

The Importance of Being Ernest

By Joe Terry

There are times when a story, as it is told, sounds remarkably like another. Describe one small town pharmacy and the story could be overlaid onto another with few alterations. The same could go for a dairy, a brewery or a bottler. In this case, the latter is to be the subject of our story. The man it centers on was no more extraordinary than any of the hundreds of men at the time doing the exact same thing he was, and yet he left a mark on history that was distinctly his.

Bottling developed out of the need to have beverages in portable containers. Some owners handled only alcoholic drinks, purchasing barrels of beer from the breweries and transferring it to glass bottles. Others bottled both alcoholic and temperance drinks. Then there were those who dealt strictly with the family friendly liquids: sodas and mineral waters.

Our gentleman was of the temperance persuasion. His name was Ernest Bacher, a German immigrant. He was born in Baden on February 15, 1826. He arrived in America in 1835. Little is known of his early life. In 1849 while living in Canton, Ohio, he was married. Within a few years the couple

moved westward to Hancock County, settling in the little village of Arcadia. There is no documentation of his occupation, but if he was consistent in his business, he dealt in ice. He moved his business to Findlay, Ohio in 1858, setting up shop on South Main Street. His one location quickly developed into two, and then branched out into bottling in 1861.

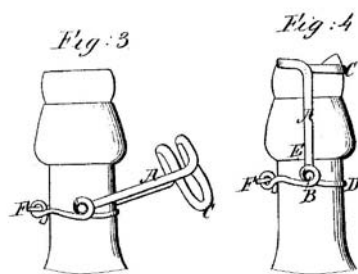
Later, he moved to the opposite side of the Blanchard River. This was locally referred to as North Findlay, though it was never really a separate community. The 1879 city directory lists his business as "fourth north of iron bridge" on the east side of Main Street. His house was next door, one door to the north. The latter location was listed, in 1885, as 80 N. Main, but renumbering changed that to 207 a year or two later. The bottling works was soon to occupy as much of his time as did the ice business. He built his own pumping device from the abandoned remains of the town's first fire engine, known as "Tom Thumb." The mechanics of the pumper were sold to Bacher in 1859,

perhaps calling into question the 1861 establishment date. Regardless, his earliest bottles would have likely been pontilled, but since there are no known embossed examples, one must assume that his first were unadorned. However, it is unquestionable as to the stopper for them; Henry Putnam's wire closure. The special problem with gas-charged liquids was that the pressure was apt to pop the stopper, especially if the cork dried out. Mr. Putnam, a one-time resident of Cleveland, Ohio, developed an invention so simple it seems hardly worthy of a patent. He designed a wire device that enveloped the neck, part of which would fold over the mouth of the bottle, securing the cork into place (see next page).

His later bottles were embossed, and a few today still retain the Putnam wire assemblies. It would seem that there must have been a chronic danger in unfastening the closure, for in 1877 Ernest Bacher was granted patent #191093 for a tool for opening the Putnam closure. It was constructed out of heavy gauge wire, and combined the

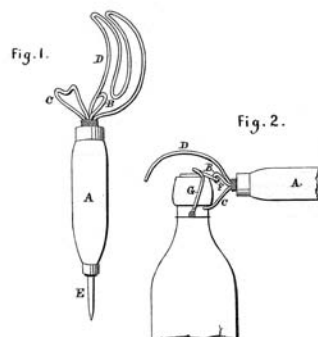
(right) - A collection of Ernest Bacher bottles. From left to right; A blue-green soda, likely the oldest and dating from the late 1860s; next a 6 oz. light green Hutchinson soda with stopper; a 12 oz. light aqua Hutchinson soda; and two slug plate sodas with original Putnam wire closures. The last two bottles are from the same mold, but one has the remains of the label still intact. (from the collections of various members of the Findlay Antique Bottle Club)





Detail from Putnam's patent.

E. BACHER.
BOTTLE OPENER.
No. 191,093. Patented May 22, 1879.



Witnesses:
M. Burris
G. P. Fowler

Inventor:
Ernest Bacher
by Theodore Munger,
Attorney.

Drawing from Bacher's bottle opener patent.

task of pulling back the wire closure and keeping the cork from flying off and causing damage. It is unknown if the unique device was made commercially, but, even if it was, it would have had a short span of usefulness.

