

Dr. Cronk In Central New York (And Beyond)

By Thomas Kanalley

A long time ago, the Auburn (N.Y.) Bottle Club had a contest. We were to bring in our very best bottle. Dr. Burt Spiller was asked to come down from Rochester to pick the best of the best, and be the only judge. For a new collector it didn't get much better than this!

There were historical flasks, bitters and other great bottles. I remember a beautiful amber square German half-post bottle from the 1700s, and a lone dark green Dr. Cronk

All of the Dr. Cronk glass bottles are very rare and desirable. Many cities west of Auburn to as far as Chicago can claim colored glass paneled "flavored beers" in cobalts, greens and other colors. Many were manufactured at the Lockport and Lancaster glass works.

The most lasting legacy may be the large number of Dr. Cronk pottery bottles. These come in pint and quart sizes. They vary in shape from round, to 8-, 10- or 12-sided bottles debossed with variations of the Dr. Cronk name and sometimes product.

Warren Cronk started in New York City. The Trow's NYC Directory of 1839 lists Warren Cronk as a "carman." He moved to Albany, N.Y. in 1840 to an address on Broad Street. At 25 years of age, he produced his "Celebrated Root Beer." He used a number of quart size pottery bottles. Some are incised "W.



**Embossing reads Dr. CRONK'S / MINERAL/
WATERS / AUBURN. N.Y.**

**Height 7 ¼ inches Diameter 2 5/8 inches
Smooth based. Dark Saratoga green.**

bottle embossed Auburn, N.Y. Burt was enthralled by the Dr. Cronk bottle to which he gave the prize.

The Dr. Cronk bottle was unique at the time. Two more have been unearthed since. These Auburn bottles are very crude and are the farthest east geographically that Dr. Cronk glass bottles have been discovered. They appear to have been blown at the Mt. Pleasant Glass Works near Saratoga, N.Y.



**Debossed: W. CRONK'S ROOT BEER (from Albany,
N.Y.)**

**Height 9 ½ inches Diameter 4 inches
One of Cronk's first bottles.**

CRONK'S ROOT BEER in a straight line on the shoulder. Others have "ALBANY" incised under the first line. In 1841 Cronk moved to 281 South Pearl St. Here he advertised his "Genuine Root Beer for purifying the blood." By 1842, Cronk was advertising "Genuine Compound Sarsaparilla Beer, for purifying the blood." In 1843, he moved again to 216 State Street.

At this time, sarsaparilla was considered a type of medicine used to cure many afflictions. In the 1840s, Albany was the sarsaparilla capital of the country. Manufacturers like Townsend's, Mosher's, Willcox, Dr. Woods and others were very active. Did Warren Cronk learn his formulation and trade from these companies?

Dr. Cronk's Compound Sarsaparilla Beer was also considered a "temperance" drink which was socially very important. The Temperance movement (Prohibition) was very strong and dictated a large part of the beverage market. Temperance drink implied there was no alcohol in the beverage. These drinks were called "small beers." The Syracuse Daily Star of April 25, 1846 contained a poem that captures the zeal of the Prohibitionists. Here is a short excerpt.

His table's furnished with fine teas,
And coffee rich and clear –
No wine or brandy do you find,
But plenty of Cronk's Beer.
We'll give three cheers for Temperance –
On high our flag we'll wave;
Death we'll deal to Alcohol,
And lay him in his grave.

Flavored beers including root beer and sarsaparilla had to be brewed. That is the reason they are called beers. Flavored beers from that era could have as much alcohol in them as today's alcoholic beers. Was Cronk's beer produced with the alcohol distilled out? How did Cronk convince people his sarsaparilla was alcohol free?

The Broome Republican of June 28, 1844 from Binghamton, N.Y. had an advertisement for Cronk:

DR. CRONK'S BEER

"We are indebted to our friend Spaulding, for a dozen of Dr. Cronk's Celebrated Sarsaparilla Beer – a very pleasant beverage for hot summer days, and represented as highly beneficial to health."

