

Saratogas of the North

by Phil Culhane

In 1873, George E. Walton, M.D., wrote an essential reference book for today's Saratoga collector: *"The Mineral Springs of the United States and Canada."* Not only is it great as a shopping list, it also has a highly enlightening section with ads placed by the various Springs at the back of the book (which likely underwrote the printing costs). Since that time, Bernie Puckhaber has given us a book on the Springs of Saratoga, Jack Stecher has written of the Thruway Springs and Don Tucker has given us a wide-ranging guide covering almost all of the Springs that used Saratoga-type bottles. I would like to offer, for your consideration and enjoyment, the Northern Springs. Consider these Springs as the Canadian equivalents to Saratoga and its American brethren - the proprietors sure did. Fame by association? Probably.

Caledonia Springs

Caledonia Springs, located six miles in from the Ottawa River in eastern Ontario, must stand as the Granddaddy of them all as far as Canadian springs are concerned. The springs at Caledonia Springs share the same oral history as many other springs, both Canadian and American; the early literature is full of references to Canada's First Nations people (a.k.a. "Indians") using the springs for their healing qualities, and before them, animal tracks into prehistory. I can almost see the bunny rabbit on crutches dragging his wee body to the springs now!

Caledonia Springs is different from its early Canadian contemporaries (Caledonia Springs was first commercialized in the early 1830s) in one important way. Through the mists of time, we are left with a single marked bottle, but what a bottle it is. This iron-pontilled black glass quart bottle was blown in Bristol, United Kingdom, at the Ricketts Factory. It bears an applied seal that reads "Caledonia Springs / U. C." U.C. is the abbreviated form for Upper Canada, the name used for the present-day province of Ontario prior to 1841. To this date, this quart is still the only known Canadian

bottle with the "U.C." embossing, making it not only the King of Canadian Saratoga-styles, but also one of the reigning royalty of Canadian bottles, period. The bottle most likely dates from the period 1837-1840. It is fascinating to note that the proprietor, writing in 1841, states, "four thousand cases of a dozen bottles each have been forwarded to various parts." How many with applied seals, I have to wonder?

William Parker, an American, was the proprietor of the Springs from 1837 to 1846, and it is due entirely to his vision and tireless efforts that the Springs ever served more than local native peoples and ailing rabbits. In 1837, Parker invested a lot of money into clearing the land and building a fine hotel. Less than a month into the 1838 season, the hotel burnt to the ground. Not willing to give up on his dream, Parker held a lottery. Every ticket entitled the bearer to a lot at Caledonia Springs, with a few lucky souls winning the (rebuilt) hotel and even the Springs themselves. Of course, these few grand prizes were redeemable for instant cash from Parker. This effort netted him fresh investment capital, substantial publicity, and several hundred new property holders in the area who stood to benefit if the Springs flourished. The lottery worked so well that Parker held a second, with equal success.

Caledonia had four springs: Sulphur, Saline, Gas and Intermittent, as well as several hotels, a racetrack, a circular railroad for guests, and a glassworks.

Parker invested in building a bottle glassworks at the Springs in 1844, with the first samples on public display in Montreal in mid-September. Sadly, no known bottles or shards from the Caledonia Springs Glassworks have yet been found, nor has the site of the glassworks itself. The Caledonia Springs Glassworks may have produced glass through much of the 1840s, but no firm evidence has yet been uncovered. Digs at the Caledonia Springs site over the past three years have turned up black glass-covered kiln bricks, but that's another article.

The next known Caledonia Springs water bottle is an aqua blob-top pint from the 1890s. Clearly, tens of thousands of bottles were shipped from Caledonia Springs from 1841-1890, but in what sort of bottle? I hope that future digs will provide answers.



Above: Close-up of Caledonia Springs seal.
Right: Caledonia Springs, U.C. black glass, quart bottle.



Varenes

At Varenes, Quebec, a once-small village just east of Montreal on the St. Lawrence River, there was a botanical oddity noted by 18th century monks. Three species of flowers that needed salt water in their diet to survive were flourishing in one small area of the village, along the banks of the St. Lawrence. The next location these flowers were found was almost 250 miles closer to the ocean. The reason they survived? "La Saline," as the saline spring at Varenes would soon be named.

