

Collecting Bottles by State, The Ioway

Part 4 - Blob-top Soda Bottles

by Michael Burggraaf

This article is the fourth in a series that deals with collecting bottles by state and by type. The last issue of the *Bottles and Extras* magazine featured the different bitters bottles known from Iowa. In this issue, I will cover a few of the various blob-top soda bottles used by Iowa bottlers from the 1850s to the 1880s.

Iowa gained statehood in December of 1846 and was rapidly growing as new areas of the state opened up for settlement. As the population and industry of the state grew, so did the demand for locally bottled soda water. Early entrepreneurs took advantage of this demand by establishing soda bottling works, mostly in the larger towns situated on the Mississippi River. The earliest bottlers in Iowa used the typical squat body style bottle with the blob-top lip that was so common during the 1850-1870s era. Collectors from Iowa

refer to this style of bottle simply as a blob-top soda or a long-neck soda.

During the 1850s, bottling works were established in Burlington, Davenport, Dubuque, Ft. Des Moines and Keokuk. John F. Miller and a Mr. Zeisler were the first businessmen in Davenport to establish a soda bottling plant in that town. The embossing reads Miller & Zeisler and the variation in the Zeisler name is most likely a mold maker's error.

The Miller & Zeisler soda bottles from Davenport are unusual in the fact that the bottle has a 5-sided back while the front is plain but has a two petals embossed on the front shoulder. All examples of the Miller & Zeisler bottles are iron pontiled and come in various shades of aqua.

Around 1858 Zeisler moved to St. Louis and engaged in the same line of work there. After Zeisler's departure,



Fig. 1



Figs. 2

Mr. Miller continued operating the bottling works and continued using the same style bottle, minus the Zeisler name. Iron pontil and smooth base examples of the J. F. Miller bottles exist, all in various shades of aqua.

Another example of an iron-pontiled soda exist from Dubuque. Charles H. Belcher and James Belcher were the proprietors of the Excelsior Mineral Water Manufactory in Dubuque from 1856 to 1859. The bottles used by Belcher's soda plant are all the typical long-neck style and are iron-pontiled. Examples are known in aqua and cobalt blue.

The early settlement of Ft. Des Moines, later shortened to Des Moines in 1857, produced an unusual soda bottle with more squared shoulders and a long neck. The bottle is iron pontiled and is a beautiful teal blue color. The bottle is embossed A. SHAW / FT. DES MOINES, IOWA.

Dr. Alexander Shaw was listed as the proprietor of the Eagle Drug Store in Fort Des Moines during the 1850s. Dr. Shaw no doubt saw the need for soda and mineral water for the local citizens and



Fig. 3

began marketing his own mineral water in conjunction with the drug store business.

The town of Keokuk perhaps prospered as quickly as any Iowa town during the 1850s, resulting in several iron-pontiled soda bottles from that city. Embossed iron pontil soda bottles exist from the firms of HENSHAW & VAN HAREN; MAGRUDER & CO. [Figure 1]; and J. CAIRNS [Figures 2].

Fred Henshaw and C. VanHaren established a mineral water factory in Keokuk in 1856 and continued business through 1857. Their iron-pontiled bottles are the typical long neck style in aqua glass.

The bottles used by the bottling firm of McGruder & Company are unusual by the fact that the embossing is placed inside a fancy sunken panel on the front of the bottle. While this feature was commonplace on patent medicine bottles, it is a feature seldom seen on soda bottles. The McGruder bottles are known in aqua and various shades of cobalt blue.

The Cairns bottles have a unusual history as John Cairns never actually resided in Keokuk. His main bottling concern was located in St. Louis as there are a number of different Cairns bottles from that city. It is theorized that Cairns established a branch depot in Keokuk as the steamboat trade between the two towns was well established. The Cairns bottles marked Keokuk, Iowa were perhaps made

to be sold exclusively in the Keokuk area.

The river town of Burlington, Iowa has the largest number of blob-top sodas known. The earliest examples are the long-neck bottles used by N. E. Coburn, which have been found with iron-pontiled

bases and also with smooth bases. His bottles are embossed N. E. COBURN on one side and BURLINGTON / IA on the reverse side and come in a wide range of aqua colorations.

This company was in business as early as 1860 and the last year of production was in 1865. For reasons unknown, during the late 1860s, the Burlington bottlers began the practice of using large capital initials embossed on their bottles. The first example in the photo shows a deep aqua, blob-top soda bottle embossed O & G/ BURLINGTON / IOWA. No information has been found yet to identify this partnership.

