

When Mr. Libbey Went to the Fair

By Jack Sullivan
Special to Bottles and Extras

In my Toledo family, he was always known as "Mr. Libbey." Edward Drummond Libbey (**Fig. 1**), the tycoon who built his glass companies to be foremost in America. My aunt had been his executive secretary and told many stories illustrating his ability and generosity. Only recently, however, have I learned that by going to a fair, Libbey made possible the invention of the automatic bottle machine -- perhaps the most important event in glass industry history for bottle and glass collectors.



Fig. 1: Edward Drummond Libbey

The Libbey story begins in 1872 when William Libbey (**Fig. 2**), Edward's father and part owner of the Mt. Washington Glass Company, became an officer of the New England Glass Works located in East Cambridge, Massachusetts. Founded in 1818, the company was struggling financially when William joined it. An effort to revive its fortunes by sponsoring a pavilion at the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition had proved a financial disaster and closure threatened. In 1878, William took over as CEO of New England Glass.

Edward Libbey went to work for his father in 1872 as a chore boy, rising to a clerical position by 1874. Originally planning a career as a minister, Edward



Fig. 2: William Libbey

yielded to his father and at 26 became a partner in the firm, precipitating the change in the name of the business to W.L. Libbey and Son. When William died in 1883, Edward Libbey, at the early age of 29, took over the glass works.

During the next five years, Libbey managed to keep the company afloat despite financial woes, chronic fuel shortages, and labor problems. In 1888 he agreed to move his glass works to Toledo, Ohio, in exchange for

some generous concessions from city fathers. They provided him a four-acre factory (**Fig. 3**) and land for 50 worker homes. In August of that year, a special train arrived in Toledo with 50 carloads of machinery and 250 workers. Despite the fact that the new home for the glass works had ample natural gas and good transportation via railroad and Lake Erie, Libbey's company continued to lose money in Ohio.

To be successful, the young businessman believed, his newly named Libbey Glass Company badly needed a national reputation. In order to obtain that recognition Libbey made up his mind to go to a fair. Not just any fair. It was the Columbian Exposition of 1893, a gigantic world's extravaganza held in Chicago (**Fig. 4**), meant to commemorate Columbus "discovering" America. Libbey asked company directors for \$200,000 to build a pavilion.

They vigorously opposed his proposal. The idea was a total waste of money, the directors contended, just at a time when the company was cash-poor. They also reminded him of the financial bust that the Philadelphia Exposition had been. Undeterred, Libbey borrowed money from private investors and plowed ahead. He secured exclusive rights to build a fully operating glass factory at the Exposition

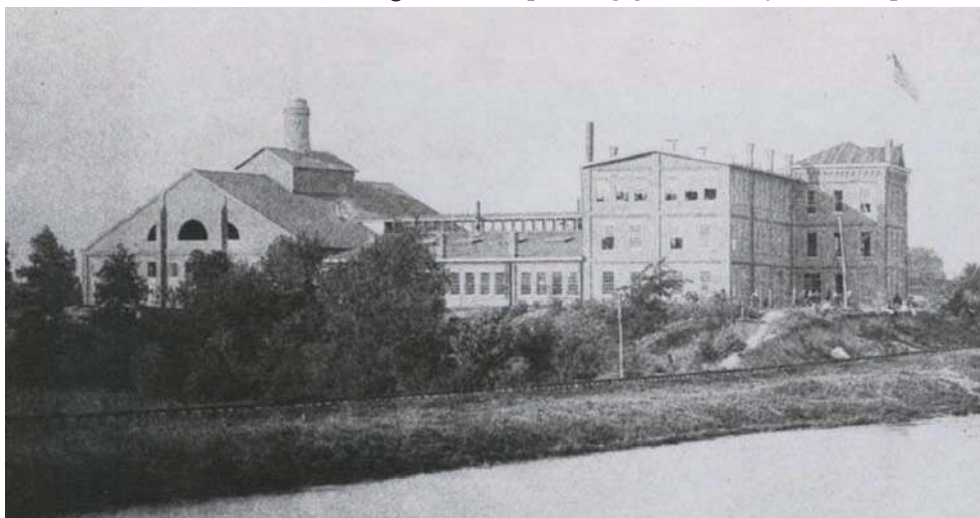


Fig. 3: The Libbey Glass plant



Fig. 4: The Chicago Columbian Exposition

-- the only American glass firm represented. He also arranged that his pavilion would be located on the Midway promenade where thousands would pass it every day.

