

ERNEST VERDIER AND HIS FRENCH SODA WATER

By Eric McGuire

The purpose of this article is to document what is probably the earliest siphon bottles made and used in San Francisco, California. There are a number of good articles explaining the history of siphon bottles and their variants, such as gasogenes. I strongly recommend a look at a classic book that, fortunately, has been digitally copied and is available online. A TREATISE ON BEVERAGES, OR THE COMPLETE PRACTICAL BOTTLER, by Charles Herman Sulz, and printed in 1888, is an excellent book that is loaded with wonderful graphics related to the bottling industry. (see – <http://www.archive.org/details/treatiseonbevera00sulzrich>) Another good article titled “Mixing it Up” by Digger O’Dell includes information on a number of patents that relate to siphon bottles.

(see - http://www.bottlebooks.com/Siphons/mixing_it_up.htm)

While Sulz covers nearly every conceivable topic related to soda water, including drawings of soda water dispensing carts, he didn’t touch upon the delivery mechanism for siphon bottles. Since the pressure in each bottle must reach 120 to 140 pounds in order to effectively release all its contents, they may easily be considered highly lethal bombs. Careless handling could unleash a deadly shower of glass shrapnel. An extremely graphic example of such an incident was reported at the Steam Soda Works in San Jose, California in 1869 - and this was a relatively common occurrence:

A young Italian named Fortinito Villo came to his death today about eleven o’clock in a strange manner. He was working at the Steam Soda Works on Market street, and was engaged in putting soda into bottles, when one of them bursted, and a piece of glass struck him. It entered the left side of the neck, penetrating downwards,



This photograph of a Mt. Shasta Mineral Spring Co. wagon is loaded with siphon bottles. It was taken in San Francisco in the 1890’s.

perforating the pleura and entering the chest, severing the left vertebral and interior thyroid artery, destroying both jugular veins. As soon as it happened his brother took hold of him and ran with him to Martin’s drug store. Several of our best surgeons were on hand in a moment, among whom I noticed Drs. Turner, Corey, Thorne, James B. Corey, and great efforts were made to

reach the bleeding vessels, but without success. The unfortunate young man expired almost half an hour after the accident. (1)

Each bottle was put into a wooden box containing wooden dividers so that the bottles could not come into contact with each other. The boxes were then placed onto the bed of a delivery wagon. Just one layer was typically the

norm since interference with the metal siphon valve affixed to the top of each bottle should not be compromised for fear of potential explosion. The horse-drawn wagon load would then be on its merry way across the rough and bumpy streets of the day – a ride that surely must have caused some consternation with the driver. The photograph below is a surviving example of such a wagon in San Francisco that is loaded for delivery. The siphon bottles are clearly visible.

The beginning point of this story is obscured somewhere in France, probably in Paris. It is thought that Ernest Verdier and Pauline Somny were married in Paris about 1857. Their only child, Marie, was born in April 1858, and the young family maintained their residence in France for several years prior to immigrating to the United States. Aboard the steamship Saxon, the Verdier family arrived in New York City on October 8, 1862, but within three days they proceeded to San Francisco. The United States was fully engaged in a civil war at that time and immigration was considerably reduced. San Francisco undoubtedly appeared to be a relatively safe haven from the active hostilities in the East. After the boat trip to Panama, they boarded the Pacific Mail Steamship Co.'s steamship, Sonora, and arrived in San Francisco on November 6, 1862. Young Pauline was especially driven in her goal to enter the business of fashion, bringing the world of haute couture to the unsettled culture of San Francisco.

Pauline set about arranging for the necessary requirements to run a business in the bustling city and by February 1863 her first newspaper advertisement was published in the Daily Alta California.

Her husband, Ernest, was

Modes de Paris.

MME. VERDIER, MILLINER, RUE
de Richelieu, in Paris, has the honor to inform the ladies of San Francisco, that she has opened a store for the sale of

BONNETS AND HEAD DRESSES,

No. 609 Sacramento street,

Over J. W. Davidson & Co.'s Dry Goods Store.

Mme. Verdier also informs the ladies who will honor her with a call, that they will always find at her store the newest and most fashionable goods—the house in Paris sending by every steamer Ribbons, Feathers, Flowers, Silks, Velvets, etc., from the most distinguished and fashionable establishments in Paris. felm2p

The first advertisement for Pauline Verdier in San Francisco, California. (Daily Alta California [San Francisco, California], February 1, 1863)

decidedly quiet in the venture and probably did not actively participate.

The “City of Paris” store was the primary outlet for French dry goods in San Francisco during its early years. Established about 1850 by Felix and Emile Verdier from their headquarters in Paris, it was operated by Emile Verdier and several other partners until 1868. As a result the name of Verdier

ALL COUNTRY PRODUCTS COMBINED IN THIS HOUSE. 086-02

M O D E S !

