

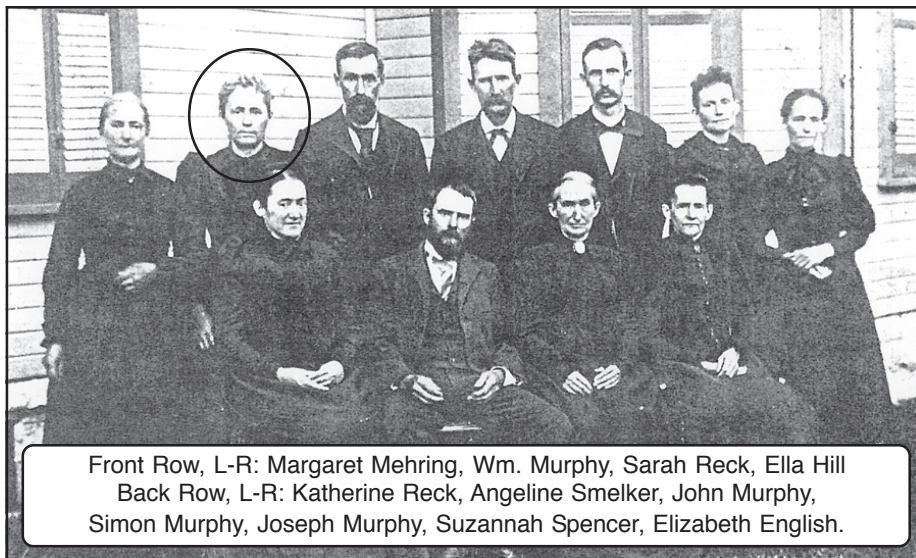
Angeline Smelker

by Joe Terry

Many people claim that it's a man's world. History tends to prove them correct. Few names of the female persuasion emerge from the annals of time to fall upon modern ears, especially with a connection to the hobby of bottle collecting.

In the course of doing research on a totally unrelated project I came across a previously unknown fruit jar patent. This caught my attention because it was to an Ohioan listed only as "A. Smelker". As I continued my research I discovered a couple of more patents to this person. Furthermore, the inventor was now identified by the first name.

An Ohio native through and through, Angeline Smelker was born, raised and died in the Buckeye State. She came into this world on April 1, 1844 as Angeline

