



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 6

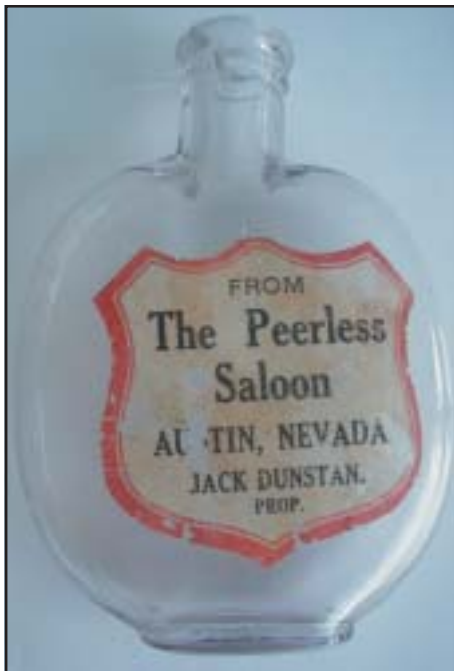


Figure 7



Figure 9



< Figure 10



Grouping of Texas flasks. >

Western Flasks

by Ralph Van Brocklin

For some time I have considered joining my friends who were kind and responded to my appeals for articles and/or columns for *Bottles and Extras*. Looking back through a packet of photographs from the Auburn, California, show last year I found the motivation to pen at least an inaugural attempt at a column on Western flasks. Whether it will be a quarterly effort or only a sporadic addition to these pages remains to be seen. But, look for a format that blends some information on recent finds, productive digs, eBay offerings and show reports.

Found in the gold country of California, and presented for my camera by Charlie Holt, was a Wormser Brothers flask from San Francisco. A common flask with the vertical embossing WORMSER BROS. / SAN FRANCISCO, when found it was securely wrapped in a leather carrying pouch [Figure 1]. Slicing open the pouch to remove the bottle [Figure 2], a wonderfully bright and significant label was found [Figure 3]. Appropriately named EUREKA WHISKEY for an early California slogan (“I Have Found It” — **I wish that I had found it!**) the label indicates that it was “PUT UP BY WORMSER BROS., S.F.” and it sports the seal of California. Absolutely a fantastic label and probably the most significant new Western flask find since the mystery of what the pinged out embossing on the amber

shoofly J.H. CUTTER / OLD BOURBON / A.P. HOTALING & CO / OOOOOOO represented was solved. Speculation as to what this represented was answered when a pair of Washington State diggers turned up one where SOLE AGENTS was embossed where the typical slugged out area is. (Richard Siri suggests that the wording “Sole Agents” was removed following the 1894 purchase of the rights to the Cutter brand in the State of Oregon to the Rothchild Brothers.)

The time frame for the labeled Wormser flask is described by John Thomas in *Whiskey Bottles of the Old West* as 1867-1872. He elaborates that a previous labeled example was found which advertises “Golden Sheaf Whiskey” and indicates that it “portrayed a woman standing in a wheat field holding a sheaf of wheat. Underneath this picture was written “Wormser Bros. Cor. Front & California Sts, S.F.” Quite amazing how occasionally one of these labels will survive the years. The one I have pictured for you... bright as the day it was applied to the bottle!

The Reno show did not result in any items quite as remarkable, but there were a smattering of good flasks on sales tables—some for sale and some to entice. Among the items noted were a couple of Phoenix Bourbon (no, not the Hollister variants!) pints in the \$400-500 range and two or three of the vertical Wormser Bros. flasks

(sans labels). Several varieties of flasks from Lilienthal and Company were to be found, including a couple of tool top Lilienthal Distillers strap-sided half pints (at \$250-500) and a sharply embossed High SF union oval. The Lilienthals on my table (a “cognac”-style and a couple of “teardrops”) went home with me, but a AAA Old Valley [Figure 4], JF Cutter Star & Shield and large and small circle Millers found their way from my collection into the Frank Ritz collection.

