

Enjoying the West - Montana and Idaho

By Ralph Van Brocklin

Dawn is coming... and I am an hour north of Boise on Highway 21. The blur of the dark gives way to the shape of the big trees whose aroma I have enjoyed in the brisk early morning air and I'm reminded of why I so love the West. It becomes increasingly light and now I can appreciate the rising fog off of the highland meadows. Streams abound and I can imagine the trout just waiting for me to dangle a line! But, I must stay focused... Missoula is six hours away and I am to meet Ray Thompson, one of Montana's pre-eminent bottle collectors, at noon to make a run for the Flathead Lake region of Montana and the opportunity to visit with a collector who has amassed the finest collection of Montana flasks and jugs ever assembled.

The sky begins to take on the pink tones of a sun about to rise and I crest a hill to behold a view so spectacular that it does not matter if I am hours late to my destination—I just *have* to stop. Misty valleys preceding the ridges of the Sawtooth Mountain Range unfold in front of me and my gaze follows them through the mountain crags and into the sunrise beyond. Reflection follows and I know deep in my soul that the collector in me, who understands that we must honor our history and preserve the past, is at one with this unspoiled part of the West. We must never allow our children to lose the connection to our history and we must never allow those who would exploit these natural treasures to take it from them.

I continue through Banner Summit (7056 feet) and Sunbeam, taking Highway 75/93 to Clayton and then to Challis. The countryside changes from swift flowing rivers, canyons and mountains to fields of hay and spectacular ranching country. I continue on Highway 93 through Salmon (home of Sacajawea) and on into Montana. I have to confess that the reason for taking this route, which yet lay ahead of me, was not in anticipation of the beauty that I encountered, but to have the opportunity to travel through four Montana towns from which I hold mini jugs. In order, traveling north, they are Hamilton, Corvallis, Victor and Stevensville.

For any collector, learning what the area your prized possessions come from lends a different appreciation. My view of what

these towns would look like was markedly different than what I found, particularly in the case of Victor! I guess that to my imagination any town named "Victor" will always be similar to Victor, Colorado. Flat lands, with the mountains to the West, characterized all of these towns and my images of the life led by those who operated the concerns the mini jugs were from has modified, considerably.

The Trip To Flathead Lake

Amazingly enough, I made it to the Conoco Station in Florence, where I was to meet Ray and K.C. Thompson, within a few minutes of when they arrived. Their car was laden down with boxes, having made the trip back from Helena that morning following two days at the Montana Bottle Show. Since I totally screwed up my travel arrangements and did not coordinate with attending the show, I took the opportunity to paw through some of the boxes to see what "had to haves" they might contain. I did not get very far before Ray diverted all thought of what I might find by pulling out a bottle he had recently acquired – a pumpkinseed flask embossed GEO C FITSCHEN & BRO / MAIN STREET / BUTTE CITY, MONT. [Figure 1]. Although cracked, it was a considerable step up, condition-wise, from the one pictured in the "Recent Finds" section of

the Winter, 2003, *Bottles and Extras*.

K.C. had some obligations near home with a rental property she and Ray own, so she declined the offer to ride north with Ray and I (then again... perhaps she had heard about my driving! Ask any of my good friends in the hobby and they can all tell you a story about one thing or another I have subjected them to! Thank God for friends—they forgive even if they do not forget!)

Road construction could have made the two-hour trip miserable, were it not for having such good company! Ray and I had never had a chance to visit prior to this and bottles, areas we have lived, family and information about the areas we were traveling through made the journey very enjoyable. No matter how much we talked about the collection we were headed to see, however, I did not have a grasp of the scope I would soon find.

The Montana Collection

Greeting Ray and I at the door was a gentleman I had met at the Montana Collectibles Show, in Helena, some six to eight years prior. We had pretty much lost contact with one another until some eBay dealing beginning a couple of years ago, and it was certainly a pleasure to get the opportunity to visit again.

