



Western bottles have always had a strong appeal to me. After almost thirty years of collecting antique bottles, I always seem to gravitate back to early Western glass.

I grew up in Central Oregon and was fortunate enough to associate with some well-known old time bottle collectors. Most are gone now, but for years, I heard about some virtually “unknown” Oregon bottles.

Over the years, I have been lucky enough to either own, or at least handle, some of the rarest examples of Oregon glass. I will never forget seeing for the first time the “Marx & Jorgensen Whiskey,” the “S. F. Beer, Astoria, O.” and the “Henleys Indian Hair Restorative.”

One bottle that particularly intrigued me, however, was the “S. Adolph, Salem, O. Amber Whiskey Flask.” I had heard of one example known that was dug in Portland, Oregon in the 1970s, but had never actually seen the flask, or obtained a rubbing of the embossing.

Being a Western flask collector, this was constantly eating away at me. I would sure like just one chance at one of these flasks, assuming it did actually exist.

Finally, after many years of dreaming about this piece of Oregon history and tracking any tidbit of information about the company, I got a break.

Fellow collector Jim Xiggores in Washington suggested I try to contact the actual Adolph family, as he believed a descendant was still alive, and living in Oregon. It took several years, but I finally came face to face with Anna Rose Adolph.

Anna Rose is the great, great-granddaughter of Sam Adolph himself. She is a sweet and cordial lady, who is extremely proud of her Oregon heritage.

We spent the day together as she reminisced about growing up in the Salem area, and what she had learned about her long-distant relative.

She told me that Sam had come to Oregon from Germany, in 1862. He had saved up as much money as possible and opened a brewery on Trade Street in Salem. Sam had also operated a saloon at this address, and after it was destroyed by fire in 1869, he moved to another location and rebuilt the brewery and saloon.

This new location on the corner of Commercial and Trade Street was his location for the next sixteen years. Sam took a lot of pride in his business, and demanded only the finest quality beer and liquor to be sold to the many loggers and farmers who frequented his establishment.

In the winter of 1879, Sam ordered one trial run of embossed flasks, which were to be given only to his select customers for the new year of 1880. However, he found this venture to be too expensive to repeat again, and to date, only two pint and one half-pint flasks exist.

The two pint flasks have crudely applied tops, and are embossed in a circular plate, “S. Adolph & Co. Salem, O.” One of the pints has such a crudely made top that it would never accept a cork. The Adolph family kept this example for 120 years, until I was able to acquire it from Anna Rose. It was never buried, or used in any way. This example remains one of the most crudely made of any known Western flask.

After owning the pint for a year, I received a call from Anna Rose, who asked if I would be interested in the half-pint. I assured her that I was, and arrangements were made for my purchase of this flask.

The two known pint examples are in the classic Western “knife edge” style, and the half-pint is in the “union oval” style. All three examples are in a light amber coloration. This makes sense, as there were only one production run of these flasks. Since the first example was dug many years ago, I am not aware of so much as a shard of an S. Adolph flask being found.

The two examples from the Adolph family are likely to be the last to be discovered for a long time to come.

One can only wonder how large an undertaking it was for a small-time saloon operator in Salem, Oregon to order his own embossed flasks. Several of the extremely rare Western flasks have this same type of background. They will be



discussed in future articles. These pieces remain tangible evidence of a time long since past.

I cannot thank the Adolph family enough for their courtesy and respectful attitude. They know that these two pieces will remain in a prominent place in a Western flask collection.

I suppose it truly pays to follow all leads and to develop friendships with fellow collectors. Jim Xiggores has never demanded anything in return for his assistance, and my relationship with dozens of collectors will hopefully help in building a quality Western flask collection.

I cannot believe how lucky I was to acquire two examples of one of the West’s rarest flasks. The way it occurred will remain one of my most treasured memories of an amazing hobby.

