

Collecting Bottles by State, The Iowa

Part 3 - Bitters Bottles

By Mike Burggraaf

To the readers that are following the Iowa section, this is the third article in a series that will deal with collecting bottles by state, and by type. The previous issue of the *Bottles & Extras* magazine dealt with the different Iowa medicine manufacturing businesses and the bottles that they used. This issue will give the reader insight on what Iowa bottles are available in the bitters category.



Bitters bottles have been collected for such a long time and have such a strong following of dedicated collectors that it is hardly necessary to include information dealing with bitters in general. There have been many articles and fine books published dealing with this extremely popular segment of the bottle collecting fraternity. What this article will provide is a more complete listing of the bitters bottles available from Iowa along with some brief history on some of the companies represented.

For those familiar with the numerous bitters bottles available, this particular grouping of bottles has perhaps the greatest variety of shapes, colors and embossing of all the bottles groups available to collect. While Iowa does not have any of the fancy barrels, figural or other fancy mold designs, our humble state does have its share of rare squares, that is the typical amber square shaped bottle used for packaging bitters.

Perhaps the most common bitters bottles from Iowa are those used by the Chamberlain Medicine Co. of Des Moines and the Severa's Stomach Bitters from Cedar Rapids. Let's first look at the bottles used by the Chamberlain firm. Most of you probably already know that there are two distinct bottles available from this company, the square and the common flask type, both being made in various shades of amber. What you may not know is that there are three distinct variations of the flask and two varieties of the square bottle.

If you read the article on Iowa medicines in the last *Bottles & Extras* magazine, you may have read the difference in the Chamberlain bottles by the embossing used. Mainly, those bottles having the Chamberlain & Co. embossing date from 1882 to 1892 while the bottles that are embossed the Chamberlain Medicine Company date after 1892. All of the Chamberlain bottles can be dated this way except for the bitters. After the name change in the company in 1892, all of the bottles ordered were embossed with the new company name while the bitters bottles retained the old Chamberlain & Co. embossing.

The difference in the two different eras



can be identified by several subtle details. On the flasks, the earlier examples have a diagonal hinge mold base mark while the newer examples have the typical style base seen on bottles manufactured during the 1890s up to 1910. The earlier flasks also have a definite raised panel effect on the front panel while the newer examples do not. The older flasks may also have a slightly cruder applied or gloppy top as opposed to the more perfect tooled tops of the newer flasks. A new discovery just two years ago produced perhaps the first flask used by the Chamberlain & Co. firm in Des Moines. The embossing is identical to the early amber flasks including the hinge mold base mark. This example however is aqua and has a crude, gloppy lip that would ordinarily make you think it was an 1860s bottle, but of course could only be dated to 1882 at the earliest.

The age difference in the squares can be identified by similar traits found in the flasks. The earlier squares have the older base mark and applied tops and more variation in color while the newer examples are more uniform with little variation in the amber coloration.

Overall, the flasks seem to outnumber the squares by at least a five to one



margin. An interesting difference between the flasks and the squares is the embossment of CURACOA BITTERS on the flasks and CURACO BITTERS on the squares.

Referring back to the Iowa medicine article again, you may recall the predecessor to the Chamberlain Company in Des Moines was the Owens & Chamberlain Medicine Company located in Marion. In addition to the medicines that they produced, they also put out two extremely rare bitters that are a very welcome addition to any Iowa collector.

The flask is similar to the older bottles used by the Des Moines firm but this example is clear and has the large O & C initials as shown. While this bottle is rated as scarce in Ring and Ham's great book on bitters, I am aware of only one example of the clear flask. The other bottle that they used was the larger square bottle which is very crude with a gloppy applied top and adorned with the familiar O & C initials. The square is a very desirable bottle with only a handful of examples known. The time line on the Marion

bitters bottles would be from 1872 to 1881.

The other very familiar bitters from Iowa was produced by W. F. Severa. Wesley Francis Severa came to Cedar Rapids in 1880, immediately establishing a drug store trade. It wasn't long before he began to prepare and market his own line of proprietary medicines including his Stomach Bitters.

Similar to the Chamberlain firms, Severa used a flask and a square bottle to market his bitters, the flask being the fifty cent size and the square selling for one dollar. The flasks are amber and are not embossed with the word bitters. Labeled examples of the flask exist that confirm that it was used for bitters. The script embossing on the side panels reads: W. F. Severa / Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

There are three distinct versions of the larger square bottle. All known examples are various shades of amber with the most popular variety being embossed on one side W. F. SEVERA and on the other side STOMACH BITTERS. The other version is embossed W. F. SEVERA/ CEDAR RAPIDS in block letters while the newest example is embossed with the same

lettering, only in script style. There are machine made examples of the script embossed bottles in both the flask and square. There are no known examples of Severa's bottles that are embossed with both the town and the word bitters. Also known is a "label only" example on a crude square bottle that leads to speculation that the early 1880s examples of Severa's bitters were not embossed.

The remainder of the known Iowa bitters bottles that I'll describe are all considered to be difficult to find. This includes the Beggs Dandelion Bitters from Sioux City. Although I'm aware of around ten examples of this bottle, it remains as a bottle that is fairly elusive.

