers agents also and one bottle from Sioux City is embossed with the name of the saloon which was called THE BODEGA.

One other bottle introduced during the 1890s was the use of a bright green bottle used by H. J. Witt, a prominent bottler in Davenport, Iowa. The bottles use a wire bail and a porcelain stopper to seal the blob top. They are embossed in a slugplate H. J. WITT / WIESS BEER / DAVENPORT, IA. The stoppers are usually marked H. J. WITT, DAVENPORT, IOWA. The bottles were made in amber and a deep green glass and also come in two sizes, a pint and a smaller pony beer.

H. J. Witt also carried on a brewing agency with the Wm. J. Lemp Brewing Company and the Val Blatz Brewing Company.

By the late 1890s, several breweries began to use the newer style crown top cap closure and by 1905 most all Iowa breweries had switched to using the crown top closure on their regular size bottles. Two firms in Burlington used a different style closure commonly referred to as a trim lip closure (illustrated below).



The five sizes of amber blob beers from Iowa beginning with the Pony beer on the left to the picnic beer on the right.



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The Casper Heil Brewing Company and the Moehn (pronounced Main) Brewery were two dominate breweries in Burlington and were highly competitive. Both had large elaborate buildings to house their brewing operations. Moehn had a huge new brewery constructed in 1903 and Heil followed with a large new building of his own in 1904.

Both used the usual promotional items such as etched glasses and mugs, numerous advertising giveaways, and signs to promote their breweries.

While it is not known which brewery began the use of the trim lip bottle, it's obvious not much time elapsed before the other began using the same style bottle. Evidently both switched over to the newer crown top bottle shortly thereafter as the trim lip bottles are harder to find than the newer crown top examples.

As stated before, both breweries were shut down after 1915. The Moehn Brewery building is still standing with its original tin sign on the front of the building. Likewise, Casper Heil's mansion still stands majestically on top of one of the hilltops in Burlington.

With the turn of the century, many of the smaller breweries were closing down as the larger Iowa breweries continued to dominate the market. One of the innovations used at this time by the larger breweries was the use of large half-gallon sized beer bottles commonly referred to as a "picnic" bottle because there was most likely enough beer in one container to easily refresh everyone present at a small picnic!

The picnic beer bottle is almost always made of amber glass, many times marked on the base with the A. B. Co. glasshouse mark, and employed the use of a blob top. While many of the breweries were

switching over to the more modern and efficient crown top closure, the picnic bottles continued to use the blob top with a wire closure and a porcelain stopper with a rubber seal. The use of picnic beer bottles seems to be limited to the mid-west states of Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin although there are a very few examples from other states. The bottles generally stand 13 to 14 inches tall and have large slugplates with plenty of room for embossing. Some have more attractive embossing than others such as the bottles from the DUBUQUE BREWING & MALTING CO. and the DAVENPORT BREWING CO.

The most elaborate embossing however was used by the brewery from the small town of New Vienna, Iowa. The details on the slugplate show a large flying eagle with a banner perched on a globe. Smaller quart size versions of the New Vienna bottles exist but all with crown top lips. This picnic size bottle is perhaps the most desirable and hardest to obtain of all the picnic beer bottles from Iowa.

If you're trying to amass a complete collection of the picnic beers from Iowa, be prepared for a challenge as there are several tough examples besides the New Vienna bottle.

The following is a list of all known embossed Iowa picnic beers:

Clinton - Clinton Brewing Co.

Davenport - Davenport Brewing Co.

Davenport - Independent Brewing & Malting Co.

Des Moines - P. Dapalonia

Des Moines - Des Moines Brewing Co., two slug plate varieties and one in olive amber

Dubuque - Dubuque Brewing & Malting Co.

Dubuque - Dubuque Star Brewing Co., base embossed only

Keokuk - Phil Glaser, two slug plate varieties

Keokuk - Pechstein & Nagel

Maquoketa - Fritz Staemmele

New Vienna - New Vienna Brewing Co.

Ottumwa - Ottumwa Brewing & Ice Co.

Many of the smaller Iowa breweries and some of the larger ones undoubtedly used unembossed bottles with paper labels. This was a big savings in expenses as embossed bottles were more expensive than the unembossed versions. Few paper labeled examples exist from the Iowa pre-prohibition era prior to 1916 but one example is shown here. The label is marked OTTUMWA Budd SELECT BEER / OTTUMWA BREWING & ICE CO. / OTTUMWA, IOWA. It also has the nice graphics of the eagle flying through the "O" which is very similar to the etching found on the beer glasses from this company. This brewery was established in 1905 and closed around 1913.

While this article dealt mainly with the older style beer bottles, there are a number of embossed crown top beers from Iowa which I won't cover at this time.

Again, with the established statewide prohibition law enacted in Iowa in 1916, all the breweries in Iowa were forced to close their doors or switch over to manufacturing a nonalcoholic product. Some of the larger breweries did attempt this but with limited success. What is left for bottle collectors is a limited number of embossed beer bottles from Iowa to collect.

As always, it's the pursuit and the people you meet along the way that make our hobby so enjoyable and unique.

A special thanks to Bruce Mobley for the use of his pictures in this article.

Stay tuned for my next article which will describe the few liquor and whiskey bottles known from Iowa. As always, enjoy the hunt the people you meet during the journey!

