

Chase & Co.

Soda Water Manufacturers in Gold Rush California

By Eric McGuire

This story should, rightfully, begin on Nantucket Island off the coast of mainland Massachusetts. A haven for persecuted Quakers, a handful of the religious sect populated the island in the late 1600s. Living in relative harmony with the native Indian population, the group remained isolated from the mainland and slowly increased in numbers. The original families intermarried into a tight-knit, extended family community. In fact, one observer, upon visiting his island relatives in 1846, noted:

“Another trait of character which no one can mistake or dispute is that whenever one goes among them, if he can show any Nantucket Blood in his veins, he is received as one of OUR people and is acknowledged as a cousin even to the 4th or 5th generation. But if he is no extract from Nantucket, he is a stranger and is spoken of as such and called a stranger even in their public records – unless indeed he connects by marriage with them – then they will own him.”¹

By the early 1700s, Nantucketers discovered whaling and during the following decades built upon this overwhelmingly dominant economic resource, prospering greatly and becoming the third largest city in Massachusetts. A whaling fleet of 85 vessels plied the waters of the earth with a ready market for the products derived from whales – mostly the oil. Beginning in the mid-19th century, a turn of unrelated events brought the demise of prosperity for this whaling town – the discovery of oil in Pennsylvania; the silting

of Nantucket’s harbor; a series of disastrous conflagrations, the last on July 13, 1846; a decline in whale populations; and the *coup de gras*, the discovery of gold in California, which literally depopulated the ailing town. Between 1840 and 1870, the population of Nantucket decreased from almost 10,000 to a little more than 4,000.² The town languished for nearly one hundred years until the profits from tourism bolstered its stature to a world-class recreation destination.

The names of its earliest residents are repeated many times over such that some have become synonymous with its heritage. Surnames such as Chase, Coffin, Folger, Coleman, Starbuck and Macy are readily identifiable as having a Nantucket connection.³ The subjects of this investigation were typical of many who left Nantucket Island for the potential riches awaiting in California. It is not clear which brother was the dominant force behind the establishment of one of California’s pioneer soda water bottling ventures. Chase & Co. included both James Franklin Chase and Frederick Coffin Chase, sons of Franklin Chase and Nancy Ellis. James was born in Nantucket on November 7, 1816 and Frederick was born there on August 5, 1821.⁴ As with many of Nantucket’s male residents, their father, Franklin Chase, was a seaman. He was captain of the ship *North America* when it left port on September 2, 1824. His ship arrived home in November 1827, with 2,015 barrels of sperm whale oil on board. He is reported as dying at sea in 1825, so it is assumed he lost his life on this voyage.⁵

Indeed, it is likely that the Chase family

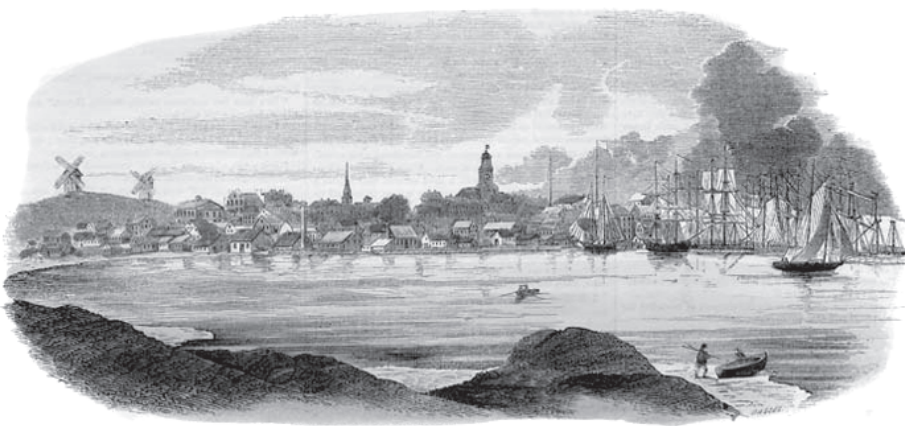
had first-hand knowledge of San Francisco prior to the brother’s arrival during the gold rush. Initially, San Francisco, known as Yerba Buena until 1847, was under the control of the Spanish and after 1821, the Mexican government, until 1846 when it was claimed by the United States. The ships of Nantucket regularly plied the waters of the Pacific Northwest during the first half of the nineteenth century since the otter fur trade was quite lucrative as was the Mexican hide trade – helping to bolster the economy of the declining Nantucket whaling industry.