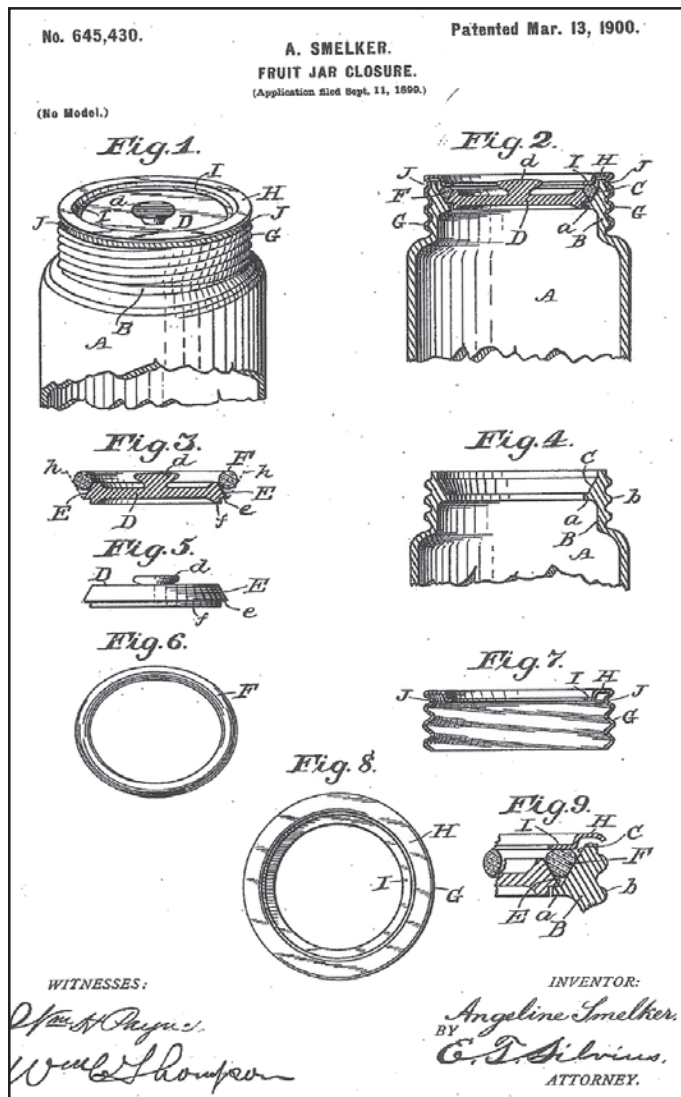
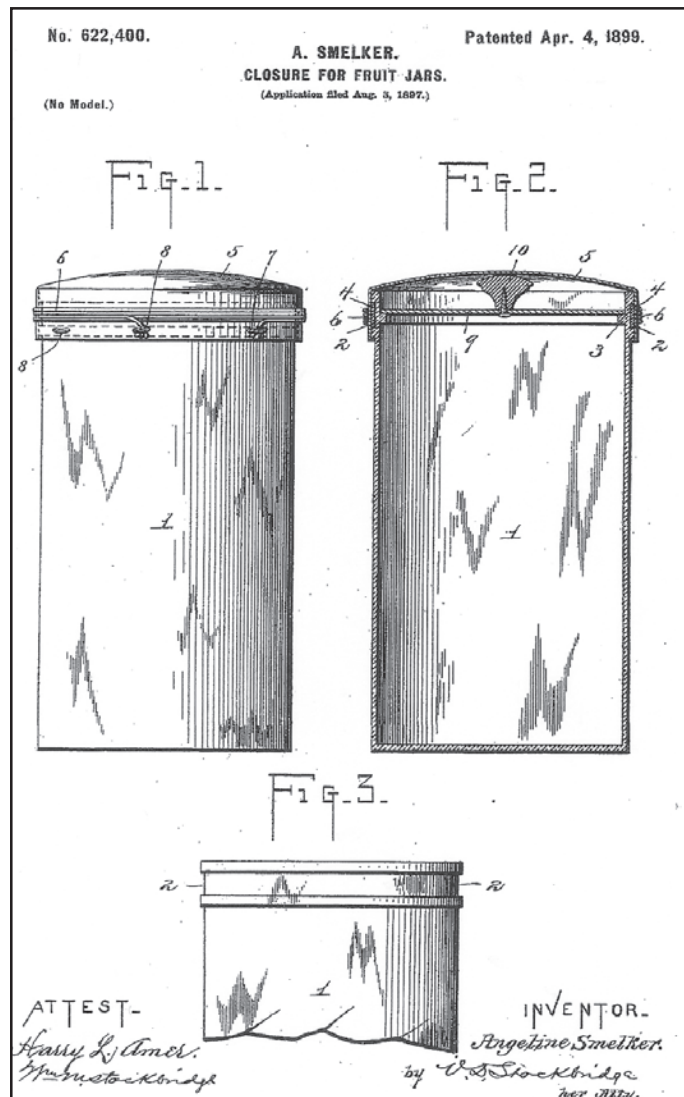


Front Row, L-R: Margaret Mehring, Wm. Murphy, Sarah Reck, Ella Hill
Back Row, L-R: Katherine Reck, Angeline Smelker, John Murphy,
Simon Murphy, Joseph Murphy, Suzannah Spencer, Elizabeth English.

Murphy, one of a large family raised by William and Mary Murphy. She grew up on a farm, and as she matured, learned to do those tasks essential to farm living.

At the outbreak of the Civil War, the teenager watched several siblings leave home and join the Union Army. She stayed

home and helped her parents with the farm, filling in the void created by her brothers' departure. After the conclusion of the conflict, she remained on the farm. She was finally courted away by the attentions of David Smelker, a somber local farmer ten years her senior.



The couple exchanged vows on December 31, 1871. The two moved around a little, eventually settling down on a farm near North Star, Ohio, in Darke County. She gave birth to the first of their seven children less than a year after their marriage; Harry was that child, followed by Florence in 1874, Olive in 1876, and Eva in 1877 (who died the same year). The rest appear to have come into this world after 1880, and included William, Leroy, and Edward.

It could be presumed that life for the Smelkers passed by much as it did for any other farmer of the time period. There was a living to be made if you were willing to work for it. Part of this would have included the preservation of food stuffs. By the 1880s this process became increasingly easier and more economical to accomplish. This was due in part to a multitude of fruit jar patents, as well as the increased number of glass factories making them. While Mason's Patent of 1858 would eventually prove to be the most prevalent of designs (simplicity is always best), inventors continued for decades to

come up with alternate designs.