The "O" initial may represent Chris Osterberg, an off-and-on soda bottler in Burlington, as well as being a proprietor a copper works. The crudeness and style of the bottle should likely date it from the late 1860s to the mid 1870s.

The second Burlington bottle is embossed W & Co. / BURLINGTON / IOWA and was most likely used by the bottling works owned by C. G. Warth, who established his soda company in 1870. During 1875 and 1876, Mr. Warth began a partnership with C. Walther. It is highly probable that these two men used the third



Fig. 4

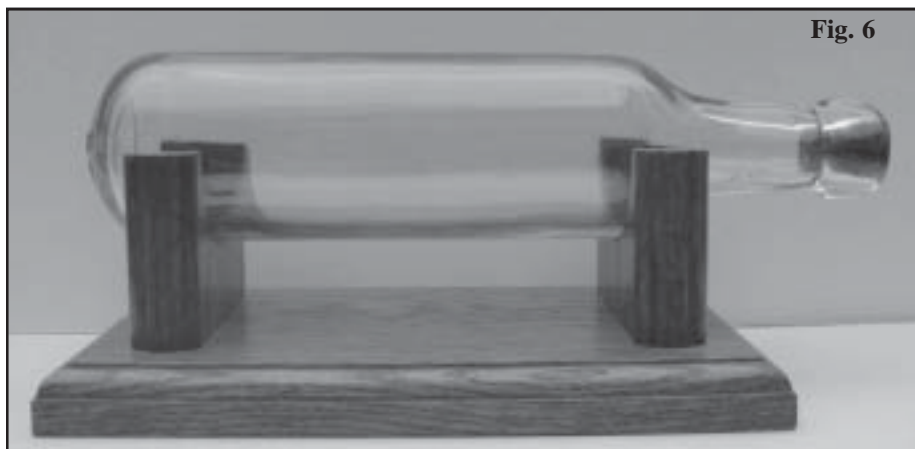


Fig. 6

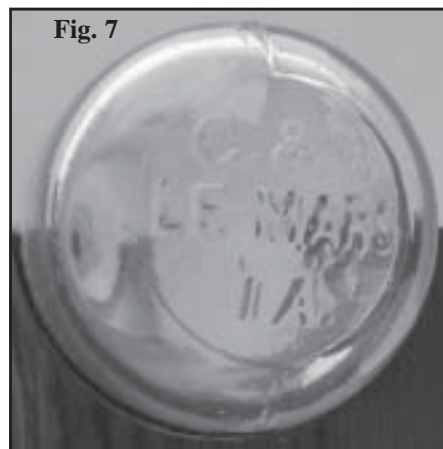


Fig. 7

bottle shown in the photo which is embossed W & W / BURLINGTON / IOWA. The brief time of their partnership explains the difficulty in obtaining this particular bottle. [Figure 3]

As Iowa's population improved, so did methods of bottle manufacture and methods of sealing soda bottles. By the 1860's, the use of the iron pontil rod was all but eliminated in the manufacture of soda bottles. Most, if not all, examples from this time frame forward are smooth base bottles. However, the method of preserving the soda water within the bottle had become more complex as numerous closures and devices were being invented during this time and the next few decades to follow. Iowa proved to be no exception to these bottle contraptions as the next few examples will show.

Two unusual sodas from Des Moines feature uncommon lip styles for soda bottles. One example shown is the slope shouldered bottle with the mushroom style blob lip which is embossed GEHRING & HUTTENLOCHER / DES MOINES / IOWA. The bottle dates from the late 1860's and employed the use of an unusual lip and an unknown closure. The other odd soda from Des Moines is the example embossed along the base STEHM & RICHTER. This bottle has an unusual square lip with a closure system that is also unknown. A few examples of this bottle were unearthed at the old Fred Stehm Bottling Works site in Des Moines. Examples that were found were aqua and a deep apple green. [Figure 4]

Sioux City boasts the only known soda bottle from Iowa to employ the use of the gravitating glass stopper. This closure was patented in 1864 by John Matthews. The bottle is embossed A. JACKSON / SIOUX CITY / IOWA [Figure 5]. While some of the gravitating stoppered bottles have the

Matthews patent dates embossed on the bottom of the bottle, the Jackson bottle has no base embossing of any kind. Anthony Jackson was in the soda water business in Sioux City from 1870 to 1877.

Marble stoppered bottles from the United States are rare as few bottlers could afford the more expensive equipment needed to fill the Codd style bottles. However, two of the larger bottling firms in Davenport, Iowa employed the use of Hiram Codd's marble stoppered bottles.