The 1850 census for Nantucket lists James F. Chase as a “mariner,” and he very well could have had first-hand knowledge of San Francisco early in its unfolding, during its Mexican period.⁶ Frederick’s Nantucket occupation was described as a “tin plate worker” and a “tinman.”

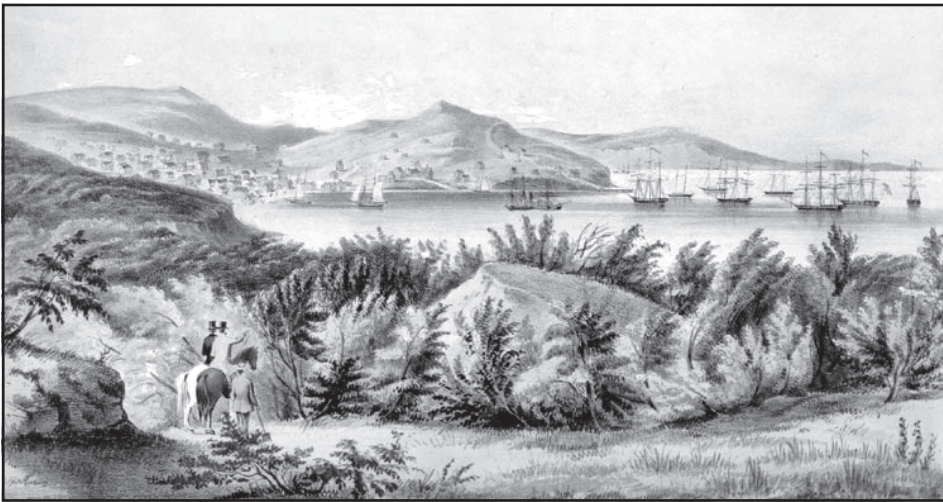
The culture of Nantucket was such that any able-bodied man, including husbands and fathers, could be absent and at sea for a period of years. Imagine, if you will, the anxiety of loved ones waiting back in Nantucket, not knowing if they would ever see significant populations of their male counterparts. Deaths at sea were common, as evidenced by Nantucket’s death records. So it may not have been that unusual for both James and Frederick Chase to have left their families in Nantucket while they established a business in California. James had married Phebe Macy in Nantucket in 1848. Frederick married Delia Maria Coleman and also left two children behind; Walter S. Chase, born Dec. 11, 1846, and Arthur Stephens Chase, born June 30, 1848.

Shortly after the discovery of gold, the brothers Chase, with possibly other family members, determined to blitz California’s soda water business like no others. While their San Francisco factory was undoubtedly the largest, they also established branches in Marysville and Stockton, thereby covering three of California’s four largest cities at the time. No records suggest why they decided to stay away from Sacramento; however, it was likely given consideration as well. Perhaps it was the already established competition by Addison Boley, Martin Rancich and others.

Marysville was the practical up-river port for the eastern Sacramento Valley, located on the Feather River at its confluence with the Yuba River, thus servicing the mining communities between Oroville and Grass Valley in the northern



Nantucket, Massachusetts as it appeared in 1858.



San Francisco as depicted on the eve of the Gold Rush.

Sierra Nevada gold region. Likewise, Stockton was its southern counterpart with virtually no ship passage any further south on the San Joaquin River, thus being the main port for the southern Sierra Nevada mines – generally from Sutter Creek to the Mariposa region. Therefore, both cities had excellent potential for growth.

It is not clear exactly when the Chase brothers arrived in California; however, Frederick is noted in the 1852 California State census as a soda water manufacturer in San Francisco.

