

# PAPER TRAIL

a feature showcasing the contributions  
of "Bottles and Extras" readers

Edited by Steve Ketcham

Most collectors have seen or dug the plentiful, three-sided, amber bottle embossed FREDERICK STEARNS & CO. DETROIT, MICH. While the bottle seldom gets much respect, the company behind the bottle is worthy of a second look. Shown here are two front pages of a Stearns publication titled "The New Idea." A couple of paragraphs found on the 1885 example of the publication indicate that Stearns was attempting to remove the mystery behind the secret recipes of the big nostrum makers and at the same time undercut the patent medicine manufacturers by making nostrums for small retailers unable to make their own. Stearns would then sell the medicines to these small druggists and other retailers, complete with the buyer's own label, at a cost far less than the comparable, brand name patent medicines.

Here is the Stearns explanation of the process:

The New Idea of which this paper is the exponent and organ, is explained as follows:

Under the title of Popular Non-Secret Medicines, we introduced, in 1876, to the retail druggists of the United States, a line of articles avowedly made to supplant patented and secret medicines. The plan comprised staple articles like Sarsaparilla, Condition Powders, Cathartic Pills, Liniments, Cough Syrups, Worm Medicines, etc., to simulate the forms and sizes of like popular patented goods. To print the working formula on each package; to make them in large quantities at a saving of cost in material and labor; to sell them to the RETAIL TRADE of the United States; to print each buyer's name and address on labels



Stearns publication titled "The New Idea."



Stearns publication titled "The New Idea."

and wrappers in place of ours; to sell them on a close margin of profit as manufacturers; to use good glass, velvet corks, excellent printing, engraved and tinted wrappers; to adapt the style, sizes and prices to meet popular wants; to furnish the retail druggist, who has few of the appliances himself, a means to drive patented medicines out of his sales; to enable him to make the profits himself which otherwise go into the pockets of patent medicine manufacturers; to replace quack and secret nostrums by medicines of known composition and value. To the list new articles are constantly being added, which are first described in this paper.

The Stearns paper also contained sections offering Patent Medicine Analyses, Formulas and a section devoted to Swindles in the patent medicine market. A piece in the June, 1885, issue begins, "During a recent visit to New Orleans, we visited early one morning the French market, and among the hucksters and fakirs which crowded the sidewalks around the market, were some that dealt in Cinnamon Beans." The beans turned out to be horse beans coated with paraffin and scented with oil of cassia.

Still another article, written for "The New Idea" by L.C. Hogan, an Englewood, Illinois, pharmacist, was titled, "Free Prescription Frauds. How Shall We Treat Them?"

While quackery was rampant in the United State for many years prior to the publication of "The New Idea," it would be another 20 years before Congress finally enacted the first pure food and drug laws in 1906.



### Hawaiian Liquor Companies:

Invoices and letterheads from companies that produced and/or sold bottled products often provide a wealth of knowledge to collectors lucky enough to find them. Shown here are three invoices from Hawaiian companies once engaged in the liquor business on the islands.

Thomas Frazier-Deweese submitted these items. His notes indicate that W. C. Peacock & Co. Ltd. operated on both Maui and Oahu. Known bottles include amber cylinder whiskies, pint gins and shot glasses (considered rare). Note that the sale recorded on this letterhead was to a saloon.

About the Serrao invoice, Tom says, "The Serrao Liquor Company was a Portuguese firm on Hawaii Island and a pint gin is known and rare."

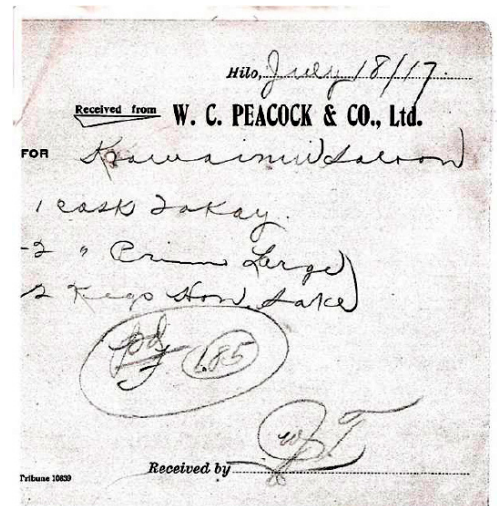
Tom also shares that the Hoffschlaeger invoice is from a firm that began in 1851 as Hoffschlaeger & Stepenhorst. Tom goes on to say that known bottles from this firm include "a monogrammed whiskey and two sizes of tooled top gins, one and two pints."

Images and information submitted by Thomas Frazier-Deweese.

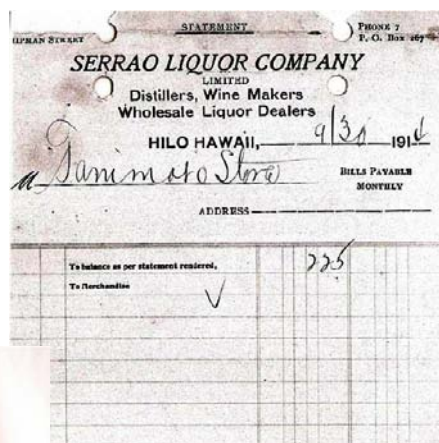
Bottle photos courtesy of Bruce Silva



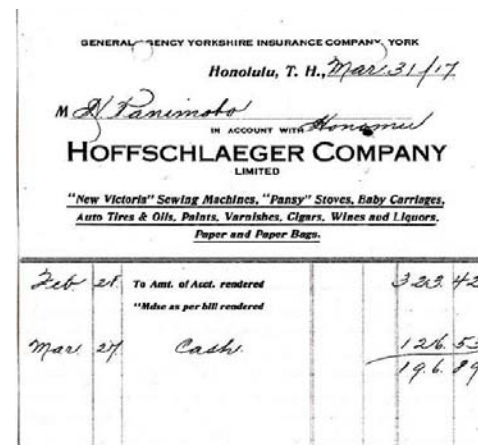
Hoffschlaeger and Co Ltd.



W.C. Peacock & Co. Ltd. Stationary



Serrao Liquor Company  
Stationary



Hoffschlaeger and Co Ltd.  
Stationary



W. C. Peacock & Co. Ltd.

"Paper Trail" is a regular feature which showcases the wide world of bottle-related ephemera, from trade cards and post cards to letterheads and blotters. Readers are encouraged to submit items for publication. Simply scan or photograph your item (JPG please), add a short paragraph or two about the item, and include a photo of the bottle to which it relates.

E-mail your contribution to:  
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