

TWO BROWN BOTTLES

by Steve Ketcham

Two recent additions to the collection piqued my curiosity. Both are simple, unembossed, amber bottles featuring labels which bear intriguing images. One product is called Pluto Water; the other is Bevo.

The Pluto Water bottle is the older and larger of the two bottles; its label states it once held 25 ounces. It carries no embossed product name, measures nearly 12 inches high, and bears a hand-finished blob lip. The base is embossed R. G. Co. (possibly Renton Glass Company of Renton, Washington).

The most interesting visual on the label is the red devil image of Pluto which stands front and center. Apparently, it was the idea of the waters coming from deep within the bowels of the earth which inspired the name Pluto Water and the red devil label image. In mythology, Pluto was the god of the underworld.

On one side of the label, to the left of Pluto, are the testimonials of two doctors, both giving glowing medical reviews to the product. Professor D. W. Yandell, M. D., Emeritus Professor of Clinical Surgery at the University of Louisville, wrote, "I know of no waters superior to those of French Lick. They are strikingly useful in liver troubles and in the indigestions. They do quick and great good to persons made invalids by sedentary habits, overeating and heavy drinking. They act well on the bowels, kidneys, and skin. In a word, they are great depurators, while they increase appetite and quicken digestion."

Dr. Joseph Rogers of Indianapolis, Indiana, testified, "These waters are especially adapted to the treatment of diseases of the skin, dyspepsia, constipation, chronic inflammation of the various mucous surfaces, scrofula, rheumatism, all specific diseases, and in fact, where a tonic and alterative effect is desired."

The French Lick area of southern Indiana was first settled in 1812 when a U.S. fort was built there. The nearby spring water, which

emitted a strong sulphur smell, was soon drunk for its supposed medicinal properties. It was found to be especially useful as a laxative. Dr. William Bowles began a spa at French Lick in 1842, drawing people from across the land to drink and bathe in the waters.

The famous waters of the French Lick Springs Hotel Company were touted in magazine ads as late as the 1930s. The ads advised, "What Nature won't, Pluto will," and promised readers, "Take Pluto Water and see a new world in 10 days!" One particularly striking ad depicted a small boy sobbing to his dog, "Mama Slapped Me." The text of the ad attributes Mama's mood to constipation and prescribes Pluto Water as the way to household bliss and better parenting.

Like so many product ideas from the past, the water-as-medicine idea has never really gone away. While I have found no waters advertised as laxatives, many brand names promise something beyond simple thirst quenching and hydration. My recent visit to www.bottledwaterstore.com was a water revelation. I found a product called Glaceau Vitamin Water which comes in no less than "fourteen gulpable functional formulas...." Flavor names suggest a benefit which the beverage provides to the drinker. Flavors include endurance/peach, stress-b/lemon lime, energy/tropical citrus, revive/fruit punch, focus/kiwi-strawberry, and perseverance/peach. There is even a flavor called leadership/lemon roobios which ought to sell well in Washington D.C.

I saw no promises for a Pluto-Water-like laxative effect from any of the Glaceau drinks, but there was a version called determination/raspberry yerba tea. Readers will please draw their own conclusions.

While Pluto Water is no longer sold, the spa which grew

up around it still thrives in French Lick, and patrons may still bathe in the waters.

The second bottle is a small, unembossed, ten-ounce stubby affair, machine made with a crown-style lip. According to the Anheuser-Busch website, Bevo was a non-alcoholic malt beverage first trotted out in 1916 in reaction to the growing U.S. movement toward Prohibition.

It was quite popular during Prohibition.

Bevo was sold as a family beverage. To one side of the label is a stork on a nest; to the other an eagle. The bottle's reverse label pitched Bevo as "The All-Year-'Round Soft Drink, Appetizing - Healthful- Nutritious- Refreshing." The label also reminded consumers, "Milk or water may contain bacteria, Bevo never does."

And to squelch any lingering doubts about the product, the label's final pitch assures that Bevo is, "Immensely popular in U.S. Cantonnments and on Men-of-War." If our boys in uniform like it, it must be good!

Shortly after Bevo was introduced, August Busch built the Bevo Mill, a restaurant located near the Anheuser-Busch brewery. According to www.beertravelers.com, "The Bevo Mill, a replica of a Dutch windmill, was a high-class restaurant, with beer and wine (no hard liquor) available only at tables. There was no bar, no sawdust, no bawdy women."

While the manufacture of Bevo ended in 1929, the Bevo Mill remains open today, still featuring its stone-carved gnomes, original tile murals, and fine German fare. Anheuser-Busch spent \$1 million on restoring the building in the 1980s. So dominant is the unusual structure, the St. Louis neighborhood where the mill is located is known today as Bevo.

Two simple, amber bottles recently found their way into my collection. Neither was expensive nor fancy. Without labels, the bottles would have been relegated to the 50-cent box under some table at a bottle show. But each holds a piece of history. The Pluto Water bottle reminds us that the French Lick resort area still thrives, though the waters are no longer sold for medicinal purposes. The Bevo bottle reminds us of our nation's Prohibition era, while it also connects past to present through the historic Bevo Mill in St. Louis. Even the simplest of old

