

Collecting Bottles by State, The Ioway

Part 6 - Beer Bottles

by Michael Burggraaf

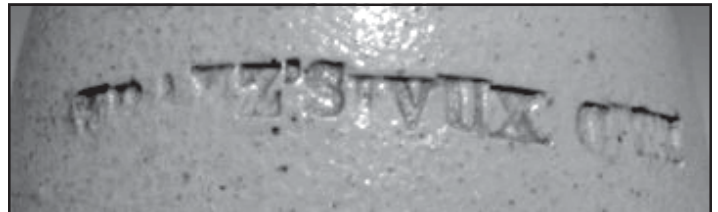
It's been a while since you've heard from me but I'm back with more historical information about Iowa bottles. This is the sixth article in a continuing series of "Collecting Bottles by State, The Ioway." This article will give some history and examples of the bottles used by various breweries and brewer's agents. Like many states, the history of the brewing industry in Iowa can be traced back to the original immigrants that came to the Hawkeye state during the 1840 - 1890 time period. A large percentage of the original settlers in the early Iowa towns and cities were of German heritage, with ties to the brewing trade being a common tradition. Many of the early German immigrants found a ready market in the relatively unsettled state of Iowa and many quickly sent up small "backyard" or "basement" breweries to supply local demand. Beside various styles of beer, they also produced ale, porter and stout at these small hometown breweries. By the 1850s and 1860s, there were several breweries that were prospering and with the growing demand, larger facilities were required as the demand soon overwhelmed their original operations. As expected, the larger Mississippi river towns soon dominated the market with larger breweries, many with an output of ten to thirty barrels a day. The preferred method of selling beer at that time was in kegs or in barrels. It seems that few brewers used bottles for selling their products as difficulties in preserving the beer in bottles had not been perfected at that time.

There is one early example from Iowa that could be included in the beer category and that is an early black glass bottle used by Hornung of Dubuque, Iowa. The bottle is made of dense olive green glass, or black glass, with a large pickup base and what appears to be a refired pontil base. The bottom of the bottle is slightly irregular and the edges are rounded as typical of refired pontil bottles of this type, typically used for ale or porter. The bottle is embossed around the shoulder in large crude letters: HORNUNG & Co / DUBUQUE. The style and shape of the bottle is nearly identical to those used by a merchant in Galena, Illinois that bottled ale during this same time period. Further research lists five different breweries in Dubuque in the 1957-58 City Directory but the Hornung name is not among them. However, he is listed as Hornung & Co. under liquor dealers. He was not listed in any previous or post directories. While the bottle is not a true beer bottle, I've listed it here as it is typical of ale bottles used during this time. Of the two known examples, one was found in Wisconsin while the other was found under a porch of a cabin in Canada. Regardless of the contents, this bottle represents one of Iowa's oldest and most desirable bottles.

By the 1870s and early 1880s, many breweries began to use bottles as a means to sell their products. While many surely used unembossed bottles with paper labels, eventually the larger and more prominent brewers began to use embossed bottles to promote their business and their products. One of the first brewers to use embossed bottles was the firm of A. H. Peaslee & Co., establishing his brewery in 1866 in Dubuque. Advertisements for the company list them as exclusive manufactures of XXX stock ale and porter.

Sales were reported to extend to the Dakotas, Colorado and even New Mexico. The bulk of their trade was in Nebraska, Wisconsin, Minnesota and of course Iowa. Peak production lists the capacity of the brewery at 1,800 barrels of ale and 250 barrels of porter annually. The bottles used by Mr. Peaslee are quart-size with an oversized blob top. Some examples are made of typical amber glass while earlier examples are made of amber glass so dense that they appear black. Examples have been dug in Nebraska, South Dakota and Illinois and usually date in the 1870s.

Another method of bottling beer was the use of stoneware bottles. The Sioux City Brewery, operated by J. Franz & Co., is one of just a few Iowa brewers to use marked stoneware beer bottles. The brewery was established in 1871 and their best production years were listed at 10,000 barrels annually. The small salt glazed bottles look to hold less than a pint as they are just over 7" in height. They are crudely made and the stamp is crude as well as it almost looks like the mark was impressed one letter at a time although this is highly unlikely. The debossed mark reads: FRANZ'S IVUX CITY. The unusual spelling of Sioux City only adds to the appeal of this early stoneware container.



Close-up of the debossed mark on the stoneware bottle for J. Franz & Co. Note the misspelling of Sioux City.

The early 1880s introduced a newer style of bottle for Iowa breweries to use. The pint- and quart-sized bottle with the typical bulge neck and a crude double collar neck were used by a limited number of Iowa brewers. The double collar examples usually are very crude and often display crudely hand-cut embossing. Examples of this style bottle were used by Burghart & Fischer of Council Bluffs; H. Frahm of Davenport; A. Potthoff of Des Moines; Mrs. M. Eigenmann of Muscatine; Henne & Schleifer of Mt. Pleasant; the Kraner, Hoffman Brewery of Ottumwa; and the firm of Bensburg & Cheadle of Ottumwa.