Probably the nicest amber flasks in the show were at Richard Siri’s table. Included in his offerings were a mint Jesse Moore flask at \$9500.00 (ex- Elvin Loader and Van Brocklin collections) and a nice yellow-amber knife-edge Fleckenstein and Mayer from Portland. The flask which teased all of us who covet the Western flasks was a golden-amber with a hint of olive OLD BOURBON / CASTLE / WHISKEY / F. CHEVALIER & CO / SOLE AGENTS. This flask is another of the early and appealingly rare San Francisco bottles, reported by John Thomas to be from the 1875-80 time period. This particular example was one of which I was previously unaware, and I am unable to provide any details regarding whether it was recently dug or out of someone’s collection. Overall,

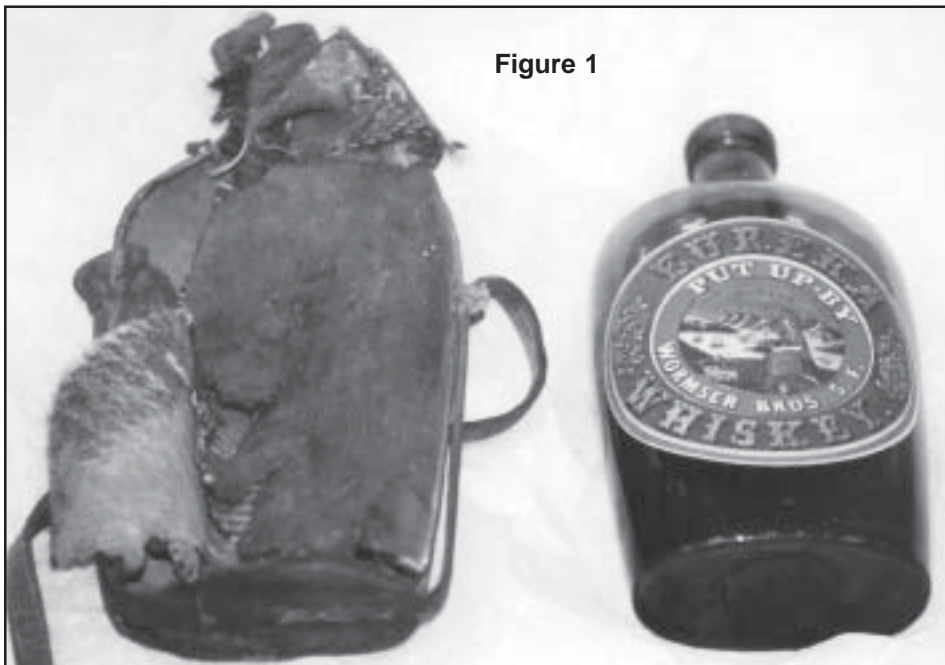


Figure 1



Figure 2

I know very little about it beyond that it was a superior example of the bottle and... at the time of the close of the show a deal was still in the works for it.

Clear pumpkinseeds and coffins/shooflies were in short supply at this show. Happily, a couple of the more prolific of the Western diggers had been having some luck in the past few months and offered a few items up!

On the table of Lane Puckett (now of Virginia City—previously Grass Valley) was a WW WARD / GROTTO / MARYSVILLE pumpkinseed and a pint and half-pint MOUNTAIN BROOK / WHISKEY / JOHN L. STEWARD / MARYSVILLE / CAL. coffin [Figure 5], indicating that he is still finding some productive holes in Marysville. He advised that he had recently come up with another Clinch Bros Grass Valley coffin flask, as well.

John Shuler made the show for me by giving me the opportunity to buy a pint and half-pint example of a clear coffin flask embossed: CASEY & CRONAN / 50 K ST / SACRAMENTO. I had previously only seen this flask in the half-pint size, the lone example being in the possession of Peck Markota. As excited as I was to obtain these two bottles, I really felt for one of my friends from Sacramento, George Wagoner. I know that he was sick watching me buy these two bottles right in front of

him. One of the few things I **don't** like about collecting... Keep your chin up, George— John tells me there is yet digging to be done on this site. Maybe he and David will surprise you with a phone call one of these days!

