

More Jars From Capstan

by Barry L. Bernas

What Is It?

In the *Letters to the Editor* section of the November 1970 issue of *The National Bottle Gazette*, a subscriber wrote in with an inquiry about a number of trademarks. The writer wanted to know if the magazine's staff could identify any of the logos for them. Unfortunately, I could find no response to the requestor's question in any subsequent edition of this magazine. I presume the couple's thirty-three year old request remains unanswered to this day.



The hand-drawn depiction above was one of the entries from the original 1970 request. Although tardy, a reply on at least this example can now be provided.

In the specimen, the capital letters *ASGO* should actually be *ASCO*. This set of capital letters stands for the American Stores Company. Based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, it was formed during World War I by the merger of "five competing grocery chain organizations" which was composed of twelve hundred and twenty-three stores at the time of their unification. This new firm was a marketer of prepared foods, mainly through its Acme chain of stores.¹

Below *ASCO* in the drawing is a crude representation of a glass makers' trademark. It is a capstan and was used by the Capstan Glass Company, Connellsville, Pa. from May 1919 until about August 1938.²

It is evident from this one example that the Capstan Glass Company most likely made food containers specifically for some of their customers. I say this because I have several other Capstan-made glass containers with either *ASCO* or the American Stores Company's name or another firm's name abbreviated or spelled

out on the base of that item. I want to show you some of these containers.

Jar One

The jar in the next picture was made for the American Stores Company. It is 3 and 13/16th inches tall with a 57 millimeter wide mouth. There are eight, 1 and 1/8th inch, rectangular panels around it. Each has a triangular top. Between the triangles are other triangle-shaped forms directed downward. This feature gives the top part of the vessel a prism-like effect.



The finish is a pry-off one which would take a friction cap to close it. Below is a sketch of the finish.³



The metal sealer for this style of finish is shown in the next picture. "These caps are made with either a disc liner or a composition gasket for vacuum sealing. Head pressure applied to the caps forces it down over the glass where it is held in place by friction or vacuum."⁴



The eight-sided base of this *ASCO*-marked jar can be seen below. Remarkably, it is quite similar to the 1970 sketch. The *ASCO* embossing is in script and a capstan logo is placed directly below the lettering just as in the November 1970 inquiry. I wonder if the same kind of jar base was used to draw the original diagram.



Of interest, the base of this jar doesn't have a mold number on it like most other Capstan-made jars. The only numeral on the base is a probable mold series number. In this case, it is the number 8. Why a mold number wasn't placed on this *ASCO*, base-embossed container isn't known.⁵

Also of note, the motif of this jar was patented. The picture here was taken from the application filed by Theodore J. Piazzoli.⁶

I mentioned previously that Capstan Glass probably made



some food containers exclusively for a single customer. Although I can't be certain, this could have been the case with jar one. The ASCO embossing, the absence of a mold series number, the non-discovery of a Capstan Glass Company advertisement showing this vessel for general sale, the fact that Mr. Piazzoli was issued a design patent for this ornamental container and the non-appearance of a similarly shaped jar with or without another concerns name embossed on it seems to confirm my suspicion.

Jar Two

The next ASCO marked container I want to introduce follows.



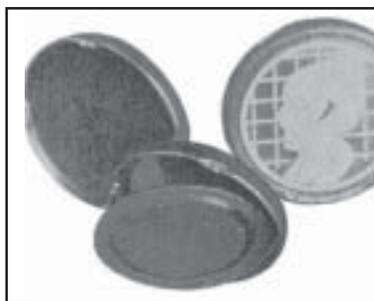
This jar would be in the Capstan 4300 series. It is 5 and 7/16th inches tall with a 59 mm wide mouth. There are four, outwardly curved panels with rounded tops. Each side is about 2 and 1/4th of an inch across at the top tapering out to approximately 2 and 1/2 inches at the bottom. This feature caused the container to be wider at the base than at the shoulder section.

The finish on jar two is the four-lugged variety. A sketch of it can be seen in the next illustration:



This closure style is "...designed to reduce the amount of turning action required to bring the cap against the seat."⁷

The sealer which fits the lugged finish is the Amerseal cap. It is shown in the following picture.



