

Callet Nursing Bottles Unique, but in Many Varieties

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I know, the title of this article doesn't make sense. How can something be unique and yet still have many varieties. Well, it can surely happen and the Callet line of nursing bottles is just such an example.

The Callet bottles are unique in the fact that they are nearly the only baby bottles designed with the intent of becoming advertising bottles with a definite final use — that of being infant feeding bottles with a dairy, furniture company, children's clothing and jewelry store's name or logo pyroglazed on the front panel. I know, you are going to throw the argument in my face that Hygeia and Evenflo also did this, especially with insurance company advertising. The difference is that Hygeia and Evenflo did this on a very limited basis and strictly as an afterthought after their bottle designs had been on the market for decades.

The Callet Nursing Bottles were also designed to be marketed as single units or in sets of differently designed bottles, sold or given to the final user — the mother and her baby. This is also unique in that the Callet Manufacturing Company, in conjunction with the Knox Glass Company, had this intent from the very get-go. They

went into the baby bottle manufacturing business with these two intents in their business plan.

It all began in 1947 when Samuel Callet contracted the Knox Glass Company of Parker, Pa., to supply his Canonsburg, Pa., plant with the nursery rhyme nursing bottles. These were the small mouthed ones of which there were only six different designs or nursery rhymes — the Circus Train (orange), three Scotty Dogs (black), Da-Da Clown (dark blue), Robbie Yum Yum (brown), Goosey Gander (yellow) and Peter Rabbit (light blue). The small-necked bottle took the black pull-on nipple that had been popular since the 1920s. Of the 13 plants that Knox Glass Company owned, only the Oil City and the Parker plants produced the nursing bottles. The pyroglazing was originally done at the Oil City plant and later moved to the Parker plant.

In the early 1950s the wide mouth screw neck baby bottles were becoming more popular and the Knox Glass Company designed a bottle exclusively for Callet. The bottle was designed to be easily held by the mother because of the horizontal ribs on the sides and they also had flat fronts and

backs that made it easy to pyroglazed the designs on the individual bottles. The flat sides also kept the bottles from rolling. These different nursery rhyme designs were originated by Samuel Callet, sometimes on napkins, sometimes scrap paper or just ideas cut out of magazines. He must have been a heck of a doodler, one with a wonderful resource base to pick from. All of these designs were given to Hunter Silves to finalize the artwork for the silk screens.

Five of the original six designs were carried over onto the newly designed nursing bottles. Only the three Scotty Dogs didn't make the changeover. From what us members of the ACIF (American Collectors of Infant Feeders) have been able to accumulate and catalogue, we have found out that a complete collection of the Callet Nursery Rhyme bottles would be mind-boggling. So far there have definitely been 73 different designs located, some with only one example known. Each of these 73 can be found in anywhere from one color to as many as 6 different colors. Some of these designs have a white panel behind the design and can also be found without the white panel. Just a simple mathematical multiplication indicates that there could be as many as 438 different bottles as a basic complete collection — WOW! Granted, some of the designs have been found in only one color so the total will be a little lower. A couple of these are Little Red Riding Hood is only found in red and Baby Bear, Mama Bear and Papa Bear set of bottles are only found in black.

Also, we have noticed that lettering



Figure 1: Two of the original Knox Glass Company set of Nursery Rhyme Baby Bottles. Note the small neck for the pull-on nipples, the line-ribbed sides and the icicle type design on the shoulder area. The Scotty Dog design (right) was not carried into the Callet set of Nursing Rhyme bottles.



Figure 2: The Three Little Pigs set of the wide mouthed Nursery Rhyme bottles. The most common color of the pyroglazing is dark green, but they have also been seen in orange, yellow and black. These examples have the Evenflo plastic collars, not the Callet collars, mounted on the bottles. If you look carefully, you can also see the different sizes of lettering and that on the first bottle the design is slightly cockeyed.

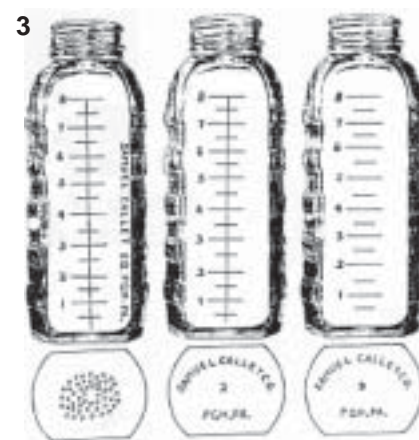


Figure 3: Progression of the Callet bottles — from the oldest to the newest. The left drawing is the original bottle designed for Callet about 1950. The other drawings show the progression up to the final design. *Drawing compliments of Don Gifford, ACIF.*

styles actually change within parts of the nursery rhymes on some of the bottles. Heavier lettering, lighter lettering, different styles of the letter "O," for example. No one has really made note of this before, but it does exist. Having worked in the silk screen industry for a few months in my earlier days, I would say that this was due to the silk screens wearing out and being repaired at a later date with a slightly different font of lettering.