The springs at Varenes were commercialized circa 1840, with the requisite hotel and spa attributes being added. In 1859, the hotel, springs and all, was sold to the local curé, the parish priest, who promptly ceased the "ungodly acts" occurring there. He promptly moved in nuns, the elderly and orphans as tenants. In 1871, however, the curé sold the grounds, moving his charges closer to the parish church, and the new owner restored the spa to its former glory. One Quebec author, who has written extensively on the history of Varenes, claims that this "devil to god and back again" slant on the Varenes story is true, based on interviews with local elders and on the verbal folklore surrounding the curé and his religious philosophies.

To date, no marked bottles from the Varenes Springs have been found from the 1840-1859 period. The most fascinating reminders of the second era of Varenes are two cornflower blue round



Varenes Seltzer bottles, pint and quart.

bottom bottles, embossed "Varenes Seltzer / Varenes / Near Montreal." What's most stunning about this pair of bottles is that one of them is a quart. This bottle is the only round bottom quart I've ever seen, and after 30 years of dedicated collecting, that's saying something. The embossing is wonderful – with the duplication of "Varenes," as well as the directions "Near Montreal." My guess is that the third line was included as a form of advertising; as buyers in distant markets could not be counted on to know where Varenes was located. I'm hopeful that someone can fill me in on other quart round bottoms, hopefully cornflower blue ones, so that perhaps I can get a sense of where these bottles were made. Further research may help clear up the story

behind these bottles. For now, they stand as two exceptionally attractive Canadian Springs bottles. They aren't Saratoga-shaped, but then again, neither is the Eureka Springs bottle, and it's included in the Saratoga books.

Plantagenet/Carratraca

According to the 1873 book mentioned at the beginning of this article, the author believed that these two Springs, the Plantagenet Mineral Springs and the Carratraca Mineral Springs, were the same. In fact, they were not. They were, however, located within five miles of one another, and only about ten miles away from Caledonia Springs, mentioned before.

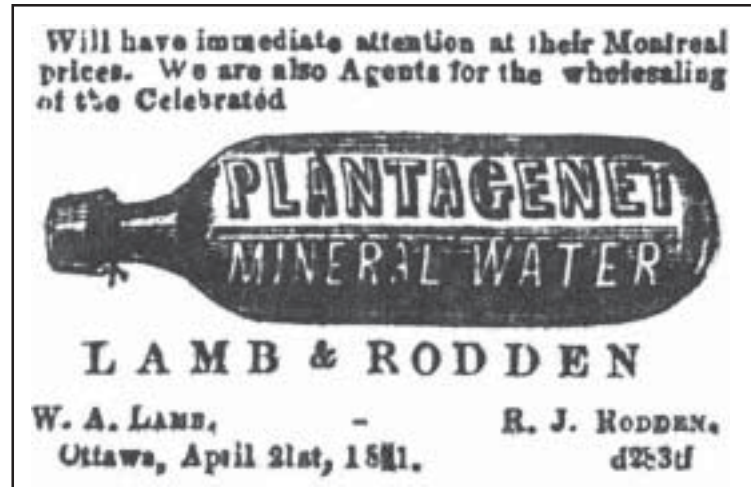
Five Hundred Miles Away From Home

Every so often, I'll find out about a fantastic Canadian bottle hiding in an American collection, many, hundreds of miles from where it was first produced, or at least sold with contents. A great number of our early coloured bottles, pontils and bitters were purchased by American collectors while holidaying in Canada during the 1950s and 1960s, as Americans took up bottle collecting long before Canadians did. Also, Americans occasionally bought Canadian bottles (with contents) back in the 1800s, and brought them home, wherever home might be. These bottles sometimes show up in dump digs south of the border.

The quart Varenes shown in this article is one of two that were dug in a hotel dump in South Carolina, if you can believe it. When I received a letter from an American collector with a photo of the quart Varenes, I could only think that something had "happened" to the photo: I had owned a pint Varenes for over fifteen years; as he hadn't mentioned the bottle as a quart, I could only see that the bottle was too short and fat, and the embossing too tall and thin, for the photo to be correct. It took several E-mail exchanges as well as his actually mailing me an image of the quart Varenes next to a standard aqua pint round bottom for the fact to compute in my skull: this was a very different bottle! Months of chatting back and forth, and I can happily say that the quart and pint now sit together on my shelf. If you know where the second Varenes quart is, or if you have any other neat Canadian bottles on your shelves, I'd love to hear about them – you may have something on your back shelf that we don't even know about up here.

