

Wyoming Whiskies

by Warren Borton

As with most western states, the most popular Wyoming bottle with local collectors is the whiskey bottle. Certainly nothing gives a better vision of the old west than a cowboy or miner standing in the local saloon with a whiskey bottle in hand. The whiskey flask was only used in six Wyoming towns: Cheyenne, Laramie, Rawlins, Rock Springs, Kemmerer and Casper. Certainly other towns had whiskey bottles, but they remain either unreported or undiscovered.

All known Wyoming whiskies are flasks. Whiskey was sold in the coffin, shoofly, Olympia, dandy and pumpkin seed flask. Both the dandy and pumpkin seed bottles are screw-top bottles. All the pumpkins are ground top, whereas the dandies come either tooled or ground. Apparently these bottles were given to special customers who came in regularly with their personal flask to get a refill. Since they were produced in small numbers and had a poor survival rate due to the inherent weakness of the flask, the urban digger recovers few intact. Overall the Wyoming whiskey flask is both the

rarest Wyoming bottle and as well the most valuable.

Phil Kerrigan began in the saloon business in 1877. He operated "The Arcade" for many years and left the collector three different flasks. The first was embossed: W. A. Gaines & Co. / Phil Kerrigan & Co. / The Arcade / Cheyenne, Wyo. / Old Crow Whiskey. Next came Kerrigan & Leslie / The Arcade / Cheyenne, Wyo. After this, Leslie seems to have become the sole owner of the Arcade with the last bottle: A.S. Leslie / The Arcade / Cheyenne, Wyo. / Old Crow Whiskey. All flasks are dandy style and only the first one is a ground top bottle. The later two flasks are by far rarer than the earlier flask.

Harry P. Hynds arrived in Cheyenne in 1882 as a blacksmith. In 1886, he started in the liquor business and operated the "Capital Saloon" for nearly thirty years. During this time two different flasks were used. The early pumpkin seed came in half-pint and pint bottles and was embossed: H. P. Hynds / The Capitol / Cheyenne, Wyo. The dandy flask was

embossed: W. A. Gaines & Cos. / H. P. Hynds / The Capitol / Old Crow Whiskey. This bottle comes in both sizes and in tooled top and ground top variants. While the dandy flask is common, the Hynds pumpkin seeds are very rare. It is amazing that Cheyenne had only two saloons that produced embossed whiskey bottles, "The Arcade" and the "Capitol." The city certainly had its share of saloons.

J.F. Johnson was the proprietor of the Johnson Hotel from 1901-1910. After his death, his widow continued the business until 1929. His flasks come in half-pint, pint and a mammoth-sized quart bottle. This once extremely rare flask is now more obtainable due to a few more having been unearthed in the past decade. The pint and quart Johnson flasks remain extremely rare. The Johnson Hotel Bar is the only Wyoming business to have used the Olympia flask.

J. A. Fischer operated from 1875 to 1905. His bottles are found in both pumpkin seed and shoofly style. The shoofly is found in pints only whereas the pumpkin seed are half pints with screw top and ground mouth. All Fischer whiskey flasks are rare.

In 1886 John Huempfer is listed as the proprietor of a saloon. The last listing is of him in 1906 as "Huempfer Bros. Beer Hall" at 111 Grand Ave. His half-pint pumpkin is embossed; Jno.



Huempfer / Elkhead Saloon / Laramie, Wyo. This is the only known bottle from his saloon and is so far unique.

Years ago a bottle friend of mine dug up a broken shoofly flask embossed: Paul Jones / H. Small / Laramie, Wyo. A decade passed before I dug up the first perfect example. To my amazement, it was embossed: Paul Jones / J.H. Small / Laramie, Wyo. Since the previous bottle was from broken pieces, we had missed the little piece with the "J" on it. The flask remains the only known example.

I am sure there are more unknown whiskey bottles from Laramie. Only time and more digging will prove that theory.

