

# COLLECTING SAMPLE BOTTLES

by Bryan Grapentine  
Photos by Larry Grapentine

Webster defines sample as a “representative part or a single item from a larger whole or group presented for inspection or shown as evidence of quality”

In this article I will review mainly embossed glass sample bottles. These are of the most interest to collectors. Many samples were in paper label only bottles. Stoneware mini-jugs and sample tins popular collector categories are samples but will not be considered here. These are a separate category

Sample bottles may be put into two broad classes. Salesman’s samples were used to demonstrate to a potential customer some new feature, closure,

design or on ACL sodas and milk bottles, the colors available. I have not seen many bottles in this category and I rate them scarce.

Far more common are bottles made to contain a small quantity of a product normally found in a larger size bottle. These bottles usually have the same shape, color and embossing as the full size product bottles. If the consumer liked the sample he knew what the full size bottle looked like, making it easier to find in the store. These bottles were often given free to potential customers – a form of advertising still in use today. Trial-size samples were sold for a small price to introduce a

new product and are fairly common.

Less common are sample bottles made to hold a sample of some liquid such as water or a flavoring concentrate for future testing. I have not seen many of these usually larger bottles.

Also seldom seen are physician’s sample bottles. A French Lick, Indiana Pluto Water bottle with “Physicians Sample” printed on the label, recently sold on Ebay.

Sample bottles are usually, but not always, quite small - but all small bottles are not sample bottles. This is especially true for scent and perfume bottles which



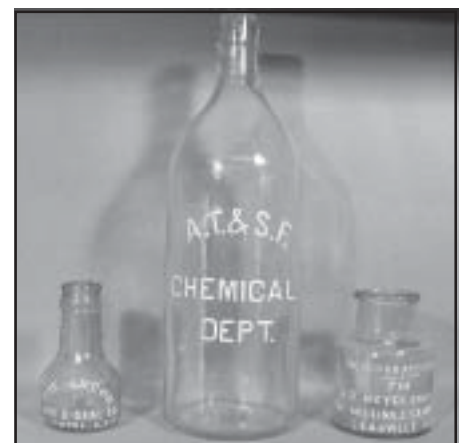
**Photo 1: Spirits** (L-R) E.A.FARGO CO. WHOLESALE LIQUORS S.F. CAL. whiskey; I.W.HARPER whiskey THE CAMPUS GOSSLER BROS. COLUMBUS AVE & 104TH. ST. N.Y. Liquor; PORT (paper label 1 ¼” tall); MT.VERNON PURE RYE WHISKEY; QUAKER MAID WHISKEY



**Photo 2: Salesman’s samples** (L-R) The Owens Illinois duraglas HANDI-SQUARE A.C.L. COLOR SAMPLES 1948 DESK CALENDAR 12-color, each month is a different color; ACL APPLIED COLOR LETTERING ADVERTISES MERCHANDISE SELLS! DAIRY PRODUCTS OWENS ILLINOIS PACIFIC COAST CO.



**Photo 4: Food & tobacco** (L-R) HIRES EXTRACT/FOR HOME USE; OLD MANSE CANADIAN SAP MAPLE SYRUP; GLOBE TOBACCO COMPANY DETROIT & WINDSOR full size; GLOBE TOBACCO COMPANY DETROIT & WINDSOR 2 1/4” sample size.



**Photo 3:** (L-R) THE CROWN CORK & SEAL CO. BALTIMORE, U.S.A. used to demonstrate recently (at the time) patented crown cap; A.T. & S.F. CHEMICAL DEPT.; The A.R.MEYER AND CO. ORE MILLING & SAMPLING CO. LEADVILLE COL.



**Photo 5:** Bitters (L-R) LASH'S BITTERS SAMPLE; SEAWORTH BITTERS CO. CAPE MAY NEW JERSEY U.S.A.; HENTZ'S CURATIVE BITTERS; DR. HARTER'S WILD CHERRY BITTERS 3 3/4" and 4 1/2", FREE SAMPLE.



**Photo 6:** Bitters (L-R) GEO BENZ & SONS APPETINE BITTERS, sample and full size; HOLTZERMAN'S PATENT STOMACH BITTERS; DR. LOEW'S CELEBRATED STOMACH BITTERS (very small 1/8" letters on the sample).



**Photo 7:** (L-R) CARTER'S INDELIBLE INK; PARKER QINK; THE SHERWIN WILLIAMS PAINT AND VARNISH MAKERS; SANFORD'S INKS; two SAMPLE THREE IN ONE OIL.

were often sold in small size bottles.

