

For all of you out there who may read this, I want to set the record straight. Did the Californians get all the good bottles from Montana's gold camps before us locals woke up, pulled up our suspenders, stepped out on the front porch and muttered, "I wonder what all the excitement is about? That is the third set of California license plates I've seen go by here this week. I think that there might have been one from Oregon, too. I'm gonna take a drive up the canyon and see what those folks are doing."

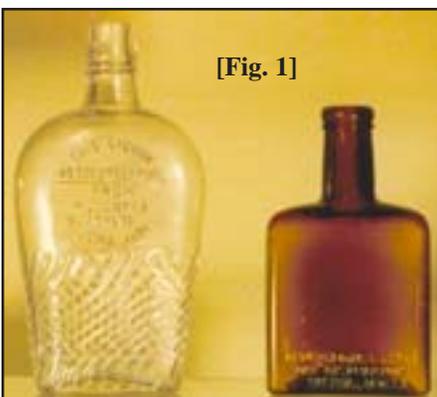
We did wake up when the caterpillars started rolling through the ash dumps and ranchers were saying, "Sure you can go up and pick up all that junk. I've been trying to get that s#@\* out of there for twenty years." I guess they figured that if there were so many people from outside wanting all these bottles and other garbage that they must be worth something.

An inquiry of a passing motorist at the gas station where I worked in the 1960s kind of went like this:

Attendant: "Morning Ma'am, nice day isn't it? What may I do for you?"

Lady: "Good morning son. We need a tank of gas and please check the oil and tires. We are going into the hills for a couple days and don't want any problems with the car."

A: "Sure thing Ma'am, nice rig! What are you going to do? The fishing hasn't been



too great. It's been too hot and dry and the water is too low. The trout aren't much for eating these days. Too soft."

L: "Oh! We're not fishing, although my husband likes to once in awhile. We are looking for old bottles around the mining camps in the hills over there. We've been here before and did pretty well. There are lots of sun colored bottles out there, and some old ones too."

A: "I've seen lots of bottles around where the old timers used to live, but what's a sun colored bottle?"

L: "Son, those are the ones that are purple, all shades of purple up here."

A: "Are those worth anything?", as his eyes lit up and the wheels began to turn in his head.

L: "Not much, but they are pretty and look nice in the windows at home. The dark-colored bitters bottles are worth a little more but are harder to find. My specialty is collecting the old ink bottles."

The attendant's work on the car was done, so he collected his \$4.00 and wished them good luck as they headed north out of town. So much for the introduction to bottle collecting. I guess they did get quite a few before the rest of us woke up and smelled the dumps.

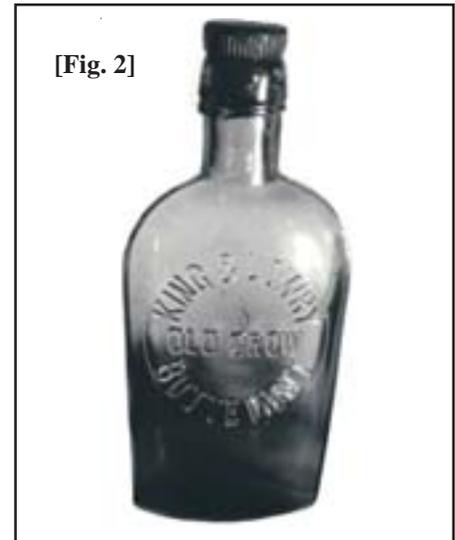
There were seven years between the story above and my first look at a bottle collection by a Montana collector. It was now only 1967. My collection started that year with an aqua Vaseline style bottle and several black glass ales. The ales were discards in a campground that I was cleaning as part of a summer job. I later thought that if they were throwing away 1860s black glass ales and cracked Hostetters, what were they taking home?

When I asked the question about where to go and what to look for to find some really old bottles, the answer stuck with me, "You won't find much out there anymore since the Californians got them all."

My excursions to familiar old places were discouraging that summer, since all I found were the shards. I was a believer now, and sort of wore the California story on my sleeve for several years. That story later.

