



Collecting

OWL DRUG STORE Stuff

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Part I

One of the most interesting, varied and rewarding categories of collecting is the Owl Drug Store of San Francisco.

I started collecting "Owls" in 1985, after discovering a beautiful blob-top citrate, light blue in color, filled with bubbles on a shelf in Goldfield, Nevada.

The different variations, types and colors of owl bottles are exceptional. The different types of "birds" embossed on the bottles and associated items are in themselves a collection.

Within this category of bottle collecting there are many other cross-categories like different colors; amber, cobalt, milkglass, poison bottles, pharmacy bottles, Florida waters, Jamaica gingers, perfumes, animal characters, drug store and others.

The Owl Drug Company was founded in San Francisco during 1892 and spread

through California into Oregon and Washington and later many other states.

I believe the "Owl" was selected as a logo because the Owl once represented wisdom and was also a nocturnal bird (24-hour stores).

At the turn of the century common practice was to treat oneself for medical conditions.

The President and founder was a Canadian, Richard E. Miller. They were one of the first cut-rate drug store companies with stores open twenty-four hours.

Their motto was "the customer is always right". Each employee was treated fairly and considered part of the family.

A monthly newsletter "The Owl Drug Store Doings" was "Published Monthly in the Interests of the Customers of the Owl Drug Company".

Each one of these issues is very collectible and contains many historical facts about the chain of stores.

They were intended both as advertising and also contained poems, quotes, health tips and other interesting tidbits.

The first store at 1128 Market Street was destroyed in the 1906 San Francisco earthquake. Some bottles and items bear this address embossed on the glass.

The Owl Drug Company also founded a mail order business and any of their products could be ordered from their catalog and shipped via Railway Express to any location within the United States and the world.

Unfortunately during the depression years they entered bankruptcy and were bought out by the United Drug Company of Boston (Rexall Drug and Chemical Company).

The name was changed to Owl/Rexall and adopted the orange and blue colors which identified later stores.

Most of the earlier embossed bottles were used up and discontinued sometime in the early 1950's.

Standard Pharmaceutical bottles were usually filled at warehouse facilities and distributed to stores for retail sales. Prescription bottles were usually filled and sold at the individual drug stores by a pharmacist.

These series of bottles were stored at the individual drug stores and filled from bulk containers. Very few of these bottles had ounces embossed on the glass, therefore, each size or height represents an equivalent capacity in ounces.

Many of these bottles can be found in various shades of sun colored amethyst, meaning they have been exposed to the sun and the manganese, originally placed into



the glass prior to 1914 for clarity, actually colored the glass. Some collectors seek only these (SCA) colored bottles.

Not all drug stores which sold The Owl Drug Company products were company stores, some were Authorized Agents, others were private. In Prescott, Arizona, the Owl Drug & Candy Company (different owl logo) sold TODCO (The Owl Drug Company) products.

From 1892 through March 1917, twenty-four (24) stores were opened in California, Oregon and Washington:

San Francisco - 1128 Market Street

778 Market Street

Grant Avenue and Post

710 Market Street

Golden Gate and Market Streets

Sixteenth and Mission Streets

Fillmore and Geary Streets

Twenty-Second and Mission Streets

Sixteenth and San Pablo Streets

Oakland - Thirteenth and Broadway

Fourteenth and Washington

Sixteenth and San Pablo

Los Angeles - Fifth and Broadway

Fifth and Spring

Third and Spring

Seventh and Hill Street

625 Broadway

Pasadena - Colorado and Fair Oaks

Sacramento - Ninth and K Streets

San Diego - Fourth and Broadway

Portland - Broadway and Washington

Spokane - Riverside and Wall

Seattle - Third and Pike

Fresno - J and Tulare Streets

San Jose - First and San Antonio

Stockton - Main and California

In October 1919, the following were included in the roster:

San Francisco - Powell and Market

Powell and O'Farrell Streets

Los Angeles - Third and Broadway

Milwaukee, WI - Grant and Second

Chicago, IL - State and Quincy Streets

Minneapolis, MN - 7th and Hennepin

The earliest of the Owl Drug Company bottles from 1128 Market Street, had no embossed owl and only the "The Owl Drug Company" is embossed in script on these bottles. They are very hard to find and the color is usually clear with some variations.

