

HENRY CLAY WEAVER: 19TH CENTURY ENTREPRENEUR EXTRAORDINARE

BY GARY BEATTY



Mexican Bitters - Meyer Collection

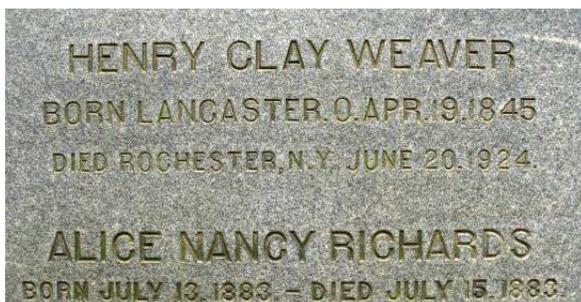


Lancaster is also the birthplace, and home of a famous Civil War General, "Gen. William Tecumseh Sherman." Just think, he probably visited Henry Weaver's bar and possibly drank his bitters!

This is my second article on the Henry C. Weaver Mexican Bitters bottle. I wrote the first one many years ago (I think 1978) for *Antique Bottle & Glass Collector Magazine*. I also assisted Ferdinand Meyer V with an article on Weaver's Bitters which appeared on "Peach Ridge Glass."

My reason for writing another article is five-fold. First, I am from Henry's hometown of Lancaster, Ohio. Second, I have been captivated by this bottle since the first time I laid eyes on it. Third, to introduce a beautiful and extremely rare bitters to our bottle hobby. Fourth, to give you some background on Henry and his bottle, and fifth, to clarify some facts about the bottle that are incorrect.

Henry Clay Weaver was born on April 19, 1824 in Lancaster, Fairfield County, Ohio. He passed away June 20, 1924 in Rochester, N.Y. at the age of 79 years. Henry's interment was in Mt. Hope Cemetery in Rochester. Henry's grave marker is just



Henry and Alice Weaver's gravestone marker

inside the North Gate, to the right, and in section D. North Gate is located on Mt. Hope Ave.

As a side note, Mt. Hope Cemetery, founded in 1838, was one of the first rural municipal cemeteries in America.

There are several famous people buried there and I will mention only a few. Susan B. Anthony of women's suffrage fame; Hiram Sibley, founder of Western Union, and Frederick Douglass, former slave and leader in the abolitionist movement. Douglass was also a statesman and sought-after orator. Douglass was also the first African-American nominated for vice president of the United States. And last, but not least, Nathaniel Rochester, an American Revolutionary War soldier and founder of Rochester, is also buried there.

The Weaver family was one of the most respected families in all of Fairfield County. One of my boyhood friends was a direct descendant of this family. It all started with Henry's paternal grandfather, Adam Weaver. Adam moved to New Lancaster, Ohio in 1802 from Lancaster, Pa. New Lancaster was founded in part by folk from the Pennsylvania town, thus the name.

In 1803, Lancaster became a town before Ohio became a state. Shortly thereafter the "New" was dropped and it became simply Lancaster. The county was formed and named "Fairfield" by the early settlers because the fields were considered fair. Lancaster was located on the Hock Hocking River and there were still Indians encamped there when Adam Weaver arrived.

Lancaster was the birthplace and home of another famous family by the name of Sherman. Charles Robert Sherman served on the Ohio Supreme Court. He had four sons who became renowned: 1) Charles T. became a federal judge, 2) John Sherman became a U.S. senator, 3) Hoyt Sherman was a local banker, 4) General William Tecumseh Sherman of Civil War fame. General Sherman received his middle name "Tecumseh" because his father was an admirer of the great chief of the Shawnees "Tecumseh." As a boy Sherman was not called William, but rather Tecumseh. Suffice it to say there can be no doubt whatsoever that the Weaver family would have known and interacted with the Sherman family.

I need now to get back to the Weaver family. When Adam Weaver first arrived at Lancaster he served as a clerk in the mercantile store of Rudolph Pitcher. In 1810, Adam was elected justice of the peace of Hocking Township. He was considered so fair and impartial that he held that position for 18 years. In 1812, Adam was given a commission of lieutenant to serve under Captain Summer in his artillery company during the war of 1812. He never served long, as Governor Meigs recalled him to become sheriff of Fairfield County.

I could go on and on of the accolades of Adam Weaver, but must get on with Henry's story. One of Adam's sons was John Weaver. John became a very successful and respected business man and banker. John married Miss Nancy Archer and their first child was named Henry Clay Weaver. Again, there can be no doubt that young Henry was named after Henry Clay, the noted Kentucky senator and orator. Henry Clay also was a three-time loser in his bid for the presidency. He stumped through Ohio giving political

“Seward & Bentley Constitution Bitters, Buffalo, N.Y.” The dimensions are really about the same. However, at the top of the Constitution it is embossed AMS 2, while on the Weaver it is embossed ASF 5. As far as I know, no one knows what these letters stand for. Also, at the base the Constitution is embossed “1864” and the Weaver “1866” just two years apart. The rest of the bottle is identical. I love the grip bars on the lower part of the bottle both front and back. The side panels are “HENRY C. WEAVER, LANCASTER, O.” the other side “MEXICAN BITTERS.”

