

PROLOGUE

It was in the early 1960s. My wife, son and I were returning from a short visit to the snow in the local mountains. The road was a shimmering black asphalt ribbon as the snow melted in the bright sun. The side of the road was piled with recently plowed dirty snow. Perhaps because of the contrast, my eye caught sight of and my mind wouldn't let go of the picture of a white stubby beer bottle lying at the side of the pavement. It was quite a few yards down the hill when the picture became fixed and focused in my mind's eye. I quickly pulled to the side of the road and stopped. "I saw a white beer bottle back there," I answered my wife's questioning look. Before any discussion about my habit of picking up things, I got out of the car.

After walking back up the hill in the slush, I claimed a Carling Black Label milk glass, stubby, 7-oz. beer bottle and carried it back to the car. I thought it would look better without its label so when I got home I soaked and scraped off the label and, since I was alone in my admiration of the bottle's plain beauty, I put the bottle on a shelf in the garage and forgot about it.

I forgot about it, that is, until the mid-1960s when I found an almost identical bottle in a light olive-green color. I

brought it home and, after some searching, I found the milk glass bottle and put the latest find with the original – on the shelf in the garage.

By then I was a collector of antique bottles and belonged to the local bottle club. And I had a bottle shelf in the living room window. What I didn't have was the courage to place those beautiful modern bottles in my display. "What would my friends say?" I silently asked myself.

Several years later, while attending the annual bottle show of the mother club, Antique Bottle Collectors of Sacramento (ABCA), I purchased a stubby bottle identical in shape to the two securely secluded on the shelf in my garage. It was a beautiful Anchor Hocking Glass Company "Royal Ruby Red" stubby that once, in 1961, contained Schlitz beer.

I could hardly wait to get back home. I knew exactly where my light olive-green and white milk glass bottles were and I was excited about seeing how they would look sitting next to the new red glass stubby.

As I had expected, the sun shining through the display window gave the trio of bottles an almost stained glass (church) window look (Figure 1). From then 'til now, I include any bottle I like in my display. For me collecting bottles is more about gathering not what is popular or expected, as much as collecting what is desired.

Ever since I formed my own collecting philosophy, numerous beautiful and interesting bottles have come to rest in my bottle cabinet. Someday, I thought, I would make and take the time to study some of my bottles. Since my retirement at the

turn of the 21st century, that has become a reality. I joyously spend lots of my retirement time researching and writing about the bottles I've included in my collection over the years but have not had time to study.

The story of Carling Black Label Beer began as history in 1818. Until recently the once-discarded 1961 white (milk glass) 7-oz. "stubby" bottle was consequent of the story. Thanks to my library, the Internet and time to devote to this project, I am able to add the following story to bottle collecting history.

RESEARCH

It was in 1818 that a farmer named Thomas Carling (Figure 2), migrated from England's Yorkshire district, to the city of London, Ontario, Canada. As a farming pioneer, Carling obtained some land and began clearing it of trees in preparation for his planned farm. In accordance with the custom of the day, he called on his neighbors to help him remove the tree stumps. The cooperative effort was called a "stumping bee." His neighbors came with their oxen and tools and the land was cleared of tree stumps.

It was the custom for the recipient of the community effort to provide food and drink for the event. Thomas Carling's liquid refreshment was a home-brewed ale of such quality that soon he was brewing it for other stumping bees. In time, it grew so popular that he abandoned farming for full-time brewing.

According to one historian (see bibliography), "The first Carling brewery was a modest affair – a couple of kettles, a horse to turn the grinding mill and six strong men to work on the mash tubs. Carling was his own sales and shipping department. He started by trundling his wares through the streets of London, Ontario on a wheelbarrow." He established the first brewing company that bore his name in 1840 in London, Ontario. It was called, "Carling Brewing and Malting Company, Ltd., of London, Ontario."

Around 1849, Thomas Carling's sons, William and John, took over the brewery. It became known as "W. and J. Carling's City Brewery." Bottling both ale and porter, by 1860 the brewery was using 18-20,000 bushels of grain a year, 12-18,000 pounds of hops and malting 22,000 bushels of barley a season. "The proprietors give steady employment to between 15 and 20 men" runs a descrip-

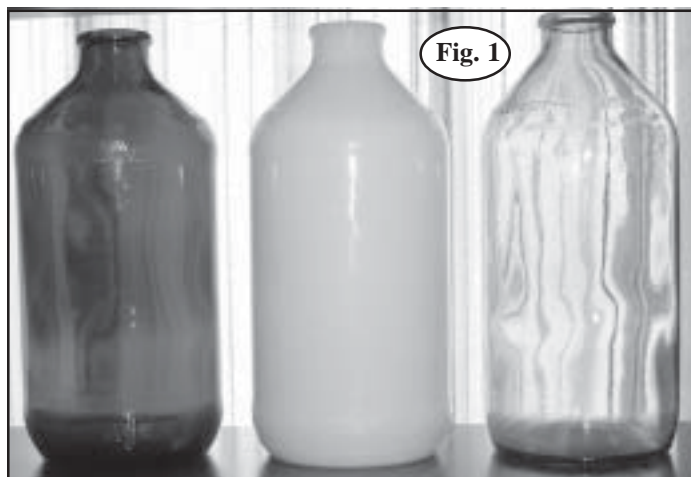




Fig. 3

tion written about 1860, “and six horses are constantly employed in connection with the establishment (Figure 3). The works are propelled by a steam engine....”