By Aug. 17, 1853, Frederick Chase was a founding officer of Pioneer Engine Co., No. 5 of Marysville. He served as an alderman for Marysville in 1854. Further, he was a charter member of the Marysville Society of California Pioneers, organized in 1869, wherein he gave his date of arrival in California as 1849. His photograph exists on a photomontage of pioneers living in Marysville that is in the possession of the Yuba County Library (Photo No. 106 of the montage).

James F. Chase was treasurer of the Yuba Engine Company, No. 2, organized in Marysville on May 23, 1853, which infers that he was a resident of Marysville at least by that date.⁷

The earliest documented evidence of

Chase & Co. as a soda water manufacturer in California is a cautionary advertisement in the *Daily Alta* California that began on May 1, 1852, which advised against using bottles marked with the names of Lynde & Putnam, as they were the property of F.C. Chase & Co., successors.

Lynde & Putnam found the necessity to run a similar advertisement beginning in October 1851, which alluded to the widespread theft of their bottles by other soda water dealers. While the advertisement shown above documents the succession of Lynde & Putnam to Chase & Co., it does not necessarily establish a firm beginning date for Chase, except to confirm the existence of the company by May 1, 1852.

San Francisco was built almost entirely of wood during its gold-rush years. Major conflagrations tried successively to obliterate this new city from the face of the earth. However, the residents were resilient, and money so available that it continued to mushroom. Six major fires destroyed much of the city from December 1849 to June 1851. Overshadowed by these huge infernos were a number of smaller fires, as on May 31, 1854, over forty structures were consumed for a loss of about \$44,000 – hardly worth mentioning compared to previous fires. The soda works building constructed by Chase, pictured in the accompanying advertisement, had recently been constructed. Fortunately for Chase, he had just sold the building to Abel

Cudworth who succeeded Chase and was operating his Eagle Soda Works there at the time of the 1854 fire. Loss was estimated at \$8,000.⁸

For James Chase, participation in the odyssey of formative California came to an end on June 2, 1857. The *Marysville Daily Herald* reported on an incident that occurred in the mining town of Oroville, about 25 miles north of Marysville:

“...Chase was killed by a shoemaker named John Coleman. It appeared that Chase went into Coleman’s shop, put on a pair of boots and started out without saying anything about paying for them, whereupon Coleman followed him across the street and commenced an attack upon him, first knocking him down with his fist and then kicking him in the face and on his body, so severely as to cause his death in a few minutes.”⁹

This event exemplifies the time and place of the early western life of California, where there were copious amounts of whiskey, gold and testosterone. Competition for fabulous wealth, which had been attained by some, caused men to lose perspective of societal structure, which was skewed by the very reason that people had suddenly populated this country – gold!

Frederick Chase maintained some interest in the manufacture of soda water in Marysville until 1863, although he had no more bottles embossed with his name. This was followed by a number of other occupations during his residency in Marysville. He was a well driller for the longest period. At about the same time that he celebrated his 59th birthday, Frederick began working for E.C. Ross & Co. of Marysville, peddling tin-ware, etc., in the classic style often seen in films set in the time period of the 19th century – with two horses teamed to a wagon loaded with clanking cups and pots – truly a door-to-door salesman in the country style.

In 1880, Wheatland, a nearby agricultural community located in Yuba County, California, had just been plagued by a terrible fire that destroyed, among other buildings, the Masonic Hall. While plying his trade in the countryside surrounding Marysville, Frederick stopped his team in front of a saloon in the town of Nicolaus, Sutter County, about 15 miles south of Marysville, on the Sacramento River, to read a newspaper account of the Wheatland fire. The *Marysville Daily Appeal* documented Chase’s actions as he entered the saloon to read the newspaper;

THE COPARTNERSHIP HERETOFORE EXISTING
under the name and style of CHASE & CO., in San Francisco, Stockton and Marysville, Soda Water Manufacturers, is this day dissolved by mutual consent. All demands against the late firm in Marysville, will be settled by F. C. Chase, at Marysville, corner of 6th and A street. All demands against the firm in Stockton will be settled by Wm. Westgate, at Stockton. All demands against the late firm in San Francisco will be settled by W. C. Pease and A. W. Cudworth, corner of Vallejo, Hinkle and Pinckney streets.