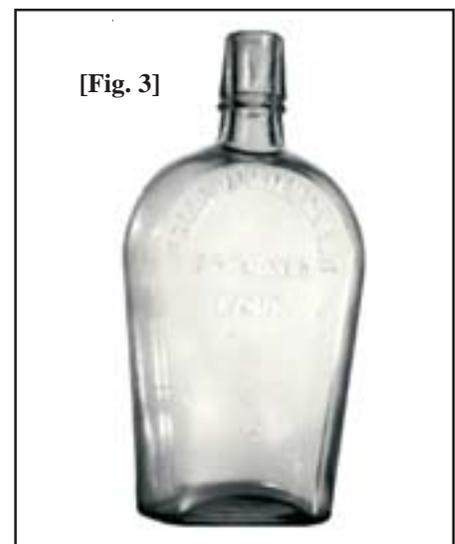
Collectors from outside of Montana

stimulated the locals into a bottle collecting frenzy by the early 1970s, and when I arrived home from the Army I was in a different collector's world. Everybody had some bottles and was finding them all over Montana. I didn't need much coaxing to getting a collection started myself. When I traded some friends out of a Warren Drug from Bozeman, and I dug a Choteau Drug and a Kessler beer - I was hooked on Montana bottles. That was thirty years ago and collecting has been good since.



Collectors in many states have experienced ownership of a Montana bottle. I say this with some assurance that the large number of folks accumulating "state" collections of most bottle types had at least one in their hands. Some of those handled were undoubtedly rarities while others were common. Nevertheless, the many and varied types, sizes and embossments made for a lucrative collectors' exchange.

Montana bottles and artifacts are sought





[Fig. 4]

for a variety of reasons. Foremost behind a collector's urge might be the romance connected with a relic once part of the 1860s Gold Rush or early 1900 homesteading era. Next might be a connection to a place a family called home or where they had a business venture.

Then there are those of us who have an affinity for bottle types and collect that state or one specimen from a number of states. And how many of us can be called casual collectors keeping what you dig, eventually trading for what sparks our interests? If you have dug in Montana, I am sure you have discovered a few Montana bottles and relics.

No matter how we all got started, the bottom line is, "we like Montana bottles."

Montana entrepreneurs of the last century and back into the late 19th century had their names and businesses embossed on bottles representing their businesses. These bottles came in a variety of shapes, colors, and sizes that match the commonly used styles of the day. Most of us, who have collected for a while, will recognize a shoofly whiskey flask, an enameled back bar bottle, the Hutchinson soda, a stoneware jug, the seltzer, blob top beer or soda, and the prescription drugstore bottle. We have all these bearing Montana places and businesses.

I will portray some of these and characterize their uses and histories for you. I do not intend to get into a detailed discussion of an individual item, as that information will be aptly presented soon in a Montana bottle book.

The Hellgate Antique Bottle Club of Missoula began cataloging and describing Montana embossed and labeled bottles in 1969 or 1970. This effort, through the energy and perseverance of several ardent Montana collectors, is about to emerge as a definitive book on what our state has to offer.

As some of you authors have experienced, you are always finding new items,

and that is the case here. New whiskey, soda, beer and drugstore bottles have emerged in the last year. Going back for a moment to the statement I made about wearing the successes of the early bottle diggers on my sleeve, all but two of these discoveries were made out of state.

Dunno, but I think we still have a few surprises in store. And to end the California story, I do not hold you responsible for anything except waking us up in time to enjoy the fantastic hobby of bottle collecting.

Let's move on and discuss some of what we have that we are proud of and seek with an intensity not measured in many states. Since I started out above with a short list, let's start there.

### WHISKEY

In summary, we have several clear quart embossed cylinders, a shoulder sealed cylinder in amber and olive green that comes as a quart and a "fifth". At least 20 coffins and shooflies, that many more straight sided flasks, around 10 silver overlay flasks, several leather covered flasks, gold printed with the proprietor's name and business, make for a nice group of very collectible bottles.

There are also a few unique bottles, back bars and ceramics that contained liquor. We have evidence that the summer of "02" produced fragments of a true pumpkinseed embossed from Butte City. When this one surfaces for inspection, it will add another special bottle to pursue.