I was only a couple of feet into the house and was getting an idea that this would be an amazing collection to view— Montana advertising signs and stoneware were everywhere! A walk into the kitchen revealed stenciled stoneware topping every cabinet. Early photos and drawings graced the walls. After a short talk, the awaited invitation... 'I guess that you'd like to see the collection?' Well... You Bet!

Montana hutches, drug stores, beers, crocks, jugs... and the object of my photography quest— flasks! What a collection awaited my eyes! I knew that our host had been able to consolidate a number of significant collections and had even gleaned a couple of choice pieces from my shelves, but I had no idea what a significant portion of the available Montana items he had been able to acquire.

After a general period of looking around, I set up my photography apparatus and flask after flask was captured by my lens. One day the majority of these bottles



will be seen by a wider array of collectors. But, for the time being, my book on Western flasks is still a work in progress. The progress this trip... photography of a number of embossed flasks I had never seen, snaps of dozens of labeled flasks I had never imagined and comprehensive researching of the firms associated with Idaho and Montana liquor endeavors.

Rolling to Ray's

After a nice dinner at a restaurant overlooking Flathead Lake, Ray and I headed south for Missoula. I was thankful for his gift of conversation, for I was 20 hours into my day by the time we arrived at his house. I was even more thankful for his hospitality in putting me up for the night!

Morning gave me the opportunity to photograph a number of Ray's flasks and then I was off to Belgrade, Montana, to visit with another Montana friend, Sonny Cranson.

Sonny's

Sonny and I first met at the Montana Collectibles Show previously mentioned. We've chased the same bottles and enjoyed the occasion to visit and swap stories in the years since and I had always hoped to get the chance to see his collection. This trip finally gave me that opportunity and I timed it well, getting to see his beautiful new log home as well as his collection. Perched on a hill, with huge windows overlooking a valley below, you just could not ask for a prettier spot to put a home.

Sonny has recently branched out into collecting some of the California flasks and he bought a number of the ones I offered in my flask auction at the Reno National. His timing on buying has been right on target, of late, including the eBay purchase of a pumpkinseed flask from near my boyhood home (The Bismark – Monterey, California) that it took me twenty years to acquire! But, the true love in his collecting is the Montana flasks, of which he has a sizeable collection and some specimens which are unique. The basket-base shoofly flask embossed PURE LIQUORS / AT / M. B. RADEMAKER / BILLINGS, MONT. certainly would be any Montana collectors favorite! [Figure 2]

Following an afternoon of photographing stoneware, flasks, saloon photos and shot glasses, Sonny pointed me in the direction of the best collection of Kalispell directories known and I spent the

next hour making notes on firms of interest while he grilled lamb chops. As many of my friends know, I have a weakness for lamb and these were cooked medium rare and just plain delicious! Now just how much is enough to compliment someone who opens their house and their collection to you and then cooks you your favorite meal???! What a wonderful host!

On to Helena

After a couple of hours drive back to Helena and a decent night sleep, I headed over to the Montana Historical Society Research Center for their 9:00 a.m. opening. The reception at this facility was outstanding and the staff, under Reference Historian Zoe Ann Stoltz, went out of their way to be helpful both prior to and during my visit to their library.

One of the things you quickly come to understand on research trips is that you need to be prepared and focused. My period to research in Montana was limited to two days this trip and that included covering 175 firms in 56 cities over a span of 40 years of directories and gazetteers. Flow charts have to be at the ready and the approach has to be very organized if one is to make enough progress to justify the cost of visiting research facilities far from home.

Following a very productive first day at the Historical Society, I spent the evening

at the Helena Public Library, where I found a very nice collection of early Helena Directories. I did not get through all of their directories that evening, which was just as well, because only a couple of hours into research at the Historical Society the next morning the smell of gas began to waft through the library and the library and entire State Capitol complex had to be evacuated! It seems that a work crew had ruptured a main gas line right outside of the library building! Minus my car, which could not be moved from the adjacent lot, I hoofed it back down to the Public Library, where I spent a couple of hours finishing up what was available from Helena.

