

Capstan Tumblers, Jars and Bottles Used by the American Stores Company

By Barry L. Bernas

A Snapshot of Capstan's History

While in business, the Capstan Glass Company called South Connellsville, Pennsylvania its home. This Delaware incorporated glass container maker was formed as a subsidiary of the Anchor Cap & Closure Corporation of Brooklyn and then Long Island City, New York. From April 12th, 1918 (incorporation date) until October 31st, 1928 (capital stock acquired), Capstan Glass was operated in this capacity. Thereafter it became a part of the Anchor Cap Corporation. The same day six years later, the Salem Glass Works of Salem, New Jersey joined the Anchor Cap team as a member of its Container Division which was headed up by Capstan officials. The combined Capstan-Salem glass making team continued until December 31st, 1937. At the turn of the New Year, both outfits were absorbed into the newly formed Anchor Hocking Glass Corporation, headquartered in Lancaster, Ohio. Container production ensued at the former Capstan plant until February 18th, 1938 when the name Capstan Glass Company passed into history. Thereafter, the South Connellsville factory became the production site for the newly named Anchor Hocking Glass Corporation of Pennsylvania. Officers managed operations at the former Capstan works until September 1938 when corporate heads decided to close this facility. In all, the Capstan Glass Company was a corporation for nineteen years, ten months and six days.¹

How the American Stores Company Came About

Before the end of World War I, the American Stores Company was formed in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. But it wasn't created from scratch in the 1917-1918 timeframe. Its lineage goes even further back to the 1880s and five grocery stores that grew into independent outlets with multiple units each.

The first was Robinson and Crawford. In the late 1880s or so, two friends emigrated from Ireland to the City of Brotherly Love. Once in this Commonwealth municipality, Samuel Robinson and Robert Crawford

opened a small neighborhood grocery store (Robinson and Crawford) on Second and Fernon Streets. Their business did so well they started to expand, adding two new stores within a few years of the first one being set up. This expansive trend continued right through the latter part of the 19th Century and the first two decades of the next one.

Like the initial venture, the next grocery store chain grew out of a one store operation which was formed by an Englishman in 1883. In that year, S. Canning Childs started his first business in Camden, New Jersey. About thirty-five years later, he had 268 stores within his group in the Philadelphia and Camden metropolitan areas.

On Germantown Avenue and Oxford Street in Philadelphia, Thomas P. Hunter was another one store owner in 1885. By the time his organization was absorbed into the American Stores Company, his Acme Tea Company consisted of 433 stores.

In 1888, George M. Dunlap entered the grocery store business. By 1917, this Irishman's company (George M. Dunlap Company) managed a chain of 122 grocery markets.

The final component of the American Stores Company was initially put together in 1890 by another Irish businessman, James Bell. His Philadelphia operation later merged with another small chain of stores run by John Eagleson. This outfit then acquired 71 stores of the William Butler Company around 1917. At this point, 214 stores comprised the Bell organization.

Here is how the author of the book – *Pennsylvania Titan of Industry* – described the consolidation of the above concerns and the eventual formation of the American Stores Company.

"...These five competing grocery chain organizations had all begun as single stores and developed into large and successful chain store enterprises. Between them they were operating by World War I some twelve hundred and twenty-three stores. Before the war had ended, the death of several leaders in

the several organizations and other circumstances led to proposals to merge the five competing chains. Out of this came the...American Stores Company..."²

The Confluence of a Glass Container Maker and a Budding Supermarket Chain

Both Capstan Glass and American Stores were established at about the same time in the late second decade of the 20th Century; although, the latter concern had much older roots than its novice associate. Over the next two ten year cycles, each one adapted and expanded their separate enterprises.

On one hand, container design and manufacturing, vessel marketing and product distribution at the South Connellsville firm all showed a steady rise. This upward trend was so positive before the onset of the Great Depression that the Company's president, G. Fred Rieman, could announce that his operation was the worlds "...largest exclusive manufacturer of commercial packers' glassware."³

On the other side of the aisle, the American Stores Company also grew in response to progress in mass production and consumer preferences. In his book *Pennsylvania Titan of Industry*, Mr. Stevens described this flux in the following manner.