### COLLECTING SAMPLE BOTTLES

Few collectors, including the author, specialize in sample bottles, but they do make a great secondary collection. They are fun to collect, are easily found, interesting, attractive and do not take a lot of room to display. Sample bottles are usually inexpensive to buy and are a great

category for the budget minded collector. You will find them at all bottle shows and many antique shops. An Ebay search for "sample bottle" will usually result in a list of several dozen for sale. However, many of the bottles listed there are just small bottles, not necessarily sample bottles. The small sample bottles survive well in trash dumps and privies, so are frequently found intact while digging.

Three interesting sample bottles recently appeared in a WESTERN AMERICANA auction. The three bottles from Leadville, Colorado mining companies resemble large round ink bottles (2 1/2" w and 3 1/2" tall but are described in the catalog as sample bottles. These extremely rare bottles were used by mining and milling companies located near the mining town of Leadville, Colorado, circa 1880's. These large ink shape bottles are the only known embossed mining company bottles from the Western states. The three sold for an average price of \$373. See photo # 3. This photo also shows a 10 1/2" bottle believed to have been used to hold water samples from Fred Harvey restaurants and Steam engine water refilling locations. Railroad collectors prize these bottles.

### SAMPLE BOTTLE CATEGORIES

Sample bottle categories include bitters, spirits, medicine, hair, cosmetic, household, food, perfume, ink, and milk. Not often seen are Clevenger Bros. Factory samples made in the early 1900s for their retail outlet customers.

Bitters are perhaps the most popular, interesting, and attractive sample bottles. These bottles often come in various beautiful colors and figural shapes usually the same as the full-size bottle. Many sample bitters have high dollar value. One of the most expensive is the amber lighthouse figural S-82 SEAWORTH BITTERS (photo # 5). The selling prices of these figural samples have exceeded \$3,000 each in recent Glass Works Auctions. Sample medicine bottles are the most common, easily found, and generally reasonable priced.

### DISPLAYING SAMPLE BOTTLES

Sample bottles are easy to display. New and used display shelves of various sizes can often be found at shows, antique shops and used fixture outlets. I found a lighted, revolving TIMEX display case at a store going out of business. This lighted unit has 105 shelves each holding 2 or 3 small bottles – room for 300 bottles in a relatively small space. Front lighting is usually adequate. Back lighting will enhance colored bottles such as the AYER'S HAIR VIGOR. An interesting display can be created by placing the full and sample size bottles side by side on a shelf. See photo # 6

I find sample bottles fun to collect and

display. The usually low cost and great variety of these interesting bottles makes it easy to add to your collection on a regular basis. After all, much of the fun in the bottle hobby is adding to your collection.

Bryan Grapentine can be reached by postal mail at:  
 1939 W. Waltann Lane  
 Phoenix, AZ 85023  
 Or by E-mail: bgrapentine@att.net.



**Photo 8: Medicine** (L-R) BROMO SELTZER; CALDWELL'S SYRUP PEPSIN; FREE SAMPLE WARNERS' SAFE CURE CO.; DR. KILMER'S SWAMP-ROOT KIDNEY CURE.



**Photo 11: Cosmetic** (L-R) A.S.HINDS PORTLAND ME HONEY & ALMOND CREAM CAP. 2 1/2 FL. DR. ALCOHOL 7%; OUR ROSEBUD C&T perfume; HOYT'S 10-cents COLOGNE; RIEGERS FLOWER DROPS PERFUME



**Photo 9: Medicine** (L-R) SOZODANT FOR THE TEETH AND BREATH; PINEOLEUM TRIAL PHYSICIANS; SAMPLE RUBIFOAM FOR THE TEETH (on opposite label side); RENE'S PAIN KILLING SAMPLE MAGIC OIL TRY IT.



This photo shows a 8 1/4" rectangular bottle listed as rare in Rink/Ham as S-219.5.

One side panel reads SULPHUR AND IRON, the other panel BITTERS. Paper label front and back, one in English, the other in French. The product was produced by the Climax Chemical Co., Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Lettering on the box includes: "Its properties are blood making, blood cleansing and life sustaining."

This must have been a miracle cure, one of the many claims on the box: "One bottle will make the weakest chronic invalid feel that new life has been put into him" - what a bargain at 50 cents a bottle.



**Photo 10: Cosmetic** (L-R) AYERS' HAIR VIGOR beautiful sapphire blue; A.S.HINDS PORTLAND ME. HONEY AND ALMOND CREAM ALCOHOL 7%; HARLENE FOR THE HAIR SAMPLE.