Glass that has been thrown to the four seasons on a rocky hillside has not fared well. We often find items with a variety of damage. You don't have to stretch your imagination to understand the fate of the fragile shoofly and coffin bottles.

One time, during my collecting adolescence, I asked a veteran collector how long it takes to find an embossed Montana whiskey. He stated, "If you get into a single dump and dig around twenty plain ones, you are likely to find one that is embossed."

I now have reason to believe he knew what he was talking about. I was digging a trashy area below an 1895-1900 cabin and was finding whole plain shoofly bottles and other evidence that the former occupant believed in cures in a bottle.

I had dug around 18 plain whiskeys when the basket weave of shoofly base caught my eye. Lo and behold! It was an embossed Montana, one pint flask from H. J. ZAYAS in Helena (Fig 1). Was I excited

or what? And guess how many unembossed shoofly whiskey bottles were in that dump? Yup, 21!

Many nice examples from nearly 60 proprietors have survived in the larger dumps. Specie from Anaconda, Butte, Great Falls, Helena, and Kalispell top the list for variety of collectible embossed flasks. These examples from Butte (Fig. 2) and Anaconda (Fig. 3) are extremely desirable.

Montana businesses advertised across the state by stenciling names, businesses and products on stone ware jugs (Fig. 4). Our jugs come in the "mini" size up to, and probably exceeding, 3 gallons. We have cataloged close to 100 different jugs. Almost all are rare, 1 to 5 known. A few proprietors have 20 - 25 known, usually in several sizes.

A rarity would be the FIVE TAPS SALOON from Great Falls (Sorry that my photo didn't turn out) and more common are those from the MONTANA LIQUOR COMPANY of Butte (Fig. 4, left). Another from GOODKIND BROS./ WHOLESALE WINES/ LIQUORS AND CIGARS/ HELENA. MONT (Fig 4, right) represents the middle range of availability.

Montana jugs are very collectible and highly desired by both collectors of western whiskey jugs and those who stick to Montana items. Recent bidding on available specimens has been phenomenal.

### SODAS

Blob top, Hutchinson, Baltimore loop, and crown top sodas grace many collector's shelves. The American soda-water bottling industry was well on its way when gold was discovered in Montana and the great, mid-1860s rushes to Virginia City, Bannack, Last Chance (Helena) and many smaller unnamed strikes were under way.

A thirst followed the miners as they ventures north to the mines. Some may have brought a bottle or two of their



[Fig. 5]



[Fig. 6]

favorite with them. A few colored sodas from the mid west and California have been found here in the earliest mining camps. This is evidence that it wouldn't be long before the soda bottling entrepreneur would set himself up in business in this wide open territory.

By the mid-1870s, soda businesses were being established in both larger and smaller communities. The small community of Coulson on the Yellowstone River, near what is now Billings, bottled a soda in a unique, dark aqua, heavy glass bottle, succinctly embossed W. A. BOOTS.

This bottle has a gravitating (?) style stopper, which is unique among Montana embossed sodas. Research is continuing on this bottle's closure, and it may be one of the first embossed sodas in Montana. Butte and Helena proprietors were on the heels of this enterprise and had sodas bottled in embossed blob top bottles by the early 1880s.

Wm. WILSON of Butte City used a bottle reminiscent of the earlier west coast blob tops, as did JURGENS & PRICE (Fig.5, right) and MERRITT & CO. of Helena. By 1885, Merritt had his own custom mold bottles in circulation (Fig. 5 left).

As an historical note, Montana did not become a state until 1889. Of the bottles

noted above, Wilson is the only one marked with M. T. for Montana Territory. SPECKART & CO./BUTTE CITY/MON. is also an example of a territorial blob top bottle.

Montana has two known Hutchinson sodas that are clearly marked M. T. These are from KROGER BROS. in Butte and A. LANDT in Livingston. Several other bottles marked with MON. are also known to be of Territorial vintage. Examples are GAMER & JACKY/PHILLIPSBURG/MON. (Fig. 6), MONTANA BOTTLING CO./BUTTE/CITY/MON., and MONTANA LIQUOR CO./GRANITE, MON.

Most examples of Montana Hutchinson and Baltimore Loop sodas are embossed with Montana or Mont., suggesting their vintage is after statehood. Some of these businesses were established prior to statehood, but we are still researching when some of the bottles may have been introduced.