"...Suffice it to say that one of the institutions which has developed in modern times as a complement to the recent trends in mass production in the field of manufacturers is the so-called 'chain' grocery store. In the 'supermarkets' are displayed and sold the multitudinous food products which are the product of the modern food manufacturing industry. The entire process reflects the changes which have taken place in American life in the past few decades. An increasingly large percentage of the population has become dependent upon manufactured foodstuffs...Whatever the choice of the modern housewife may be...it is certain that prepared foods is one of our major manufacturers today. Their sale is a major factor also behind the rise of the

modern chain 'supermarket...'”⁴

Because of these two mutually supportive trends, the single American Stores tree with its five small neighborhood grocery store branches gradually became an orchard of ACME supermarkets.

The glass food packing container served as the interaction point of both concerns. Let's see what the Capstan Glass Company provided in the way of product vessels and what the American Stores Company put in them for sale in their East Coast markets.

Prior Capstan Examples

In the Fall 2003 edition of *Bottles and Extras*, I introduced to you two unlabeled, but ASCO® base-embossed, stylish jars that were made by the Capstan Glass Company.⁶ Throughout the remainder of this article, I'll add more information to my earlier effort. In subsequent paragraphs, you will see three plain and two fluted tumblers, another size of a previously documented jar (mentioned as Jar One in the above article) along with a new cylindrical style and two bottle motifs from the same South Connellsville container maker. Each example will have a paper label on it from the American Stores Company. This assembly of product vessels will start to give you some idea of the amount of business Capstan conducted with American Stores.

How to Tell a Glass Container was made by Capstan?

The trademark is the key. In this case, the United States Patent Office registered the nautical symbol of the Capstan Glass Company on May 31st, 1927.

In the application paperwork, G. Fred Rieman stated that this stylistic logo had been placed on the firm's ware since May 1919. A little over two years after its issuance, an Anchor Cap Corporation pamphlet indicated

"...the 'capstan' trade mark (was) pressed in the bottom of each container."

And as late as February 1938, the symbol for this piece of shipboard equipment was still visible on the base of containers promoted by the Capstan Glass Company in the trade journal *The Glass Packer*.⁷

Considering the above facts, I think it's safe to say that any glass container with

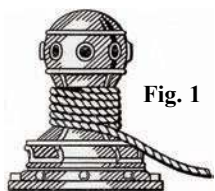


Fig. 1



Figure 2



the embossed design seen in **Figure 1** came from this South Connellsville business.

The basic capstan design appears on the left in Figure 1. It was extracted from the trademark application. Beside it to the middle and on the right are pictures of the Capstan Glass Company's symbol as it appeared on the base of a machine pressed tumbler and a machine blown jar or bottle. Note the clarity of the pressed logo versus the muted appearance of the blown one.

Plain Tumblers

Figure 2 has a picture of three sizes of plain tumblers made by Capstan and employed by American Stores as a jacket for their ASCO brand of peanut butter.

Officials from the Capstan Glass Company used the letter C or the title - standard - to identify this unassuming line of tumblers. A July 1922 advertisement stated this kind of container came in twenty different sizes, ranging in volume from one to sixteen ounces. Starting with the above promotion, packing vessels of this type appeared in Capstan Glass sponsored marketing pitches up to January 1935.⁸

The tumbler on the left side in Figure 2 is 3 11/16th inches tall. Its lip has an outer diameter of 63 millimeters. The same measurement across the base comes to 2 inches. Below the Capstan trademark on the underneath side of the base is the number 5 1/2. According to the American Stores Company label on it, this vessel held 5 ounces.