Fig. 5

The Hill & Witt bottling works used a variety of blob-top bottles, but also used the Codd style bottle for a short time. John Hill and Henning J. Witt were in business together from 1874 to 1879 and the Codd bottles appear to have been used near the end of the partnership. Their bottles are embossed HILL & WITT / DAVENPORT / IOWA with the H. CODD PAT. / JULY 23 & APRIL 29 / 1872 & 1873 embossing along the base.

During 1879, Mr. Hill sold out his share in the business and H. J. Witt became the sole proprietor of the soda works. Mr. Witt evidently liked using the Codd bottles as he continued using this style bottle for a short period of time. His bottles are embossed H. J. WITT / DAVENPORT / IOWA with the same patent embossing along the base. If you compare the two firms bottles you can tell that they are nearly identical and were actually manufactured from the same bottle mold. Close examination of the front embossing area shows that strategic filling of the "ILL" in HILL and the "&", as well as cutting in the "J", created the new embossing of H. J. WITT.

Iowa's only round bottom soda was used by the firm of Chesterman & Barrow of LeMars. The bottle is rather plain with the only embossing on the round end of the bottle which reads: C. & B. / LE MARS / IA [Figures 6 and 7]. The bottling works run by Chesterman & Barrow was in LeMars from 1883 to 1886 before moving to Sioux City.

The blob-top bottles used by the Fairfield bottlers liked the style of the tenpin soda bottle. Harris E. Kinsloe was the first bottler in Fairfield. He established his bottling works in 1877 after moving from Pennsylvania. His first bottles were the typical long-neck style but he quickly switched to the tenpin style in the late

1870s. He later sold out to Alexander Easton in 1891 and Mr. Easton continued using the tenpin style bottle for a number of years before switching to the more popular Hutchinson stoppered bottle.

Fairfield is the only town in Iowa to have used the tenpin style bottle. [Figure 8]

Other unusual soda bottles from Iowa include the bottles from Beacon which were discussed in an earlier issue of *Bottle and Extras*. The tall quart example embossed WM. BEARDSLEY, BEACON, IOWA [Figure 9] is shown along side an odd-sized soda bottle from Council Bluffs. Both bottles have unusual lever and cam closure devices with a close up view of the Council Bluffs top [Figure 11]. The pint-sized bottle from Council Bluffs is embossed WHEELER & HERALD / COUNCIL / BLUFFS / IA. [Figure 10] The back side is embossed FULL PINT on the shoulder and half way down is an embossed line to show when the bottle was half full.

Perhaps you now have a little better idea of the few but interesting early soda bottles that were used in Iowa. We may not have the quantity of colored sodas like the eastern states and California but we still

enjoy the pursuit of our home state bottles. With the few colored examples that exist and the unusual varieties and closures that were used, collecting early blob sodas from Iowa presents a rewarding challenge and the opportunity to meet other interesting people during the search. And as always, it's the memories of the people we meet that help to make this hobby great. Next time we'll take a look at the Hutchinson soda bottles available from Iowa.

References:

The Antique Bottles of Iowa, 1846-1915, by Burggraaf & Southard, 1998.

An Introduction To Collecting Soda Pop Bottles, by Ron Fowler, 1984.

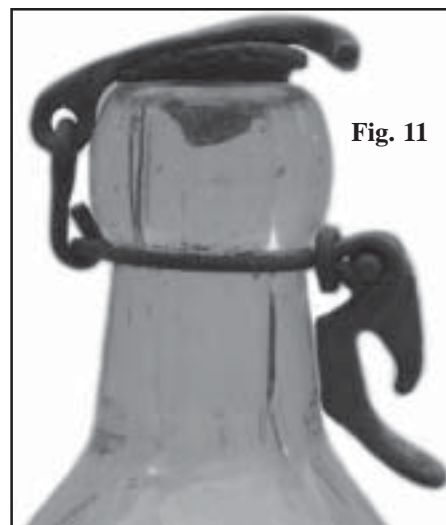


Fig. 11

Mike Burggraaf got started collecting antique bottles in 1968 and has become an avid collector of Iowa bottles and Iowa stoneware jugs. Research on the bottles and the history that goes with them has always been an important and enjoyable segment of his collecting.

Mike is co-author of "The Antique Bottles of Iowa 1846-1915" published in 1998. He also is the current *Iowa Antique Bottleers* editor, which he has been doing since 1991.

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Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