...AND...

DRESSMAKING ESTABLISHMENT.

MME. VERDIER,

No. 609 Sacramento street,

HAS THE HONOR TO INFORM HER
customers and the ladies of San Francisco, that she has enlarged her establishment and is now ready to receive orders for Dressmaking.

THE TRIMMINGS RECEIVED FROM PARIS are of the best manufacture, and are all very handsome and fashionable. fel2-2wp

Pauline Verdier expanded her business to include dressmaking by 1864. (Daily Alta California [San Francisco, California] December 13, 1864)

was already associated with fine French fashion even before Pauline arrived in San Francisco. There is some indication that Ernest Verdier, Pauline's husband, and Emile Verdier, held a common ancestry but their business interests were completely autonomous. Ernest Verdier had no interest in or connection with French fashion and his wife, Pauline, had no interest in the activities of Emile Verdier and the City of Paris store. In fact, Ernest Verdier is not documented in any business activity in San Francisco until 1865 when he began manufacturing his “French mineral water.”

By the end of 1864, Pauline had demonstrated her business acumen and apparently became concerned that the profits from her success were at risk from her husband who had the legal right to her earnings by virtue of the laws of the day. Throughout much of history, wives were considered the property of their husbands. The doctrine of coverture allowed the husband to control much of the wife's activities and her property.

(2) California law allowed for a wife to petition for “sole trader” status, thus giving her the ability to control her own business activities and keep her own profits. Pauline petitioned for sole trader status and won this right in September 1864. (3)

Pauline Verdier expanded her business to include dressmaking by 1864. (Daily Alta California [San Francisco, California] December 13, 1864)

Ernest Verdier soon entered into the business of selling French mineral water at 311 Dupont Street in San Francisco. It is not clear whether Verdier was dispensing his water solely by fountain at this time or whether he was using bottles.

E. F. HERVE. **J. H. PERRY.**

**STEAM
SODA WORKS**

No. 712 BROADWAY,
Between Stockton and Powell Streets,
SAN FRANCISCO.



The advertisement for the Steam Soda Works in the 1871 San Francisco Business Directory, and operated by the short lived partnership of Herve & Perry.

MME. PAULINE VERDIER (42 WEST TWENTY-
third street) will have her opening of Fall and Winter
Imported Bonnets and Hats, on Monday, October 4

This advertisement in the New York Herald reflects Pauline Verdier's move to New York City. (New York Herald, September 26, 1875)

He continued in this business for approximately two years. Based upon his claimed income, Ernest was barely subsisting, while his wife was making a comfortable living. In either 1865 or 1866, it is known that Ernest ordered bottles from the Pacific Glass Works – undoubtedly siphon bottles. The quality of the delivered bottles was not to his liking and he sued the Pacific Glass Works for breach of contract in the amount of \$4,000. He initially brought a suit against the glass works in August 1866 (4), but the case didn't go to trial until December 1867. (5) Within a few days, the jury rendered a verdict in favor of Ernest Verdier, but awarded him only \$250. (6) It is assumed that the

CUSTOM HOUSE SEIZURES.

The customs inspectors seized yesterday two trunks belonging to Marie Verdier, a passenger on the steamer *Periere*, from Havre. Each trunk had a false bottom, in which were the following articles:—Three pieces of silk, five remnants of velvet, twelve and a half yards of printed scarf silk, twenty-five pieces of linen belts, two pieces of woollen galloons (about one hundred yards), and a quantity of ladies' wearing apparel.

One dozen gold studs were sent to the seizure room from the Post Office, an attempt having been made to send them through the mail.

This article undoubtedly exposed the activities of Mme. Pauline Verdier when her daughter was caught transporting French goods into the United States without paying the necessary customs duty. (New York Herald, September 26, 1878)

exacting standards necessary for the effective use of seltzer bottles were not upheld in their manufacture, but it is not known why he was awarded much less than his initial demand. Likely the top finish was not consistent enough to adequately accommodate the siphon mechanism attached to the top of each bottle, but this is only conjecture. Regardless, it is apparent that during his period of operation, Ernest also had bottles blown at the San Francisco Glass Works. Of the two known examples of Ernest Verdier's siphon bottle, one is composed of a clear glass that is typical of that made at the San Francisco Glass Works from 1865 until June 1868 when that factory burned to the ground. The Pacific Glass Works never ventured into the manufacture of colorless glass since it was the most difficult type of glass to produce.