In the middle, the next example of a plain Capstan tumbler is 4 5/8th inches in height. Mouth and base outer diameter figures are

72 millimeters and 2 5/16th inches, respectively. This model carries the mold number 506 below the maker's embossed nautical symbol on its bottom. The ASCO brand label says there were 9-ounces (ADVR) of peanut butter in this container at one time.

The center version in Figure 2 came with an original Anchor metal sealing cap.

On the top in **Figure 3** is a cut away drawing of this cover. The left side of the sketch shows the placement of the rubber ring and where it seals along the finish of the tumbler. On the right, the outer profile of this Anchor friction closure is depicted.

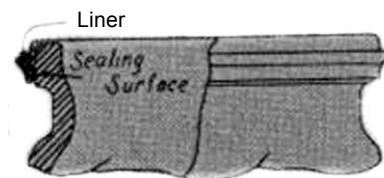


Figure 3



On the bottom of Figure 3 is a picture of the gold and dark green colored metal cover. Along its outer skirt is the following inscription - NO. 73C ANCHOR CAP NEW YORK PATENTED. In the central area of its top surface, the following was lithographed in dark green letters on the gold background: SPREAD *Victor Bread* WITH ASCO PEANUT BUTTER - TO REMOVE CAPS

USE ANCHOR OR ANY HOOKED BOTTLE OPENER.

Figure 4 has a picture of an Anchor Cap & Closure Corporation box along with an Anchor opener. This tool was just one of many that could pop the airtight seal on an Anchor metal cover sitting atop a Capstan or another glass firm's tumbler.

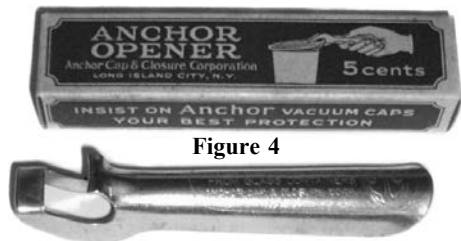


Figure 4

Coming back to Figure 2, the height of the right-hand specimen is 5 ⁷/₈ inches. It has an 83 millimeter outside mouth measurement and a 2 ¹/₂ inches outer diameter for its base. On the bottom is the Capstan logo with the number 15 under it. The American Stores dark blue, white and red colored label assured 15-ounces were contained therein.

Fluted Tumblers

The other prominent style of tumbler turned out by Capstan Glass personnel was the fluted variety. This version came with panels on the outer, inner or both exterior and interior side wall of the container. For the two-sided examples, the flutes could be aligned one over the other or be off-set either to the right or left of one another. **Figure 5** has a picture of the two labeled models in my collection from the American Stores Company.



Figure 5

The left-hand specimen has a smooth outer surface. On the interior wall are nine panels of the same height, width and design. These inner surface flutes have a curved outward or convex contour throughout their length. Also, these panels touch each other at the bottom just above the thick round base. However, they aren't joined together

at the top, being separated by a small gap.

This example is 3 ³/₄ inches in height. Its lip and base outer diameters are 63 millimeters and 1 ⁷/₈ inches, respectively. On its underneath side is the number 5 ¹/₂ which is positioned below the embossed Capstan Glass Company trademark.

This particular sample came with a push-down lacquered metal cap. It resembles the outer profile of the Anchor C cap seen in Figure 3; however, rust has obliterated any trace of an Anchor pedigree on its outer skirt. On the central portion of its top surface, the following instructions are embossed in a circle: FORCE FORK DEEP INTO RUBBER-BREAK OUT END-PULL OUT. In the center, the instructional method for unsealing begins with the raised words – TO OPEN.

On the right side in Figure 5 is another fluted tumbler of the same design mentioned for its mate. This example is 4 ⁵/₈ inches in height. Its outer lip has a diameter of 73 millimeters. The same measurement on the exterior base is 2 ⁵/₁₆ inches. The bottom of the base has the embossed Capstan logo in the center with the raised number 506 beneath it. This version came with a metal cap identical to the one shown in Figure 3.