In 1875, the brothers abandoned the old brewery and moved further down the creek from which they got their water. It was in that location that they built one of the largest breweries in Canada. The name was changed to, “Carling & Company.”

John Carling was the head of the company (Figure 4). John also represented London in the Canadian Parliament and became one of the best-known men in the Dominion of Canada. He was knighted in 1893 and became “Sir John” (Figure 5). [He died in 1911.]

Sir John’s son, Thomas H. (or T. Harry) and Joshua Dalton, an investor, joined the brewery as partners and all looked bright until February 1879 when fire gutted the new building. The fire, which appeared at one point to be under control, set off a terrific explosion (probably caused by malt

dust) that opened up the center of the building and re-started the flames. Despite the explosion, the building’s walls were still sound and the brewery was rebuilt (Figure 6). However, as a result of directing fire-fighting efforts in the frigid February temperature, William fell victim to pneumonia and died

several days later. The company rebounded after the fire with the help of investment from outside the family and with T. H. remaining as manager. (After only a few years as a partner, Joshua Dalton died in 1882.)

In 1880, Carling made its first entry into the American market, from Canada, by purchasing the “Rogers & Hughes Forest Brewery” in Cleveland, Ohio. Calling it the “London Brewery” (after London, Ontario), they brewed Carling’s line of ale, porter, and brown stout.

By 1890, Carling was capable of putting out about 30,000 barrels of ale and porter a year. Carling also produced lager and, at the time, employed about 100 men. Also, at that time, the company issued its first metal serving tray (Figure 7) and other advertising items that are eagerly sought by collectors today.

Carling sold the American rights for Carling (1898) to the Cleveland & Sandusky Brewing Company. Sandusky



Fig. 6

brewed and sold Carling products until 1911. Carling did not reappear in the USA until after “National Prohibition.”

“The opportunity for Carling’s reappearance on the American scene in 1933 was created by a combination of the repeal of Prohibition and the deepening of the Great Depression,” according to one historian (see bibliography).

The building that became Carling’s Cleveland Brewery was the home of the Peerless Motor Car Company, makers of the prestigious custom-build cars. In the depressed economy of the times there was little demand for expensive Peerless automobiles. Peerless management decided to



Fig. 7

take advantage of what they saw as the imminent rebirth of the long dormant American brewing industry. They exchanged 25,000 shares of Peerless stock, for the rights to the formulas for Carling brews, their identifying labels, and trademarks. The new firm was called the “Brewing Corporation of America.” The company tried at first to just brew Red Cap Ale (Figure 8), but sales were too slow to maintain the brewery. And sales didn’t climb until the introduction of Black Label (Figures 9, 10, 11) beer.

According to one beer historian (see bibliography), “The philosophy behind Black Label was to have a high quality lager that was available nationwide, but with a locally brewed budget price. The strategy worked and the next several decades led to rapid growth and



expansion for the brewery and for the Carling Black Label brand.”

After World War II, the parent firm, Canadian Brewers Limited, acquired the Brewing Corporation of America.

In 1946, it was decided to eliminate the Black Label brand and concentrate on the higher priced and more profitable Red Cap Ale. That was a bad decision. Sales dropped 40% in just two years. By 1947 the company was losing \$300,000 a month. The firm underwent a reorganization. By 1949 Carling sales reached 300,000 barrels per year which put the firm in 62nd place.

“Hey, Mabel! Black Label!”

Under new management, the Carling Black Label brand was re-introduced in 1950 and sales quickly rose 28% in one year and another 25% the next.

During the 1950s Carling Black Label featured an attractive blond beer-toting waitress named Mabel in a series of commercials. When a customer wanted a beer they cried “Hey, Mabel! Black Label!” Mabel the bartendress rarely spoke in the commercials but at the end of each spot she gave the TV viewers a friendly wink. Lang, Fisher, & Stashower created the advertising campaign in the late 1940s. Phil Davis wrote their ad jingle. A receptionist at a Cleveland television station was the first to play Mabel for a few months in 1950. Her name was Lucille Schroeder.