Angeline's education would be assumed to have been basic, as were most women's at that time. However, there was a ten-year period between her reaching adult age and her marriage. So maybe, just maybe, she was a little more learned than we know.

There is no doubt she had a familiarity with fruit jars, and among them was unquestionably the screw top Mason. Still, her first patent was for something different. In 1897, she submitted a formal application to the U.S. Patent Office for a closure for a fruit jar. The government granted her request, giving her patent 622400 on April 4, 1899. She had just turned 55 years old.

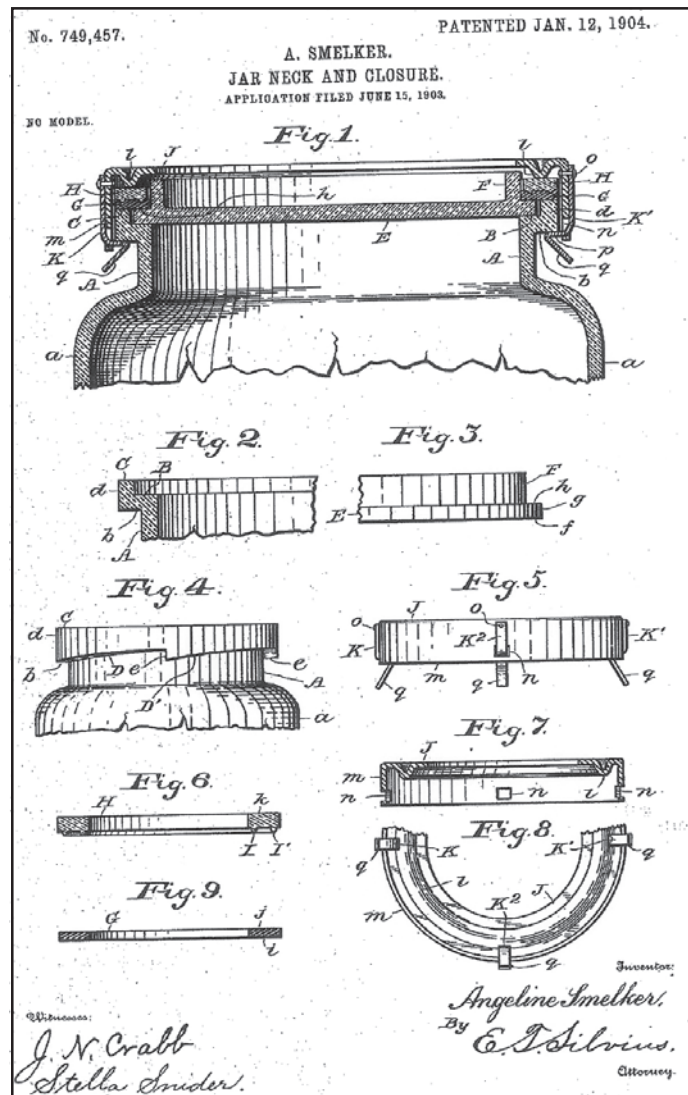
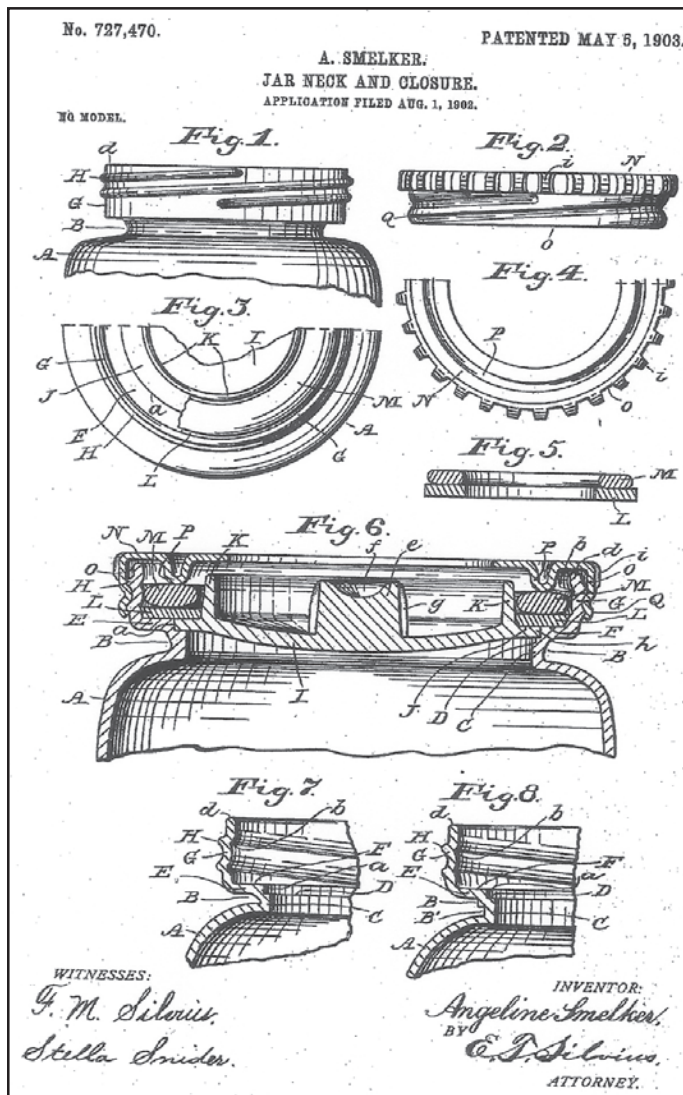
Her idea was for a jar made of glass, earthenware or other material, with a recessed section on the sides, near the top, which would have a rubber ring. The lid would clamp down upon this, as opposed to having the ring on top of the mouth of the jar. Another rubber band or flexible cord was wrapped around the outside of the cap to help seal the container. It also