Warren Cronk moved to Auburn, N.Y. in the 1844 to 1845 period. He said he could be contacted on Canal St. An article in the Daily Star dated June 5, 1846 from Syracuse, N.Y. describes his beer:

DR. CRONK'S BEER

"Mr. Editor – Having been frequently interrogated upon the healthful and unhealthful effects of Dr. Cronk's Compound Sarsaparilla Beer, I have until within a few days been unprepared to give any satisfactory answer to the numerous enquires on that subject. I have this day had an interview with the Doctor, who has disclosed in a gentlemanly, frank and candid manner, the ingredients of which it is composed, and from the knowledge thus derived, I am prepared to say, that no medicine compounded within my knowledge, not to say Beer, contains more valuable ingredients – their nature is such as to come truly within the term – remedies. Their combination is healthful as well as scientific. It contains valuable tonic, sedative, alternative, antiseptic, atiscorbatic and durtic properties, all of which are required to keep the circulation healthful and vigorous – and having been engaged in the practice of medicine for more than ten years and acquainted with each separate ingredients in the above named beer, as remedial agents, I can with confidence recommend Dr. Cronk's Compound Sarsaparilla Beer as healthful, and very desirable as a Temperance drink. The Doctor has numerous certificates from invalids corroborating the above statements, as well as certificates of numerous medical gentlemen in high standing – Star of Temperance."

His beer was a cultural phenomenon and a status symbol for the affluent public. An unsolicited article in the Cayuga Chief March 29, 1853, from Auburn, N.Y had this to say about travel on the train:

"Most of the rowdies in high and low life carry a bottle with them. We have seen all kinds of "pistols" from the Cronk beer-jug, to the more delicate silver flask. Our common whiskey and rat-juice drinkers need not be ashamed because the upper crust drink with their substantial jugs and Cronk bottles."

While in Albany, Warren Cronk developed his sarsaparilla. In Auburn, he developed his business model of franchising bottling works with partners. As collectors, we have always questioned why there were so many cities where Cronk's beer was manufactured. He had bottlers in Syracuse, Binghamton, Utica, Jamestown and Auburn. In Warren Cronk's own words, in the Syracuse Daily Star dated September 13, 1847, the answer is revealed:

DR. CRONK'S COMPOUND SARSAPARILLA BEER

"The subscriber is the author and proprietor of a beverage known and distinguished as Cronk's Compound 'Sarsaparilla Beer,' a beverage entirely free from all that can intoxicate, and which defies competition. He has for the last year or two been in the habit of selling the knowledge of said beverage, together with certain territory and a privilege of vending the



Dr. Cronk pottery bottle found in an Auburn, N.Y. estate same for a

reasonable compensation. It is now manufactured in Auburn, Syracuse, Norwich, Elmira, Mt. Morris, Groton, Dayton, Ohio, Toronto, Canada; branches are to be opened next April and May at Binghamton, Canandaigua, Cazenovia, Cooperstown and Geneva. Any persons of good moral integrity wishing to engage in a business that pays well and is at the same time honorable are informed that they now have an opportunity. The subscriber can satisfy any person who feels interested, of the advantages to be derived from the business. He would here say that the knowledge if his beer can be obtained of none other than himself, that it never has been placed upon paper, nor is that the method of communicating it to any person. He is not ignorant of the fact that there has been offered in market recipes purporting to be genuine; it is only necessary to say, that the fact, that the article never has been, and never can be produced from them, is sufficient proof of imposition."

Auburn, March 6, '47

W. CRONK

Now we know why there are so many pottery bottles with the Dr. Cronk name and no city. The bottles could be used in

any of Cronk's franchises. If you are from New York State, there is a good chance that these pottery bottles came to your town. Cronk's Beer had reached Ithaca, N.Y. confirmed by an ad in the Daily Chronicle of June 7, 1848. The beer was described as "first rate" and "a healthy summer beverage." It was time to move on. Warren Cronk put an ad in the Auburn, N.Y. Chief dated December 13, 1848:

Cronk's Compound Sarsaparilla Beer

A CHANCE TO MAKE MONEY

"The Subscriber will sell his Beer privilege, together with the stock in trade, consisting of all that is requisite to carry on the above business, with the knowledge of manufacturing and preparing for use the above named Beer. Any person can have access to the cash book, who is desirous of knowing the amount of business done, stock enough to do business two years, will be thrown in. It is a desirable location in the account of the many villages within 12 miles of the city. Call on me in Canal St."

