

The First SIMPLEX Screw Cap

by Barry L. Bernas

New Finds Continue

I'm always amazed at what shows up at a bottle or jar show. That's one of the reasons we attend so many of them each year. With "the thrill of the hunt" always present, you just never know what you will find at one!

Take the 2005 get together in Mansfield (Ohio) as an example. With its owner, the earliest model of a SIMPLEX screw cap traveled into the Fairhaven complex. At that time, the possessor was seeking any information about it. Fortunately for me, June Lowry of Raymore, Missouri saw the cover and brought it over to my table to see if I could identify it. When I saw the sealer, my heart almost skipped a beat. At long last, I had in my hands an actual specimen of a closure I hadn't known existed minutes previously.

This cover was made to the May 3rd, 1904 patent which was issued to William B. Fenn. However, other than the phrase - PAT.APLD.FOR - it had nothing embossed on it which would indicate its lineage. Nevertheless, its outer motif and inner surface features were immediate clues as to where it came from and what jar it most likely closed. Scarce to say the least, this all-glass lid will be the topic of the article that follows.

Made by the Sterling Glass Company

The first notice about this screw cap was contained in a June 11th, 1903 report in *Crockery and Glass Journal*. It read:

"The Simplex packing jar is the latest by the Perfection Mfg. Co. It has a glass thread, and while there is a rubber band to exclude the air, it is so placed that it cannot possibly come in contact with the contents of the jar..."¹

To make a long story short, William B. Fenn entered into a binding agreement with John P. Elkin over a year earlier. In that contract, he agreed to invent and patent a new jar. On June 10th, 1903, Mr. Fenn forwarded an application to the United States Patent Office to fulfill his part of the bargain. His request was for a jar closure. The container and closure are pictured in **Figure 1**.²

At this point in June 1903,



Figure 1

William B. Fenn was an officer in both the Sterling Glass and Perfection Manufacturing Companies. Each one was situated in Washington, Pennsylvania. The former made glass items that were marketed and sold by the later. It was in the plant of Sterling Glass that the screw cap in **Figure 2** was most likely manufactured.³

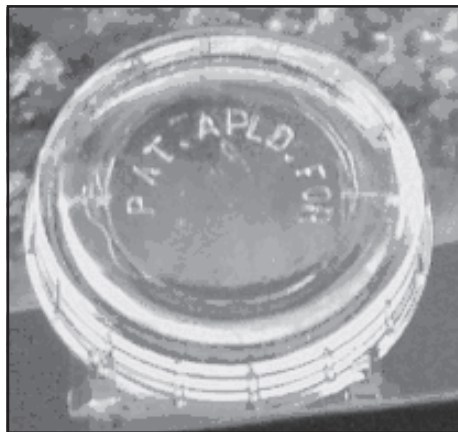


Figure 2

The Earliest Cap

In addition to the 'Simplex Packing Jar,' the all-glass sealer in Figure 2 was probably a closure meant for the machine-made, clear glass, fancifully patterned condiment container marked with FLACCUS BROS. STEERS HEAD FRUIT JAR.

Using my previously developed methodology, the cover in Figure 2 would be in Group I. Its full reference guide listing would be: 1.2.1.5 - a.4.b.3.c.4.d.3.e.16.f.2.⁴

The inner surface of the earliest cap can be seen in **Figure 3**. Starting at the top interior of the inner skirt, there is a flat, 1/4th of an inch wide circular ledge. At the ledge's innermost part, a 1/16th of an inch vertical rise occurs. This forms an internal, raised circular plane in the center of the cap's inner surface. The geometric shape has a convex top surface with an outer diameter of 1 5/8th inches. The phrase - PAT.APLD.FOR - is cut backwards in a curve onto the top part of the convex area. This group of words was applied so that it could be read naturally through the top surface of the sealer.

Flaccusesque in outer design, the screw cap in **Figure 4** has a standard height of 13/16th inch. At the base of its outer skirt, there is a 1/8th of an inch tall band which goes around the circumference of the cover. From the top of this feature, the outer skirt angles gently inward to a point about two-thirds of the way up. From here, the same area slants inward at about a forty-five degree angle until the outer top surface of the cover is reached.

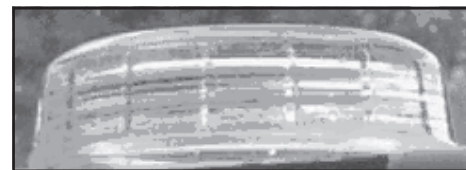


Figure 4

The top surface of the **Figure 5** specimen is non-tiered as shown. It is 2 3/16th inches in diameter and concave to the feel. Of note, there is no embossing of any kind on this region. You will recall the phrase - PAT.APLD.FOR - was marked on the cover's inner surface.