The Hotel Kemmerer Bar produced Kemmerer's only embossed flask. The hotel was completed in 1898. Although the spelling is Kemmerer, the name was shortened just to fit the bottle. The flask is found both in half-pint and pint and is snap and ground. The pint flask is by far the rarer size of the two.

Rock Springs had more saloons than any two other towns combined, with one directory listing 37 different ones. Perhaps the city should have been named Whiskey Springs. After all, this was not a huge town at the turn of the century, but it was surely a cold windy place in the winter. Apparently no one was likely to freeze! So it is surprising that there is only one known flask. The shoofly is embossed;

Hartney Bros. / Rock Springs / Wyo. With only one pint and one half-pint known, it is an extremely rare flask. John Hartney established the "Metropolitan Saloon" sometime in the late 1800s and was soon joined by his brother Tom. The saloon was last listed in 1902.

The oil town of Casper, Wyoming has two different snap and ground half pint pumpkin seed flasks. Both are extremely rare. The Grand Central Hotel was built in 1894. Theodore Pringle and Robert White were the proprietors of the Grand Central Bar during the late 1890s. Their flask is embossed: White & Pringle / Grand Central / Bar / Casper, Wyo. White later owned the Hotel in Kemmerer. Pringle operated a liquor business in Douglas, which someday may produce a flask. The other pumpkin seed is embossed: Patton & McGrath / Stock / Exchange / Casper, Wyo. Hugh Patton was an early day Casper lawman and John McGrath was a close friend with the odd nickname of "Posthole McGrath."

The Wyoming Bar of D. McKenize operated during the early 1900s and produced both half-pint and pint dandy flasks. The flasks are found both tooled top and ground top. They are embossed: "The Wyoming Bar / Casper / Wyo." or "The Wyoming Bar / Casper, Wyo." The Casper bottle seems a bit rarer than the Casper variant. But both bottles are

available to the collector.

John C. Gunning left his job with the railroad in 1888 and opened the Club Saloon in Rawlins. His saloon produced both coffin and shoofly flasks. The early coffin style bottles are extremely rare. Both variants were embossed; John C. Gunning / Club / Saloon / Rawlins, Wyo. He owned the saloon until 1908.

Richard Magor arrived in Rawlins in 1880. He operated a grocery store for many years. As early as 1887, he advertised wholesale and retail liquors on South Front Street. His flask is embossed: R. C. Magor / Wholesale / Liquor Dealer / Rawlins, Wyo.. The Magor flask is found both in pint and a unique quart shoofly.

Robert Freedman established the Wyoming Saloon in Green River in 1891 and had branch stores in Granger and Diamondville. Thus far there are no known bottles from these locations. He sold all his saloons to open The Wyoming Saloon in Rawlins in 1902 where he remained for several years. His flasks are found in both half-pint and pint and are snap and ground. The pint dandy flask being the rarer bottle, both flasks were embossed: Old Crow / Bourbon / Robt. Freedman / Rawlins, Wyo.

John Ryan and his partner Joseph Buckley operated the Club Saloon, the Bank Exchange, the Home Ranch and the Pioneer. Buckley left the partnership in 1907 while Ryan continued for several years. His rare flask is found only in a pint dandy. It is embossed: Jack Ryan / Rawlins / Wyo.

Peter Johnson was advertising liquors and cigars in 1893 and continued in the business for several more years. His rare pumpkin seed flask is embossed: Pete Johnson / Corner / Saloon / Rawlins, Wyo. The bottle is only found in the half-pint size. I was lucky enough to have dug this bottle on the site of an early barbershop in Green River, Wyoming. However, in the late 1890s, this was next door to The Wyoming Saloon. So apparently it is a drink, a shave and then a haircut!

Over the past twenty years, I have found a number of Wyoming whiskey flasks. I admit I get a thrill out of all Wyoming bottles I find. But nothing is as exciting as finding that embossed Wyoming flask! As much as I love digging them up, I would be thrilled to hear from anyone having a Wyoming whiskey not in this article. . But until then, I'll keep on digging, and I hope you will too!

