

FLASKS AND TOKENS — THE CONNECTION

by Duane H. Feisel

Astute token collectors long ago discovered that bottle collector shows can be a good source for tokens. As the bottle diggers do their work extracting bottles from dumps, outhouse pits, land fills, etc., they sometimes encounter tokens. Before it was known that there was a good demand for old, dug tokens, the bottle diggers were not always very careful in examining their diggings - after all, they were looking for bottles! Today, bottle diggers are cognizant of the value of old tokens, and some of them will carry a metal detector to examine the dirt when it is dug to locate metallic items that otherwise might be missed. Bottle shows still produce tokens, but the word is out, and the competition among token collectors can be fierce.

Years ago, perhaps in the mid-1970's, I latched on to the idea of going to the bottle shows looking for tokens. One of the first things I saw that connected tokens to bottles was an old beer bottle from the Fredericksburg Brewing Company that I recalled seeing depicted on one of my trade tokens! There exists a whole series of such tokens, each with the standard reverse and a similar style converse - the obverse has an area



carrying an inscription for the issuer of the token. Most of the known examples of this style token are from San Francisco merchants, but there is a scattering of this type from other locations in California.

Well, that whetted my appetite (I bought examples of the bottle, both in quart and pint sizes), and I began looking at other bottles at these shows. I happened upon a whiskey flask that I recognized being from a merchant who had also issued trade tokens. That opened up a new avenue of token "go-with" collecting as I began buying whiskey flasks from California for which the merchant also issued tokens.

Right now, my collection numbers perhaps 200 such flasks, and I continue to add examples at almost every bottle show that I attend. I am not adding new pieces as frequently as before, and the current prices are considerably elevated over what I paid in that not-too-distant past. Still, in all, I find that most flasks that I want are reasonably enough priced when compared to what I have to pay for tokens. There are also whiskey bottles in cylindrical quart size from businesses which also issued tokens, but I have picked up only a couple of those (they take up too much room to store!).

Whiskey flasks come in several





different shapes. For the ones I have collected, the bottle collectors call them "pumpkinseed" or "picnic", "coffin", "Shoo-fly (coffin and shoo-fly are quite similar) and "jo jo" or "straight-sided" or "oval" or "dandy." These are listed in order of manufacturing period, in general.

The first item to be shown is likely the oldest of what I have - both the token and the flask. And both are very special favorites of mine. The shape of this flask is what is called "picnic" or "pumpkinseed." According to information obtained from the old John Thomas book, the Pacific Ocean House was built by Eli J. Swift in Santa Cruz, California, and it opened for business in 1866, mainly as a saloon and boarding house. Swift remained as proprietor of the establishment until around 1889, which dates both the token and the bottle. Thomas dated the flask from about 1878 to 1885 and notes that the Pacific Ocean House burned to the ground on November 7, 1907.

The next item is a "shoo-fly" flask. This flask probably dates from about the turn of the century. What is outstanding about this item, and the corresponding token, is that the inscription and layout of the wording are the same for both the slugplate of the flask on the obverse of the token!

The next combination of flask and related token is also interesting in that the flask serves to attribute the maverick token!

vides the name for the establishment which issued the bottle.

B. O. Hart is listed as proprietor of the Mirror Saloon in the 1899 Pacific States Telephone Companies directory, is listed as a saloon proprietor in both the 1905 Suits-Shuman California State Gazeteer and the 1905 Bradstreet directory, and is not listed in the 1914 Bradstreet directory. These listings help to date the time that the flask and token were in use. (A side note: Ferndale is known today for the large number of big old Victorian houses in the town. Well worth a visit if you are ever in that area of Northern California).

Whether you collect tokens with bottles as "go-withs", bottles with tokens as "go-withs" or both bottles and tokens, the tie-in is fascinating!

This article is excerpted, and slightly revised, from an article by the author which first appeared in *Talking Tokens* in February, 2000.

About the Author: Duane Feisel is founder and past-president of the National Token Collectors Association and can be reached at (530) 474-4168, or by E-mail: tokensrme@shasta.com.

