

Fortune Chevalier and the Picture Castles 1890-1919

By Ben Kutzkey

A Short History

Fortune Chevalier was born in 1815 in Belle Isle, France. His family was not in the wine business so he apprenticed as a stained glass craftsman. Together, with a group of similar craftsmen, he went all over France repairing the windows of various castles and churches damaged by the frequent wars of the time.

In 1850, he sailed for San Francisco with some helpers and a large stock of window panes with the idea to establish a business of window construction and repair. He hoped that when his helpers were fully occupied with stained glass window work, he would be able to steal away and pan for gold in the Sierra foothills.

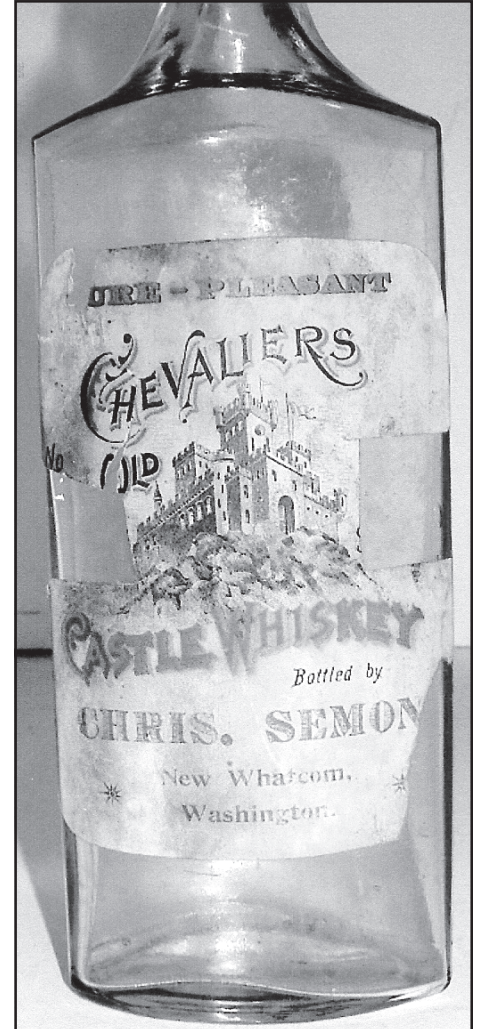
It turned out that his helpers had the same idea and they abandoned him once they arrived in California. Fortune ended up in Placerville and later in Sacramento, settling into the trade of wine and spirits. There were tens of thousands of thirsty miners and Chevalier established F. Chevalier and Company with the intent of satisfying his own thirst for profit. The firm of F. Chevalier Company was founded in Placerville, California in 1857. Chevalier became the sole agent for Old Castle Bourbon Whiskey and imported Grappe d'Or Cognac. The business was shortly afterward moved to Sacramento and there



carried on until 1870, when the increasing importance of the house and its expanding operations caused its removal to San Francisco. In 1872, its celebrated Castle whiskeys were protected by a trademark deposited in the U.S. Patent Office in Washington, D.C.

In 1875, Fortune took on a partner, a man named Comte, who had experience in the wine business. In 1899, Fortune died at the age of 84; his son, George, then managed the business.

In 1905, the company was situated at Nos. 9, 11, 13 and 15 Beale Street, San Francisco, and had traveling representatives covering the entire Pacific coast, besides resident agents at various



Sole Agents on Pacific Coast for
OLD CASTLE BOURBON WHISKEY. Payable in U. S. Gold Coin, in

days. (F. Chevalier.
(A. Comte, Jr.

San Francisco, April 8 1875



Mr. E. Augustus

Bought of **F. CHEVALIER & COMTE,**

Importers of

FINE WINES, COGNACS AND LIQUORS,

Shipped on your order, your account and risk.

No. 614 FRONT STREET.

1 bbl Chinit 42 @ 1.50 bbl 3
1/2 Port wine 20th @ 1.25
Aray

66 00
25 63 only 9 63
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centers throughout the eastern states. The company also owned the Chateau Chevalier vineyards near St. Helens in the foothills of Napa County, California.

The Bottles

One of the most interesting of all the picture whiskies are the San Francisco Castle whiskies of 1890-1919, a span of almost 20 years. Castle whiskies go back further to the 1870s, but they are typical of their time in not having a picture embossed in the glass.

Most collectors lump all the picture Castles together, not noting the many differences that they had throughout the many years of their production. The first bottle is completely different than those that followed; it is a long-necked, round-shouldered, cork-stoppered bottle embossed "Chevaliers Old Castle Whiskey" and is in the fifth size. But the company didn't like the shape and changed it to the shorter neck, squared-shoulder bottle that remained its choice for the rest of the life of the bottle. With one exception, however, there is a square Castle, label only, clear glass, three-piece mold, cork-type bottle with identical wording on the label. It does differ in one respect: the word proprietor has been added. This bottle is also an 1890s-type, being single-air vented at the shoulder. Recently, quart and fifth variations of the embossing on the first bottle have come to light. Although the embossing is the same, the bottles are of the latter type and are the first of the inside screw types.

