

COLLECTING WESTERN SODA BOTTLES

By Bryan Grapentine
Photos by Larry Grapentine

There are many wonderful soda bottles to collect from states west of the Rocky Mountains. The Western states were settled later in history, and many still have smaller populations than most Eastern states and subsequently had fewer soda bottlers. However, there are many attractive and interesting bottles in the four major soda categories: blob tops, Hutchinson, embossed crown tops and ACL crown tops.

BLOB TOP SODAS

So called because of the prominent blob top under which the cork (used to hold the carbonation in) was wired down. Fewer had a wire swing stopper to hold the cork in place. These are the oldest soda bottles used in the West. Most of these bottles date from the mid 1850s to the mid 1880s until replaced by the Hutchinson stoppered bottles. Many blob tops have an iron pontil mark, all have tooled or applied tops. California has far more blob tops than any other western state. Some states had very few of these early bottles. The bottles come in a variety of shapes and colors including aqua, cobalt, and other shades of blue, teal, green and amber (the scarcest color).

Many bottles from the same company and mold come in several different colors such as the green, teal and cobalt ITALIAN/ SODA WATER/ MANUFACTORY/ SAN FRANCISCO. The BAY CITY SODAWATER Co / S.F. bottle comes in green teal and cobalt and other shades of blue.

The blob tops are the historically most interesting and attractive soda bottles to collect. Besides the various colors and shapes available to the collector, many bottles have an embossed picture. The BREIG & SCHAFER / S.F. pictures a fish. The CALIFORNIA/ NATURAL / SELTZER WATER has a picture of a bear on the reverse side. Several bottles picture an eagle including the green and amber COTTLE POST & CO. / PORTLAND, OGN.

Bottles with a pontil mark are desirable and have added interest and dollar value.

A valuable reference book is *WESTERN BLOB TOP SODA AND MINERAL WATER BOTTLES* by Peck and Audie Markota.

HUTCHINSON SODA BOTTLES

These are very popular and widely collected Western sodas and are frequently referred to simply as Hutches. This internal stopper was patented in 1879. From the mid-1880s until completely replaced by the crown top bottles by 1915-1920, these were the type of bottles used by all Western soda bottlers. Every Western state has many examples even from some relatively small towns. Bottles from old mining and ghost towns are very popular with collectors. Hutches with the "T" designation for Territory are very desirable and often quite scarce and valuable. An example is A.T. for Arizona Territory. Although many of these bottles were manufactured while the state was still a Territory, often the "T" was not included with the state name. Manufacturers' marks add interest to the few bottles that have them, as do spelling mistakes and backward letters (see the Albuquerque hutch in the photo).

Most of these popular bottles come in various shades of aqua, a few in clear or turned SCA (sun-colored amethyst) and only a few are in true colors such as blue and amber. With the exception of California, most states do not have an abundance of Hutches with the city and state name embossed on the bottle. Bottles from Nevada and New Mexico are scarce and usually sell for a premium price.

Collectors of local sodas try to acquire an example of every Hutch from their state or at least one from every town. Other collectors may try to obtain a Hutch with the "T" from the Western territories of Washington, Oregon, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, Arizona and Hawaii, with Idaho Territory the hardest bottle to find.

Blob top and Hutchinson bottles are strong, durable and survive well in the ground, accounting for the many dug bottles now in circulation.

EMBOSSSED CROWN TOPS

The crown cork metal closure was patented in 1891 by William Painter. A new type of bottle had to be made to close tolerances to accommodate the crown closure so it took many years to become widely used. It was cheaper to make, lighter,

easier to clean and replaced the Hutchinson bottle by 1920.

Crown tops are generally, but not always, more affordable and more easily obtained. Almost every town had a soda bottler using this type of bottle. Most bottles are the standard 8-ounce, although a few quart size bottles were made. One from Arizona is the G.L.MERRITT/ SODA/ WORKS/ PRESCOTT/ ARIZ. with only a few specimens known. Several bottles from California were made specifically for ginger ale, a popular flavor at the time. Many Coca-Cola franchisers had bottles made with the words Coca-Cola embossed either in block letters or in the more popular script. These are referred to as straight-sided Cokes to distinguish them from the contoured hobbleskirt bottles which followed. Collecting a Coke bottle from each state can be a challenge with Wyoming being one of the more difficult bottles to obtain. Few Pepsi-Cola bottles from the West are known – a paneled bottle (with Pepsi in script on four of the panels) from Los Angeles is scarce and very attractive.

Very few colored bottles are known; most are aqua. Both tooled top and ABM (automatic bottling machine) bottles are sought after by state collectors. Territory bottles are scarce – see the Prescott bottle in the photo. Many companies had their crown top and Hutchinson bottles made with the the same style of embossing. An example of this is the ZIEGLER'S/ SODA WORKS/ TUCSON, ARIZ. These make an interesting pair in a collection.

ACL (Applied Color Label) CROWN TOPS

The ACL soda bottles became popular and widely used by the 1940s. The price of these newer bottles ranges from a few dollars to several hundred.

The paper labels used prior to this did not wear well, often came off when immersed in water coolers and usually had to be replaced each time the bottle was filled. The fired-on painted labels were very durable, did not wash off and allowed advertising, pictures and colored graphics. The ACL process allowed more variety, easily changed graphics, and were cheaper

to produce. Small town soda bottlers could have attractive bottles made in small quantities for a reasonable price.

Some ACL bottles have the bottler's name embossed near the base (see photo) and others have the same information on the base. Many bottles have the company name or logo and the date painted on the base. Some have only one digit for the year so it may take some research to find out if it is from the 40s, 50s, or 60s.

Even though these ACLs may not have much history behind them, they add a lot of color and interest to a soda collection. The bottles are really more interesting to look at than the embossed crown tops and are fun to collect. Most ACLs come in clear glass but a few can be found in amber and green. Most use one color (sometimes the bottles' contents adding a second). A multi-colored bottle is very desirable and more valuable. A 3-color 1952 bottle from San Bernardino, Calif. pictures Uncle Tom serving root beer on a tray.

The ACLs with pictures are the most interesting, desirable and valuable. Popular pictures include Indians, cowboys, pioneers, birds, animals and geographic features. A 1962 bottle from Idaho Falls, Idaho pictures Old Faithful. I predict these newer bottles will become more widely collected in the years ahead.

A few Western bottles do not fall into these four main categories. Gravitating stopper, Codd's patent and others were used by a few Western bottlers. An example of this is the JAMES DEWAR/ ELKO/ NEVADA bottle which used the floating ball stopper patented by William Roorbach in 1885.

Bottles from the categories described trace the evolution of soda bottles from their inception up to the 1960s.



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