The Constitution Bitters can be found in several colors, but the Weaver Mexican Bitters exists only in amber. I used to go over to Paul and Mary Ballentine’s home at Springfield, Ohio to see Mary’s bitters. I say Mary’s because she collected the bitters, while Paul specialized in Mid West glass. Mary had the most beautiful Constitution Bitters I have ever seen. It was a deep amethyst plum color. It was found in a cornfield in northeast Ohio. I handled that bottle many times, not knowing there was similar bottle (Weaver) from my home town.

To close out my story on the Mexican Bitters, I will tell you what I know and what I suppose. The first Henry C. Weaver Bitters was found in a barn not far from Lancaster, Ohio, laying on a rafter. The book “Bitters Bottles” by Carlyn Ring and Bill Ham says two were found on a farm. That is incorrect, but it’s not the authors’ fault. They are vulnerable to what is reported to them. I went to the home of the man who obtained that bottle. I tried every way I could to purchase it from him. This would have been about 1974. Several collectors tried to obtain it to no avail. The man became the center of attention by many who sought to acquire the bottle. He was on a “high,” to say the least. One early evening some fellows visited him and he came outside to their truck and showed them the bitters. The story goes like this: they ended up talking about many things and the man set the bitters on the truck back bumper.

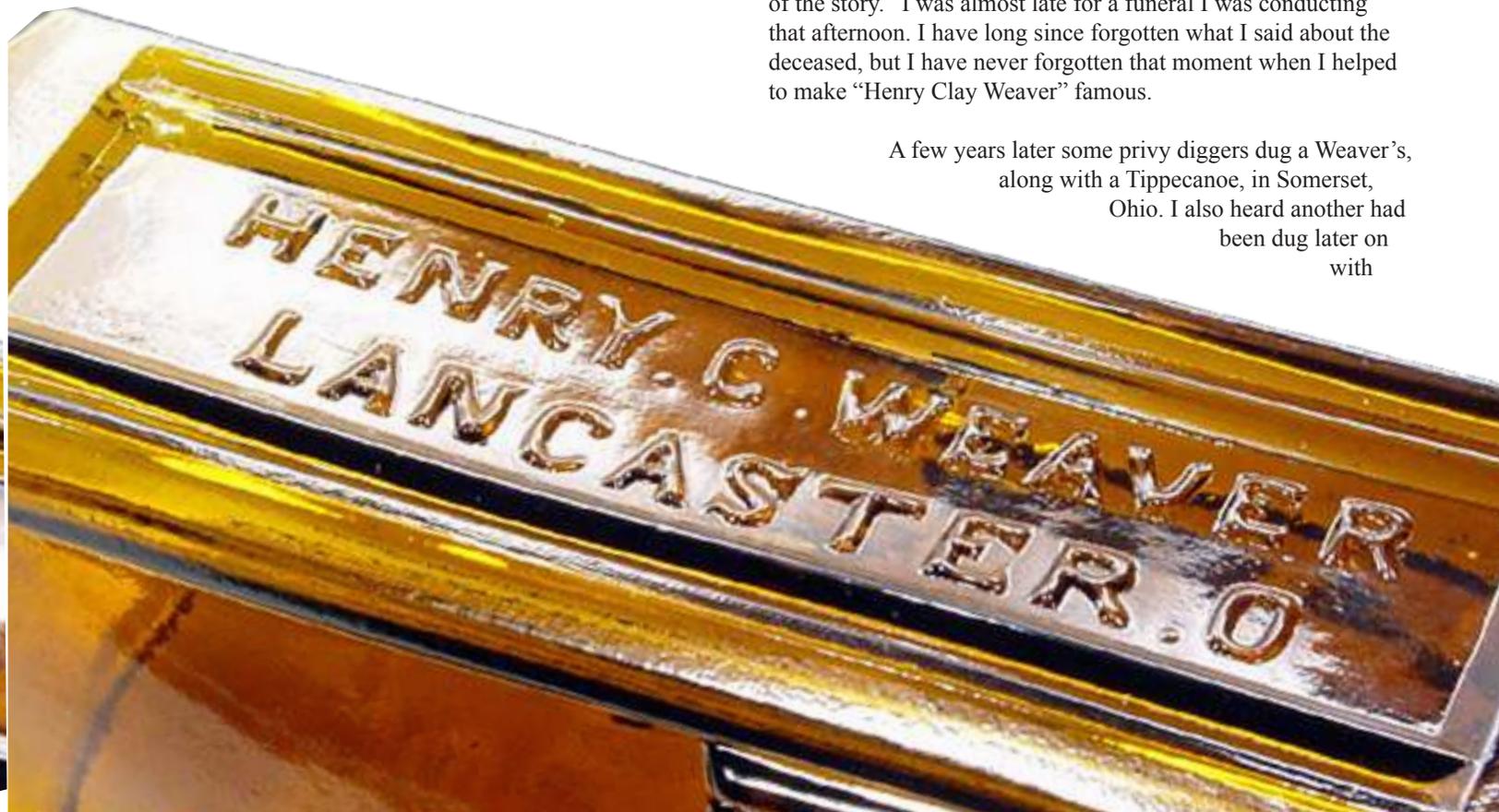
Darkness set in and they decided to call it a day. When the man went into his home he soon realized he left the bitters on the truck bumper. Panic set in as he ran outside to look for it. He was able to call one of the men and they looked, but said they found no bottle. The man and his family searched the streets for the bottle or broken glass but didn’t find it.

