

WESTERN SARATOGAS AND THE PACIFIC CONGRESS SPRINGS

by Bryan Grapentine and Jeff Wichmann - Photos by Larry Grapentine

MINERAL WATER BOTTLE HISTORY

Natural mineral waters were often carbonated by nature and have dissolved appreciable amounts of salts and, in some

cases, gas from the rocks and soil into their underground rivers. These natural waters were considered to have medicinal properties even in the earliest days of

Greece and Rome. In Europe in the late 1700s it became fashionable to visit these springs and to drink and or bathe in them.

In America, the spas were less elaborate but considered the most fashionable resorts in the land and a definite accessory to the social life of the times. In addition to a spring, these resorts featured parks, hotels, gambling, and horse racing. Only the very rich could afford to frequent these resorts, but there was a demand by the average citizen for these waters.

During the period of 1828 to 1889, the mineral waters from approximately 30 springs in Saratoga County, New York were bottled and sold around the world. The distinctive bottle design now known as Saratoga-type was designed and manufactured at the Mt. Vernon Glass Works of Mt. Vernon, N.Y., and were used at the spring water bottling works in Saratoga Springs.

This style bottle was later used by mineral springs across the United States. These bottles were produced in pint and quart sizes, mostly in shades of green but also in amber and aqua. Bottles were made sturdy to absorb the pressure of the contents, shipping and rough handling.

SARATOGA SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

"Taking the waters" was fashionable and supposedly healthful in Saratoga, N.Y.

Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

When bubbling mineral water springs proved to contain the same chemical ingredients as those found at one of the larger fountains in Saratoga, N.Y., it's understandable that there became a Saratoga, California. Its general location is south of San Francisco and west of San Jose.

The area voted to name the town Saratoga and the post office name was changed in 1865. Previous names included Tollgate, McCarthysville and Bank Mills.

Darius Ogden Mills, the West's outstanding banker, and Alvina Hayward, a Mining Tycoon, formed a corporation and purchased 720 acres of Congress Springs from George Cross, a pioneer, for \$2,000 in 1865. The carbonated water was bottled and sold for its medicinal qualities and invigorating flavor.

Mills and Hayward sold stock to finance the building of a public resort type 14-room hotel. The spa appealed especially to nature lovers.

In 1872 Lewis Sage bought the entire resort for \$15,000 and later spent \$15,000 more on improvements. Under Sage's management the resort had its greatest popularity. Their dairy, orchard and vineyard furnished milk, butter, fruit and wine for the hotel's tables. Sage advertised the baths, now called Pacific Congress Springs as efficacious in cutaneous diseases and rheumatic afflictions. The waters, similar to Congress Springs, N.Y., were tonic, purgative, diuretic alternatives – a cure-all for man's diseases and afflictions.

Congress Springs had its ups and downs over the years. In 1903 a fire destroyed the hotel. The hotel was never rebuilt and by the mid-30s, the springs were closed to the public.

Pacific Congress Waters were dug in the San Francisco dig of 1998. Here's an account by Jeff Wichmann.

As I sat staring in disbelief I was thinking, I can't feel my legs? I had been kneeling so long. The scene that was unfolding in front of me was one of the most amazing sights I'd ever seen (in the bottle world anyway). I mean I've been to a World's Fair, a picnic and a rodeo and I'd never seen anything like this. A friend and bottle digger was in a hole in the now famous San Francisco Dig of 1998, pulling one Pacific Congress Water Springs out

after the other. Bright green, olive, yellow amber, 7-Up green; I needed a drink.

That memorable scene was one of many that I witnessed at the Bryant street dig in February of that year. Although many of the most exciting moments of the dig were not experienced by me (although I did find a nice Crystal Soda Water in my first 20 minutes) the cache of Pacific Congress Waters was one of the most astonishing single hole digs I've ever seen.

The dump was not really a dump at all but rather a bottle-recycling site from a much earlier age. You could tell that even if it wasn't written on the fire map. The bottles found were all oddballs, misfits that weren't the regular shape of a generic bottle, a whiskey or soda for instance. In other words, non-reusable. Instead there were things like the Pacific Congress Springs, some without the running deer and some with, too distinct to re-use. Everyone has most likely heard about the Bryant's Stomach Bitters that our auction house sold for nearly \$70,000, but there were others. Cassin's Stomach Bitters, a new find in the name of AT&Co., the beautiful and elusive V. Squarza, the incredibly wonderful Dr. Parker's Indian Tla-Quillaugh's and many, many more. All rare, with San Francisco heritage, exotic and mostly very valuable.

In fact, before the big dig, there were but a dozen or so of this wonderful bottle. There are a few variants actually; the example that is just embossed Pacific Congress Springs, the running deer variant and the running deer that also has the Sage's name on the reverse. The first Pacific Congress Springs bottles come in aqua, ice blue, cobalt blue and black glass. All shades were found in the S.F. dig. The running deer versions come generally in bright yellowish green, olive and various shades of the former.

