



Part III

The first British bottled registered for poison was in 1859 by Savory & Barker. The first American patent for a poison bottle was granted to Joseph Harrison in 1871. Afterwards, poison bottles were manufactured in numerous colors, sizes and shapes. The skull and crossbones were embossed on many; some were shaped like coffins, skulls, others had ribs or raised ridges. Some had raised diamonds or dimples. The early perfume bottles are good examples of the raised diamonds or dimples. The color cobalt blue was used predominately in the United States, however some drug companies

used green and also amber. The “odd shape” or raised embossing was to convey to the user, whether in the middle of the night or during the day, that this bottle contained a dangerous substance. Who knows how many unfortunate individuals mistakenly consumed poisons in the middle of the night. Sometime after 1892, the Owl Drug Company chose dark cobalt blue bottles in a triangular shape.

In 1872, the Whitall-Tatum Company introduced a new line of deep, cobalt blue bottles for poisonous substances. The surface of the bottle was embossed with a quilted pattern and sharp diamond shaped points. “Thus the bottle would protect patients from the danger of mistake both

day and night - by the touch as well as sight.” In a 1924 Whitall-Tatum catalog there is no mention of blue glass bottles. Many things may have led to the demise of the “special” poison bottle; others have speculated — better illumination in houses, education, unfortunate attraction by children and others, and possibly the





high cost of producing “odd shape” or special embossing. Then again maybe automatic bottle making machines played a roll.

I don't know for sure when The Owl Drug Stores started putting poison compounds into the cobalt blue three-sided bottles. The following information was found in a 1909 Owl Drug Company Catalog for ordering products through the U.S. Mail:

We Adopt Every Precaution We Can to Protect Our Patrons

“We now put up all our poisons of all kinds in a special style bottle made for that purpose. All poisons are put up in dark blue three-sided bottles—you can't miss them. When you get a bottle of this kind from us, it means that it contains poison. Of course we have poison labels of all kinds, but sometimes labels get washed off or faded out. However, you can never mistake one of our poison bottles. What is more, we want you to look over your stock of medicines and see if you have any dangerous ones among them. Mention the size and manner you want, and we will include some empty bottles with your first shipment. Then you can remove all your poisonous or dangerous medicines to this particular style bottle. Of course we will make no charge for them.”

One thing I know for sure is the Owl Poisons are beautiful when displayed in a window or light box. There may be argument over how many different sizes relative to height of the one-wing bottles

and two-wing bottles were manufactured, however, the contents ranged from one-quarter ounce to thirty-two ounces in the one-wing, but only up to eight ounces in the two-wing. There is also one set of one-wing bottles with a slug plate type embossing around the Owls and one lone bottle with an embossed Grandpappy Owl. You can find almost any of the “birds” embossed on the bottles, this makes it costly to collect a series of “birds” in cobalt.

Several other bottle collecting books have assigned identifying numbers to the different sizes in each series. The two hardest to find are the 7 ¼” one-wing and the Grandpappy.

Keep on looking for those birds!!



Jim Bilyeu
P.O. Box 101
Independence, CA 93526
(760) 878-2216