Several years later, I was serving as the pastor of a church at Bucyrus, Ohio. I read in the paper there was an estate auction being held that Saturday at Caledonia, Ohio. My wife Betty and I attended the auction and were blown away by the 100-year estate of great antiques. Both the front and back yards, barn and house were full. We started to walk down a long row of tables when suddenly the I spotted a bottle. I immediately recognized the shape. My heart gripped me as I grabbed Betty and pointed to it. “Is that a Constitution, or a Weaver,” I whispered to her?

I soon took hold of it and knew that dreams do come true. It was a Weaver’s. It took the auctioneer forever to get to that bottle and by this time another bottle collector had shown up. We were friends but that was put aside when the bidding started. A teenage girl that had been holding up objects held up the bitters by one finger stuck into the opening. She waved it around while the auctioneer shouted, “Who will give a dollar for the Mexican bottle?” All the while laughing. I started the bidding on the bottle and Carl Conklin jumped in right away. I jumped the bid to \$10 increments and it soon sailed to \$200. The crowd was getting loud and pushing in to see what was so special. The auctioneer stopped and shouted, “Folks, if you will hold it down, we’ll all learn something here. He immediately removed the bottle from the awestruck girl’s finger. We stayed at \$10 increments till we reached \$850. With a racing heart and what seemed like a million eyes fastened upon me, I stepped forward and was awarded my prize.

As newscaster Paul Harvey would say, “And now for the rest of the story.” I was almost late for a funeral I was conducting that afternoon. I have long since forgotten what I said about the deceased, but I have never forgotten that moment when I helped to make “Henry Clay Weaver” famous.

A few years later some privy diggers dug a Weaver’s, along with a Tippecanoe, in Somerset, Ohio. I also heard another had been dug later on with



damage. Here is the supposition I said I would make: Because of who Henry C. Weaver was, and the many business connections he had, both in Lancaster and also Rochester, he may have drunk a Seward & Bentley Constitution Bitters while at Rochester. Buffalo was not that far away and you can be sure the Constitution was available at Rochester. Seward and Bentley were in business together for only a couple of years. Weaver may have heard they went out of business and, being the entrepreneur he was, decided, "Hey, I can do that." He may have really liked that bottle and sought out the manufacturer and contracted to have some made to his order. For sure, he knew how popular bitters were to the sick and those who just wanted alcohol. Dollar signs are every entrepreneur's catalyst. There were no doubt many hypocrites of the Temperance movement who would not touch a beer or whiskey, but imbibed bitters with a clear conscience.

When I was a newspaper boy of 10 years age, I knew and sold papers to Henry Weaver Davidson. His mother was a sister to Henry Weaver. I didn't make the connection then, of course. He was an eccentric inventor who lived in an alley off main street in his old barn-work shop. He wore a full beard. I would deliver the paper to him and he would invite me in to see his gadgets of which he was most proud. I remember he was trying to motorize a wheel barrow. He was a kind old man and I missed him greatly when he died. I remember that I walked 22 blocks one way to view his grave.

Henry concocted his bitters and then would have sold it at his tavern on Main Street. We don't know what the ingredients were since we have never seen a label. It wouldn't have been hard to just copy the recipe of someone else. It won't surprise me if one day a digger in Rochester digs a Henry C. Weaver Mexican Bitters. Odds are no one will ever know why Henry named his bitters "Mexican." I often dream of the undug privies at Lancaster and wonder how many "WEAVER'S" are resting at the bottom just waiting for their resurrection.

In closing, consider this about the bottle: It is far rarer than the American Life Bitters from Tiffin, Ohio. Or the Holtzermans Cabin Bitters from Piqua, Ohio. And much rarer than the Seward & Bentley Constitution Bitters (except for color). And how great is the name "Henry Clay Weaver?"

I have long since realized these glass gems that arrest our attention, romance our heart and start us down the road of endless obsession, have a story behind them that is far greater than the bottle itself. Keep looking and digging because there is still an unknown gem out there with a story to be told.

Much of the information in this article was obtained from various historical sites on the internet. Such as Rochester Historical Society, Mt. Hope Cemetery records, Forest Rose Cemetery records, Peach Ridge Glass. Lancaster, Ohio Public Library, Ohio Historical Records. The bottles featured in this article are from the fabulous collection of Ferdinand Meyer V.