A bottle that would probably hold little appeal to anyone but me was a label-only pint pumpkinseed that I purchased from Angelo Torre. Containing J. H. Cutter whiskey, the merchant offering it was A. Wideman from Gonzales, California [Figure 6]. As a Salinas, California, native I am thrilled to have added a flask from a tiny town about eight miles from where my parents live and 15 miles from where I grew up. It represents only the second bottle I have seen from the town, the other an embossed druggist bottle embossed L. T. HERNDON / PHARMACIST / GONZALES, CAL.

Other flasks available through the show included offerings from Bruce Silva (primarily Berges and Garrissere bottles from Salinas City — now, where did an Oregon dealer get those? Come on Bruce, that's **my backyard!**) and Jim Dennis, both Western whiskey bottle and shotglass dealers. Jim's offerings included a number of clear Oregon flasks, including a pair of nice clean F. Zimmerman pumpkinseeds from Portland. Two of the Sacramento pumpkinseeds put out by J.H. Powers and a cracked F.W. Koch, Denver, half-pint

fancy-based shoofly were also available.

The treat of the show was the opportunity to see a San Francisco flask I had only previously heard about but never had the opportunity to hold and peruse. Clear in coloration and pontiled (unique in the Western flask collecting), the bottle is embossed Wm T COLEMAN / (star) / SAN FRANCISCO. Bill Ham, in his update of John Thomas' book, notes that William Tell Coleman was born in Kentucky in 1824, coming to California in 1849. He is noted as a merchant in 1850 and in subsequent directories encompassing 1854 and 1856, but is no longer found in the listings for 1859. Involved in Vigilance Committees in California, he was apparently quite a colorful fellow. Ham attributes this flask to the 1850-56 period and indicates that there are only three known examples.

Shown, too, were two labeled flasks from Nevada procured by Bob Ferraro on his way up to the show. The first, an amber flat flask, has a blue background on a label which reads "Cunningham Whisky / Choice Old Kentucky Handmade / Whisky / Bottled Expressly for "The Stone House" / B. Sciuchetti / Battle Mountain, / Nev. Bob has promised me some additional information on the Stone House, which apparently stood a lonely vigil in the desert these many years until recently razed by the mining company which owns the land. The second (which really got me going) was a half-pint pumpkinseed flask labeled From / The Peerless / Saloon / Austin, Nevada / Jack Dunstan / Prop. [Figure 7] New finds and, for the Nevada collector, fantastic additions!!!

No Reno show is complete without a trip to Fred Kille's to enjoy the food and spirits at his yearly open house and to oogle all of the bottles. For the collector of Western fifths, flasks and bitters, this is a treat not to be missed. New additions to Fred's shelves included a Dr. Henley's Wild Grape Root IXL Bitters square with nice color and whittle (okay, so it's not a flask!) and for the gun lovers reading this, an early Colt pistol. I always like to visit all of the nice flasks on his shelves that I once owned! And, I often wonder what possessed me to sell them to him! He still gloats about acquiring my applied top California Street Livingston and pint Kane, O'Leary and Co union ovals from me. Fred's wife, Dee, put on a great meal for all of us, and a really pleasant visit and evening of talking bottles and digging was enjoyed by about 20 guests.