involved an internal disk, which rested on an inside edge. This had a knob, which the cap rested on. When the lid was applied, it pressed down on the disk, which did some of the actual sealing.

There are no known examples of this patent design, or for that matter, of any of Mrs. Smelker's jars. This could be for several reasons, the first of which is that none were ever made. This seems a little unreasonable, as with six patents, why bother if no one was making them?

The other possibility is that the jars are unmarked with patent date or number. This has been the situation with a number of jars. Take for example, Alexander Brinkerhoff. At least one of his jelly glasses has turned up with only a metal lid embossed. If this were the case with Angeline, those lids would be rare due to the deterioration of the metal. Time will tell if someone eventually finds one.

Her next patent, number 645430, was granted in 1900 and followed by number 727470 on May 5, 1903. By this time, there seems to have been a rift between her and her husband. The first patent listed



her home as North Star, as did the second. These later ones show Greenville, the county seat, as her home. Investigation showed that her husband and several children moved to Saskatchewan, Canada. Angeline remained behind, and while there seems to be no record of a divorce, they never cohabitated again.

Angeline would have now had more time to devote to her ideas, especially if she was living alone. The 1903 patent had similarities to her first, but also had some radical differences. It still had the internal disk, an idea she seemed attached to. The sealing ring, which was actually composed of two pieces, now sat inside the jar, as opposed to outside as before. The closure had a screw cap assembly. This lid also had teeth, much in appearance like a gear. This was followed by a similar patent in 1904, when she was granted patent number 776206 on November 29.

It was only a year later when she received yet another fruit jar patent.

During much of this time, Angeline had a partner in her fruit jar exploits, a Mary Mehring of Indianapolis, Indiana. Mrs. Mehring was formerly Mary Margaret Murphy, sister to Angeline. She had a few ideas of her own, which were incorporated into the designs. It would seem that they started working together on the 1900 design.

On November 7, 1905, patent number 803902 saw the light of the world. A seemingly simpler idea than the previous patent, the sealing ring was placed where it was easiest to work with, on the jar top. It was held in place by a glass disk. A metal screw-ring held this down, much like many Mason jars of the day (and today, as well).

This seems to have been the last patent Angeline Smelker ever received. Nothing is known about what kind of success she had in marketing her ideas. There exist thousands of patents that likely never saw fruition. It is quite possible, even likely, that no one found her ideas practical. This

could have been in part due to the fact that she...was a she.

Her husband died in 1913 in Orange, a town in Saskatchewan, Canada. Angeline was to carry on for another eight years, dying in 1921 at the home of her son, the Rev. William H. Smelker of Dayton. She was survived by four children, a daughter living in Canada, and sons William, Leroy, and Edward. It would seem that she spent her years of separation in quiet obscurity.

Her obituary mentions nothing of her patents. This is not surprising, as many more prolific people have suffered the same indignity. These were, perhaps, not considered worthwhile accomplishments. It did declare her as the widow of David Smelker, indicating, at least, that while they were separated, they never did divorce. She was buried at Green Mound Cemetery in Darke County, Ohio.

My thanks to the Local History Department of the Greenville Public Library for looking up the biographical information on Mrs. Smelker. JDT