In 1879, Charles Hutchinson developed a new and improved stopper that was soon to take over the older, simpler Putnam model. The Hutchinson stopper likely needs no introduction to modern collectors. It used the pressure of the charged liquid to hold it tight against the internal shoulder of the bottle. While it could technically be used in any existing bottle, a specially designed "no neck" bottle became the standard for use with the device. Today, we all know them as Hutches. Hutchinson's design spanned a flurry of similar stoppers, one of which was

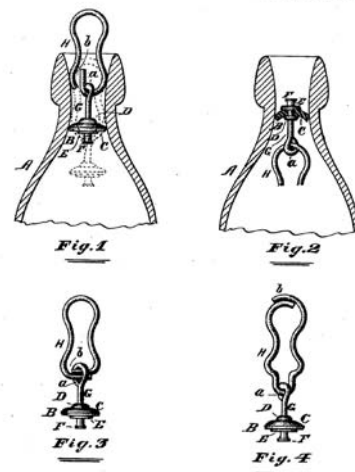
granted to Ernest Bacher. Bacher was quick to embrace the new technology, but saw what he thought were flaws in the design. With the help of his friend Vincent Coons, he created a modification to the Hutchinson stopper. Coons was part owner of the Findlay Foundry, so he had access to tools and materials necessary in making the bent wire assembly.

Patent #299714 was granted June 30, 1884. It is hard to say whether or not his design saw production. His main concern was the fact that the Hutchinson wire "hook" that helped secure the stopper applied pressure on mainly one side of the bottle neck. His design applied equal pressure to both sides. Since the Hutchinson stopper lasted until 1912 or later, it would seem that the point, while valid, was unimportant in the long run. A better design would have been one that protected the open part of the bottle neck, as Hutchinson-stoppered bottles were prone to allowing dust and dirt to accumulate that would contaminate the drink when it was opened. It was this flaw that eventually doomed the stopper.

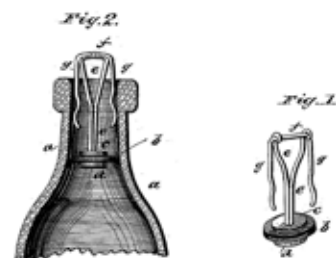
Regardless of these patents (two of four he received), Ernest ran a rather normal, down to earth business. His sons, Alonzo, Henry and Theodore, all likely worked there, though Alonzo is the only one listed in the directories. The earliest listings indicate that mineral water was bottled here. As the years went by, other products were added to the list. As the popularity of fizzy drinks grew, so too did the list of flavors. Eventually it included small beer, ginger ale, birch beer, sarsaparilla, orange, wild cherry, lemon, strawberry, peach and vanilla. At one time there was even an "iron brew" which may have been an ox blood tonic.

All these flavors were hardly marketable without bottles to put them in. By the mid to late 1860s, Ernest began purchasing his own, marked simply E. Bacher Findlay, Ohio. Later

C. G. HUTCHINSON.
Bottle-Stopper.
No. 219,729. Patented Sept. 16, 1879.



Hutchinson's patent, showing variations on the theme.



Drawing from Bacher's bottle stopper patent.

examples were embossed with "Findlay Bottling Company." Of course, later versions utilized the Hutchinson stopper, but none have been seen with Bacher's special modification. A few variants have the dimples in the side of the neck seeming to indicate a third style of closure. For some years he sold soda in two sizes, a 6-7 ounce size, and one double that volume. His clientele were pretty much local, as was the case with most bottlers of the day.

In 1887 Ernest retired from the business, seeing as his sons had taken up other occupations. The business was sold to Robert B. Motherwell. Motherwell apparently reused the Bacher-embossed bottles for a while, as fragments of one were recovered by the author at the site of the Zihlmann Glass

Company in North Baltimore, which wasn't built for another year or two. The business ran under his direction until his death on July 11, 1902. By this time, the business had been relocated to 122 Clinton Court. Emmett F. Levan took over the reins from that date until it went over to Motherwell's son. All of this activity was watched with interest by Ernest, who didn't pass away until October 15, 1908. By now, he was living in grand style in a fine home on North Main Street, in a section of houses that reflected the region's prosperity from the abundant gas and oil reserves. In a time when some Northwest Ohio communities had passed prohibition ordinances, Findlay had never been a "dry" town. Mr. Bacher, however, had made sure that it never went thirsty.

The bottling plant eventually became the Findlay Coca-Cola Bottling Company sometime in the 1920s, and it was in operation into fairly recent years.

For those who might be curious, Mr. Bacher's other two patents were unrelated to bottling. His earliest was #132044, and was for an improved blacksmith butteris, a device for cutting steel. He was partnered in the deal with John W. Rhamy, also of Findlay. The other patent, curiously enough, was a device for tempering butter. This was done in partnership with William McKinnis.