The eBay offerings over the past few

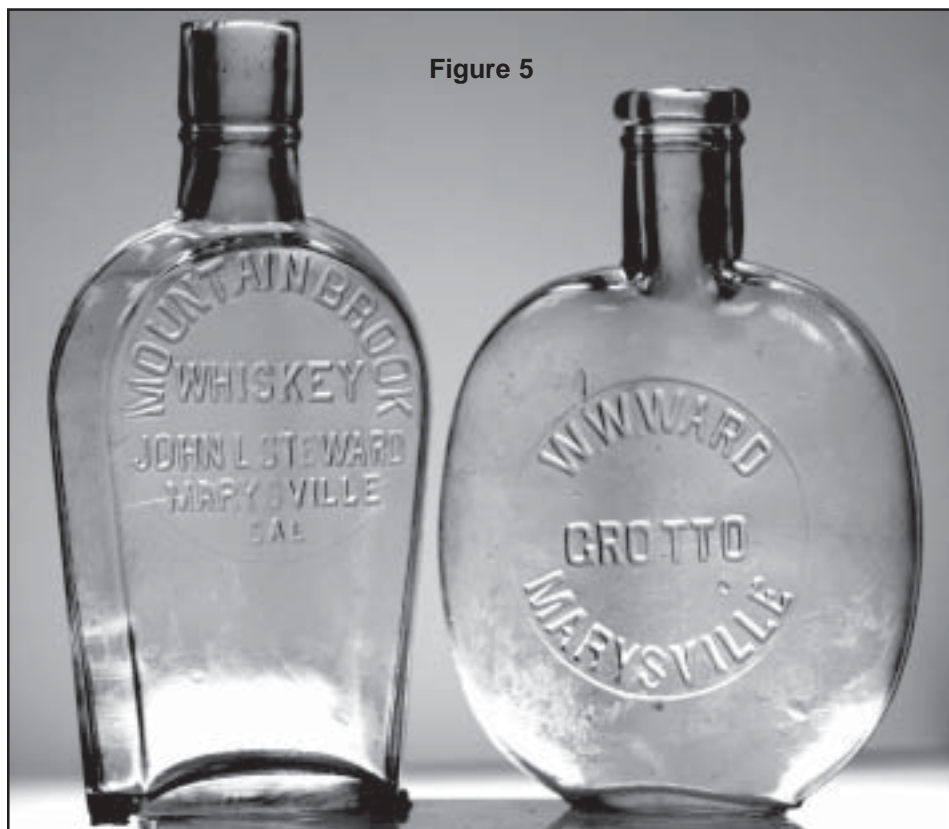


Figure 5

months have been quite interesting. In February I came home to a listing of Texas flasks that made my jaw drop. Many have speculated that these flasks were at least a portion of the Bryant collection, but the seller, Ken Cromer, declined to comment. Included in that listing were:

- Red Light Saloon, Brownsville fancy-based shoofly
- Cattle Exchange Saloon, Nacona strap-side
- The Snake, Thurber strap-side
- Ruby Café, Houston strap-side
- Senate Saloon, Wichita Falls strap-side
- Crown bar, Fort Worth strap-side
- Silver Eagle Saloon, Terrell strap-side

And the bottle that corralled my attention, a half-pint pumpkinseed embossed "A. SHOLZ'S / PALM GARDEN / SALOON / SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS [Figure 8]. I spent the evening manipulating my finances and my bills to figure a way to chase **all** of them only to check after work the next day and find that all auctions had been closed early. Bummer! If nothing else, it would have been very interesting to see what they all closed at.

I was fortunate to be able to purchase half a dozen of his other "Saloon"-embossed straps and was really looking forward to placing a flask I had only heard rumored to exist on my shelf, the Neff and Duff Iron Front coffin with embossed longhorns head. Alas, it too eluded me when it was a casualty to the cleaning process. A sick seller and an equally sick buyer who was so looking forward to placing this flask next to my Iron Front pumpkinseed.

Other flasks offered by this gentleman [Figure 9] were quart strapsides as follows:

- Aqua W.D. Ingram Corsicana, Texas (\$337.00)
- Amber Jacobs & Co Henderson, Texas (\$560.00)
- Amber I. Jacobs Tyler, Texas (\$510.00)

I will try to add a few more photographs of Texas flasks in my next column, as most of these are bottles one never gets to see. My thanks to Ken for making these photographs available!

