

Henry's Bottling Works in What Cheer, Iowa

By Bill Baab

I purchased a small accumulation of bottles that included milks from Georgia and a clear crown top embossed HENRY'S / BOTTLING WORKS / WHAT CHEER, IOWA.

That can't be real, I thought. I checked out the list of Iowa places in the Rand-McNally Road Atlas and learned What Cheer actually exists. I contacted my friend and fellow collector, Mark Wiseman, in Des Moines, Iowa, to learn what he knew about the place. I also looked it up on the internet.

While nothing appeared about Henry's, I learned that a pottery in What Cheer was famous (or infamous) for its anatomically correct bull frogs. Mark owns one of the male frogs.

What Cheer was founded in 1865 and first called Petersburg after its founder, Peter Britton. But the U.S. Post Office objected (its reasons were not posted) to the name and in 1879 it was changed to What Cheer.

The town thrived on many coal mines in the area, while railroads also helped drive the economy as well as haul away the coal, according to online sources.

The town today is noted for its opera house and what has been billed as the largest flea market in the midwest. Mark said the Iowa Antique Bottlelers used to meet in What Cheer at least once a year.

He said What Cheer pottery items are desirable collectibles.

Mark said Mike Burggraaf's Iowa bottle book lists a Hutchinson embossed SIMON FURSTENBURG (STAR) / WHAT CHEER, IOWA. The bottle dates to 1895-96. Mark has never seen one.

Unfortunately, Burggraaf's book on Iowa bottles does not include the crown top era, so little is known about Henry's..