Paneled Jar

The jar discussed as Jar One in the Fall 2003 issue of *Bottles and Extras* didn't have a mold number on its base. This and other factors suggested to me that this style of glass container may have been made exclusively for the American Stores Company. The appearance of two other jars in the same Theodore J. Piazzoli outer design with an ASCO label on each seems to add more credence to my theory. See Figure 6.

Theodore J. Piazzoli was granted a design patent for the outer motif of this container on March 1st, 1932.⁹

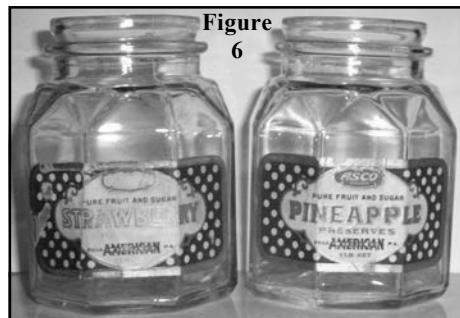


Figure 6

Either model in Figure 6 is 4 ³/₈ inches in height. At the top is the finish. On these models, it is comprised of a pry off sealing region, an annular bead and a vertical neck.

A metal cover seals these examples. Its profile and top surface stenciling can be seen in **Figure 7**.

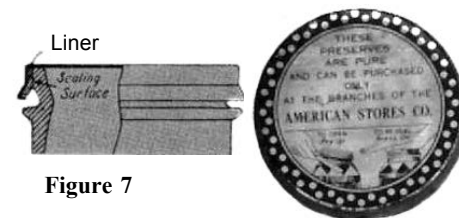


Figure 7

On the left is a drawing of the cap atop a container. The cut out shows the placement of the rubber liner and where the sealing surface is on this example. Beside this depiction in the same left-hand sketch is the outer surface design of the cap.

The right side photograph is the topside view of the dark green and gold colored lacquered metal cover that came on the jars presented in Figure 6.

Its skirt has a 58 millimeter inner diameter. A compound sentence highlighted the upper part of the top's circular central region. This wording read as follows: THESE PRESERVES ARE PURE AND CAN BE PURCHASED ONLY AT THE BRANCHES OF THE AMERICAN STORES CO. Below this phrase was a line. Under it on the left was the instruction TO OPEN *Pry Up*. A hand holding a dinner knife is depicted prying off the metal cap from one Figure 6 style of jar directly underneath the above instruction. Opposite is another instructional phrase To RE-SEAL *Press On*. Under this wording was the same kind of paneled jar. But this time the hand with its palm facing downward was pushing down on the top surface of the metal cap to reseal it on the container.

The style of metal cover used to seal the Figure 6 jars was known in the industry as the White cap. Here is how a writer from the trade journal – *The Glass Packer* – described this closure.

"The White cap is one of the newer closures in this group. Here is a one-piece tin plate cap of unusual shape which is also solely applied by head pressure. (Figure 7) gives an illustration of the closure applied to a container with the pry off finish. The gasket, a composition rubber ring, is in the skirt where it presses against the side of the container. It is claimed that this closure has unusual merit as a reseal friction cap."¹⁰

Below the finish is the jar's body. The top part or shoulder joins the neck region

and is of the same diameter and form as the last component of the previous section. It then slants down and outward at about a forty-five degree angle. Instead of being smooth and curved, this area is flat and composed of sixteen opposite facing triangles. Next is the rest of the container's exterior. Eight flat and rectangular shaped panels of equal height and width are strung together around the outer circumference of the vessel.

The octagonal base is the post bottom mold rendition with a Capstan logo in the center. Below this nautical symbol is the mold number 5972. Above the trademark is the embossed phrase – PAT. APPLIED FOR.

Plain Jars

Figure 8 has a photograph of the same style of jar but with three different American Stores Company labels on them. Regardless, of the sample you pick, the jar's height was $5\frac{1}{8}$ inches.