The few examples that exist are all of amber glass, except for the Council Bluffs and Muscatine bottles, and all typically date from 1879 to 1888. There are other pre-1888 Iowa beer bottles from Iowa but they employed the use of the typical single blob top. Examples of early blob top beers exist from C. Magnus of Cedar Rapids; Geise & Linder of Council Bluffs; M. Hollenfelz of Dubuque; F. W. Anschutz of Keokuk; J. Auwerda of Keokuk; Leisy Bros. of Keokuk; and the Kraner, Hoffman brewery of Ottumwa. Iowa enacted a major prohibitionary law in 1886 and by 1888 that law shut down much of the brewing industry in Iowa for a short period of time. This is a major reason for the lack of early beer bottles from Iowa. There are undoubtedly other merchants



1850s black glass ale
Hornung & Co., Dubuque.



One of the first brewers to use embossed bottles
was the firm of A. H. Peaslee & Co.,
establishing his brewery in 1866 in Dubuque.
Black glass example is on the left.



that used this style of bottle in Iowa but until further examples from other breweries turn up, Iowa collectors can only wait.

By 1890, many of Iowa's breweries were back in business and several new breweries would be established during this decade. Nearly all of the embossed beer bottles used during this time frame are relatively plain with plain block style embossing within a round slugplate. Most used the common blob top lip and most were made of aqua glass with amber being used infrequently.

One brewery that strayed from the plain embossing was the Eagle Brewery operated by Christian Magnus of Cedar Rapids. The Eagle Brewery had been established in 1859 but it wasn't until 1868 that Christian Magnus became the sole proprietor of this large and highly successful brewery. Beginning in the 1890s, Mr. Magnus had his familiar trademark embossed on many of his bottles. The trademark displays a large wooden keg with an eagle perched on top. There is a male worker tapping the keg into a stoneware jug. This makes for attractive embossing and one that would become very familiar in Iowa.

All of the Magnus bottles used during this era are aqua with either blob tops or Baltimore loop style blob lips. Sizes vary from quarts to pints to the hard to find split or pony beer size that is embossed only with the trademark. There are also Hutchinson sodas embossed with the trademark and base embossed C. MAGNUS, CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA. When Christian Magnus sold his interests in the brewery in 1898, the new owners renamed the company as The Magnus Brewing Company and used only crown top beer bottles without the use of the familiar trademark embossing. They did use a Hutchinson style bottle embossed with only block letters: THE MAGNUS BREWING CO., CEDAR RAPIDS, IA. All bottles with the embossed trademark can easily be dated to the 1890-1898 time frame.

The Magnus Brewery, like all other breweries in Iowa, was shut down at the end of 1915 due to a state wide prohibition law strictly enacted in 1916.

The 1890s also introduced the use of embossed bottles used by brewers agents. A brewers agent was usually a liquor dealer or saloon operator that sold beer from one of the larger nationally known breweries. It was also common practice for some of the larger soda bottling works in Iowa to also have a brewing agency. Schlitz, Pabst, The Fred Miller Brewing Co. and Anheuser



Trio of Magnus bottles from Cedar Rapids with closeup
of the Magnus trademark in the inset.



Early 1880s
double collar beer -
Kraner - Hoffman,
Ottumwa, Iowa.



H.J. Witt, Weiss Beer,
Davenport, Iowa
in deep green.



Quart beer from The New Vienna
Brewing Co., New Vienna, Iowa
[Photo courtesy Bruce Mobley]



Labeled only blob beer
from the Ottumwa
Brewing & Ice Co.

Busch are just a few examples of major breweries that sold beer through smaller agents in Iowa.

Typically, the bottles used are the same as those used by the larger breweries with slug plate embossing and blob top closures. For some unknown reason, most examples from Iowa are the pint-size with very few quart-size examples. The main difference is the embossing which usually represents the name or establishment of the brewing agency as opposed to having the name of the brewery embossed. Burlington, Iowa seems to have the most examples of brewers agent bottles with no less than five different individuals that used embossed bottles. Of course other Iowa towns had embossed bottles used by brewers agents also and one bottle from Sioux City is embossed with the name of the saloon which was called THE BODEGA.

One other bottle introduced during the 1890s was the use of a bright green bottle used by H. J. Witt, a prominent bottler in Davenport, Iowa. The bottles use a wire bail and a porcelain stopper to seal the blob top. They are embossed in a slugplate H. J. WITT / WIESS BEER / DAVENPORT, IA. The stoppers are usually marked H. J. WITT, DAVENPORT, IOWA. The bottles were made in amber and a deep green glass and also come in two sizes, a pint and a smaller pony beer.

H. J. Witt also carried on a brewing agency with the Wm. J. Lemp Brewing Company and the Val Blatz Brewing Company.

By the late 1890s, several breweries began to use the newer style crown top cap closure and by 1905 most all Iowa breweries had switched to using the crown top closure on their regular size bottles. Two firms in Burlington used a different style closure commonly referred to as a trim lip closure (illustrated below).



The five sizes of amber blob beers from Iowa beginning with the Pony beer on the left to the picnic beer on the right.

Continued on Page 49.