

Table and Office Ware from Capstan

By Barry Bernas

More Than A Glass Container Maker

The officers and employees of the Capstan Glass Company prided themselves on being able to develop, manufacture, market and sell glass containers in large quantities. The fact that many labeled examples still exist today attest to the success this company had in convincing food packers to use Capstan Glass vessels as the outer wrapper for their various products.

Based on this corporation strong point, I naturally expected only tumblers, jars and bottles to have been turned out in this firm's factory located in South Connellsville, Pennsylvania. When asked on previous occasions if Capstan ever made items other than food containers, I always responded in the negative because none were ever advertised and, more importantly, I'd never run across a monogrammed specimen. However, after years of collecting examples from this company, I've recently discovered that trademarked pieces were also manufactured which didn't exactly fit into the category of a glass food container. Although relative few in number so far, these oddities will be the subject of this article.

Tableware?

The first odd item is a two-piece set of matching shakers made by Capstan.



Figure 1

The specimens in Figure 1 are both 4 9/16th inches in height and weigh 7 3/4th-ounces each. The box quilted outer design on these rounded-square shaped shakers was quite popular during the later years of the 1920s and throughout the 1930s. Besides Capstan Glass, I've seen editions with similar motifs from the well-known glass houses of Hazel Atlas and Owens-Illinois, just to name a few manufacturers.

On the outer body of these two containers, there is a checker board pattern composed of 1/4th inch squares which are lined up in rows on three sides. This attractive motif starts just below the vessel's curved shoulder and ends at a point above the bottom parting line. On the front of the jars in Figure 1, there is a smooth 2 x 2 inch label space positioned between two rows of squares each above and below this promotional area. In the center of the blank segment is a rectangular shaped raised area with rounded corners that is 1 9/16th inches wide and 11/16th inch in height. On the outside surface of this geometric form is either the embossed word SALT or PEPPER in 5/16th inch high capital letters.

The four sided, cup bottom mold style of base on both models has a Capstan Glass nautical logo in the center with the mold number 5984 below it and the series numbers 5 (salt) and 2 (pepper) above the trademark.

Due to the absence of Company ephemera, it isn't known whether these embossed examples were made to market a specific brand for one or more commercial packers of food seasonings or were sold without contents in small general, grocery and/or department stores or supply outlets. Certainly, each scenario is believable on its own merits. I prefer the latter course but I'll leave you to decide for yourself which one is most appealing.

Office Ware?

The next four pieces surely don't fit into any glass food container category that I've encountered. Collectively, these models have a common theme. I've often wondered if they were manufactured for a specific Company purpose.

Between 1919 and 1938, Capstan Glass opened and staffed district sales offices in major food packing centers around our nation. Starting with seven cities in 1921, the firm's complement grew by 1934 to eighteen country wide and two in Canada.¹

In these offices, part of the daily routine for the sales personnel involved meeting with customers to determine their packing needs and to demonstrate how Capstan could solve any of their problems. Undoubtedly, this corporate philosophy of personal contact necessitated many face to face meetings. Whether at corporate headquarters in the South Connellsville or in their many satellite places of business, the ash trays, ice bucket, ice crusher and monogrammed glass that I'll describe in follow on subsections may well have played vital refreshment and relaxation support roles. As office accessories, this set probably served their Capstan masters nobly during the closing of deals between Company officials and packing industry counterparts and/or potential clients.

Initially when I came across the four items, I was dumbfounded. Throughout my prior research into the history of the Capstan Glass Company, Corporation executives and marketers constantly emphasized that the output of their factory comprised tumblers, jars and bottles. At no time did they mention or even allude to ash trays, ice crushers, ice buckets and monogrammed glasses being in their line of wares. Coupling this factor with the color of the items and applied designs thereon, I had and now still have a major head scratching conundrum to resolve. If these entertainment accoutrements weren't turned out specifically for Company executives in offices nationwide and in Canada, I'm at a loss for why they are

extant today. If you have a better explanation for their presence, other than what I've laid out in my supposition, I'd surely like to hear from you.

Ash Trays

Figure 2 contains a picture of two sizes of octagonal ash trays that carry the Capstan Glass trademark.

On the left, the black glass



Figure 2

specimen is 5 7/8th inches wide, 5 7/8th inches long and weighs two pounds two and one-fourth ounces.

At its summit, the side walls are 1 3/16th inches tall. Four semicircular shaped depressions are formed onto the outer top ledge. Due to their size, they most likely were meant as a resting place for lighted cigars.

The circular indentation in the center of this ash tray is 9/16th of an inch in depth and has an outer diameter of 4 9/16th inches. Boldly embossed in the center of this region is an 11/16th inch tall capstan, proudly facing upward and announcing its presence for all to see.