In the coastal amber flask area, there were some good offerings, including a mint Old Bourbon Castle Whiskey (no bid at

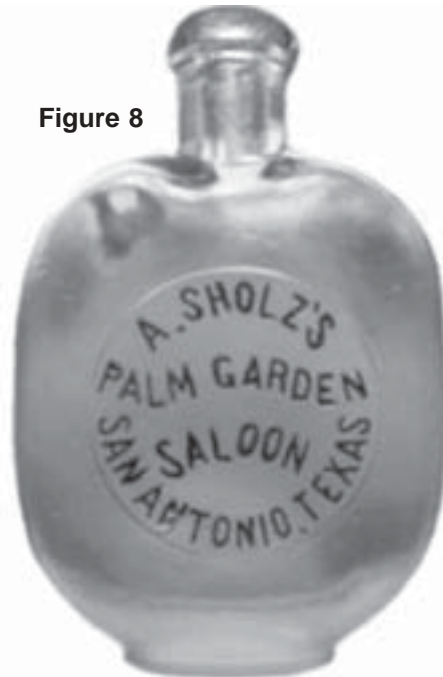
\$8500.00) and a highly whittled variegated amber AAA Old Valley Whiskey that reached \$1300.00, but failed to meet the sellers reserve. The fact that neither of these sold was a bit of a surprise to me, as both are bottles I had previously owned and both were choice bottles. I will be happy to forward the name of any interested reader to the respective owners, should you have interest.

Other early amber flasks sold included two vertical Wormser Bros, an amber example selling for \$350.00 while the lighter example on realized \$229.00. A stained amber flask embossed C P MOORMAN / ONLY / MANUF'R OF / J H CUTTER / OLD BOURBON / A.P. HOTALING & CO / SOLE AGENTS / S.F. [Figure 10] garnered a bid of \$408.00 and a large circle Millers Extra in amber made it to \$878.00. A diminutive bottle that is in the "cognac"-style and base-embossed E.M. & Co (E. Martin & Co) sold for \$27.00 in April.

The clear, amber and aqua flat and miscellaneous-style flasks have been well represented on eBay in the last few months, with offerings of some nice Washington and Montana flasks by David Bethman and Marc Lutsko through their online auctions under "thebottlevault." Included in their auctions have been a clear half-pint tooled top THE PLACER HOTEL / HELENA, MONT. which reached a bid of \$41.00, despite a flash and some rare Washington flasks that included

- ½-pint clear tooled top THE HOFFMAN / HOFFMAN / AND / CARTER / SOUTH

Figure 8



BEND, WASH. (\$79.00)

- ½ pint clear tooled top THE / ALBERTA CAFÉ / SPENCE THOMSON / PROP / 922 1st AVENUE / SEATTLE, WASH (Washington-style) (\$129.00)

- ½ pint clear tooled top THE BROOK / MONSANTO, WASH. (\$38.00)

- ½ pint clear tooled top THE FASHION / MAYBERRY BROS / ABERDEEN, WASH (\$113.00)

- pint clear tooled top THE FASHION / MAYBERRY BROS / ABERDEEN, WASH (\$66.00)

- ½ pint clear ring top NEUBERT & COOPER / OLYMPIC CLUB / SOUTH BEND, WASH. (Olympia-style) (58.00 with hairline fracture)

- ½ pint clear ring top JOHN KREMER / WALLA WALLA / WASH. (Olympia-style) (\$68.00 with 2" crack in base)

Further Washington offerings included a leather-covered flask from the Schlitz Bar in Hoquiam that ended at \$139.00 and a ½ pint threaded flask embossed HOTEL DONNELLY / TACOMA which closed at \$27.00. Interestingly, the Hotel Donnelly produced one of the few sample whiskey flasks from the West.