"The Amerseal cap...is a divided thread cap which made its bid for fame on the proposition that because of the quarter turn the product within the jar is easily accessible, and also the speed of cap application is increased. In form this closure resembles the C. T. (continuous thread) cap except for the fact that instead of a thread on the skirt, there are two or three indentations or lugs which engage gradually pitched projections or sections of the threads on the glass (jar)."⁸

The base of this particular container can be viewed below.



As with the sides, the base is four-sided with curved segments. ASCO (in script) PEANUT BUTTER is embossed on it. In addition, there is the Capstan Glass Company trademark in the center with a likely mold series number (2) to the left of it and a probable mold number (4315) below the logo.

Unlike the first jar we inspected, this one does have a mold number on it. Most likely, this jar was made for other packing firms in addition to American Stores. I say this with some confidence because

Capstan Glass advertised this jar on at least two occasions. One of the ads appears in the picture below.



The assumed to be mold number on this 4300 series jar is 4314. It has a band finish with a 63 millimeter wide mouth. The vessel in the ad held a liquid capacity of 14 and 1/4th ounces to the fill line or 15 and 1/4th ounces to the overflow point.⁹

This container doesn't have any other base embossing. To me, this would tend to indicate that no design patent was issued for this jar. In fact, I couldn't find one at the U. S. Patent Office. Why the design for the first vessel was patented and the motif for this one wasn't remains unexplainable.

Jar Three

A probable variation of the second container was used by the Old Virginia Packing Co., Inc. of Front Royal, Va. to pack at least apple butter for sale. An example is shown below.



There are four, straight-sided panels on this container. Each is about 3 inches wide. The tops are gently rounded. It is 7 and 1/8th inches in height with a 62 millimeter wide mouth. The finish is a four-lugged version. An Amerseal cap or

equivalent would be needed to seal the contents securely. According to the label, one pound and fourteen ounces of apple butter were placed in this jar.

The base of this vessel is square. It appears in the following picture.



Old Virginia (in script) is embossed on it along the top section. The Capstan Glass Company trademark is clearly visible in the center. A possible mold series number (2) is to the left of the maker's logo and the words APPLE BUTTER are underneath it.

A quick review of U. S. Patent Office records didn't turn up a design patent for this unassuming container. A jar similar to this one only shorter in height, unembossed on the base and with a different finish appeared in a May 1935 Capstan Glass Company ad. Based on this data, I would assume this jar was an item for general sale.

Jar Four

The final jar to discuss comes in both embossed and unmarked versions. This vessel is the only one I've come across that has embossing on a part of the container other than the base. In this respect, this jar is unique among all of the jars Capstan Glass produced. A picture of both styles follow.

This 9500 series, Capstan container didn't appear in any ad that I have discovered so far from Capstan Glass. Likewise, I have been unable to associate it with any other design patent that was either issued to Capstan or could have been modified by that firm to come up with this motif. I'm at a loss to explain the absence of information on this attractive, tri-paneled container.¹⁰

The initial jar four example, the one embossed on the front with the business name Loft (in script and underscored)



followed by PURE CANDIES, is 7 and 7/16th inches tall. The unembossed, second variant is taller. It is 7 and 1/2 inches in height. Except for this difference, the jars are identical in all other aspects. Both mouths are 67 millimeters wide. Each has three, flat panels on the front and reverse areas of the container. The center one is



roughly 1 and 5/16th of an inch wide from the rounded top to the flat bottom on both vessels. The two panels on either side of the center one are about 1 and 3/8th inches wide. The tops of these slope downward, conforming to the curvature in the jar's shoulder. In between the front and rear set of panels is a nearly flat segment that curves inward at the top, following the rounded aspect to the container's shoulder region. At the base of this jar, the same area juts outward slightly. These features give both vessels a distinctive profile.

Each specimen has a deep, continuous thread finish. An example follows.¹¹



There are three kinds of closures that can be used on this finish.

The first is a one-piece continuous thread cap seen below.