Later bottles almost always had their trademark, an embossed Owl perched on a mortar and pestle which bears the letters T.O.D.C.O.

As a general rule, bottles before 1920 were usually tooled top, after 1920 they were ABM. Also as a general rule the early bottles had a one-wing bird and the later bottles a two-wing bird.

Over the years many author/bottle collectors have published articles on the Owl Drug Company and these articles are in themselves collectible.

I have divided the bottles, glass containers and other items into the following 31 groups or series; this is not inclusive and only used as a reference.

1) Script, including Cod Liver Oil

2) Dr Ira Baker *

3) Rectangular prescription

a) early rectangular, round shoulder with panel - one-wing bird

b) rectangular, no panel - one-wing bird

c) rectangular, no panel - one-wing bird (aqua color)

d) rectangular, no panel - one-wing bird (GWL**)

e) rectangular, no panel - two-wing bird

f) rectangular, amber in color - one-wing bird

g) rectangular, amber in color - two-wing bird

h) rectangular, milkglass in color - one-wing bird

i) rectangular, screw-top with long neck - two-wing

j) rectangular, screw-top with short neck - two-wing

k) rectangular, screw-top slug panel (Oz)

4) Standard pharmaceutical, square bottom rectangular

a) one-wing bird

b) two-wing bird

c) two-wing bird, screw top

5) Salt square bottom, rectangular cobalt color

6) Cobalt blue triangular poisons

a) one-wing, 2½, 3½, 4½, 5, 6½, 7¼, 8, 9½ (varies in height)

b) two-wing, 2¼, 3¼, 4, 4½, 5½, 6½ (varies in height)



Sarah



Chesty Dan



Nazimoue



Pretty Boy

- 7) Extract two-ring, no owl
- 8) Extract one-ring, no owl
- 9) Bay Rum Cylinder
 - a) one-wing
 - b) one-wing (GWL)
 - c) two-wing
 - d) two-wing screw-top
- 10) Hair tonic, various styles
- 11) Florida Water
- 12) Jamaica Ginger
- 13) Peroxide amber Tool Top
- 14) Olive oil
- 15) Ointment jars
- 16) Miscellaneous jars
- 17) Coldcream rounds
- 18) Whiskey tops
- 19) Citrate (Soda)
 - a) blob top
 - b) crown top
- 20) Dose glasses
- 21) Perfume
- 22) Pill
- 23) Cardboard rounds
- 24) Cardboard boxes
- 25) Tins
- 26) Plaques
- 27) Paper Items
- 28) Photographs
- 29) Advertising
- 30) Miscellaneous
- 31) Owl Copycat items***

*Dr Ira Baker was the first official physician on the Owl Drug Company staff

**GWL, there has been some argument as to whether the mold maker inadvertently used a letter G rather than the letter O, however, paper letterheads are to be found with this configuration.

***Other companies tried to take advantage of the Owl Drug Company logo and fame. They produced bottles and items of their own using the Owl to market their products. These are very collectible as a side collection of the Owl Drug Company. Many different states have embossed Owl Drug bottles.

Some of the more rare and expensive Owl Drug Store bottles in no specific order are:

- 1) Green Whiskey Top
- 2) Large Salt Cobalt with Grandpappy bird
- 3) Small Salt Cobalt with Grandpappy
- 4) Any Script
- 5) 5 inch Cobalt poison with Grandpappy bird
- 6) 7¼" Cobalt poison
- 7) Reversed Owl on 11¾ inch Whiskey Top Clear
- 8) Milkglass ointment jars
- 9) Amber Pharmacy (larger sizes)
- 10) Citrate with large Sarah bird.

You should look for the cobalt, green, and amber bottles along with powder blue, rose milkglass, light green jars and

coldcream rounds.

The cylinder citrates (sodas) are reportedly found in nine different colors or shades. The colored bottles are sought after as more collectible.

The 7-inch bottles in any prescription series are harder to find. Some collectors prefer labeled bottles only; other collectors prefer non-labels to better show colors.

When collecting the Owl, try to find a prime strike also, as the mold was used to produce bottles it tended to wear down, although some probably were bad engravings to begin with.

One-wing birds are generally older than two-wing. Always check your selection for dings, cracks, repairs and other imperfections.

Let the buyer beware.

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