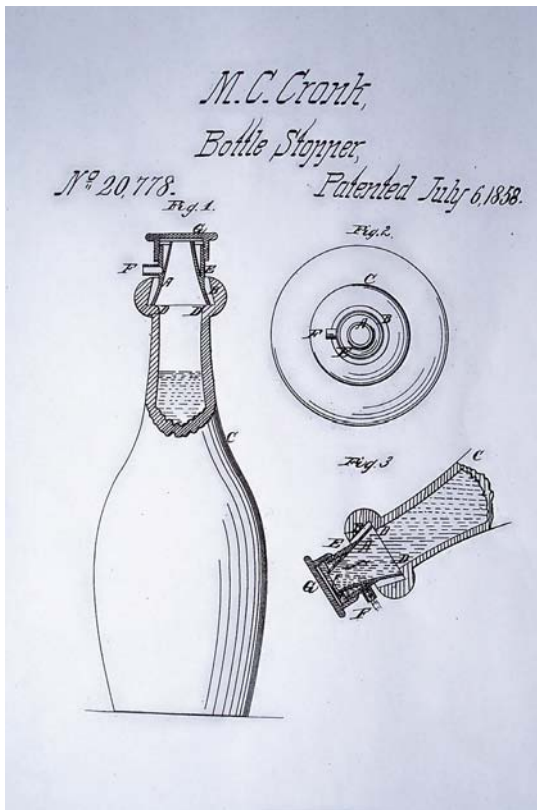
Dec. 13, 1848 W. CRONK

The New York State Agricultural Society on September 13, 1849 in Syracuse gave W. Cronk an award for his "bottle cleaner." Warren Cronk was still in Auburn when the 1850 census was taken. At that time Warren was 35 years old, born in New York State and manufacturer of "compounds of medicine."

He would try to be the first or one of the first soda manufacturers in a town. By 1850, the soda manufacturing frontier was getting too crowded in Auburn. Fort and Sclover were selling 49,200 bottles of "sarsaparilla beer" a year, and Samuel Smith of New York City fame had just moved to Auburn and was selling his Knickerbocker soda.

Warren would start a bottling works; bring in a relative or partner to run the business, and move on to the next new town. By August 1849, Munson C. Cronk had moved to Auburn. Munson was 20 years old. The first Auburn directory of 1857 shows Munson living at 23 Walnut St. The 1860 census lists Munson C. Cronk as a "beer maker," his wife Eliza, as a dress maker, and their two children Anna and Herbert. Munson Cronk is listed as a "beer manufacturer" up until the 1865-66 Auburn directory. The 1867-68 Auburn directory lists him as a "patentee."

United States patent number 20778 of July 6, 1858 states: "Be it known that I, Munson C. Cronk, of Auburn, in the county of Cayuga and the State of New York, have invented a new and useful improvement in faucets or stoppers for bottles designed to contain mineral water, beer, and other effervescent liquids." This was the second bottle closure granted a patent by the United States. Basically, the the top of the closure was twisted to unseat the valve and pour the drink. The top could be twisted the opposite direction to close the bottle.



Dr. Cronk pottery bottle from Auburn, N.Y. as identified by Munson Cronk's "patented" closure.

"CORRECTION – Dr. Cronk in jail in this city for passing counterfeit money, is not the original Root Beer Manufacturer. The one arrested has been engaged in that business here, and we supposed he was the original Dr. Cronk.

"Dr. Cronk, the Root Beer and counterfeit coin vender in Syracuse, and Dr. Warren Cronk, the original inventor of the Celebrated Root Beer, are separate and distinct personages. The latter is now a resident of Pennsylvania."

The mysterious Dr Cronk from Syracuse and counterfeiter was probably Ezekiel Cronk, another relative who was 25 years old when arrested. The counterfeiters were sentenced to three years in Auburn prison.

The Cronk Beer franchise in Syracuse went on until at least 1870. The Syracuse Daily Courier of

September 28, 1869 had an article on the bottler:

FIRE – Last evening about 11 o'clock, a fire broke out in the wooden building No. 204 Mulberry St., owned and occupied by N.G. Cook, and used for the manufacture of Dr. Cronk's root beer. The building and contents were entirely consumed. Mr. Cook has an insurance of \$800 on the building and \$500 on the contents. The origin of the fire is unknown."

The Syracuse Daily Journal of October 22, 1870 stated:

FOR SALE. The subscriber offers for sale his business of manufacturing the "DR. CRONK BEER" including Horses,



Patent and drawings compliments of Dave Graci

The pottery bottles that can be identified from Auburn, N.Y. are plain stoneware with the words DR CRONK debossed on the shoulder and an indented cap seat that would have taken the patented closure. I have seen two of these that were dug locally. Munson C. Cronk had left Auburn, N.Y. by the printing of the 1871 Auburn directory, only to show up at a Cronk franchise in Port Huron, Michigan at a much later date.