Sometime during 1880, Charles W. Beggs proposed a partnership with E. C. DeWitt who had been manufacturing and selling patent medicines to a local market. Both men at that time were residents of Elk Point, Dakota Territory. A partnership was formed and by 1883 the patent medicine firm of Beggs & DeWitt had moved to Sioux City, Iowa. During 1886 the business was moved to Chicago and eventually the partnership was dissolved.





the early 1880's Chamberlain's flasks. All of the known flasks are made of aqua glass and are embossed: C. H. WARD & CO. / DES MOINES IOWA on the two sides and WARD'S EXCELSIOR BITTERS on the front panel. I know of only one amber

square example and the crudeness displayed would suggest that the bottle is 1870s vintage. An ad in the 1875 Andreas Atlas of Iowa confirms C. H. Ward as proprietor of Ward's Excelsior Bitters. The square bottle is embossed on three sides:

Both men then established separate patent medicine companies, both of which were very successful.

All known examples have been blown from the same mold and are embossed BEGGS DANDELION BITTERS on one side and SIOUX CITY IOWA on the opposite side. The bottles will display various degrees of crudeness and come in a wide range of amber coloration. The examples shown here display the drastic difference in color. One bottle is a wonderful light yellow amber while the other bottle is a very dense amber with hundreds of seed bubbles in the glass to add to its character.

The next rare Iowa bitters is from the C. H. Ward Company which was located in Des Moines. Charles H. Ward had been in the wholesale and retail drug trade in Des Moines as early as 1873. From 1882 to 1889 the firm operated strictly in the wholesale drug market as C. H. Ward & Company. The business merged with another wholesale drug firm in 1889 which established the Hurlbut, Ward & Co.

C. H. Ward & Company marketed its bitters using the flask style bottle and the square bottle. Several of the flasks have been dug in Iowa and are very similar to



WARD'S EXCELSIOR BITTERS / C. H. WARD & CO., PROPRIETORS / DESMOINES IOWA.

Next on the list is a maverick bitters, which is a bottle that does not have the town or state embossed on the bottle. There are many mavericks in the bitters category but this next example is well documented as being from Davenport, Iowa. This amber bottle is another crudely made square with a nice gloppy applied top and embossed on two sides: EUROPEAN HERB BITTERS / ASCHERMANN BROTHERS.

The Aschermann family established a grocer business in Davenport in 1857. At various times, a saloon was also managed next door to the grocery. Ads in the Davenport city directories list C. Aschermann & Co. as manufacturers of the Celebrated European Herb Bitters, none superior in the world! The firm name of Aschermann & Co. was discontinued in 1896 and the ads for the bitters no longer appeared in the directories. Ferdinand Aschermann, one of the four brothers, continued to operate the grocery business through 1911.

Another maverick that we have attributed to Iowa is an early aqua bottle embossed DANDELION AND WILD CHERRY BITTERS. This aqua bottle is



round with a double collar lip and has an early hinge mold base mark. This particular bottle has a mostly complete original label that reads: DANDELION AND WILD CHERRY BITTERS / PRICE 25 CENTS / S. HUNTINGTON, PROPRIETOR / FARMERSBURGH, IOWA.

Samuel Huntington had been a dealer in patent medicines and a druggist in McGregor, Iowa as early as 1865. The small town of Farmersburgh is just a few miles west of McGregor so it's a good possibility that Mr. Huntington had been in business there before moving to McGregor.

With so few embossed Iowa bitters to collect, the label only examples from Iowa are always a welcome addition. Some are unique as the survival rate for labeled examples is low. Add in the history of a short lived business and the rarity factor is greatly increased. The examples in the photo include a labeled SEVERA'S STOMACH BITTERS from Cedar Rapids; an ACME PEPSIN BITTERS from Dubuque; an EXCELSIOR STRENGTHENING BITTERS from Des Moines; and a BARRAGAR'S BURDOCK BLOOD BITTERS from Sheldon, Iowa.

That concludes the bitters segment of collecting bottles from Iowa. I hope you've enjoyed the article and perhaps you have gained a little more knowledge of some lesser known bitters bottles. As always, enjoy the search and the people you meet along the way!

References:

The Antique Bottles of Iowa, 1846-1915, by Burggraaf & Southard, 1998.

Bitters Bottles, by Ring & Ham, 1998.

Mike Burggraaf got started collecting antique bottles in 1968 when he found a Mexican Mustang Liniment bottle in an old barn. Since that time he has become an avid collector of Iowa bottles and Iowa stoneware jugs. Research on the bottles and the history that goes with them has always been an important and enjoyable segment of his collecting.

Mike is co-author of "The Antique Bottles of Iowa 1846-1915" published in 1998. He also is the current *Iowa Antique Bottleers* editor, which he has been doing since 1991. As always, Mike is happy to answer any questions about Iowa bottles and would be glad to have the opportunity to add a new example to his collection.

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OREGON
American Brewing & Crystal Ice Co.
1903-1916
by Dave Scafani



This Baker City, Oregon brewery was actually started in 1874 by Henry Rust, and was known as the Pacific Brewery. Its peak production was 10,000 barrels per year.

In 1903, Henry Rust, almost 70 years old, decided to retire, and sold the business to Reinhard Martin. The name was changed to American Brewing and Crystal Ice Company.

The brewery, located at Third and Dewey, was closed by state prohibition in 1916.



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