According to their literature, “the Plantagenet spring water was first introduced to public notice in 1832.” The mandatory apocryphal tale is included; in this case referring to 1832 as being “a memorable year for the province. It was devastated by that most terrible of Divine inflictions, the Asiatic cholera, the city of Montreal having been actually decimated.” A lumber merchant by the name of Cameron used the Plantagenet waters, and induced friends and employees to use it as well. The result? Naturally: “this singular fact is recorded, that of all those who used the water and were attacked by the cholera, none died, while of all those who refused the water none recovered.” With an introduction like that, how could you help but love Plantagenet Mineral Springs water?

Merchants from as far away as Ottawa (80 miles) were advertising Plantagenet Waters as early as the late 1840s, available for sale in bottles in their stores. In the summer of 1871, an ad ran daily in the Ottawa Citizen, with an image of a round-bottomed bottle boldly marked “Plantagenet Mineral Water.” Given the



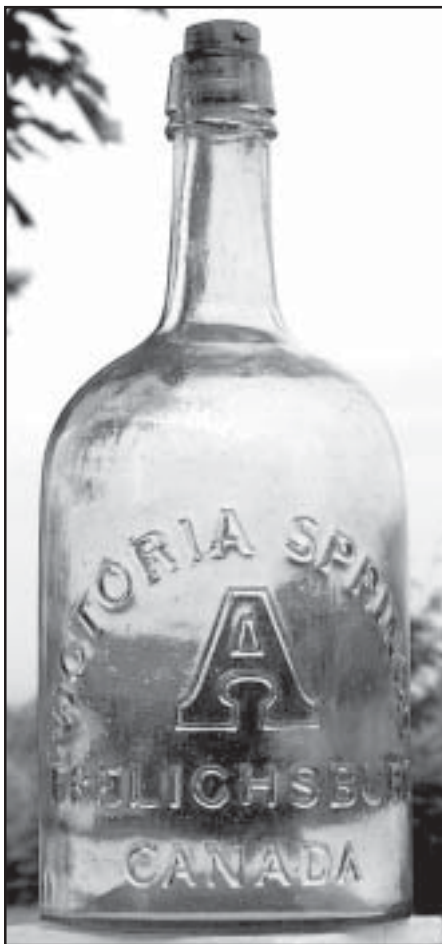
Plantagenet Mineral Springs bottle (from newspaper advertisement).

existence of the two Varennes bottles, it seems quite natural that the image in the newspaper advertisements represented an actual embossed Plantagenet bottle, not just a bit of advertising. However, for all that, no bottles have yet been found – unless they too are in American collections.

Carratraca Mineral Springs were located only a few miles west of the Plantagenet Springs, and their 1870s booklet on the place is quite humorous. In addition to comparing the qualities of Carratraca’s waters to those of the best-known American spas, they also claim it to be “superior to all waters from any other Plantagenet Springs.” Plantagenet being a hamlet of some 900 souls at the best of times, most of them rural farmers, the humor becomes readily apparent. Despite their claims of Carratraca Waters being shipped everywhere, no known examples of Carratraca bottles have come to light either.

Frelighsburg

The only Canadian Saratoga-style bottle, and the only one that has been widely known for the past several decades, comes from the Springs at Frelighsburg, in the Eastern Townships of Quebec, just above Vermont (Tucker’s M-56). The Victoria Springs bottle is one of the few early aqua Saratoga-style bottles, and is quite scarce – or is it? A bottle-collecting friend tells me of someone who, in the 1960s, had over 100 Victoria Springs bottles: he used them to bottle and sell maple syrup! If nothing else, there is a reason to dig 1960s era dumps in the Eastern Townships – who knows what might come up?



Victoria Spring, Frelighsburg quart.

Nowadays, the Victoria Springs site is lost to history. An article written on the Springs in the 1960s notes that, by that time, the Springs site was completely lost and forgotten, that no trace of the Springs existed, and that it was anyone’s guess to within three or four miles where the Springs may have been located.