A blue and white lithographed metal cap closed every model. On the cover's top surface is a white circle bordered in dark blue. Within the white area is the dark blue stenciled name AMERICAN with STORES CO. in a rectangular box overlaid on the first word. Along the dark blue colored and ribbed outer skirt of this metal cover is the following in small gold lettering – 70 AMERSEAL ANCHOR CAP N.Y. PATD.

Under the quarter-turn screw cap, the finish on each example has a four lugged sealing area followed by a tiny annular bead and a very short vertical neck.

The body on each of the Capstan packing jars in **Figure 8** is composed of a shoulder and side wall. The former starts out conforming to the neck design but then quickly curves outward and down, joining the latter. This vertical region is cylindrical

in shape, unembossed and labeled. Its outer surface curves back inward as it approaches the bearing surface of the jar.

Of interest, three different styles of labels were seen on these product jars.

The paper one on the left is familiar because the plain and fluted tumblers seen in **Figures 3** and **5** had a similar one pasted on their outer surfaces. However, this is the first instance of the American Stores Company using a pint jar to market their ASCO brand of peanut butter.

As you can see from the pictures in **Figure 8**, American Stores used these 16-ounce capacity containers from Capstan Glass to pack their HOM-DE-LITE brand of salad dressing and mayonnaise. According to the gold, red and yellow and gold, dark blue and light blue colored labels, the contents of each were prepared by the American Stores Company.

A circular post bottom mold base was found on all of the specimens. Regardless of the model in **Figure 8**, the outer diameter of the bottom feature was $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Below the Capstan Glass logo on every one of the product vessels was a mold number. The left-hand example carried the figure 4016. Its compatriots to the right had A-4016 as their mold identifiers.

Catsup/Ketchup Bottle

The example shown in **Figure 9** is $9\frac{3}{8}$ inches tall. The outer diameter of its crown closure is 27 millimeters. A long and sloping shoulder gives way to a body with panels joined side by side around the outer circumference of the bottle. The eight flutes are flat surfaced. Each has a curved upward top and rounded downward bottom. Their individual dimensions are $4\frac{11}{16}$ inches (apex of the curved top to nadir of the round bottom) by 1 inch.

The American Stores label on this bottle is for their *Sunrise* brand of Tomato Ketchup. Sixteen ounces of this popular condiment was contained in this rather regular looking container from Capstan Glass.

The round cup bottom mold style of base had an outer diameter of $2\frac{5}{8}$ inches. This underneath part of the bottle carried the embossed Capstan trademark in the center with the raised number 9516 underneath it.



Figure 9

Vinegar Bottles

Two vinegar bottles are the last Capstan Glass containers to describe. These can be seen in **Figure 10**.

Both bottles are the same style. Each is $9\frac{11}{16}$ inches tall.

The finish on them is composed of a two lugged sealing component, an annular bead and a very short vertical neck.

Either specimen of an ASCO brand vinegar container has a 33 millimeter mouth which takes an Amerseal metal cap. The covers on the bottles are dark blue and white in color. One version had the following inscription in white letters on its outer skirt near the bottom edge 33 – AMERSEAL ANCHOR CAP N. Y. PATD. On the top



Figure 8



Figure 10

surface is the phrase *ASCO BRAND* surrounded by the ornate banner that matches the one seen on the label on right-hand bottle in Figure 10. Under this logo is the instructional phrase TO OPEN TURN (arrow pointing to the right).

As you can see in Figure 10, the shoulder on either version begins as a straight segment which slowly angles outward until an outward and down curved region commences. Just prior to the curved aspect, the abbreviation *ASCO* is embossed.¹¹ Thereafter, the sides angle inward until just above the bottom parting line.

On this part of the container are twenty flat surfaced panels strung side by side around the circumference of the vessel's body. These flutes have a rounded upward top and a curved upward bottom. At the top, each panel has the same width; however, this distance either narrows or widens as the side wall of the flute goes towards the base of the bottle. Even though the top of every flute is the same

measurement, the opposite end segment shows a one narrow panel and one wide panel pattern. About $\frac{5}{8}$ th of an inch from this latter feature, the outer surface of either bottle slopes outward and down in a gentle curve until it joins the base.