**FREDERICK C. CHASE,
WILLIAM WESTGATE,
WILLIAM C. PEASE,
A. W. CUDWORTH.**

Marysville, April 1st, 1854.
Marysville Herald and Stockton Journal please copy, and send bills to this office
a7-15*

This advertisement, which ran in the *Daily Alta* (San Francisco, California) during April 1854, marked the end of the Chase & Co. soda water establishment.

CAUTION.—The Public, and particularly
Mineral Water dealers, are hereby cautioned against purchasing, from anybody, Mineral Water Bottles having the name of Lynde & Putnam pressed on the side of the bottle. All such bottles belong to the subscribers, who have never disposed of any and who require all for their own trade. This notice is given because the subscribers have discovered that other persons are using their bottles for their trade.

**F. C. CHASE & CO.,
Successors to Lynde & Putnam.**

Ad, circa May 1852.

"He had barely stepped inside the door when his horses started to run away. He followed in hasty pursuit, and in grasping at the head of one of the animals for the lines got hold of the halter, and in some way became so entangled that he fell prostrate, when both wheels of his wagon passed over his breast, breaking two ribs and causing injuries which proved fatal the following night."¹⁰

His final request was that his body be conveyed to Marysville and buried beside his brother in the City Cemetery, where he reposes to this day. Thus ended the last direct knowledge of the history of Chase & Co., and the story behind why, and how, they chose to open three branches of their soda water bottling venture in three California gold rush communities simultaneously. Both Chase brothers were violently killed in accidents separated by

23 years – neither returning to their families and homeland on Nantucket Island.

Frederick's youngest son, Arthur S. Chase, eventually left Nantucket and followed his father to California, making Marysville his home beginning in the late 1860s. On September 22, 1877, Arthur married Alta Octavia Warner in Nevada City, California, where she and her eleven siblings were living with her parents, George W. Warner and Sophia Ann Gill. Arthur was not one to stay at home much and chose a life in sales. His tumultuous marriage was marked by at least two divorces initiated by Alta, the last occurring in 1905 when she sued for desertion.¹¹ Two months later, he lost his real estate sales job and seems to have disappeared from California.¹² Two daughters were born to Arthur and Alta Chase, which ended the Chase surname legacy in California begun by the gold rush soda water bottler, Frederick C. Chase, and his brother, James.

Arthur's wife, Alta Octavia Chase (nee Warner), died in Long Beach, Los Angeles County, on June 26, 1943.¹³

As noted earlier, James F. Chase died on June 2, 1857, in Oroville, Butte County. Frederick C. Chase died September 2, 1880, at the Western Hotel in Nicolaus, Sutter County, California.

THE BOTTLES

Two distinct molds were used to produce the Chase & Co. bottles. Probably the first to be produced is embossed with **CHASE & CO. / MINERAL WATER / SAN FRANCISCO / CAL.** The embossing is all contained within a removable plate (generally termed a "slug plate") that was inserted into the side of a standard mold. This method allowed for the same bottle mold to be easily reused by changing the lettered plate with a different name in the future. All specimens noted are blown in shades of green glass and exhibit iron

ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT.

59

CHASE & CO. SODA WATER MANUFACTURERS



AND DEALERS IN ALL KINDS OF

SODA WATER STOCK,

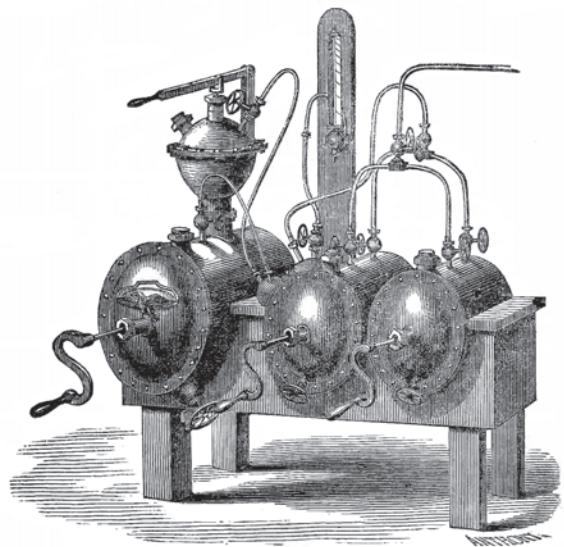
Corner of Vallejo, Hinckle and Pinckney streets,