He hired a well-known architect, David Stine, to design a building that was both a pavilion able to hold 2,000 people and a factory, including a 10-pot furnace in the design (**Fig.5**). Visitors could actually watch glassware being made by 40 handpicked glass blowers Libbey brought from Toledo.



Fig. 6: The glass dress



Fig. 5: The Libbey Fair Pavilion

Libbey's most popular exhibit was an entire room with glass furnishings, including screens, window curtains and lamp shades. Enchanted with these items, a well-known stage actress asked Libbey to make a glass dress. He obliged and she, as shown here, modeled it (**Fig. 6**). The dress became one of the most popular exhibits at the fair. Although a New York Times writer predicted that glass dresses would become the fad of the future, the garment proved too brittle for general use.

Enter Her Royal Highness, the Spanish Infanta (Princess) Eulalia (**Fig. 7**). After a visit with President Grover Cleveland in Washington, she traveled to Chicago to represent Spain at the Exposition. A world celebrity, the mere mention that Eulalia would be visiting the fair on a particular day reportedly could increase attendance by 50,000.

The Infanta, fascinated by the glass dress, made repeated visits to the Libbey Glass Pavilion. Her presence generated tremendous publicity for the glass company. The Princess asked Libbey to



Fig. 7: Princess Eulalia

make a second glass dress for her. He obliged and in gratitude Princess allowed him to use the Spanish royal insignia in his advertising. Libbey in turn had his craftsmen create a new cut glass pattern he called "Eulalia," (**Fig. 8**).

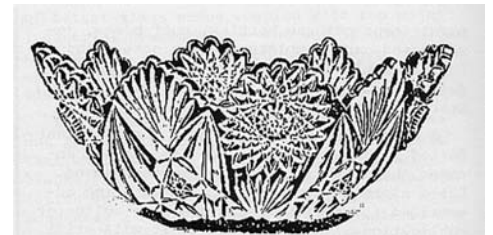


Fig. 8: The "Eulalia" pattern bowl

Unlike many of the exhibitors, Libbey charged to get into his pavilion. It cost a dime and when the factory proved very popular, Libbey raised the tariff to a quarter. For that fee, visitors could observe his workers hand-blowing and cutting glass. The price of admission could be applied toward the purchase of glass souvenirs. Popular among them was a glass inkwell in the shape of the Fair's Administration Building (**Fig. 9**).



Fig. 9: Fair headquarters glass inkwell

Paperweights were another specialty item, made and sold on the premises. The Libbey factory turned out a wide range: Some depicted other pavilions at the fair, including the Indiana State Building (Fig. 10), the Ohio State Building (Fig. 11), and, in color, the Horticultural Pavilion



Fig. 10: Indiana Pavilion paperweight



Fig. 11: Ohio Pavilion paperweight



Fig. 12: The Horticultural Pavilion



Fig. 13: Libbey building paperweight

(Fig. 12) and Libbey's own glass factory (Fig. 13). Other subjects were the Liberty Bell (Fig. 14), Columbus landing in the New World (Fig. 15), and a glass ax that featured the face of George Washington, an obvious allusion to the cherry tree legend (Fig. 16).



Fig. 14: Liberty Bell paperweight



Fig. 15: Columbus landing paperweight

The fair glass makers also turned out fancy "art nouveau" pieces like the stylized face weight shown here (Fig. 17). Other souvenirs were glass slippers, cups and saucers, and a highly unusual salt shaker in the shape of an egg (Fig. 18). The egg displayed the Libbey logo (Fig. 19), as did many other glass items.



Fig. 17: Art Nouveau paperweight



Fig. 18: Salt and pepper shakers



Fig. 19: Libbey logo



Fig. 16: Washington's hatchet paperweight



Fig. 20: "American Brilliant" punch bowl



Fig. 21: "American Brilliant" decanter



Fig. 22: "American Brilliant" perfume bottle

More expensive cut glass also was offered for sale. One highly popular exhibit was a huge ornate cut glass punch bowl hewed from a single block of glass that subsequently was exhibited in the Toledo Museum of Art. It was masterpiece example of a style called "American Brilliant." Libbey Glass Co. became identified as a prime creator of this form of art glass. Shown here are examples of the Libbey's "Brilliant" craft (Figs. 20-22) as displayed in a punch bowl, decanter, and perfume bottle.