Figure 5

The capital letters on the inner surface were 3/16th inch in height. The bottom edge of the closure was polished smooth and flat to the touch. This example of a William B. Fenn cap had sixteen vertical grippers positioned around the outer skirt. The model in Figure 2 sealed a sixteen ounce container. Therefore, it had an outer

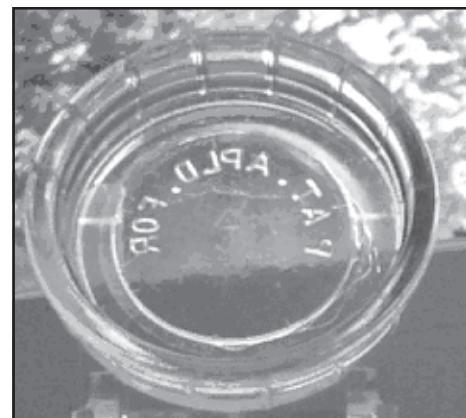


Figure 3

diameter of $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches and an inner measurement of $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches.

Follow-on Cap

I'm convinced the closure depicted in Figures 2-5 was the earliest sample of a William B. Fenn inspired all-glass screw cap. I say this because I believe the one shown in **Figure 6** is its successor.



Figure 6

In a reference listing which employs my classification scheme, the Figure 6 model would also be in Group I. A complete entry would be: 1.2.1.2 - a.3.b.3.c.3.d.3.e.16.f.2.

At the nadir of the inner skirt, there is a flat, circular $\frac{1}{4}$ th of an inch ledge. Precisely at its innermost segment, a $\frac{1}{16}$ th of an inch vertical depression occurs. This inner region has a diameter of $1\frac{9}{16}$ inches and is concave to the feel. Within this area, the following backwards embossing is present. Curved along the top is the phrase - PAT.APLD.FOR. Along the opposite or bottom segment are the words - Trade Mark Registered. Between both is the logo - SIMPLEX - enclosed by a diamond form. See **Figure 7**.⁵



Figure 7

Also Flaccusque in outer shape, the follow-on cover in **Figure 8** has a standard height of $\frac{13}{16}$ inch. Along the

circumference of the outer skirt is a $\frac{1}{8}$ inch tall band. From the top of it, the outer skirt of the cap angles gently inward to about two-thirds of the way up. Then it curves upward and inward until the outer top surface is reached.

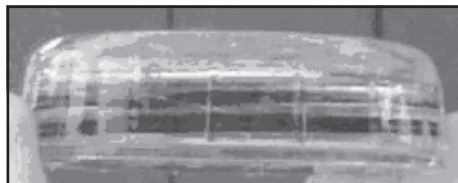


Figure 8



Figure 9

As with its mate in Figure 5, this version in **Figure 9** has a non-tiered top surface. On this example, the smooth top area is $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. Looking down through this part, the inner surface labeling that was previously described can be easily read.

The dimensions of the diamond on the screw cap's inner surface are $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in height and $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide. Capital letter size is $\frac{3}{16}$ inch. The cursive letters are each $\frac{1}{8}$ th of an inch tall. A small "v" forms the center component of the larger letter "M" in the word SIMPLEX. The bottom edge of Figure 6 is polished and flat to the feel. Sixteen ribs adorn the outer skirt. As with the sealer in Figure 2, this successor was meant to close a sixteen ounce container. It has an inner diameter of $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches and an outer measurement of $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches. My example came with the original black packing ring still intact. The all-glass cap was on a clear, machine-made FLACCUS BROS. STEERS HEAD FRUIT JAR embossed container.

Conclusion

Because I knew about the second cap, the first or earliest example was easy to identify, group and classify. I think the pictures and measurements I've presented speak for themselves. In my estimation, these fully substantiate my conclusion that both sealers are related. If you have any information you would like to share about either cover or just want to discuss the issue more fully, please don't hesitate to contact

me.

Endnotes

¹ *Crockery and Glass Journal*, June 11, 1903, pg. 26.

² *Fruit Jar Patents Volume III 1900-1942*, compiled by Dick Roller, Phoenix Press, Chicago, Illinois, December 1996, pgs. 154-156 and District Court of the United States, for the Western District of Pennsylvania, Docket No. 2339.

³ The maker of the 'Simplex Packing Jar' was eventually to be the Republic Glass Manufacturing Company in Moosic, Pennsylvania. Although this facility wasn't open at this time, the owner had 150 gross of the 'Simplex Packing Jar' made and shipped to the southwestern part of the Commonwealth in Washington for use in an advertising campaign for the container. The cap in Figure 2 could have come from that location as well. *Perfection Glass Company, One of Many Glass Houses in Washington, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 2005, pgs. 6 and XXXVIII-XXXIX.

⁴ *Cataloging Process for the Fenn-Designed, 1904 Patented, Screw Cap*, Barry L. Bernas, *The Guide To Collecting Fruit Jars Fruit Jar Annual Volume 10 - 2005*, Jerome J. McCann, 5003 W. Berwyn Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, pgs. 4-20 and *Perfection Glass Company, One of Many Glass Houses in Washington, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 2005, pgs. III-XVIII.

⁵ I opine the circular vertical rise/vertical depression seen in the center of the inner surface on both caps was caused by the operator of the top-down and bottom-up press used to manufacture these items.