The underneath side of the left-hand model has a slightly raised, flat, 3/16th inch wide, octagonal bearing surface. At its innermost point, there is a 3/16th inch slanted inward segment which blends into a 4 1/8th inch wide and 4 1/8th inch long flat and unembossed octagonal surface.

If the heavy left-hand example was for cigars, then its mate to the right could have been for cigarettes. This black glass specimen is 4 inches wide, 3 15/16th inches long and weighs ten and one-half ounces.

The vertical outer side wall is 3/4th of an inch tall. Similar to its counterpart, there are also four semicircular shaped depressions along the top outer surface. Unlike its mate to the left, these half circle indentations are shallower in construction and probably intended as a place rest for lighted

cigarettes.

The center of this ash tray's top has a 5/8th inch slanted depression that merges into a flat circular recession which has a 2 3/8th inches outer diameter. Directly in the center of this region is an upward facing, 7/16th inch tall Capstan Glass trademark.

Turning this model over, we find a flat, 3/16th inch wide, octagonal bearing surface. At its innermost point, there is a 3/16th inch slanted inward segment which blends into a 3 1/8th inch wide by 3 1/8th inch long flat and unembossed octagonal surface.

Ice Crusher

The second specialty piece is composed of a tumbler from Capstan Glass and an ice crushing mechanism from the Schulte Brass Manufacturing Company of Norwood, Ohio. Figure 3 shows each section.



Figure 3

Regarding the container, this vessel is 5 5/8th inches tall and holds 13-fluid ounces when filled to the overflow point.² It has a smooth sealing area at the outer lip vice an Anchor finish which is usually comprised of a vertical surface and knurling. To properly seal this container, a 70 millimeter size of metal push-down cap would suffice.

The exterior side wall on this specimen is smooth and slants ever so slightly inward from top to bottom. Around it are five applied color bands in a red-black-red-black-red sequence. The red lines are 1/8th inch in width and the black ones are twice that size or 1/4th inch wide.

Internally, there are thirty-two

vertically oriented flutes. These identical panels have a convex shape throughout their length. Designed with rounded upward tops, curved downward bottoms and canted inward sides (1/4th inch wide at the top and 3/16th inch wide at the bottom), these curved outward features are connected side by side around the inner circumference of the tumbler.

The circular base on this banded model has an outer diameter of 2 9/16th inches. Figure 4 has a picture of this part.



Figure 4

In the center, the trademark for the Capstan Glass Company is strongly embossed. Underneath it is the mold number 595 while over the same symbol is the series number 13.

The ice crushing apparatus on the right in Figure 3 consists of a black wooden handle connected to a thin circular metal support bar. At the end of this rod is a round metallic plate carrying nine pointed downward prongs constructed of the same material. Around the support bar is a shiny metal top with the phrase – PAT.PEND. – stamped into its top surface. On the interior of the cap is stenciling in black letters. It spells out Schulte Brass Mfg Co. on one line with Norwood, Ohio below it. I presume this information is the manufacturer's name and location of his business. Unfortunately, a quick search of the Internet website for the United States Patent and Trademark office failed to turn up a patent for this hand ice crushing mechanism.



Figure 5

Figure 5 profiles the fully assembled ice crusher. Ironically, I've seen the same style of crushing tool atop a Hazel Atlas Glass Company marked applied color banded tumbler. On the HA trademarked example, the container was internally fluted and carried the identical red-black-red-black-red outer design as the Capstan 595 version. Which one came before the other? I can't say one way or the other.

If nothing else, my encounter with a twin from another glass maker indicated one of two things to me. Either there was an intense head to head competition on-going between both firms in the mid-1930s for a bigger piece of the glass container market or the assembler of the ice crusher got a better deal for the glass bottom from whomever made it second.

Ice Bucket

To complement the ash trays and hand operated ice crusher, the next Capstan oddity is a depression green colored ice bucket. It is pictured in Figure 6.

This beautifully crafted model is 5 7/8th inches tall. Across the outer top lip, the distance measures 5 1/16th inches. Its circular side wall angles inward from top to bottom, drawing the exterior diameter of its base down to 4 inches. Two circular glass bosses

at the top provide the support for a shiny metal carrying handle.

In my opinion, the decorations on the outer and inner body of this pail are extraordinary.



Figure 6

The slant exterior surface has a smooth backdrop for other objects and patterns that have been engraved thereon. Along the top just under the lip are twelve finger tip shaped forms cut into the exterior wall in a downward position. Two inches down from the mouth is a 1/8th inch wide line, running around the bucket. Two inches up for the base is a matching companion. On the front and back between both horizontal features is a flower motif. It is composed of six, 5/16th inch in diameter circles arranged in a circular pattern. To the right and left of this form are leaves in the shape of an arrowhead.

