

Some Interesting Facts about Silver Or

Why are some Baby Bottles & Nipples Made of Silver

By Charlie Harris

I know, I just don't seem to be able to keep my Civil War interests and the Baby Bottle writings separated. Here we go again, Charlie's done got them mixed up again. So where is he going this time. Well, read on.



Front and reverse of a Civil War "Puppy Paw" stud style of hooks Belt Buckle, model 1839. This buckle was dug out of an 1863 Civil War camp site and after about 145 years under ground, some of the leather belt still remains intact. From the Charlie Harris collection.

Leather when left out of doors and eventually buried only takes a very short time to disintegrate and become nothing more than an additional element in the ground fabric of this planet, just like wood, leaves and other organic compositions. But there is an exception to this rule and it has shown its face quite often in the Civil War relics that have been recovered from the ground in campsites and battle locations. Occasionally a brass and lead belt buckle will be recovered with a portion of the leather belt still attached to its back side or a brass bayonet scabbard tip will be recovered with leather (or on one known occasion readable newspaper) still inside of it.

I can see you right now saying, "Huh??" Yes, it really does happen and these items have been out there in damp soil for almost 150 years. Under the right conditions the damp soil will react with the copper in the brass creating a cupric oxide that will not allow the bacteria to eat that or-

ganic material that is in contact with that belt buckle or scabbard tip. This cupric oxide actually kills those bacteria that it comes in contact with. So much for the Civil War --- well, almost.

Last Thursday night I took a few tin containers to our Civil War Relic Club meeting for my program and passed them around to see if our big tough relic hunters could identify them. Not much luck there, but after I identified them for the club, a couple members, Phil Stephenson and Dr. Bill Blackman, looked at the tin canteen shaped baby bottle again, even looking inside with their flashlights. I asked Phil what he was looking for and he piped up with, "A silver coin." Now guess who said "Huh??" Charlie did.

Phil told me that in the Old West days that the Wagon Train people would put silver coins in their milk and water containers to keep them from spoiling and tasting bad and it actually worked. "But," I asked, "they didn't know about bacteria and germs back then. How did they know to use this silver coin trick?" Phil answered, "Probably somebody did it by accident and then put 2 & 3 together and realized what happened. Maybe they actually hid their silver coinage in the milk and water containers to keep marauders from finding them and then noticed that the milk didn't spoil and the water stayed fresh tasting."

I then asked Phil if he had any documentation to back up these statements and he offered to forward some of the sources to me. For the rest of this article I'm going to combine some of the facts from these sources for your perusal.

from **Medicinal Uses of Silver**
& from

**A Brief History of the Health
Support Uses of Silver**

Silver has a long and illustrious history of medicinal use. A brief history follows:

- The ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome used silver to control bodily infection and prevent food spoilage. In the fifth century B.C., Hippocrates (known as the Father of Medicine) used silver to heal wounds. Medicine's dad also used silver as an ulcer treatment.
- In the same century, the King of Persia (now known as Iran) used silver container to carry water to prevent contamination.
- The Greeks used silver vessels to keep water and other liquids fresh. The writings of Herodotus, the Greek philosopher and historian, date the use of silver to before the birth of Christ.
- Approximately seven decades before the birth of Christ, the Roman scholar Pliny the Elder wrote of the ability of silver to heal wounds by preventing infection. No men-

tion was made of Neosporin.

- The Roman Empire stored wine in silver urns to prevent spoilage.
- The use of silver is mentioned in ancient Egyptian writings.
- In the 8th through 10th centuries, silver became a very popular treatment in the Middle East for many ailments, from cardiovascular disease to bad breath.
- The Chinese emperors and their courts ate with silver chopsticks.
- The Druids have left evidence of their use of silver.
- In the 16th Century, a Swiss alchemist and physician by the name of Theophrastus Philippus Aureolus Bombastus von Hohenheim (no kidding!) used silver and other elements as medicines. He is often known as the Father of Toxicology, and believed that things became poisonous in large doses. He wrote, "All things are poison and nothing is without poison; only the dose makes that a thing that is not poison."
- In the early 1700s, Angelus Sala used silver nitrate (AgNO_3) to treat syphilis and chorea.
- Throughout the Middle Ages in Europe, it had been noticed that royalty, who consumed their food and drink from silver tableware, utensils and cups, tended to develop a bluish skin tone. (Ever heard of the phrase "blue bloods"?) This was thought to be due to the silver that entered their bodies during consumption. Furthermore, the lower rate of plague-related deaths among royalty led to the inference that silver could be protective.



Sterling Silver Pap Boat, gold washed on inside the bowl, about 6-inches long. The edge is heavily decorated and cast integrally with the bowl. These date from the late 1700's well into the late 1800's and were used to feed infants & occasionally invalids.