We have a couple of others that are worth mentioning, since they are somewhat unique among Montana sodas. One is the W. H. BULLARD - MILES CITY - MONT., a six-sided, round bottom, blob top aqua bottle (Fig. 7).

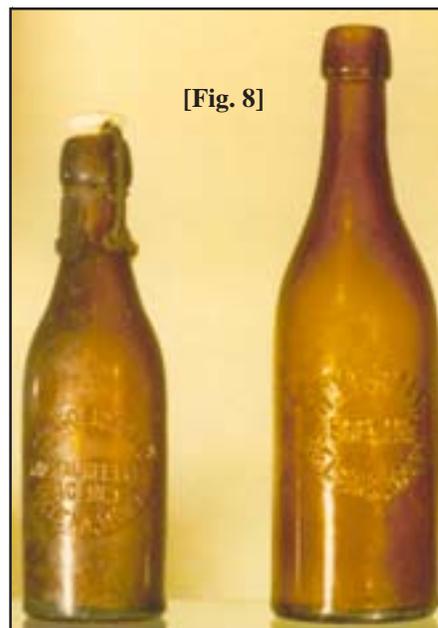
Another is the aqua Hutchinson embossed: DEERLODGE/SODA/FACTORY. Without the state or city embossed, we call these "mavericks," but I am sure the folks from the Deerlodge Valley had no trouble knowing where the soda factory was, since the town was one of the biggest in the Territory in the 1880s.

The factory was producing soda as early as 1873, but the known bottle had to date after the patent of the Hutchinson stopper in 1879. Is there another blob top out there from Deerlodge that has yet to surface? Let's hope so! Statewide, we can account for nearly 60 sodas that are either Hutchinson or Baltimore loop stoppered.

Several from larger towns are relatively

common and are a good nucleus around which you can start a very nice collection. An example is the HOLLAND RINK/BOTTLING/WORKS/ BUTTE, MONT. (Fig. 5, center).

Around 1900 several rare and short-lived, tooled top, crown finished sodas



[Fig. 8]

followed their older cousins, the Hutchs, into the iceboxes of Montana businesses. These are beginning to gain a following among collectors, and new examples are surfacing annually.

With the advent of machine-made bottles (ABM) early in the 20th century, the hand-blown examples are surprisingly hard to find. While there are nearly 50 of the ABM types, I can account for fewer than 15 of the tooled top variety. For you aspiring collectors, the hand-blown, tooled top Montana sodas might be equivalent to the proverbial penny stock.

## BEERS

Montana has always been a big beer drinking state. Attesting to the numerous blob top amber and aqua beers in the old dumps, many collectors left the bottles on site for the less experienced to pick up. I guess that is where the four cases of blob tops in the garage came from. I do keep them hidden so when the value goes up I can get them out, clean them up and make a bundle! I suppose by now you are all wondering what I've been smoking?

Anyway, several Montana businesses chose to advertise their products and businesses through the use of embossed beer bottles. Nick Kessler of Helena was producing beer by 1865 and bottling in available discards and the rare shipments of new bottles that wound their way up the Missouri River to Fort Benton and then across the muddy, hilly road to Helena.

We have an interesting conundrum with Kessler and when he may have chosen to emboss his bottles. Several (I can account for four found within 50 miles of Helena)



[Fig. 7]



[Fig. 9]

blob top, amber beer bottles, with the letters NK peened into the side near the base, have been found by area collectors.

The letters on all the examples are similar enough for us to speculate that Kessler may have had someone mark his bottles with the hope that they might be returned for refilling. The other argument is that one or several bored miners, sitting around the stove on cold wintry days, tried their hands at depicting Nick Kessler's logo on the glass with a nail and the butt of their pistols. Who knows for sure? It is fun to speculate on the possibilities. If a positive attribution could be made - WOW!

There are less than 20 embossed blob top and tooled crown top beers from Montana. More may surface and we hope they do, but among the twenty, several are from the same companies. Kessler has a least four embossing styles on his beers, with the pint blob top, plate molded as in Fig. 8.

