



Colorado Whiskey Bottle Collecting



by John M. Eatwell

One of the most interesting aspects of bottle collecting is the search into the history of the person behind the company the bottle was made for. We are very fortunate to have an extensive collection of memorabilia in the "Western History" section of the Denver Public Library. I have spent many hours in this library while researching for the book "PIKE'S PEAK GOLD" (1), and for miscellaneous bottles and their source.

WOLFE LONDONER certainly qualifies as an interesting and prominent part of Colorado's history, as follows:

"This gentleman, well-known throughout the entire Rocky Mountain region as one of the leading merchants of Colorado, was born in the city of New York in 1839. His father being a wealthy merchant, he had in his youth all the advantages which wealth can bring, but being even then of a restless and adventurous disposition, when about thirteen years of age, he left home and, boarding a California-bound steamship, made his way to the Pacific Coast.

Arriving in San Francisco, he found employment in a hotel at \$125 a month and his board, and soon afterward, was engaged by a celebrated auctioneer to sell goods at auction three hours every evening, receiving a salary of \$200 a month.

At this, he continued until he had saved enough money to open a grocery business of his own. After remaining in California for about four years,

at the anxious solicitation of his parents, he returned to New York and engaged in business with his father.

About 1856, his father removed to DuBuque, Iowa, where he opened a large store, in charge of which he placed his elder son. Wolfe assumed charge of a branch store a few miles in the country.

They did a very prosperous business until the panic of 1857-1858, when they were obliged to succumb to the pressure of the times. The father taking the remnant of their goods, went to St. Louis, hoping in that city to retrieve their shattered fortunes.

Wolfe was left in charge of the family to await the receipt of funds from St. Louis for the purpose of taking them down the Mississippi. After a short time, he received \$20, and being heartily tired of his life of enforced inactivity in DuBuque, without waiting for further remittances, he determined to attempt the removal to St. Louis at once - not an easy task under the circumstances.

Going to the levee, he accosted the most genial-looking captain then on the river and asked him what he would charge to take himself and family with their goods to St. Louis. The fare was \$15 a passenger, but as his family must be small - he was then under twenty - the good-natured captain offered to take them for \$25.

This was more than the young Londoner had, and he therefore proposed to pay \$15 and the balance as soon as he

could earn it in St. Louis. To this, the captain finally consented, and a ticket was accordingly issued to "Wolfe Londoner and family."

Hurrying home, he loaded their household effects on two drays and sent the family, consisting of seven persons, on board the boat, with directions to secure berths and hold them while he remained with the goods.

It was not until the boat had put out from the wharf and was several miles down the river, that he ventured to approach the clerk, who by this time was quite anxious to see the holder of the tickets of the family that had appropriated so many of the staterooms. At the clerk's office, he met the captain, who charged him for deceiving him.

"No," said the young Londoner, "upon my word, every one of that party is a member of my family." Looking at him in astonishment, the captain asked him to explain. "Well, captain, I will tell you, although I seldom speak of it, and hope you will not in the future, I married a widow."

The captain's sympathy being aroused that the young man should be so cruelly imposed upon, closed the conversation by inviting him to drink. In the meantime, the captain's wife had made the acquaintance of the family, and at the supper table that evening, they were assigned the choicest places, next to the captain's family. The captain, in appreciation of the joke, overlooked the deception, and the acquaintance thus begun between the families ripened into an intimacy which continued for years.

At St. Louis, he obtained work at \$25 a month, until meeting Mr. A. Hanauer, an old friend of the family, he secured more remunerative employment.





In the early spring of 1860, he left St. Louis to come to Denver, in the employ of Hanauer, Dold & Co., then engaged in freighting across the Plains, and in merchandising in Colorado and New Mexico.

He joined the wagon train of the firm at Atchison, and the first day out, they made a distance of five miles. On the second day, as he was comfortably seated in one of the wagons, he was discovered by the Mexican wagon master, or -major domo-, who, disregarding his protestations that he was sent out by the owners of the train, ordered him to vacate his seat at once. Finding it useless to demur, he obeyed, and the balance of the journey performed on foot.

Arriving in Denver, almost completely worn out, and with but \$1.50 in his pocket, in a few days he assumed charge of his employers' store in West Denver. During



continued until 1865. Four years of this time, he held the office of County Clerk and Recorder of Lake County, the fees of the office, during the two years of the Red Mountain excitement, amounting to \$10,000 per annum. He also held offices of County Treasurer and County Commissioner.

In 1865, he came to Denver, and opened his present business, building up a large and constantly increasing trade, which extends through Colorado, and into Kansas, New Mexico and Wyoming, and amounting to nearly \$1,000,000 per annum. He has also a branch store in Leadville, which is under the management of his youngest brother, Joseph Londoner.

Mr. Londoner has done his share toward the build-up of Denver, and is the owner of one of the most beautiful residences in the city. He has been interested in various railroad enterprises, and is at present a stockholder in the Denver & Rio Grand Railroad. He has served one term as a member of the Board of Aldermen. He is a hard-working man, giving his constant attention to even the smallest details of his immense business.

Having acquired an ample fortune, he is enabled to follow his generous impulses in dispensing a lavish hospitality. As an entertainer, he is unequalled, and wherever an editorial excursion, a board of trade, or other body of tourists, visits Denver, Wolfe Londoner is always on hand to give them a princely reception, and set before them the good things of life.

the summer, he was sent to Carson City to start another store, and built the first stone building in that city, where he did an immense business the first year, owing to the rush from California Gulch to the San Juan country.

In the fall of 1860, he gave up the management of the Canon City store, taking the business at California Gulch for his own, which he

For several years, he has been Vice-President of the Denver Press Club, and has achieved considerable reputation as a correspondent, his letters to the Denver papers exhibiting the same happy vein of genial humor that is apparent in all his intercourse with his fellow-men." (2)

Wolfe Londoner arrived in Denver in 1864 and established a wholesale and retail grocery of his own at 15th and Blake. In 1887, the business was moved to the Londoner Block, a large four-story building located at 1624-1630 Arapahoe Street.

Wolfe Londoner won the nomination for mayor on the Republican ticket in 1889. Not taking any chances that Londoner would win the election on his own merit, a number of friends, led by Bat Masterson and Soapy Smith, stuffed ballot boxes and traded drinks for votes at local drinking establishments.



Londoner became Denver's 20th mayor by a total of 77 votes. Disgruntled candidates began filing charges shortly thereafter. The case was taken to court, and on April 6, 1890, the jury determined that Londoner should step down from office. He made an appeal to the Colorado Supreme Court to retain his office. On February 7, 1891, his hopes were crushed when

the decision of the lower court was upheld. Londoner remained in business until the time of his death in 1912.

If you have unearthed a bottle that you would like to know more about, take the time to visit your local State Historical Source. You will be surprised what you find.

- (1) "PIKE'S PEAK GOLD", by John M. Eatwell and David K. Clint, III, 2345 So. Federal Blvd., St. 100, Denver, CO 80219; Ph: (303) 922-0815. Standard \$67.50+ \$8.30 S&H, Deluxe \$97.50 + \$8.30 S&H.
- (2) Vickers, "History of the City of Denver, Arapahoe County and Colorado", pp. 497-498.

John M. Eatwell is a Past-President of the FOHBC, and a member of the FOHBC Hall of Fame. He is an advanced collector of Colorado whiskeys and Pike's Peak flasks.