Next, we come to the bottle that is embossed "The F. Chevaliers Co.;" this is the first bottle that has "The F." and the "Co.," but does retain the "s" on Chevalier. It is the last one with an "s" on the end. This is also an inside screw-stoppered bottle, as are the rest until World War I, when the company changed to the cork and glass stopper. We can assume that the reason for the many variants that follow are changes in the glass companies, mold-replacement, company requirements and errors in the moulds. Some molds began to wear out and were repaired during production, such as the one with whiskey slugged out with rocks. Later, a new mold was made that didn't have the word "whiskey" on the bottle at all. But apparently this wasn't what the company wanted, so the word "whiskey" was added under the word "Castle" with the rest of the wording being the same.

Let us now take the bottles one by one and enumerate their differences.

The Picture Castles, 1890-1919

Since a previous article I've written on the picture Castles, there have been a couple of additions, the first being a barrel-filled bottle from the Bodega Saloon in New Whatcome, Washington, now known as Bellingham. This bar was owned by Chris Semon in 1898 and shows the label used at that time. Portions of the label removed by him probably showed other products. Basically, the label is the same as used on the first picture Castles. The bottle is a

common medicine-type bottle with the "Old Castle" label. Semon probably used them because of their low cost.

The Bodega Saloon was located on 13th Street between C and D streets. The bottle dates to 1890-1891. Chris's residence was on E Street.

1) The first picture Castle whiskey has been generally dated to 1898. The bottle's shape is typical of the bottles of the 1880s with embossing that reads "Chevaliers Old Castle Whiskey, San Francisco, Cal." It was stoppered with a cork and is a scarce bottle compared to the rest of the Castles.

2) The next bottle is one of the three or four known clear glass quarts. Why it was made in clear glass is not known, but it is obvious that the company did not approve of it as no more embossed bottles have ever been found. The embossing is basically the same as bottle No. 1, but the shape was changed to the short-necked, square-shouldered bottle the company stayed with until Prohibition. All of the clear bottles I have heard of are in the quart size. This bottle was found in the High Sierras near Independence, Ore., in 1962. This bottle was stoppered with a cork and is very rare.

3) This label-only quart is one of two found in a barn in Oregon or Washington (I forget which). The label is almost the same as the embossing on Nos. 1 and 2, except it states "F. Chevalier and Co Proprietors" near the bottom of the label. This would indicate that Chevalier owned the brand and, indeed, there was a east coast agent for Castle Whiskey. I have no information why this bottle was label only. It is also a cork-stoppered bottle.

3.5) This is another new addition and a very scarce one! This fifth-gallon bottle appears to be the first inside screw-type and is embossed like the first bottles. It has the 1898-type base and is amber in color, as are all the rest of the Castles to the end.

4) This amber quart is identical to





the clear quart No. 2, except it has the inside screw closure and is the mate to No. 3. The inside screw closure may be an English invention since some have "Riley's Patent" on them.

5) This is the first bottle to have a change in the embossing, having "The F." in front of "Chevaliers" and is rather scarce. After this bottle, there is no longer an "s" after "Chevalier." There is a bottle (Barnett No. 143) that just says "The Chevalier Co." I have looked for this bottle for several years without success. If it exists, I think that those bottles are 1890s types as the following ones all come from 1890s locations.

6) This quart is typical of the early 1888 bottles and is a little scarcer in the quart than in the fifth. "San" is ahead of the "C" in Castle. This differentiates these early 1900 bottles from the late ones, which have the "San" in the back of the "C."

7 and 8) These two bottles are from the same basic mold, but you will notice No. 7 has a faint castle and rocks. As the mold grew more worn, the rocks were re-touched and whiskey slugged out with rocks as in No. 8. Both were made by the Pacific Coast Glass Works. I would date these about 1910-1912. Why the castle wasn't retouched is anyone's guess.

9) This one I believe is a mold-maker's goof. The bottle just says "Castle;" no whiskey. They must have used the bottle with whiskey slugged out as the model. This one dates about 1912-1915.

10) Here we have the correction, same embossing as No. 9, but they slipped "Whiskey" in under "Castle." This is, I believe, the last of the inside screw bottles and dates to about 1914-1916. Also, for unknown reasons, the "Old" was slugged out. I believe the inside screw stopper was made in England and importation was stopped because of World War I.

11) Same bottle as No. 10, but stopper is now cork and glass.

12) As far as I can tell, this is the last of the embossed picture Castles. There is no "Old" and it is not slugged out. Embossing has returned to a style similar to 1900 and retains the glass stopper. I have two of these and they both have "384" on the bottom; one in large numerals and the other small. Same glass company.

13) This last bottle appears to be the end of the line for this highly desirable series of whiskies. It is label-only and the bottle is an unembossed, circular slugplate Barnett No. 135.



Label for #12.



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