By the time I got back to the Capitol area, the buildings were being re-opened and I was immediately back to my research. The couple of hours lost kept me from finishing everything I needed to do, but I guess I just need to look at it in a positive fashion — it does give me an excuse to go back!

And Then... To Boise

The drive south to Idaho took me through Butte and then down through Dillon. In Idaho I passed through Blackfoot, made a side foray into Pocatello and then continued through American Falls, Glenns Ferry Mountain Home and then into Boise. These cities represent six of the seven Idaho communities with known embossed flasks (the other being Weiser.)

Researching at the Idaho State Historical Society Library was a more sedate experience than in Montana, with a staff that was quite reserved, but the directories were easily accessed and a total of 45 firms in 19 cities were searched. Directories from this state are more scarce than in Montana and the records of the firms I looked at will have corresponding gaps when I later report them.

Wedding Bells

The sun is setting as I now fly to Medford, Oregon for the wedding of friends (and fellow collectors) Dale Mlasko and Melissa Dotson. A new beginning... a new occasion to visit and enjoy the company of others in this wonderful hobby!

The Results of Research

The history might be a little dry, but I hope that you will enjoy knowing what exists in the way of Montana miniature advertising jugs!



Figure 2



(in an oval border): Compliments of / The Atlantic / BUTTE, MONT.

This mini jug is an oversized mini produced by the Red Wing Stoneware Company.

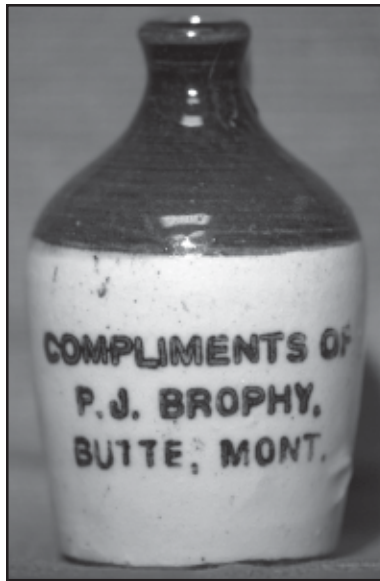
The first listing I have for a saloon at 56 W. Park is in 1900. The listing does not specify the name of the saloon, but it is under the proprietorship of Arthur Schimpf and Augustus Reichele. Schimpf and Reichele are specifically noted as proprietors of the Atlantic Saloon at this address in the 1907 directory. They are not found in the 1894 directory and I do not have the intervening years directories available to me.

This proprietorship perseveres into at least 1913. 1914 through 1916 directories were not available. In 1917, the listing is for the "Atlantic Saloon and Lunch Room" with the ownership listed as Reichele and Keppeler. In 1918, the proprietors are specifically identified as Adolph Keppeler and Paul A. Reichele. (I am not sure when Paul Reichele took over from Augustus Reichele and that will be a matter for later research.)

COMPLIMENTS OF / P.J. BROPHY, / BUTTE, MONT.

P.J. Brophy and Company are first found in the 1889 directory (they are not listed in 1888) in the business of wholesale and retail groceries. Although listed as "and Company", Patrick J. Brophy is the only owner noted in the 1890 directory and the business locale is 32 N. Main Street. The next directory available, 1894, lists him similarly, but at 28 N. Main Street.

In the 1900 Montana Gazetteer, P.J.



Brophy and Company (again listing only Patrick as owner) are denoted as in the business of wholesale and retail groceries, wines and liquors at 28 N. Main. With minor changes in listing, Patrick J. Brophy remained in business at this address through at least 1918.

(No photo available; Marc Lutsko listing.) COMPLIMENTS OF / CARR & POSS / COLUMBIA FALLS, MONT.