When the Chicago Columbian Exhibition closed, more than two million people had visited Libbey's pavilion. An estimated 20 boxcar loads of glass had been sold. The company, as hoped, had received considerable national media attention. The name Libbey had become synonymous with fine glassware. Edward now was able to place his fine cut glass products at some of the most prestigious stores in America, including Tiffany's in New York. His American Brilliant glass products would become the popular rage for two decades. A company catalogue reflected the fashion (Fig. 23).

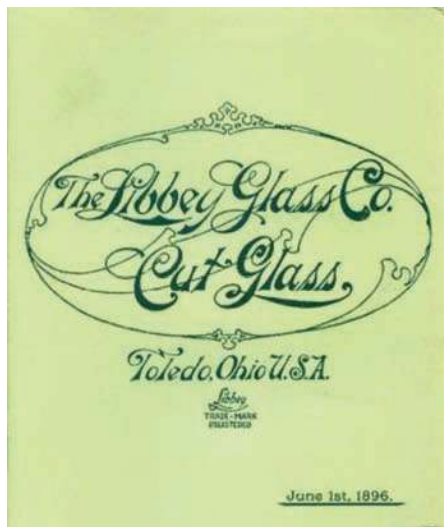


Fig. 23: Libbey 1896 catalogue

With his glass company enjoying prosperity for the first time, Libbey was able to maximize another resource -- Mike Owens (Fig. 24). Owens was an Irish-American employee of Libbey, a self-taught genius who had been working, with the blessings of the boss but highly limited funding, to mechanize glassmaking. The enhanced company profits allowed the inventor to flourish. After designing



Fig. 24: Mike Owens

machines to produce light bulbs, tumblers, and lamp chimneys, Owens in 1903 invented the automatic bottle blowing machine (Fig. 25) for Libbey. It was perhaps the most important advance in the history of glass, resulting in a wide range of products that were now made affordable to the general public. It also helped launch bottle collecting as a popular hobby.



Fig. 25: Owens with his bottle machine

Owens subsequently invented a machine that made flat glass. Out of his inventions grew three new firms -- Toledo Glass Company to make tumblers and lamp chimneys; the Owens Bottle Company, and Libbey Owens Sheet Glass Company. They established Toledo as the glass capital of America and made rich men of Libbey and Owens.

All this resulted, remember, from Edward Drummond Libbey's historic decision, overcoming strenuous opposition, that he and his glass works go to the Fair.

Notes: This article and illustrations is drawn from a variety of Internet and printed sources. Portions have previously appeared in the Swirl, the magazine of the Ohio Bottle Club, and in my blog, bottlesboozeandbackstories.

... Regional Reports continued from page 25

With further permission and determination the two diggers returned to Walla Walla in November. The houses were mostly up at the construction sites, but they pulled out their Sanborn map and looked around the area. After a few minutes they gave up looking at the Sanborn map because the outbuildings were located too close to the new house. They took off to the other side of the alley and just took a chance at a spot. With the aide of a backhoe, rock was scrapped from the surface uncovering some good evidence that it would be worth digging further. The hole ended being only four feet deep where the diggers found their treasures. One of the finds was reported by Bill Bogynska to be very significant. That find was a half-pint A. Schwartz/Walla Walla, W.T. coffin flask with a small bruise in the lip. They found additional Walla Walla bottles. There was a Jesse Moore-Sole Agents-glob top whiskey; inks, pepper sauces, pickle jars and other interesting bottles.

Here is the Postscript that so aptly describes the end of the three-month saga: "In a note that came with the article, Alan says that it was fun and hard work. He writes 'God Bless Nice Construction Owners.' He said the owner was great and helped in the pit, so they split the bottles three ways with him. The backhoe operator volunteered his own backhoe and time, so Alan and his digging partner each gave him \$50. They also dug two other lots. One was empty. They got around twenty bottles off the other, but they were just plain machine made and tool top bottles. Alan got the coffin flask. The owner got the glob top whiskey. They each got five embossed drug bottles and the miscellaneous bottles."