From the Teresa Harris collection

- As a result, silver became a popular material for tableware, goblets, cutlery, and food storage containers. It was believed that the silver in these items could kill germs. Russia's army likewise used silver lined containers to cleanse river water before drinking it. Modern science has confirmed that low levels of silver in water can indeed kill some types of bacteria.
- Settlers in the Australian outback suspend silverware in their water tanks to retard spoilage.
- In America's Wild West, silver and copper coins were placed in containers of water and milk to prevent spoilage and to keep it safe from bacteria, algae, etc. All

along the frontier, silver dollars were put into milk to keep it fresh. Some of us remember our grandparents doing the same.

- Over the past couple of hundreds of years, scientists continued to document silver's anti-bacterial properties.
- Virtually everyone reading this probably had a drop of silver nitrate solution dropped into their eyes to prevent blindness, in the event that mommy had a venereal disease. Indeed, our great grand parents probably got the same treatment, which became standard practices at the end of the 19th century.
- Silver leaf was used to combat infection in wounds sustained by troops during World War I.
- In the early 1800s, doctors used silver sutures in surgical wounds with very successful results.
- In more recent years, silver (along with copper) has been incorporated into many water purification systems.
- Stainless steel is used to create most surgical instruments, but fifty or sixty years ago, such instruments were made of silver, again to prevent infections.
- At present, several companies are marketing "break through" food storage containers that include Antibacterial silver nanoparticles to prevent spoilage. These products are touted as modern day miracles. The King of Persia was way ahead of his time!

From a very interesting "A History of Silver" I found that: "Sterling is the most hygienic metal known to man. It has actual germ killing properties. It is also the most durable art form and the most economical purchase that can be made for the home. Sterling silver grows more beautiful with the passing years, never wears out, and can be passed along as part of a heritage that grows stronger with passing generations."

It was not until the late 1800's that the Western scientists actually rediscovered what had been known for thousands of years --- silver was a powerful germ fighter. Our new modern drug manufacturers were developing medicinal silver compounds and they became commonly used in medicine and by the early 1900's this use of silver as an antibacterial substance was becoming widespread. Yes, there were anti-silver flare-ups but these were usually attributed to the overuse of certain types of protein-bound silver compounds causing a discoloration of the skin called *argyria*.

During the 1930's synthetically manufactured drugs began appearing on the market and began displacing the silver based compounds. This excitement over the "Wonder Drugs" was unsurpassed and no anti-biotic resistant strains of diseases had yet surfaced. Silver was put on the back shelf. But these antibiotic strains then began to appear and Ohhhhhhhhhhh.

Then, because of these facts, in the 1970's silver began to resurface. A Dr. Margraf in conjunction with the late Dr. Moyer, chairman of the Washington University's Dept. of Surgery, received a grant to development better methods of treatment of burn victims and he was finding continual ref-

erences to the use of silver. This began the resurgence of a very old medicine. These results showed silver to be highly germicidal, yet harmless and non-toxic to humans. Further it has been discovered that bacteria cannot develop a resistance to silver, as they do antibiotics, because silver attacks their food source, rather than them directly.

I know that I've been wandering around in the field of medicine in which I am not trained, but all this information seems pertinent and relevant to the existence of some very beautiful and expensive silver baby bottles in some of the ACIF members collections. It might help to explain part of their reasons for existence other than just being beautiful. Our wealthy ancestors may not have consciously known what they were actually doing, but the "Blue Bloods" definitely were not beyond taking advantage of advice and what they or their "Doctors" recommended for a better life.

To quote the closing statement of "Medicinal Uses of Silver": "Colloidal Silver is experiencing a well-deserved resurgence in use and research, proving once again, the old adage that There's nothing new under the sun."



Silver Nipple that was screwed into a cork which was then inserted into a small mouthed flask or Turtle Baby Bottle for feeding an infant. The wrapped silver wire acts as screw threads & also allows air to enter the bottle as fluid is being removed by the baby. The silver prevented bacteria from forming and may be the source of the British Royalty term "Blue Bloods." From the Teresa Harris collection.



An extremely rare hallmarked solid sterling silver Submarine style feeding bottle. The hinged door allows filling & also allows air to enter as milk is suckled out. Normally a rag, chamois or pickled cow's teat was tied to the snout for the baby to suckle on. From the Ros Berman collection.



A long straw silver nipple that reaches to the bottom of the bottle. The short straw allows air back into the bottle. The small disc covers the bottle cork and the large disc prevents the infant from trying to swallow the silver nipple. Evidently totally germ free and for the "Blue Bloods." Purchased from the Jinny Brodsky collection by Teresa Harris.

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FOR SHOW INFORMATION CONTACT:
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