The number of Washington state flasks offered is unusual and, more frequently, the flat flasks that show up on eBay come from California. Several different ones from California were offered, including a pair of rare amber half pint threaded flasks from Willits. Embossed BARNEY SCHOW / WHOLESALE / & / RETAIL / WINES & LIQUORS / WILLITS, CAL., the initial offering reached \$128.00 while failing to meet reserve and the second sold at \$99.99. An equally rare amber half pint tooled top flask embossed P.H. LOINAZ / BARREL HOUSE / FRESNO, CAL. was a steal at the opening bid of \$49.99. Others in this style included:

Los Angeles

- pint aqua threaded KIEFER & CO / LOS ANGELES, CAL. (\$15.00)

- ½ pint amber tooled top JOS MELCZER & CO / WHOLESALE / WINE & LIQUOR / MERCHANTS / LOS ANGELES, CAL. (\$20.50)

San Francisco

- ½ pint clear threaded BALKE BROS / THE EDDY / EDDY & FILMORE (\$27.00)

- ½ pint clear threaded FLEMER & GRAUFFEL / 1599 / HAIGHT ST / S.F. COR CLAYTON (\$131.50)
- ½ pint amber threaded THE JUSTIN LIQUOR CO / 2786 MISSION ST / S.F. CAL. (\$52.00)

Rounding out the flat flasks was a "saloon" embossed half pint from Needles, California. A number of these were dug along with flasks from Murphy-Briggs Co, Needles, in the early to mid-1990s. Selling at that time for around \$65.00, these flasks have apparently come into their own, largely on the basis of containing the word "saloon". They are embossed: NEEDLES SALOON / M. B. & CO. / NEEDLES, CAL.

In my opinion, collecting the flat and miscellaneous style flasks represents one of the real bargain areas of collecting left in the West. There are several hundred possible flasks to acquire, ranging from easily available to extremely rare, and they remain affordable. Although there are a considerably smaller overall number of the coffin and shoofly style of flasks, they represent a similar bargain in collecting, at least for the Coastal states. A few have broken out and begun to command much better, including some from smaller

communities and the handful that have pictures on them. Examples offered recently which have done well include:

- ½ pint clear coffin R.R. O'BRIEN / THE MODEL / 543 4th ST / SANTA ROSA, CAL. (\$280.00) [Figure 11]
- ½ pint clear coffin H. J. WOOLACOTT / FINE / LIQUORS / LOS ANGELES, CAL. (\$300.00, private sale) [Figure 11]
- pint clear coffin THE SENATE / HENDRIX & SHARKEY / WINES & LIQUORS / OROVILLE, CAL. (\$362.00)
- ½ pint aqua shoofly LIBERTY BELL / (bell) / WHISKEY / M. NEWMAN & CO / S.F., CAL. (\$310.00)

Among the more common flasks, the prices remain appealing for the collector on a limited budget. A basket-based, threaded half-pint shoofly from my hometown, BERGES & GARRISSERE / WHOLESALE / WINE & LIQUOR / MERCHANTS / SALINAS CITY [Figure 12] realized \$61.00, while one of the several variants of pint shooflies associated with the Goldberg, Bowen and Lebenbaum firms embossed GOLDBERG, BOWEN / & CO / SAN FRANCISCO / OAKLAND / WINE



Figure 12

MERCHANTS topped out at \$45.00. Interestingly, not all of this firm's flasks are common, a topic I hope to cover in a future column.

The pumpkinseed flasks have always been the darlings of those who collect Western clear flasks. For style and variety I certainly love them and several of my collecting buddies will echo that same verse. Among the pumpkinseed flasks offered was a choice Washington, pint embossed THE TACOMA / FRITZ REBOTSKI / PROP. / HOQUIAM, WASH. [Figure 13]. This bottle closed out at about the level I have usually seen these available at - \$305.00. Additional pumpkinseeds offered included three examples from San Francisco:

- Pint HILBERT BROS / WHOLESALE LIQUOR DEALERS / SAN FRANCISCO, CAL (one at \$142.00 and another with a slight lip bruise at \$200.00)
- Pint CALEY & ROEDER / DEL MONTE / No. 1 GRANT AVE / SAN FRANCISCO (a rare bottle that commanded \$305.00 despite a lip bruise)
- ½ pint THE HOFFMAN / LUNCH / AND / WINE ROOMS / S.W. COR MARKET & SECONDS STS / W. J. SULLIVAN / PROP. / S.F. [Figure 13] (This flask realized only \$160, partly due to some damage and probably also