Phoenix Antique Bottles & Collectibles Club – The A-Z Collector

Ever hear about an "Ugly Bottle or Item" contest? Members of this club came up with an idea. Here is what was noted "We are going to have an 'UGLY BOTTLE or ITEM' contest!" The idea came from remarks made at a meeting talking about how ugly black bottles are. "There was a movement to have

a CONTEST! The contest won't be limited to just an ugly bottle." Members are to look through their vintage items or collectibles to find something that will qualify. "There will be first, second and third-place winners, with prizes for all!" There should be some interesting items brought in and shown.

Editor Betty Hartnett mentioned a community outreach opportunity. It was her intent to bring an empty box to a meeting on behalf of the "Packages from Home" organization that supports our troops overseas. Betty said that she has been involved in this project in another organization she belongs to. She listed food and hygiene items that our troops need. The bottom line is that Betty would like to take a full box of donated items to the other organization to ship overseas. If you want to visit the "Packages from Home" organization, Betty has provided their website: www.PackagesFromHome.org.

There should be some positive comments in a future newsletter regarding what collectibles members picked up as a result of their annual club field trip. Tucson was the destination. The goal was antique shops in Tucson and also to attend the Tanque Verde antique meet. Lauren Kormylo was the trip leader for this club event.

President Robert Richshafer remarked in his President's Message that "the biggest challenge the club has in 2010 and beyond is membership. I ask everyone to put their thinking caps on and over the next few months, see if we can come up with a plan."

Reno Antique Bottle Club – digger's dirt

There is a proposed program that sounds like it will call for a meeting room full of excited members when it is presented. There was a lead-in sentence under the program section of the newsletter that introduced the thought that there is going to be an extraordinary program coming up. Here is how it reads "Retired State Archivist, Guy Rocha, will present 'Truths or Myths.' We will find the truth behind how Reno got its name, the state capitol's silver dome, the Levi pants (riveted jeans) and their

connection to Reno; along with other fascinating stories. It will be a great program." Hopefully someone will write an article on that program so that our magazine readers can drool. Maybe some of us ought to go about checking out an archivist in our areas and invite them to a meeting to give a program. What a chance for an interesting history lesson. Let's see how it goes for this club.

Here is one of President Marty Hall's ideas that he has come up with. It is for an outstanding raffle bottle. The bottle is a dark amber, Hall's Barrel Bitters-circa 1842. Members better make a mad dash to the meeting room door and bring plenty of raffle ticket money, to boot.

Here is another Marty Hall first: "For this year's show, Marty is working on a display contest. The contest will feature the J. F. Cutter, Star and Shield Whiskey (Fifths and applied top versions only). The contest will be known as the 'Shoot-Out' and there will be a special award for the best of the best." Marty do you ever sleep? All kidding aside, Marty, you are one energetic guy with refreshing ideas to keep things exciting.

Under one of the Bits and Pieces: areas of the newsletter there was a brief explanation entitled "The history behind barbed wire and the Indian influence." It is stated exactly as written. "In 1835, Jacob Haish, an immigrant from Germany, noticed the natural barriers that the Plains Indians used to corral their livestock. They used the Osage Orange plant which can send out six-foot runners of tangled thorny barbs in a year's time. Haish ran a nursery type of business and developed a durable form of hedge for fencing, using the Osage Orange plants. Using the principle behind the thorny fences, Haish applied for a patent in 1874 for the first barbed wire. He then built a factory that made nine different types of wire. The Indians referred to the new barbed wire as 'the devil's rope.' Footnote: The Plains Indians also let the Osage Orange bushes grow into trees and used the wood to make their bows. The wood was so perfect it was traded for Indian maidens, horses and blankets." *Excerpts taken from Albert Hall's "The Devil's Rope."

San Diego Antique Bottle and Collectibles Club – *The Bottleneck*

At the latter part of 2009, at the club's Christmas party to be exact, President Mike Bryant presented some awards. This is how he described that event in his Prez Sez Message: "At the party, I took the opportunity to give a few members special recognition awards for outstanding service to the club. Our treasurer, Ken Gallo, and librarian Terry Monteith were both recognized for going that extra mile on behalf of the club. Billie and Eileen Westfall were also recognized for their willingness to volunteer to help the club when needed. Clair Cunningham, someone who does so much for this club behind the scenes, and makes my job a lot easier, was given a special President's Award for Outstanding Service." Mike went on to say that there are so many more members who deserve special recognition, and their contributions to the club will be noted throughout the year.

This club is celebrating its 45th birthday. As part of the header for this newsletter there is the wording, "The World's Oldest Active Bottle and Collectibles Club Established 1965." Mike calls Vanessa Monteith the "Queen of Cakes." She baked the club's birthday cake to celebrate this special occasion.