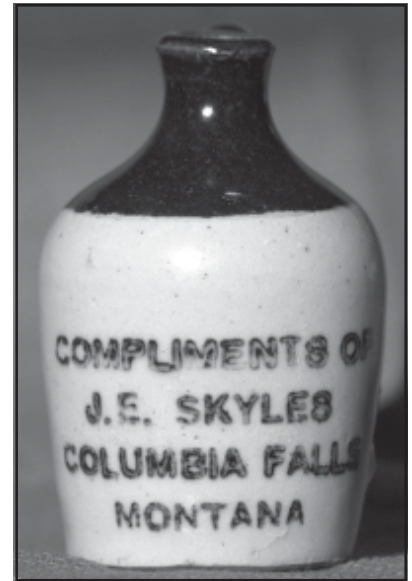
This is a very interesting miniature jug in that Oswald M. Carr and Charles H. Poss also put out a mini jug for their store in Pelican Rapids, Minnesota.

Carr and Poss are not found in the 1894 directory and there is no directory available for 1895. In 1896, they are noted as in the business of hardware and furniture and in 1904 they are listed as having a general store which is a branch of their Pelican Rapids business. By 1907, they are no longer listed as in business in Columbia Falls.

In the 1910 directory, Oswald Carr's name again appears, this time in the general merchandise business with Thorvold O. Elsethagen. Their endeavor continues at least through 1918.

COMPLIMENTS OF / J.E. SKYLES / COLUMBIA FALLS / MONTANA

John E. Skyles is first noted in Columbia Falls in 1900 (he is not found in the next earlier directory, 1896). At that time, his business is listed as bakery, groceries and meats. He continues in business through 1902. There is no directory available for 1903 and he is no longer listed in the 1904 and subsequent directories.



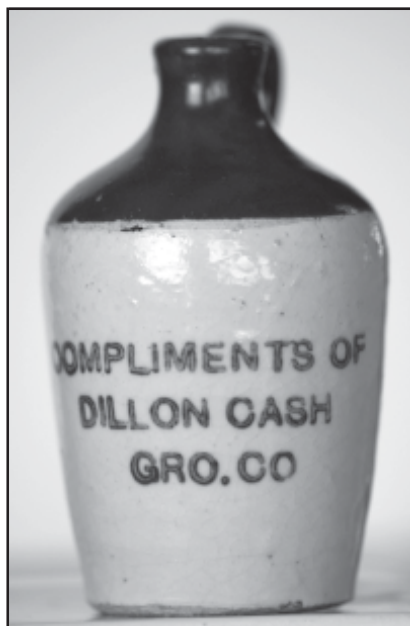
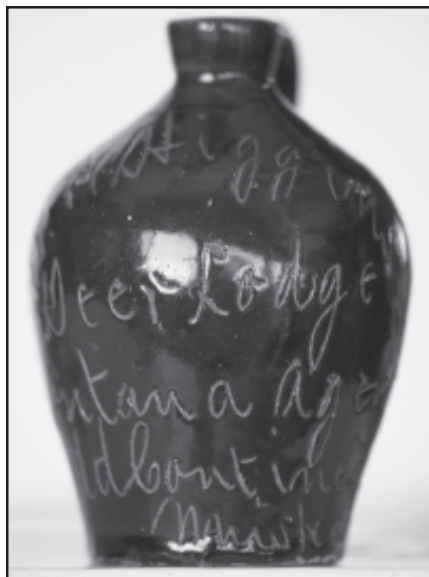
COMPLIMENTS OF / JOSEPH BOWDEN / CORVALLIS, MONT

The 1894 directory does not list Joseph Bowden and I do not have any directories available between that and the first listing I have for him in 1900. He is listed as operating a general store through at least 1918.

W W Higgins / Deer Lodge / Montana Agency / Old Continental Whiskey

This is the only scratched mini jug from Montana that I am aware of.

William W. Higgins is not found in 1889, but is listed in the 1890 Montana Gazetteer in the grocery business. He continues to be listed through at least 1896. Directories for the period 1897-1899 are not available and he is no longer found in 1900 and following years.



COMPLIMENTS OF / DILLON CASH / GRO. CO

The Dillon Cash Grocery Company, dealing in groceries, etc., is first found in the 1896 directory. T.W. Poindexter is listed as President and Manager. This listing continues through 1902.