The SILVERBOW BREWING CO. of Butte had its crown top 22 ounce, amber bottle embossed on the side (Fig. 9) and also on the base of its bottles. Of interest is the fact that the county, in which Butte is the county seat, is named Silverbow.

Helena had the most embossed beers for one city in Montana with four known. In addition to the Kessler bottles there are: CONSOLIDATED/MILWAUKEE BEER/AGENCY/HELENA, MONT., an amber blob top split (Fig. 8); CAPITOL/BOTTLING WORKS/HELENA/MONT., an amber blob top split; and MILCH BROS./



[Fig. 10]



[Fig. 11]

BOTTLERS/HELENA, MONT., amber blob top split and pint.

Other populated cities had embossed blobs or crowns. A nice example of the former style is the W. H. BULLARD/MILES CITY/MONTANA. This a tall (about 28 oz.) aqua bottle finished for the Baltimore loop closure (Fig. 10). Anaconda, Great Falls, Kalispell and Lewistown also produced collectible beers. As far as we know Anaconda, Kalispell and Lewistown had only crown tops.

To finish this section I will mention an extremely rare, amber blob top beer. This is embossed M. L. CO./GRANITE/MONT. The example I have seen is a split. There isn't a collector in Montana that wouldn't give up his or her favorite dog and a new set of snow tires for one of them. BITTERS

The sole embossed contribution to this category is an amber, BIMAL, French square from Deer Lodge embossed on a single flat panel: J. D. EASTMAN/DEERLODGE, MONTANA.

Mr. Eastman bottled his Oregon Grape Root Bitters in these labeled bottles. It is purported to have been widely distributed around Montana, yet very few examples exist. The product evolved into a tonic under a Dr. J. H. Owings, who managed the Eastman product line. Dr. Owings also had his own embossed drug-store bottles beginning in 1885, but continued to use an unembossed French square for Eastman tonic.

An unembossed French square was also labeled as a bitters from the mining town of Philipsburg. This one was for a product called an Herb and Chamomile Bitters. I do not have the exact name at hand, but you get the picture

that more than one Montana businessman got into the bitters business.

**MILK**

Milk bottles have recently received great coverage in Marvin Michelotti's book Montana Milk Bottles, printed by Advanced Litho Printing in Great Falls, Montana. His coverage of the collectible dairy industry bottles and memorabilia covers items manufactured and used in this state between the 1870s and 1970s.

The largest and most prosperous communities had many dairies competing for peoples' patronage. Keeping them aware of who was proving their milk was important, hence a variety of embossed and pyro names and advertisements came into being. The competition proved deadly to many dairies and closures or takeovers ended the use of their bottles.

I've heard stories told of glass smashing parties where the embossed or otherwise marked containers were broken so that another company could not use the bottles. As the small and large dairies disappeared, their remaining bottles were destined to become valuable collectibles.

**PATENT MEDICINES**

These fantastic collectibles were produced as part of the national "snake oil" era when everyone wanted a cure or rem-



[Fig. 12]

edy in a bottle. We have all read the preposterous claims made by these proprietors.

Montanans were not immune to the enterprising peddlers and their wares. Several Montana companies saw profits in this business and jumped on the medicine wagon with their own concoctions.

There was the Helena based Giant Medicine Co., producing Magnetic Oil, Cough Remedy (Fig. 11) and Sarsaparilla. A Mr. J. E. Steers had his Good Samaritan/Compound. Helena also had the Silver State Veterinary Remedies under W.C. Crum, which produced a variety of specialties. All were preceded by the words Silver State. These included Pain Exterminator, Distemper and Cough Killer, Overland Liniment, and Instant Colic Cure.

A few embossed examples of the Overland Liniment exist, but none of the others are known to be embossed. We believe one of the earliest embossed Montana bottles is the cobalt blue maverick: BENNET'S/MAGIC/CURE. This liniment was patented in 1876. Anyone have one? We have heard that examples exist in California (Here we go again) and Michigan.

Kalispell had Marsden's Magic Liniment and Mountain City Cough Cure, the latter being extremely rare.

A Billings company may hold the gold star for the most unique name among Montana patent medicines with its HERBOTONE/THE/BOTTLED VACATION/TRADE MARK/MADE BY CHAPPLE DRUG CO. BILLINGS, MONT. Do you think a bottle was cheaper than a train ride to the west coast or Arizona?