No doubt there'll be collectors out there that have seen them in other colors but generally that's what I've seen.

We've sold a number of the variants found in San Francisco and a few others over the years. The first we offered was a black-glass example from the Bob West collection. At the time there were only two known. Now, maybe there are four. All these are much older than the running deer, we believe. Since the company started around 1865, I believe the bottles without the deer began then. By 1872, Sage had bought the company out and that's probably around the time he had his name embossed on the back.

CONGRESS SPRINGS BOTTLES

The bottles are pint-sized Saratoga-shaped bottles most likely made at the San Francisco Glass Works in San Francisco. Only three different bottle styles are known but many color variants exist.

The oldest is on the left in **Figure 1**. The bottle has some crudity and a slightly drippy blob top. This variant comes in ice blue, cobalt blue, greens, and black glass. Before the big dig, two of the black glass color were known, now there are perhaps four [**Figure 4**]. These bottles were likely made at the original Pacific Glass Works in 1865.

The middle bottle was used next and has a top similar to the New York Saratogas. The reverse side has an attractive picture of a running deer [see **Figure 2 and 3**]. There are not many pictorial mineral water bottles, perhaps any with an animal.

The final bottle used at the springs was the SAGE'S with the same embossment as the earlier bottle on the reverse side. The lip finish is a little different with a more rounded lower collar. Both running deer variants come in yellow green, medium emerald various shades of green and olive and everything in between. They were probably made at the San Francisco Glass Works between 1865 and the 1870s.

It is estimated that there are approximately 30 or so of the Pacific Congress Water

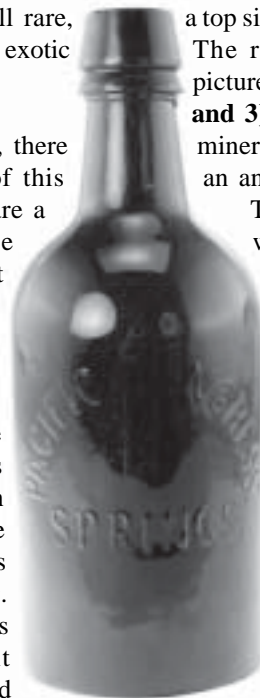
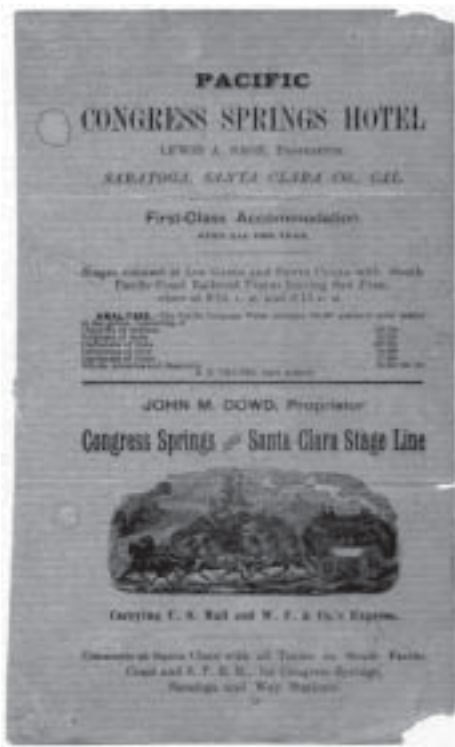


Figure 4

bottles known, in any condition and variant. It is interesting to note that many, at least half of the known examples have chips on the lip, this being done with the help of an ice pick. The corks on these wide lipped bottles must have been tough to retrieve. Most recent sales have been via American Bottle Auctions, formerly Pacific Glass Auctions. Prices for undamaged bottles ranged from \$750 to \$4000 plus buyer's fee. Unfortunately, there are not enough of these desirable attractive bottles to go around

OTHER PACIFIC CONGRESS SPRINGS RELATED BOTTLES

Blob top type soda bottles were also used to bottle Pacific Congress water. At least three variants are listed in Markota's book, *Western Blob Top Soda and Mineral Water Bottles*. PACIFIC/CONGRESS/WATER (Sacramento), PACIFIC CONGRESS WATER w/running deer on the reverse (S.F.), and SAGE'S/PACIFIC/CONGRESS/WATER (S.F.)with a deer on the reverse. The water was likely shipped in bulk and bottled in San Francisco and Sacramento. Note that these bottles are embossed "WATER" and not "SPRINGS."



REFERENCES

Saratogas by Bernhard C. Puckhaber.
Western Blob Top Soda and Mineral Water Bottles by Peck and Audie Markota.
Collector's Guide to the Saratoga-type Mineral Water Bottles by Donald Tucker.
 Article in the *Los Gatos Weekly-Times*.