It is described as a "...one piece cap which consists of a single metal shell with the thread turned on the metal skirt. The liner is generally a single disc covering the entire inner surface of the cap, although a ring or gasket of sufficient width to cover the upper surface of the jar may be employed."

The second kind of closure is a two piece cap and disc.



In this photograph, a completed cap along with a separated disc and shell are shown. This set "...consists of a shell like

the first, but there is an inner metal disc to which the gasket is secured. By using a separate disc the shell serves only to secure the disc and liner against the glass, and consequently, there is no hindrance to its removal due to any tendency of the liner to adhere to the glass.



Above is the last style of sealer for vessels with this finish. It is the two piece ring and disc. This one is quite familiar to most people. The model depicted "...uses a ring instead of the whole cap to secure the disc. This form is generally employed as a vacuum seal and is so designated by some manufacturers."¹²

Oddly, the eight-sided base on both 5900 series containers carries the same mold number, even though one jar is taller than the other. In the pictures that follow the first is the base of the embossed container while the second is the unembossed version.



These containers are only a small segment of the overall number of uniquely-molded, glass vessels that the Capstan Glass Company made.

Why Patterns?

In a previous article, I introduced two other jar styles that had other than unembossed, rounded shapes to them.¹³

The next four described in this companion to the first shows that Capstan was in competition with other glass makers to get a share of the expanding commercially-prepared food, container market of the late 1920s and beyond. But why was there such a demand for glass containers with various motifs?

Two of the glass container, trade journals of that period furnished some potential answers to this query.

In one, the author postulated that a specially-shaped glass container served as a "super trademark" for the maker. By this he meant an individualized vessel would be easy to recognize on the shelf among other jars. Also, the special form to it would provide a rapid means to visually identify the producer of the container. And finally, the motif on the container could be protected from potential copiers through the design patent option.¹

A second writer theorized a stylistic vessel served as the merchandising factor in selling the product that it held. He went on to say, "...some manufacturers still have to learn...that they are catering to a different consumer market – a market today that is very susceptible to beauty, to good design, to harmonious colors and to good taste. ...The modern container must be beautiful to sell food."¹⁵

A third article stated a desire for the food product must be created. Believe it or not, the columnist for this belief was a "desire creation" expert. He wrote, "It has been the custom to design glass containers for machines: First for the machines that blow them, and then, seriatim, for the machines that fill them, the machines that cap them and the machines that label them. Which would be quite sufficient if in the end they were bought by machines. But it happens they are not; it happens glass containers are ultimately bought by women. ...But after the machines have been satisfied, it is equally desirable to go further and satisfy the women who buy these packages from the grocer. Isn't it reasonable that these women will welcome into their kitchens a type of package which takes its place in the whole picture...No kin of container fits the cleanly atmosphere of the modern kitchen so well as glass, and if glass can be given the forms to which a woman instinctively responds, its success is certain. ...Glass is a perfect medium for this modern design. It has great beauty of its own and nothing brings out that beauty more fully than the faceted

shapes in which our new style levels. ...From a production standpoint, it may be profitable to...design only for the machines. But from a sales standpoint, it is certainly more profitable to go a step farther, after the machines are satisfied, and please the purchaser as well."¹⁶

Personally, I think each columnist had good points to make as to why glass producers in the late 1920s through the mid-1930s were turning out containers with radical designs on them. To me, their remarks indicate the competition among makers was stiff. Any technique to get their container sold to a packer was employed. It is quite understandable that the design of the package became so important.

If you ever wondered why so many now-called "art deco" glass containers were made during the 1930s, three believable reasons have been presented for your consideration.

Pattern Jar Opinion

Should this category of product jar be given the same research and cataloging attention as fruit jars have been given over the past thirty plus years? My response to this self-addressed question is yes.

In my opinion, these highly stylized jars are an important and acceptable complement to any collection of fruit jars. While the four examples in this article were not intended to have a reuse capability for home canning, they were none the less a significant part of the history of the rapidly growing, commercially-prepared and packaged food industry that expanded during the depression years in our country. Their place deserves to be recognized right along side the plethora of embossed containers made for the same commercial and family audience.