Butte, with its poor air and water quality in the late 20th Century, had a need for remedies and local druggists were not too shy to respond. There was Fair's Pneumonia Cure, Fair's Pneumonia Mixture, and just plain Fair's Nu-mon-ia.

Several labeled bottles indicate that other companies and individuals were also in the easier-breathing business. Other common ailments prompted Gallogly's drug to produce a cobalt blue salve-type jar, which is embossed on the lid: GALLOGLY'S/SEAWEED/CREAM and a citrate of magnesia bottle embossed: GALLOGLY'S/PIPE STONE/MAGNESIA.

However, it was D. M. Newbro Drug Co. that produced the greatest variety and

number of labeled and embossed household remedies, lotions and powders. Only a few of these were embossed. These include his Witch Hazel Almond Cream, and Herbicide for the scalp that often came in half gallon bottles. I wonder if it worked on lice as well as dandruff?

As you can see there are a nice variety of collectible patents from Montana businesses. There are others but I think you have a pretty good picture of what we have to offer. I believe the discussion of patents brings us to a discussion of drugstores and their proprietors.

### DRUGSTORES

As with many other states, Montana has numerous bottles blown with embossing advertising drugstore businesses across the state. Most communities, that had a population of several hundred and were stable enough for the druggist to invest in his wares, had at least one embossed drugstore or pharmacy bottle.

When you consider the large size of our state and small population, it amazes me when I think that over 200 different embossings are represented from nearly 50 communities. The ghost towns of Marysville and Virginia City are represented as are the largest communities in the state, Anaconda, Billings, Bozeman, Butte, Great Falls, Helena, Kalispell, Lewistown and Missoula.

I think the small homestead era towns (turn of the century to the Great Depression) are the toughest to find. The small initial population and short term prosperity undoubtedly makes their druggists' wares very scarce and collectible.

A few of these towns are Choteau, Columbus, Conrad, Grass Range, Hardin, Hobson, Moore, Terry and Winnett. Folks still make a living in these towns but they do most of their business in larger area towns such as Dillon, Fort Benton, Glendive, Havre, Livingston, Miles City, Red Lodge and Roundup.

When any of the very early or short-lived druggist bottles come up for sale, there are usually several collectors that want them and the bidding (such as on eBay) can be entertaining.

A few examples of rarities are from J. C. Mannall & Co. and A. T. Playter of Anaconda, Dr. I. A. Leighton of Boulder, the amber Roecher and Alward from Bozeman, and another amber from Butte embossed J. T. Finlen (Fig. 12), E. W.

Wynne of Butte, the Parchen D'Acheul, Butte, M. T., any of the Deerlodge and Great Falls drugstores, A. P. Curtain, Triangle Drug Store and the R. S. Hale and Parchen Drug M. T. bottles from Helena, any of the eight Lewistown bottles, J. A. Brown & Co. of Livingston, Highborn Pharmacy of Missoula, Willard Drug from Moore, any of the nine Red Lodge Drugstores, H. Elling & Comp. from Sheridan, Stevensville Drug/Rexall Store, The Terry/Drug Co. / Terry, Mont., Hinchman & Alward from Virginia City, Modern Pharmacy of Whitehall, R. H. McGinnis of White Sulphur Springs and R. J. Woods of Winnett. Whew!! Any questions?

There are other groups of collectible items from Montana. Some of these are the back bar bottles, dose and shot glasses, seltzers, and the pottery and ceramic figurals. This is not to mention the labeled items and the Breweriana collectibles. Stay tuned and we will deal with those at a later time.

By now you are either asleep or looking through your collections to see what is hiding in there. Let's hope it is the latter and that you have learned a little about bottles that are collectible from Montana.

This was, by any stretch of the imagination, an exhaustive discussion. Other collectors and I will contribute to Bottles and Extras over the next few months, giving you additional information on what our wonderful and unpopulated state has to offer.

### Sources:

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Personal Collections of Ray Thompson, Stuart MacKenzie and Larry Eichorn

Research and Documentation of Henry Thies

*All Photos by the Author*