Victoria Springs was an Acid spring, as noted by the capital A on the bottle, as well as the chemical analysis of the waters done in the 1860s when the Springs were first opened. For the visitors, “a neat summer house has been erected over the spring. A broad carriage road leads directly to the spring and bathing house, and the grounds have been laid out in a tasty manner.” Despite the fact that the literature goes on to state, “the Company will at an early date erect a large house for the accommodation of visitors,” no hotel was ever built there, and the popularity of the Victoria Springs of Frelighsburg, Quebec was rather short-lived. The Victoria Springs Company was incorporated in 1868, with \$25,000 in Capital Stock, but apparently, that was not enough to build a lasting reputation.

St. Leon

Another Canadian spring that can lay claim to a Saratoga-style bottle, although not technically a Canadian spring bottle, is the St. Leon Mineral Spring in Quebec (Tucker’s M-41). I am sure I’ve seen a history of this bottle written up in a small format issue of *Antique Bottle and Glass Collector*, though I haven’t been able to find that issue in months of looking. The Saratoga-style bottle was used by Earl W. Johnson, 27 Congress St., Boston, Massachusetts. I can only presume



St. Leon quart
Photo supplied by Don Tucker

Johnson had the waters shipped to him in barrels and that he bottled them in Boston for resale.

In later years (c. 1890s-1900s), St Leon used a tall half-gallon lightning closure bottle with a fabulous image of a lion. Given the size of the bottle, the lion's face is almost 5" tall, and on the best-blown examples, the lion looks quite majestic. By that time, however, the company's head office had moved to Toronto, Ontario.

St. Catharines

The last Canadian spring with a great bottle available has to be the St. Catharines mineral spring. The St.

Catharines salt springs were discovered in 1816, and apparently, a bottling plant was opened in 1847 to market the mineral water to the world. There is only one bottle left that may relate back to this firm, marked "St Catharines / Mineral Water / G. L. Mather Agent / Astor House / New York". The bottle is an olive green whiskey type cylinder, quart-sized, and likely dates c. 1870. This bottle is also quite rare. Whether the bottle's embossing relates directly to the springs in St. Catharines, Ontario is something I do not know. I hope that future research will add more knowledge to this bottle's story.

Other Canadian Springs

There are a small number of newer (late 19th century) Canadian springs for which no bottles or only newer c. 1900 crown stopper bottles are known. In his 1873 book, Walton mentions a sulphur spring and hotel located at Sandwich (Windsor), Ontario, for which I've never seen a bottle. Crown stoppered spring water bottles are known from St. David's Mountain (near Niagara Falls, Ontario), as well as Russell Lithia Springs from Clarence Creek (a few miles from Caledonia Springs and Plantagenet, in Eastern Ontario).

Summary

For being the second-largest country in the world, Canada's dearth of Spring water bottles probably points more to the country's tiny population, rather than any lack of mineral springs in the country. Eastern Ontario is rich in springs, with Caledonia Springs claiming four different types of springs, and numerous other springs located in other towns nearby. There were several springs located throughout Quebec, as well as several in Alberta and British Columbia. These latter provinces were so sparsely populated up until the 20th century that

by the time any springs had been found, the remarkable curative powers of mineral spring water had been significantly toned down. Overall, the selection of bottles is very small and they are all classified as "rare", but they do exist – the Northern Springs.

About the Author: Phil Culhane has collected bottles for thirty years. He has co-authored two books, *Transfer Printed Ginger Beers of Canada* and *Primitive Stoneware Bottles of Canada*, and continues to publish *Canadian Bottle and Stoneware Collector* magazine. Phil can be reached at pculhane@magma.ca, 102 Abbeyhill Drive, Nepean, Ontario, Canada K2L 1H2. The magazine's web site is www.CBandSC.com. Phil is always interested in hearing about Canadian bottles in American collections.

Wanted: Interesting bottles and stoneware from QUEBEC – medicines, whisky flasks, spring waters, ginger beers, sodas, etc. etc. etc. Anything interesting and/or unusual and/or colourful. Phil Culhane – phil@canadianbottles.com. (613) 831-7749



St Catharines / Mineral Water / G. L. Mather Agent / Astor House / New York bottle.



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