Turning to the interior, twelve panels are pressed onto this surface. Rounded upward at the top and rounded downward at the bottom, these flutes have sides which angle slightly inward from top (1 1/4th inches) to bottom (1 inch). Convex shaped throughout their length, these decorative features are connected side by side around the inner circumference of the ice bucket.

In the center of its circular base is an impressive and strongly embossed 5/8th of an inch tall capstan. Figure 7 refers.



Figure 7

I've seen other examples of this ice bucket in the same color with a matching engraved outer pattern and an exactly molded inner motif. However, these models didn't have any maker's logo embossed on the base.

I'm presuming Capstan Glass co-opted this popular design for their purposes. If the engraving was done by their personnel in the South Connells-ville, Pennsylvania factory, this craftsmanship represents an impressive step upward for their product line.

Monogrammed Glass

Adding to the prior trio, the glass in Figure 8 completes the presumed customer entertainment set.



Figure 8

I called this specimen a glass because it neither has the weight nor stouter construction qualities noted in the Capstan tumbler line. Additionally, it isn't embossed with a Company trademark on its base. That logo appears on the front in the applied color red.

This capstan monogrammed example is 4 3/4th inches tall and is capable of holding about 9-ounces of liquid when filled to the lip. Its outer diameter at the mouth is 2 3/8th inches or 60 millimeters. A slightly angled inward and smooth outer body terminates at a 2 1/8th inches wide base. The applied color Capstan Glass Company insignia on this outer surface is 1 9/16th inches in height.

Internally, there are fourteen, very lightly pressed vertical flutes arranged side by side. These slightly visible features appear to have rounded upward tops and rounded downward bottoms. Convex to the touch throughout their length, these panels have sides which slant inward from top (1/2 inch) to bottom (7/16th inch).

The underneath side of the base on this example carries no embossing whatsoever.

Without an employee verbal history report, speculation is the only tool left to suggest why this specimen was ever pressed and decorated. I've lumped the ash trays, ice crusher and ice bucket in with it to support a possible story line which is, at the very least, believable. Is it the correct reason? Only time will tell.

Paperweight

The last piece of office ware is seen in Figure 9. Many glass companies had paperweights manufactured as advertisement mementos but none that I've seen have ever solely used the firm's trademark in this role.



Figure 9

Being 3 1/8th inches tall, this novel promotional device has a 2 5/8th

x 2 5/8th inch square base that is 1/4th inch in height. On the obverse of each side panel is embossing which spells out – CAPSTAN – GLASS – COMPANY – CONNELLSVILLE.

This paperweight was first advertised by itself in April 1923. A February 1937 sales pitch was the last time it was shown. The text, which accompanied the initial marketing ploy, follows:

“In the Capstan glass paper weight we have visualized our Trade Mark, which has come to mean quality glass containers, fair dealing, and prompt service to the users of packers' ware. With the coming of Spring and open

office windows you will find the paper weight a handy desk accessory. We will gladly send paper weights to packing company executives on request.”³

¹ *Tumblers, Jars and Bottles; A Product Identification Guide for the Capstan Glass Company, South Connells-ville, Pennsylvania, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, 2007, pgs. 21-22 and 31-32*

² *Ibid*, pg. 68. The advertisement for this tumbler indicated it had a capacity of twelve and three-eighths ounces.

³ *Ibid*, pg. 132

Postscript

I think you'll agree with my comment that the pieces of glassware that I just introduced are anomalies, especially when discussing the glass container products turned out by factory hands from the Capstan Glass Company. If we only knew the purpose for which these decorative items were made, we could better understand why Capstan officials seemingly moved into another area of the glass industry and added these novelty pieces to their tumbler, jar and bottle lines. Maybe, it had something to do with the impending merger of its parent organization, the Anchor Cap Corporation, with the Hocking Glass Company in late 1937 or perhaps, another strategy played out altogether. Right now, the distance between that rationale and explanation continues to increase in time, causing the real reason to continually fade from crystal clarity into opaque obscurity. This trend doesn't bode well for determining the reason any time soon.

I can use your help. If you have other pieces of Capstan marked ware that are outside of the tumbler, jar and bottle categories, I would truly appreciate a direct contact. That way, we can discuss and record your find and then put forth your discovery for the benefit of all enthusiasts in our hobby.

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A PRACTICAL ANSWER TO THE *Thin* VOGUE

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CAPSTAN *Electric Annealed* **GLASS**

Ad for Capstan from the January, 1934 edition of *The Glass Packer*