SAN FRANCISCO.

60

ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT.

CHASE & CO., SODA WATER MANUFACTURERS,



AND

DEALERS IN ALL KINDS OF SODA WATER STOCK,
Corner of Market and Commerce Streets,
STOCKTON

CHASE & CO.,
SODA WATER MANUFACTURERS,
AND
DEALERS IN ALL KINDS OF SODA WATER STOCK,
Corner of Sixth and A Streets,
MARYSVILLE.



Probably the first to be produced is embossed with **CHASE & CO. / MINERAL WATER / SAN FRANCISCO / CAL.**



The second mold are embossed **CHASE & CO. / MINERAL WATER / SAN FRANCISCO / STOCKTON / MARYSVILLE / CAL.**

pontils.

Bottles from the second mold, also in the form of typical pint soda bottles of the day, are blown in shades of green glass, and embossed **CHASE & CO. / MINERAL WATER / SAN FRANCISCO / STOCKTON / MARYSVILLE / CAL.** The mold for these bottles was proprietary, generally termed a private mold – that is, all embossing was cut into the side of the mold without the use of a slug plate, thus the mold could not be easily reused without major modification. All examples exhibit iron pontils which is consistent with their age. This variant was probably used only

in Marysville and Stockton, for excavations in San Francisco have rarely unearthed the “three cities” bottle. Overall, fewer examples of this bottle are known compared with the “single city” San Francisco variant. With little doubt, the bottles were blown at an East Coast glass factory, possibly in the Boston area.

Endnotes:

¹ Charnes, Georgene Gilliam, “Diary of a Trip to Nantucket, 1846”. Published in *Historic Nantucket*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (Fall 2004)

² Oldham, Elizabeth, “Nantucket in a

Nutshell”. Published in *Historic Nantucket* (Winter, 2000).

³ Counted among other far more successful Nantucketers are Roland H. Macy, whose name is still emblazoned on large department stores across the nation. For San Francisco, another famous Nantucket native was James A. Folger, whose name is still an institution in the world of coffee. And, speaking of coffee, that other company having stores on every other corner throughout the world, Starbucks, is a name derived from one of the company founder’s favorite books – Moby Dick. Starbuck is Herman Melville’s fictional character, yet derived from some historical truth, who was the first mate of the whaler *Pequod*. Not surprisingly, the name is synonymous with Nantucket whaling life.

⁴ There is some question about the veracity of these dates (derived from the William C. Folger genealogical records), however, church records show that James was baptized April 19, 1818, and Frederick was baptized on October 6, 1822.

⁵ Eliza Starbuck Barney Genealogical Record. Nantucket Historical Association – Updated August 2006.

⁶ U.S. Federal Census, Nantucket, Nantucket Co., Massachusetts. 1850 (Ancestry. Com, pg. 40, line 7)

⁷ Lewis Publishing Co., *A Memorial and Biographical History of Northern California*. Chicago. 1891

⁸ *San Francisco Herald* (San Francisco, California) June 1, 1854.

⁹ *Marysville Daily Herald*, June 4, 1857

¹⁰ *The Daily Appeal*, Marysville, Calif., September 4, 1880

¹¹ *The Saturday Bee* (Sacramento, Calif.), July 22, 1905

¹² Ibid, September 30, 1905

¹³ Arthur and Alta Chase’s daughter, Lulu Warner Chase, died in 1930, in Long Beach. Lulu’s husband, Rudolph Pabst, died in San Francisco in 1918.

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