Evidence indicates that 1866 was the last year of production for Ernest Verdier with his French Mineral Water. William Firderer sold coal and Sitka (Alaska) ice in partnership with Phil Caduc in Sacramento, California, beginning in 1855. The partnership

terminated June 6, 1859, (7) and he then operated men's clothing stores in San Francisco until January 3, 1867. (8) Firderer was listed in the 1867 San Francisco Business Directory as a "French soda and mineral water manufacturer" at 311 Dupont Street, precisely where Ernest Verdier had operated, and Verdier is not documented as being in any business in 1867. In the following year (1868), William Firderer is noted in the San Francisco business directory as being in partnership with George F. Bragg and Phil Caduc and operating the Steam Soda Works at 530 Pacific Street in San Francisco. It is doubtful that either Bragg or Caduc would have operated any soda works directly, as they were both highly successful California businessmen with a number of ventures to manage. It is likely these three



The tops were finished without the application of a separate parison of glass. This was not a common technique for the period and must have been specially requested by Verdier in order to achieve a more exacting profile for all the bottle tops.



The Verdier siphon bottles are nine inches in height and contain slightly more than 1 ½ U.S. pints of liquid.



Both pictured examples were blown in the same mold. The dark aqua bottle is typical of the common "green" glass produced in San Francisco during the 1860's. The colorless example is also typical of the "flint" glass being produced by the San Francisco Glass Works from 1865 to 1868. The pinkish rose color is probably due to the addition of manganese, the decolorizing agent used to cancel out the green color caused by the presence of iron. (11)

men purchased Verdier's business at the beginning of 1867 and Firderer became the operating manager. Regardless, the partners sold the Steam Soda Works to Eugene Herve, who was an employee of the factory. He took on a partner, John H. Perry; however, the company was soon sold to Pierre G. Soms, who continued its operation until the end of the century.

The advertisement for the Steam Soda Works in the 1871 San Francisco Business Directory, and operated by the shortlived partnership of Herve & Perry.

Perhaps out of work from about the beginning of 1867, Ernest Verdier's troubles began to compound. His wife filed for divorce in November 1868. (9) Though the suit was dismissed, she filed again in 1869 and was granted a divorce on the grounds of adultery. (10) Ernest Verdier seems to have left the country after this event – possibly returning to France .

After the divorce, Pauline Verdier remained in San Francisco and ~~continued to operate her millinery business.~~ By 1867, their daughter, Marie Verdier, was sent off to boarding school in San Jose , about 45 miles south of San Francisco . She attended what was then called Academy of Notre Dame, established in 1851 by the Sisters of Notre Dame Namur, a congregation founded in Amiens , France , in 1804. When she graduated in the early 1870s, Pauline and Marie determined to make an even bigger name in the fashion world by setting up shop in New York City .

This advertisement in the New York Herald reflects Pauline Verdier's move to New York City . (New York Herald, September 26, 1875)

Her New York location was much better suited for making periodic trips to Paris for purchasing the latest in French fashion. Marie also became involved in the business for she made a big splash in the newspapers when she returned from Paris in 1878 and was caught by U.S. Customs officials when they found that her trunks were fitted with false bottoms and stuffed with



The base of the bottles are smooth and slightly domed with an additional ring, or foot, around their circumference, which gave the bottle added protection from the highly pressurized contents.

unclaimed French goods.

This article undoubtedly exposed the activities of Mme. Pauline Verdier when her daughter was caught transporting French goods into the United States without paying the necessary customs duty. (New York Herald, September 26, 1878)

Perhaps by 1883 her ex-husband, Ernest Verdier, had died. Pauline was listed in the 1883 New York City directory as a widow. In the same year, her daughter, Marie, became a naturalized U.S. citizen. On October 16, 1883, Marie Verdier married Lucien Jullian in Manhattan , New York City. After that date there is no more record of Pauline Verdier or Marie Jullian in the United States . Thus ended the sojourn of the Verdier family in the United States , leaving behind a material reminder in the form of glass bottles, simply marked E. VERDIER / SAN FRANCISCO, blown in either 1865 or 1866.

The tops were finished without the application of a separate parison of glass. This was not a common technique for the period and must have been specially requested by Verdier in order to achieve a more exacting profile

for all the bottle tops.

End Notes:

1. ~~Sacramento Daily Union (Sacramento , California)~~, August 23, 1869

2. Rick Geddes & Dean Lueck, "The Gains From Self-Ownership and the Expansion of Women's Rights," (The American Economic Review, Vol. 92, No. 4) September 2002.

3. Sacramento Daily Union (Sacramento , California), September 6, 1864

4. Daily Alta California (San Francisco , California), August 14, 1866

5. Ibid, December 14, 1867

6. Ibid, December 16, 1867

7. Sacramento Daily Union (Sacramento , California), June 23, 1859

8. Daily Alta California (San Francisco , California), January 7, 1867

9. Daily Morning Chronicle (San Francisco , California) November 14, 1868

10. Daily Alta California (San Francisco , California) June 1, 1869

11. The San Francisco Bay area became a significant exporter of manganese used in the "soaping" of glass. Pyrolusite (manganese dioxide), was shipped to glass factories throughout the world during the 1860's until the deposits were depleted.