Their $3\frac{3}{16}$ th inches in diameter circular cup bottom mold kind of base has the Capstan Glass Company trademark boldly embossed in the center. Unlike other examples in this article, these specimens don't have a mold number. Instead, there is the word REGISTERED inscribed above the logo in a cupped upward fashion.

Summation

I'm sure the collectors of *ASCO/ACME* memorabilia were hoping for many more examples of other labeled American Stores Company products. Alas, I would have liked to accommodate them but my sample base is relegated to the models shown in this article.

On the more positive side, two label styles (oval and rectangular) and several color schemes, three brand names (*ASCO*, *HOM-DE-LITE* and *Sunrise*) and several Capstan Glass Company containers all used by this Philadelphia based supermarket chain have now been identified and documented.

I'm certain that the same type of vessels were used by other food packing concerns as well but at least we now know which ones held brands from the American Stores Company. An added benefit was also seeing what the contents of each container held when it was filled and labeled.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this article, share your information about either the glass maker or food packer or provide documentation of other Capstan Glass Company tumblers, jars and bottles that were used by the American Stores Company, please don't hesitate to contact me directly.

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Endnotes

¹ *Tumblers, Jars and Bottles; A Product Identification Guide for the Capstan Glass Company, South Connellsville, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, 2007, pgs. 1-46.

² *Pennsylvania Titan of Industry*, Sylvester K. Stevens, Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., New York, 1948, pgs. 40-41. In the event you are interested in learning more about the subsequent history of the American Stores Company, I recommend the Internet. By typing this firm's name into the Google search engine, a plethora of facts will be at your beck and call.

³ *Tumblers, Jars and Bottles; A Product Identification Guide for the Capstan Glass Company, South Connellsville, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, 2007, pg. 26.

⁴ *Pennsylvania Titan of Industry*, Sylvester K. Stevens, Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., New York, 1948, pgs. 39-40.

⁵ The abbreviation –ASCO– is just one of the brand names I've come across

from the American Stores Company. I presume it was conceived by extracting core letters from the Company's title in the following manner - American Stores Company.

⁶ *More Jars From Capstan*, Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, Fall 2003, pgs. 55-56. Recently, I acquired another example of a container that is base embossed *ASCO* PEANUT BUTTER with a 4315 mold number on it. On this four paneled jar, there is an American Stores Company dark blue, white and red label for *ASCO BRAND* PEANUT BUTTER. This vessel is topped by a dark blue and white colored *ASCO BRAND* Amerseal metal cap. Aside from the mold series number, this container matches the attractive packing vessel shown in the above reference as Jar Two with one other exception. My model has no maker's mark in the center. In place of the expected Capstan Glass Company trademark are four overlapping circles. These features were used by a mold maker to obliterate any trace of this familiar logo.

⁷ *Tumblers, Jars and Bottles; A Product Identification Guide for the Capstan Glass*

Company, South Connellsville, Pennsylvania, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, 2007, pgs. 9 and 26 and *The Glass Packer*, February 1938, pg. 125.

⁸ *Tumblers, Jars and Bottles; A Product Identification Guide for the Capstan Glass Company, South Connellsville, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, 2007, pgs. 57-58.

⁹ Ibid, pg. 81. In my book, I listed Jar One from the Fall 2003 edition of *Bottles and Extras* under the No Mold Number Jars section.

¹⁰ *The Glass Packer*, August 1930, pg. 383.

¹¹ *Tumblers, Jars and Bottles; A Product Identification Guide for the Capstan Glass Company, South Connellsville, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, 2007, pg. 117. This source lists three other sizes of a similarly patterned vinegar bottles. Each one has the abbreviation *ASCO* embossed prominently on its shoulder region.