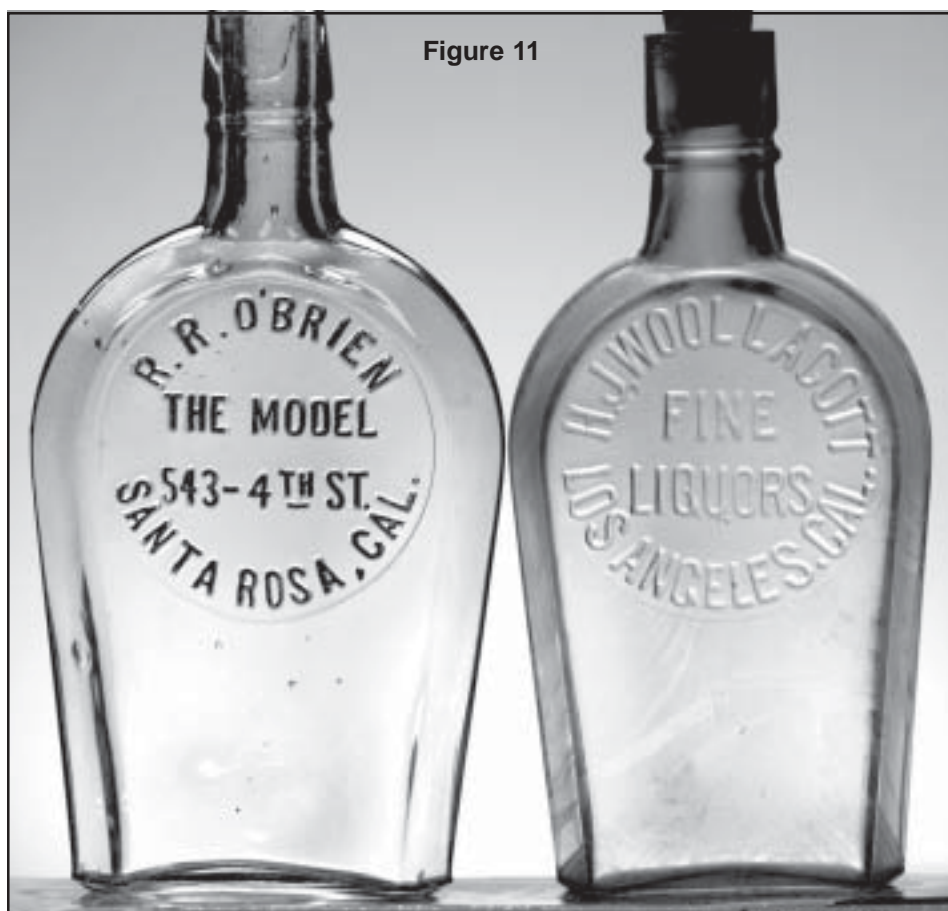


Figure 11



Figure 13

due to two or three examples of this flask being made available in the past year. The one to look for is the variant with Sam T. Bernard as proprietor – you’d certainly see me chasing it a lot higher than this!

Please view my “Recent Find” at the beginning of the magazine. Although promised for this column, I do not want my readers to accuse me of verbosity (nor brevity, it appears!), so I will break off at this point. I am especially interested in hearing from all of you about what you want to see covered in this column and what you have been finding, digging or might be interested in contributing.

Until the next issue.....

Ralph

(For the reader who wants to learn about collecting Western flasks I recommend the following texts by John L. Thomas:

Coffins, Picnics, Shooflies

Whiskey Bottles of the Old West

Whiskey Bottles and Liquor Containers From the State of Oregon

Whiskey Bottles and Liquor Containers From the State of Washington

The latter two texts both contain a very nice depiction of the various styles of “flat” and “miscellaneous” style flasks.)

Continued from Page 15.

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Figure 9: El Paso – Straight-Sided Coke Bottle (1911-1918)



Figure 10: Side Seam – Straight-Sided Coke Bottle