The business is not found in the 1894 directory or the 1904 directory. Directories are not available for 1895 or 1903.

COMPLIMENTS OF / FYHRIE GRO. CO / DILLON, MONT

The earliest Montana Gazetteer that I have available to me is 1884 and L.C. Fyhrie and Company are already listed in the general store and hardware business. In 1886, the business is listed as general store and in 1888, the partners are specified as Louis C. Fyhrie, John H. Burfeind and Christopher Burfeind. Their business is

specified as grocers.

L. C. Fyhrie and Company is noted as being wholesale and retail grocers, dealing in liquors and as agents for Val Blatz and Milwaukee Beer in 1890. No listings are found in the 1892 and 1894 directories. No 1895 directory is available.

In 1896, we find the first listing for Fyhrie Grocery Company. The business is listed as "fancy grocers" with Louis C. Fyhrie as President. The business continues through at least 1900, but has disappeared by 1902.



COMPLIMENTS OF / THE SEASON / J. MENGELKOE / DEALER IN / FINE WINES / LIQUORS & CIGARS / GILT EDGE, MONT.

This is an oversized mini, rectangular in form and with a pour spout.

John Mengelkoch is not found in the 1896 directory. The next directory available to me is 1900 and he is noted as operating a saloon at that time. He remained in

business through at least 1914. 1915 and 1916 directories are unavailable and he is no longer listed in 1917.

COMPLIMENTS / OF CREAM CITY

This is an oversized rectangular mini jug.

I have no information other than that this mini jug is reportedly from Great Falls.



COMPLIMENTS OF / C.T. GROVE / GREAT FALLS, MONT

There is no listing in 1889, but Carl T. Grove is listed as a grocer starting in 1890. He is found at 323 3rd Avenue South in the 1891 and 1892 directories and 901 3rd Avenue North in 1896 and 1899 through 1902. There is no directory available for 1903 and in 1904 he is listed as C. T. Grove Mercantile Company without an address specified.

In the 1907 directory he is again simply listed as C.T. Groves, grocer, and in 1910

the listing is for Carl T. Grove, grocer, at 901 3rd Avenue North. He is present in the 1913 directory but not in 1914.



JOHN HELLER / (eye pictured) / OPENER

Another unusual mini jug is one from John Heller of Great Falls. It is cream in coloration, with bright blue stenciling. As most mini jug enthusiasts will recall, the "Eye Opener" motif is prominently used in the marketing of the Ames Company of Owensboro, Kentucky.

In Great Falls, John Heller does not appear in the 1896 directory, but does in 1899, the first directory available to me, thereafter. He is listed as operating a saloon at 114 Central Avenue in that year. He continues to operate a saloon at that location through 1918. In 1911, the saloon is listed by name— The Central Saloon.



COMPLIMENTS OF / J.J. McDONNELL / GREAT FALLS, MONT

John J. McDonnell is not found in the

1896 directory, but does appear in the Montana Gazetteer of 1900. His listing that year is as a dealer in groceries and grain at 1810 6th Avenue North. This listing is also found in 1902. There is no 1903 directory available and the 1904 directory lists the grocery business as McDonnell and Kneeland Company.

In 1907, J.J. McDonnell is still in the grocery business, this time as J.J. McDonnell and Sons. The firm is listed at 1826 6th Avenue North and the firm includes John J., George E., John L. and Jos. P. McDonnell in 1910.

In 1911, the address becomes 2nd NW and Great Northern Railway tracks, the firm is now J.J. McDonnell and Son (John J. and George E.) and the business is brick and coal. In 1912, 1913 and 1914, they were dealers in fuel. 1917 saw McDonnell and Smith in the hotel business.