The majority of the designs are line drawings of the nursery rhyme characters and plain block lettering of the words of the rhyme below. As mentioned earlier they have been found in the range of one to six different colors for each bottle.

Within the set is what one might call a sub-set, most of which have a blue cloud background with a more detailed fine line drawing on it. This sub-set seems to be where the scarcer bottles are found. Some of them are known to exist but have never been seen by club members. They are designs created by Hunter Silves, who is sure that Knox Glass Company filled orders with them, but doesn't know how many Samuel Callet actually used.

There are also three different bottles within the wide mouth screw tops. Most likely all of the different nursery rhyme designs are not available on all three-bottle types because the designs were continuously evolving. The differences are minor but definite. (1) The earliest has about 50 raised dots on the bottom, "SAMUEL CALLET CO. PGH, PA." in block letters running vertically on the right side of the reverse of the bottle. The ounce scales are calibrated in ½ ounces with raised horizontal slashes and a raised vertical line runs down the center of the slashes. (2) The dots were dropped from the bottom and the "SAMUEL CALLET CO. PGH, PA." was moved to the bottom along with a mold number. (3) The raised vertical line down the center of the ounce scale slashes was dropped. The dates of these changes are not known.

Samuel Callet must have been quite a salesman because the variations of his packaging vary greatly depending on the interests of his clients. They could buy a single bottle of their choosing and put a "Congratulations" card to the mother in the box with it on the low end of the price range. For the high end they could buy a specially boxed set of three to five bottles. The center one was normally a bank bottle with a slotted metal cap held tightly on by

a band of heat shrink plastic. This bank bottle normally had a white panel with a blue drawing of a king boy and "To His Majesty" or a red drawing of a queen girl and "To Her Highness" printed on the panel. This bottle may also have the name of the dairy, furniture, clothes or jewelry company printed on it. The other two or four bottles were of the sponsors' picking. Another common bank bottle was the illustration of a boy jumping over a lit candle and labeled in various colors "Jack Be Nimble."

Other simpler packaging were just a plain pasteboard box or sets of one, three or five in a fancy yellow box with red or blue bows printed on it and a congratulations card inside.

The Callet business thrived until 1958 and dwindled throughout the 1960s. This was primarily due to a singular fact — the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Milk Control Commission created a regulation that would not allow a dairy to have a promotional give-away item which cost that dairy more than \$.35. The special boxed set of five bottles with the dairy's name pyroglazed on them cost the dairy \$1.30. Since the majority of Callet's business was in Pennsylvania and the eastern U.S., the hurt was put on him and his company by this regulation. After the passage of this regulation he continued to sell to the furniture, jewelry and children's stores, but

this was an ever-decreasing business and Knox Glass Company did not want to handle small orders.

Also about this time the larger dairies began buying up the smaller ones, creating conglomerates. Then these conglomerates began installing refrigerated milk cases in the grocery and convenience stores, delivering the final blow to Samuel Callet's business.

What this left us was a wonderful collectible of possibly 400 different baby bottles that the collector can organize in just about any fashion that he wishes, whether it just be one of each design (a collection of 73 bottles), a collection of just certain colors, or even a collection of the different periods. If you are into advertising, you can also make a wonderful collection.

So how variable can unique be?

Much of this information was obtained by Don and Joann Gifford in their interview with Mrs. Samuel Callet and son, Richard, in 1986 and published in the ACIF's newsletter, Keeping Abreast.



Figure 4: One of the Bank Bottles. This one is printed in blue on a white panel for the boy child. The girl version was a queen girl printed in red on a white panel. Both styles are also found without the white panel. The blue slotted top for the boy and the pink slotted top for girls were held tight by a band of heat shrink tape.

Figure 5: Three of the advertising Callet Nursing bottles. The left one shows Baby Bear and BUPP'S Milk. The center one is one of the Bank Bottles — Jack Be Nimble on a white panel, for Brokhoff's Dairy Products (it still has the heat shrink seal), one of Callet's largest clients. The right one, Little red Riding Hood is for Rutter Bros. Milk.

Figure 6: The "Pilot" or "Plane" showing a very early version of a jet fighter, designed by Hunter Silves, is one of the scarcer of the Callet bottles with three known to ACIF members. It is a line drawing printed on top of a blue cloud panel. Most of this type design bottle fall into the scarce category.