Jeanne Goodspeed, a New York actress and model, portrayed Mabel (Figures 12, & 13) beginning in 1951. However, in the mid-1950s, Goodspeed ended her career to become a mother and Carling Black Label people decided to animate the Mabel character but also thought it wise to insert images of Jeanne Goodspeed as Mabel for good measure. The ads ran successfully for almost twenty years. Finally, in 1970, a new actress was cast in the role, but soon after, the Mabel character faded into advertising history.

Carling was the first to use a woman



on television to attract the male beer-drinker. Carling used photographic techniques and beer-drinking situations for television commercials, and Mabel appeared in magazines and other print advertising (Figure 14).

The cornerstone of American TV advertising was (and largely still is) what experts call the “identifiable character” – Tony the Tiger, the Jolly Green Giant, Mr. Whipple, and many others. As indicated above, Mabel was among the earliest and certainly one of the most successful identifiable characters during the early years of television. Indeed, with Mabel leading the way, the Carling Brewing Company skyrocketed up the list of America’s largest brewers, from number 28 in 1951 to number 6 in 1957 when Carling sales hit 3,000,000 barrels for the first time in the company’s history.

In 1960, Carling became the fourth largest brewery in America, with sales of 4,822,075 barrels of beer.

1962 – Carling announced a new “continuous brewing process” and built a new plant in Ft. Worth, Texas to feature the system. The process did not work due to a single faulty piece of stainless pipe and the plant was closed after just a few months of operation. This special process was supposed to be more cost effective than brewing beer in batches. (Readers may remember reading in this magazine about a

similar attempt by Schlitz to speed up the brewing process that helped ruin the company by changing the taste of the beer – see bibliography.)

Sadly, the 1970s mark an era of very rapid decline and collapse of Carling. The company began to see sales slip. Anheuser-Busch and Miller Brewing Company started major cost cutting schemes, and heavy advertising promotions. They sponsored numerous products and events while at the same time slashing the prices of their beers. Carling had to cut prices to keep pace and ultimately cut profits to the point where Carling began to close or sell off breweries to try to stay financially afloat.

In 1976, Carling of Canada sold the American division, which in turn merged with the National Brewing Company of Baltimore and the resulting organization became “Carling-National Breweries.”

In 1979, the G. Heileman Brewing Company of LaCrosse, Wisconsin bought out Carling-National.

In 1991, heavily leveraged, G. Heileman filed for Chapter 11-bankruptcy protection and in 1994, was bought out by The Stroh Brewery of Detroit, Michigan.

While only selling a fraction of the beer that was sold in its heyday in the United States, Carling Black Label continues to have tremendous success in other countries.

EXCERPT: (edited) from “SCHLITZ – The Beer That made Milwaukee Famous” (see bibliography):

After World War II, in 1948, Joseph Schlitz Brewing Company requested that Anchor Hocking Glass Corporation (Lancaster, Ohio) submit sample beer bottles in “Royal Ruby Red ‘Anchor Glass.’” Four different samples were designed in 1949 and submitted to Schlitz.

The company wasn’t satisfied so three more designs were made and submitted early in 1950. Two of the last group submitted were selected and used to contain Schlitz beer. During the early 1950s Schlitz made three trial runs with the two Royal Ruby



It is interesting to note that at the height of Mabel’s popularity, in a clever TV spot for Labatt’s Beer, a young woman exits a tavern with a package under her arm. Wearing dark sunglasses and a scarf over her head, she scurries down the sidewalk, her face obscured by her coat collar. Much to her dismay, she is stopped by a man-on-the-street interviewer, complete with microphone and camera crew. Upon inquiry, the young woman reluctantly reveals that her package contains a six-pack of Labatt’s. The interviewer then asks, “Would you tell us your name?” The woman, as if relieved that her dark secret has been uncovered, removes her sunglasses dramatically, looks directly into the camera, and says, “Why, yes. I’m Mabel.” Of course, Labatt’s hadn’t lured away the real Mabel—merely a close facsimile.

bottles selected. In all, they ordered and used 50 million bottles – 21 million of the quarts and 29 million of the seven-ounce returnables. The experiments were failures because consumers didn’t respond positively to the unusual red glass packaging.

In 1961 the Carling Brewing Company (Cleveland, Ohio) bottled its Carling Black Label beer in “handy” -shaped twelve-ounce non-returnable bottles made of milk glass by the Libby Glass Company of Toledo, Ohio (Figure 15).

In response to Carling’s success with their milk glass bottle, in 1963 (thirteen years after the first test of red beer bottles), Schlitz again tested the market for Royal Ruby beer bottles by Anchor Hocking (see bibliography). They selected a “handy” -shaped twelve-ounce non-returnable bottle identical in construction (but not in color) to Carling’s 1961 milk glass bottle (Figure 16).

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Fig. 14



Fig. 15



Fig. 16