Somewhere along the line, Jeff Spangler should be showing up at a meeting with some DVDs he has made from the two VHS tapes Terry Monteith gave him. The DVDs will house some bottle digs that the club will want to view. What a program that would make.

Talk about club members becoming interested in what other club members bring for show and tell! Kirby Johnson brought in what he thought was just a neat soda bottle. Carol Serr saw it and right away she challenged herself to find out what the names on that bottle were doing on that bottle when it was made in the U.S. She did her research and then wrote a two-page article for the newsletter. She started the article with describing what the embossment was on the fancy, but colorless soda. She said that on the shoulder of the body are the embossed words "GLASGOW" and "HAVRE." Carol commented that both are familiar

cities in Europe; Glasgow, Scotland, and Le Havre, France. The base has the wording "PROPERTY OF COCA COLA BOTTLING CO." After much intense research she had it all figured out. A quarter of the way through the second page of her article she stated "Mystery solved." If you are interested in reading the entire article you might want to contact Mike Bryant and ask if you can read, "Kirby Johnson's Fancy Soda Bottle Mystery Solved." There wouldn't be enough space in this column to state all of her findings. I wouldn't want to leave anything out by condensing the article because it would ruin the content. Just trust that she did an extensive search and didn't give up until she had the answer.

Mike Bryant wrote a short article entitled "If I Only Had a Crystal Ball." He says "Have you ever wished that you had a crystal ball to peer into the future to see what bottles or collectibles might become valuable one day?" Mike writes that Dan Aykroyd (comedian, actor and entrepreneur) owns several wineries and a partnership interest in a Canadian distillery. It seems that "Dan has come out with Vodka inside a glass skull. It is called Crystal Head and is triple filtered over Herkimer Diamonds (quartz) and is said to be very pure. The glass skull is produced by Bruni Glass in Milan, Italy." This special product came out in September 2008. Some 5,400 cases were produced and split among five U.S. cities, San Diego being one of them. Mike said he saw the bottle on EBay for the first time. He picked one up for \$10.50 but others were going for much more. The price changed between skulls being empty or with contents. Nevada was one of the cities that received part of the 5,400 case split; so Mike made a trip to a Nevada liquor store and picked up three full ones. He said he bought one for his collection and two others were Christmas presents. The hope is that what he purchased will become a collector's item one day.

Washington Bottle & Collectors Association – *Ghost Town Echo*

Here is a different idea for a theme for show and tell. Someone came up with the idea that was stated "A and

Z from the alphabet." Secretary Keith Ferguson wrote that "a few things that run through my mind that start with 'A or Z' are, amethyst, aqua, American, amber, Anacortes, and with 'Z,' it's a little harder, but maybe, Zarembo, Zenith (Wash.), Zanesville, Zillah (Wash.), Zimmerman (Ore.) or use your imagination and see what you can come up with."

Member Tony Vincent of Seattle wrote a two-page article. Here is part of it. It is entitled, "**Collecting Washington State Pre-Pro Shot Glasses.**" The State of Washington boasts a wide variety of **Pre-Pro** (Pre-Prohibition) shot glasses manufactured for use in advertising and marketing of local establishments. Pre-pro shot glasses are **typically** about two inches tall, made of very thin glass, have labels that are generally white in color and appear to have been acid-etched. While researching material for this article, according to the **pre-pro.com** website (whose author, Robin Preston, has graciously permitted use of its material for this article), Seattle alone had over 122 distillers, rectifiers and liquor wholesalers listed in local directories from 1889 to the beginning of Prohibition on December 31, 1915. Thirty-four of these establishments (liquor companies/hotels/bars, etc.) produced sixty-eight known Seattle shot glasses that have been documented in the **pre-pro.com** database to date. An additional 55 shot glasses from various cities in Washington such as Bellingham, Everett, Spokane, Tacoma, Vancouver and Walla are also listed." Tony went on to cover the variety of different shapes and sizes. He warns that "collecting shot glasses can be a time-consuming, expensive proposition." He states that there is a scarcity of these fragile pieces of history that are nearly 100 years old. "Some states' glasses command premium prices and the most expensive tend to be West Coast glasses, especially those from California." He mentioned other expensive states can include Colorado, Florida, Oregon, Pennsylvania and Washington.