



Fair Oaks Fruit Company

THE TRIANGULAR BOTTLE

by Steve Abbott



Fair Oaks, California, a small town twenty miles east of Sacramento on the American River, made its contribution to the bottle world with the Fair Oaks Fruit Company triangular olive oil bottle just after the turn of the Twentieth Century.

Developed as a speculative realty enterprise by the Howard-Wilson Publishing Company of Chicago, Fair Oaks was the fourth of its Sunset Colonies, the second in California, and one highly touted for its agricultural promise.

Early brochures described the location as a demi-paradise with ideal soil, water, and temperature for growing all manner of fruits, especially the citrus fruits.

In fact, while the soil is fertile and the climate mild, there are anomalies of temperature, which can range from below twenty to over one hundred and fifteen degrees Fahrenheit. And it may not rain for nearly six months.

Needless to say, while the citrus industry had a nice run from around 1898 to 1932, below freezing temperatures for two weeks in 1932 took a devastating toll on the oranges, lemons, and pomelos (grapefruits).

Fortunately none of these adverse climatic events registered any effect on the growth of the olives, which had become a major crop during the first quarter century of Fair Oaks' economy.

The Fair Oaks Fruit Association, a purely cooperative, mutual, and amateurish association with no capital stock, was incorporated April 25, 1901, but failed in its first year.

Its successor, the Fair Oaks Fruit Company, a stock company capitalized at \$25,000 with fifty shares worth \$50 each, had a much longer run, lasting from 1902 until at least the depression, eventually becoming the Fair Oaks Olive Growers Association, which lasted until about 1960.

The Fair Oaks Fruit Company had leadership from men who had been successful in other fields of business. They, in turn, hired a manager, Walter W. Hinsey, who already had success in helping to manage agricultural products for George Kellogg in Newcastle, California.

The Fair Oaks Fruit Company produced canned whole olives and olive oil under the brand name SAN JUAN BRAND OLIVES and SAN JUAN BRAND OLIVE OIL. SAN JUAN BRAND also appeared on box end labels for oranges and lemons, at least. The olives were preserved in jars and solder top tin cans while the olive oil appeared in the triangular bottles and tins.

The most memorable of these containers were the tooled top triangular bottles, which came in four sizes: 11 1/4", 9", 6 3/4", and 4 1/4". The three larger bottles were embossed on the bottoms: FAIR OAKS FRUIT COMPANY. The smallest bottle was probably not embossed on the bottom (at least I have never seen one embossed).

According to one local source, this olive oil was used for a period of time on the Pullman railroad cars, a fact, if true, is not surprising given the fact that Washington Midler, an executive with the Pullman Company in Chicago, and a member of the Fair Oaks-Chicago Association, was also a gentleman orchardist in Fair Oaks.

If this oil was indeed used by the Pullman Company, it is


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Fairoaks Fruit Company

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Bottle

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surprising that the bottles are not found around the country, especially along the route between Chicago and Sacramento, California. In fact, I advertised in both BOTTLES AND EXTRAS and THE ANTIQUE BOTTLE AND GLASS COLLECTOR at various times, but never received any reply as to the availability of a Fair Oaks Fruit Company bottle for sale.

In twenty years of attending bottle shows, mostly in the West, but also all the bottle "EXPOS" from Las Vegas to Denver, I have only had one bottle offered to me for sale, and this one was dug south of Sacramento.

Actually another was offered a year or so ago at the 49er Bottle Show in Auburn, California.

A young man found a Fair Oaks Fruit Company bottle along the railroad tracks near Colfax, California around twenty years ago. He brought it to the show and was directed to me because of my interest in Fair Oaks, my home for thirty-five years.

The young man was deeply disappointed to learn that the sale of the bottle would not upwardly change his style of living, and thus carried the bottle home. The point is that although the bottles are relatively rare, beyond my own collection, I think there is little market for them.

There are several unknowns about the triangular bottle. Some time in the past, I read that the bottle was patented. Whether it was or not is unknown to me, but since it is just a triangular bottle, what feature of it that would be patentable is mysterious.

The distribution is also unknown. Beyond the story about the Pullman car use, it is unknown whether it was marketed in the eastern United States or in Europe, or even if it was marketed much locally.

And lastly, the manufacturer of the bottle is unknown. I would appreciate additional information on any of these points.

The olive oil was also produced in tins, and there is at least one example in a 9 1/2" size. Probably larger and smaller examples were used also.

Whole olives were sold in both jars and solder top tins of at least two sizes. No labeled jars are known to exist, and I know of only two paper-labeled, solder top tin cans. Interestingly enough, these two cans were found deep in a gold mine near Reno, Nevada.

An opportunity to have first chance to buy a large number of tins and other material from this gold mine find was offered to me. But, as often happens, I got distracted. Another party bought a large number of the tin cans, then sold some of them to a mutual friend and I was invited to go along with my friend to pick out the best Sacramento tin cans.

While sorting through the cans, I found the two Fair Oaks Fruit Company olive cans - cans I never knew existed and which I would never have found without all the circumstances of fate intersecting at the right time.

The moral of this story? When opportunity knocks, at least peek out the door!

Fair Oaks olives and olive oil were highly esteemed, winning awards at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific in 1909, and at several of the California State Fairs. Photographs of the awards exist, but there is no information about the actual whereabouts of the nice medals.

For those visitors who are planning a trip to the Sacramento area, the old site of the Fair Oaks Fruit Company is located in Fair Oaks at the southwest corner of Sunrise and Fair Oaks Boulevards, the present location of the Post Office.



The Fair Oaks Historical Society maintains a small museum in the administration building of the Fair Oaks Cemetery at the corner of Olive Street and New York Avenue. The museum is open on the second Sunday of the month between 1:00 and 4:00 p.m., or by appointment.

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