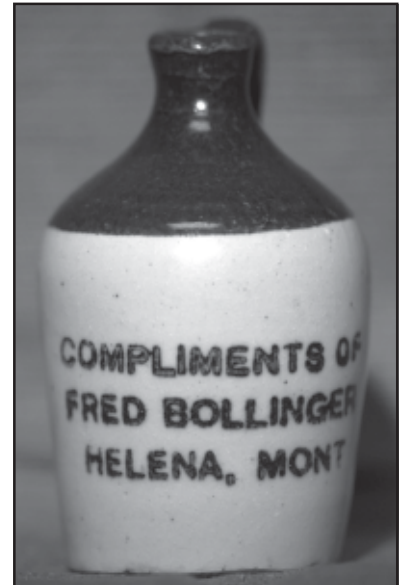


COMPLIMENTS OF / STRAIN BROS / GREAT FALLS, MONT

Herbert and Joseph H. Strain do not appear in the 1890 Montana Gazetteer. With no directories available between, the first year I note the the firm Strain Brothers in business is 1894. That year the business is listed as groceries and dry goods and it is located at 301 Central Avenue. In 1894 and 1896, the firm lists only Herbert Strain as an owner. The next year available is 1899 and both Herbert and Joseph are listed as owners in the general merchandise business. Their business is situated in the Phelps Block of Great Falls. This listing continues into the directory of 1904, which also denotes them as proprietors of Choteau Mercantile Company.

In 1913 the listing becomes Herbert and Joseph H. Strain with department stores in the Phelps Block and at 400 Central

Avenue. 1914 sees a change to Sarah R. Strain and William J. Strain as proprietors and by 1917 the business has become incorporated. There is a shift to only the Central Avenue site by 1918.



COMPLIMENTS OF / FRED BOLLINGER / HELENA, MONT

Fred Bollinger first appears in the Montana directories as a clerk in 1897. The next listing I have for him is in 1900, when he is listed as a grocer at 15 East State Street. The directory for 1901 is not available and he is not listed in 1902.

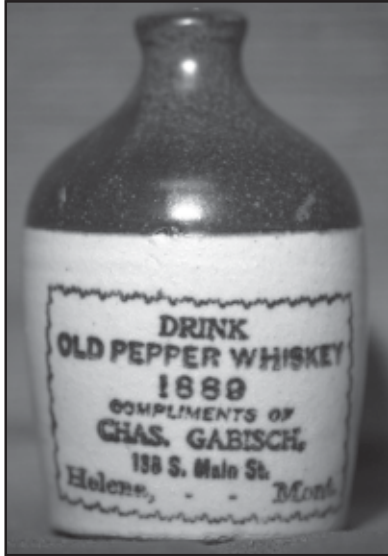
In 1903 Frederick Bollinger is listed as the manager of the Rodney Street Grocery Company at 203-205 N. Rodney. Thereafter, he is listed as a grocer at 208 and/or 210 N. Rodney Street through at least 1918.



(in rectangular border): DRINK / OLD PEPPER SPRING / 1889 / COMPLIMENTS OF / LOUIS BOSSLER, Helena, - - Mont.

The first listing for Louis Bossler in the Helena city directories is 1897, as a driver for the Helena Brewery. In 1898, Louis Bossler and Frank Wise are listed as proprietors of a saloon at 112 S. Main. In 1900 Louis Bossler, only, is listed as proprietor and this continues through at least 1904. The next directory available, 1907, lists the saloon as under the ownership of Bossler and Miller.

In 1908 and 1909 Louis Bossler is listed as a saloon owner at 120 S. Main and this continues into 1910. In 1911, Louis Bossler is found in residence, only.



(in rectangular border): DRINK / OLD PEPPER WHISKEY / 1889 / COMPLIMENTS OF / CHAS. GABISCH, 138 S. Main St. / Helena, -- Mont.

The initial listing I find for Charles Gabisch in the Helena city directories is 1888 as a baker for May Brothers. In 1890 he is listed as the proprietor of Turnverein Hall. From that point he is variably listed as a resident, deputy sheriff and bartender until the listing for 1897, when he is listed as a saloon owner at 138 S. Main Street. (The pertinent pages from 1896 were missing from the directory.)

