

Collecting Bottles by State, The loway

Part 1 - Druggist Bottles

By Mike Burggraaf

Perhaps one of the most interesting and enjoyable aspects of collecting antique bottles is to collect examples from a specific geographic location. For example, some collectors enjoy finding bottles used from their home town. Depending on the size of the town, a collection could range from just a few bottles to as many as several hundred or more. Other collectors may concentrate on bottles from a specific county or section of the state. But for many, collecting examples from the entire state presents a hefty and rewarding challenge.

When choosing to collect bottles from the entire state, one must decide on what categories to collect and which categories to exclude, if any. Having been born and raised in Iowa, it just seemed natural to collect any bottle that could be identified as being used by an Iowa merchant or manufacturer. I chose not to collect milk bottles or crown top sodas as I preferred to accumulate the older examples, preferably those made prior to 1910.

While the neighboring states of Illinois,

Minnesota and Missouri enjoy the luxury of collecting numerous examples of beer, whiskey and bitters bottles, collecting this type of bottle presents a definite challenge when trying to find examples from Iowa. The Tall Corn State has nothing to compare population wise with larger cities such as St. Louis, Chicago

and the Twin Cities. The competition in large cities such as those just mentioned lent to a much broader range of merchants that used embossed bottles. The use of elaborately embossed bottles, as well as unusual bottle shapes and colors, created a large number of interesting and highly collectible glass containers for today's collector.

So it stands to reason that in the smaller populated areas such as Iowa, the need for embossed bottles was in less demand in proportion to the lower competition level. Fortunately for collectors of Iowa bottles, our predecessors from the 1800's did create a certain level of competitive business ingenuity, leaving a smaller but no less desirable number of embossed bottles for us to collect today.

As I discuss the various Iowa bottles to collect, I'm going to break it down into general categories by type. I'll begin with drugstore or pharmacy bottles and continue each issue with a different grouping.

Embossed drug store bottles are



perhaps the easiest bottles to collect from Iowa just from the standpoint of numbers. While examples from before 1880 are scarce, there are hundreds of Iowa bottles to collect from this category that date after this time frame. There is one open pontiled example from Iowa dating to the 1850's and a handful of examples from the 1860's and early 1870's. Most of the drug store and pharmacy bottles from Iowa date from the late 1870's to 1910 with a few embossed examples being used as late as 1915.

The druggist's bottles are fun to collect as examples from small towns may represent the only embossed bottle from that town. A bottle from Cooper, Iowa, with a population of 90 people in 1905, may represent the smallest town in Iowa to use an embossed bottle. The embossing simply reads: COOPER DRUG STORE, COOPER, IOWA.

Collecting drug store bottles with fancy embossing is another popular aspect in this category as there are a fair number of examples from Iowa embossed with mortar & pestles, fancy monograms and a



few with animals. A few examples are shown here with the owl perched on the mortar & pestle, a lion mixing a mortar & pestle, a firing canon, and eagles perched upon the mortar & pestle. There is even a bottle embossed with a cat. This cat was a pet of the druggist and made his permanent home in the drug store.

Perhaps the most popular bottles to collect in the drug store grouping are the colored examples from Iowa. We are

fortunate to have Iowa druggists bottles available in cobalt blue, teal blue, teal green, emerald green and various shades of amber. The older examples from the 1880's tend to be the cobalt blue and teal green examples while bottles from the 1890's are generally the emerald green and light teal blue. Amber drug store bottles seem to span both decades with the earlier examples ranging in color from a light yellow amber to a dark amber. While aqua may not be considered a color, it is a seldom seen coloration when dealing with Iowa drug store bottles. The aqua bottles seem to be fairly scarce as they simply do not turn up that often.

Another plus with the colored



pharmacy bottles is that many of them seem to have figural embossing to further enhance their collectibility. Examples in the colored grouping pictured are embossed with a horseshoe, a quill pen, a crown, eagles, mortar & pestles, and a boat. Assembling a collection of colored Iowa drug store bottles will test ones patience but with time and some good luck, a fair number of these colored gems can be found.

As with most specific areas of collecting bottles, there are numerous go-withs for the collector of drug store bottles. Trade cards, calendars, trade tokens and other forms of advertising were frequently used by druggists to promote

their business. Perhaps the most popular go-with are embossed or etched dose glasses. These small glasses are usually heavily embossed and a very few have figural embossing.

I will describe three of the more difficult dose glasses from Iowa to obtain. The first example is from Centerville, Iowa and has the embossed cross. Another example is a slightly larger style and is embossed PHELPS & SHORE,

WHO'S YOUR PILL ROLLER?, ELDON, IOWA. This small town dose glass is also embossed with a mortar & pestle. One unusual dose glass from Iowa is attributed to druggist Aldelbert Reipe of Davenport, Iowa and is embossed TRY REIPE'S / MAPLE / COUGH CURE / CAN'T BE BEAT, which makes this glass a nice go-with for the cure bottle collector as well.

As always, pursue your collecting interests with items you like and can afford, and remember to keep the fun in collecting!

Mike Burggraaf can be reached at qrsglass@lisco.com.