Where had the originator, Warren Cronk, moved to? The Syracuse Daily Standard of March 31, 1854 gives us a clue:

Wagons, Bottles, Recipes and fixtures. Also his House and Lot No. 270 Mulberry street. The Business will be sold separately if desired. Satisfactory reasons given for selling out. Information about the business given by applying to the undersigned at the above number. N.G. COOK

In Utica, N.Y., the 1853-54 directory lists the Robert Edwards Brewery on Lansing Street as the manufacturer of Dr. Cronk's beer. In Rochester, N.Y., the Daily Union of September 23, 1852 states: About 2 o'clock this morning a small wooden building owned and occupied by Boughton and Chase, situated on the Feeder near Mt. Hope Ave., was totally destroyed by fire. The premises were used for the manufacture of Cronk's Beer and Gleason's Mineral Water."

In Batavia, N.Y., in the Spirit of the Times dated April 17, 1855, J. Baker had an advertisement. "The Dr. Cronk Sarsaparilla Beer Establishment is offered for sale, consisting of Bottles, Boilers, Wagons, and all other necessary fixtures for manufacturing and vending the above celebrated Small Beer."

The soda trade was very vulnerable to downturns in the economy which happened frequently. Most people did not have money for luxuries. A soda business could easily get in financial trouble.

Pennsylvania can boast many Cronk franchise cities including Wilkes-Barre, Philadelphia, Scranton and Pottsville. Minnesota had Cronk's Beer in St. Paul and Minneapolis.

George Charles Loik, in an article in the May 1975 issue of Antique Bottle World, published research that showed Warren Cronk with a partner named Calnon were the first soda water manufacturers in Detroit, Michigan in 1852. The company made 18 different flavors of soda. E.Y. Cronk, agent for Warren, moved from Detroit to Chicago to sell Cronk beers and produced bottles with his name on them. Cronk bottles have also been dug that were embossed Cincinnati, Ohio and Port Huron, Michigan.

The Cronk's beer franchises were extensive in the Province of Ontario, Canada especially in the 1880s. Fred Spoelstra lists ten Canadian cities that sold Cronk's Beer, including Brantford, Hamilton, Kingston, London, St. Catharines, St. Thomas, Stratford, Sarnia, Toronto and Whitby.

A few of the embossed glass Dr. Cronk bottles from Western New York include the beautiful 12-sided quart, cobalt blue, flavored beers by R. McCoun, and Boughton & Chase, from Rochester, N.Y. Buffalo has the squat green soda marked DR. CRONK GIBBONS & CO./ SUPERIOR ALE/ BUFFALO/N.Y. There is also a unique cobalt blue



Example of a quart "flavored beer" This bottle was used by R. McCoun, Rochester, N.Y. This twelve paneled cobalt blue bottle is 9 ¾ inches high and 3 ½ inches in diameter with a strong iron pontil.

squat soda marked DR. CRONK/ BUFFALO.

I don't know if it will ever be possible to trace all the cities and the influence that Warren Cronk has had with his "Compound Sarsaparilla Beer." If this snapshot of Upstate New York is any indication, he was a very busy man. To see more photos of "flavored beers," link to the website: www.glswork-auction.com and look for the article titled "Flavored Beers Of Western New York" by Ann E. Spear.

Thanks to the following persons for sharing their passions and research about Dr. Cronk. Special thanks to Dave Graci. Also Dr. Burt Spiller, Jon Landers, Tom Karapantso and the late Harold Schneidmuller, Jr.

Sources: "Smith vs. Merrill," by Dave Graci and David Rotilie, Antique Bottle & Glass Collector, June 2003.

Albany N.Y. city directories.

"Flavored Beers Of Western New York," Ann E. Spears, Antique Bottle & Glass Collector, (Featured website article).

Auburn, N.Y. city directories.

"Dr. Cronk and His Empire," Dave Graci, Jan. 5, 2003 (unpublished).

Canadian Bottle & Stoneware Collector, January 1994, Soda Waters.

"The (Almost) Complete Guide to Dr. Cronk," Fred Spoelstra.

Antique Bottle World, May 1975, "Some Colored Sodas From Detroit," George Charles Loik.

Auburn, N.Y. census 1850 & 1860

All photos are from the author's collection.