Charles Gabisch continued in business at the 138 S. Main Street address through at least 1918. In the 1909 directory, the business was identified by name – the City Hall Billiard and Pool Room and Saloon. **COMPLIMENTS OF / PIZER & SON / HELENA, MONT**

In 1897, Benjamin Pizer is found in the grocery business at 345 N. Broadway with Bernard Hirschfield. This endures at least through 1898.

The directory for 1899 is not available, so the initial listing I have for Pizer and



Son in 1900 may actually have been as early as 1899. In 1900, David is listed with Benjamin Pizer in the grocery business at 345 N. Broadway. This continues through 1907. In 1908 Benjamin Pizer is listed in residence, only, and David is now Deputy Secretary of State at the State Capital.

(No photo available; Marc Lutsko listing.) COMPLIMENTS OF / M. REINIG / HELENA, MONT.

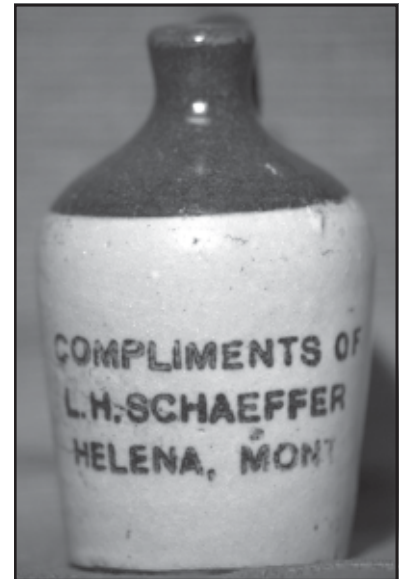
The first Montana directory available to me is 1884 and Michael Reinig is listed in that directory as a grocer, baker, and seller of wines, liquors, glassware, etc. at the corner of Bridge and Jolliett. The Bridge Street address is specified as 201 and 203 Bridge Street through 1888. In 1889, the address changes to 101 E. Bridge. The name Bridge Street changes to State Street in 1891.

Michael Reinig remains at the 101 E. State Street address until his death in 1911. The business, which became Reinig and Company in 1904, was then continued with C.N. Reinig as president through at least 1918.

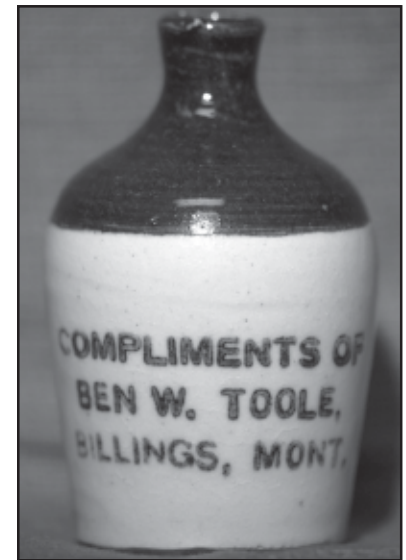
COMPLIMENTS OF / L.H. SCHAEFFER / HELENA, MONT

Lincoln H. Schaeffer is first noted in the Helena directories as a clerk for William Weinstein and Company (see following mini jug) in 1892. In 1893, he becomes part of the grocery firm Schaeffer and (Jacob D.) Tietjen and in 1895 the listing becomes L.H. Schaeffer successor to Schaeffer and Tietjen. The 1883 business address of 101 N. Rodney continues through at least 1904.

There is a gap until 1908, at which time the listing becomes L.H. Schaeffer Grocery Company, with Lincoln listed as the only



owner. At this time, the wholesale grocery business has been moved to Montana Avenue at the NW corner of Helena Avenue. The business remains thus through at least 1918.



COMPLIMENTS OF / BEN W. TOOLE, / BILLINGS, MONT.

The first listing I have for Ben W. Toole is in the 1896 Montana Gazetteer, at which time he is listed as being in the hay business. He is not found in 1894 and there is no directory available for 1895.

The next available directory is 1900, at which time he is listed as having a general store and feed business. By 1902 he is no longer listed.

Part II will conclude the listing of known Montana mini jugs, beginning with the rest of the city of Helena, Montana.