There are few if any drawbacks to completing this task. Information on the firms that produced these vessels is available along with product catalogs, company and food ads, related ephemera showing these items and other source material. Thus, as with fruit jars, these containers could easily be identified, dated, numbered and listed in a reference book.

As I see it, there are many benefits to be derived from starting now to implement this suggestion. One major one would be to generate interest among "diggers" to

retain these items when encountered and not discard them simply because nothing is known about them. As a result, more styles would become available for seasoned or new jar enthusiasts to assemble an attractive and affordable collection of these seventy year old plus jars. Further and probably most important in my estimation, an expanded knowledge

base about the vessels used in the entire food preservation process would result.

By not taking the step and recognizing the fact that stylized, product vessels have a vital and important historical significance just like fruit jars, I believe a major part of our overall “canning” heritage will go unnoticed and potentially be lost.

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References:

¹ *Pennsylvania Titan of Industry*, Sylvester K. Stevens, Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., New York, New York, 1948, pgs. 41-42.

² The United States Patent Office issued a trademark to the Capstan Glass Company on November 11, 1926. It was stated in the patent application that the capstan logo had been affixed to Capstan Glass products since May 1919. The ending date for the use of this maker’s mark was based upon the appearance of products with this trademark in either Capstan Glass or Anchor-Hocking Glass Corporation advertisements through mid-1938. In a previous article - *The Jars of Capstan* - that appeared in the October 2001 edition of *Bottles and Extras*, I used December 31, 1937 as the date for the cessation of this trademarks’ use by Capstan. However, since that time, I’ve found product ads from Anchor Hocking up through August 1938 with capstan logos still showing on items offer for sale. Presumably, it took a few months after the merger to get the plans in place to switch over to the anchor over an H mark. Per available ads, this happened in September 1938.

³ *A Study of Glass Finishes For Metal Closures*, *The Glass Packer*, July 1930, pg. 331.

⁴ *Selecting a Wide Mouth Closure To Meet Exact Packing Conditions*, *The Glass Packer*, August 1930, pg. 383.

⁵ For me, the presence of a mold series number would indicate that this container was available for any customer to purchase and use for their own needs. A vessel without one but with a firm’s name embossed on it might suggest that it was only for use by that particular company.

⁶ United States Patent Office, Filed, Dec. 26, 1931, Serial No. 42,220, Issued March 1, 1932, Des. 86,408, Assigner to Capstan Glass Company, of Connellsville, Pennsylvania, a Corporation of Delaware.

⁷ *A Study of Glass Finishes For Metal Closures*, *The Glass Packer*, July 1930, pgs. 330-331.

⁸ *Selecting a Wide Mouth Closure To Meet Exact Packing Conditions*, *The Glass Packer*, August 1930, pg. 381.

⁹ *The Glass Packer* August 1930, pg. 401 and September 1931, pg. 487. This jar was still being advertised up through March 1934.

¹⁰ The outward pattern on this container was used by at least one other glass maker. I’ve seen a tall version from the Hazel-Atlas Glass Company, carrying the familiar H over A logo and a mold number of 5932.

¹¹ *A Study of Glass Finishes For Metal Closures*, *The Glass Packer*, July 1930, pg. 331.

¹² *Selecting a Wide Mouth Closure To Meet Exact Packing Conditions*, *The Glass Packer*, August 1930, pg. 380. A standard size Mason zinc screw cap fits nicely on both jars. I presume that the embossed variant took the first style of closure.

¹³ *The Jars of Capstan*, Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, October 2001, pgs. 4-5.

¹⁴ *Distinguishing the Glass Container, Registered Trade-Mark, Copyrighted Label and Patented Design Give Glass Packages a Strong Commercial Castle*, Waldon Fawcett, *The Glass Container*, June 1922, pgs. 43 and 47.

¹⁵ *Revamping the Food Container For Its Modern Role of Merchandiser*, *The Glass Packer*, June 1931, pgs 275-278 and 288.

¹⁶ *This Question of Design – Industry Finds It Too Must Satisfy the Feminine Complex for Changing Styles*, Walter Dorwin Teague, *The Glass Packer*, January 1930, pgs. 17-20.