



# JOHN BIDWELL'S THATCHER MILK BOTTLE

*Randy Taylor*

The transportation and preservation of fresh milk presented a major problem for suppliers until nearly the end of the 19th century.

For generations milk was delivered to market in cans or earthen crocks and doled out to the consumer, who carried it home in his own pail or bottle, which was often unsanitary.

The first known patent for milk bottles was issued to the Warren Glass Works Company on March 23, 1880. Four years later, the Whiteman Milk Jar was patented, and the same year, Dr. Harvey D. Thatcher, a druggist from Potsdam, New York, invented a milk bottle he called the "Thatcher Milk Protector", with a similar closure to that employed on the Lightning fruit jar, a bail type fastener.

The Thatcher container was the also the first embossed milk bottle.

The name John Bidwell is well known

in the West. He was one of the first immigrants to come across the plains in 1841 and was instrumental in founding early California.

Friends with John Sutter at Sutter's Fort in Sacramento, he was involved in getting California away from the Mexican Government, and making it a state.

Bidwell received a large land grant, the Rancho Ayroyo Chico, and used it to found the town of Chico, about 100 miles north of Sacramento, where he donated land and laid out the streets.

John Bidwell was in on the gold rush as well, discovering and founding Bidwell's Bar, which is now under Lake Oroville, a bustling gold rush town.

An active politician also, he ran for Governor of California several times. He was a member of Congress and also was a candidate for President of the United States with the Prohibition party in 1892, getting the most votes for a third party candidate in history.

Very active in local politics and ranching, that is where he made his contribution to bottle collecting history. I am sure he had no idea the bottle he picked for his dairy would become a valuable historical artifact long after he was gone.

In 1888 Thatcher introduced the cap seal bottle that we see most often. This puts the Bidwell bottle in use between 1886 and 1888. Bidwell's decision to use the Thatcher design was a good idea, although short-lived.

Bidwell always used the best materials and products at his Rancho Chico estate, and the container he chose was no exception.

A very attractive bottle, with a Quaker seated on a stool, milking a cow under the words ABSOLUTELY PURE MILK, and under the cow and man is embossed THE MILK PROTECTOR. The other side is embossed in a circular slug plate RANCHO CHICO DAIRY / CHICO, CAL. / JOHN BIDWELL.

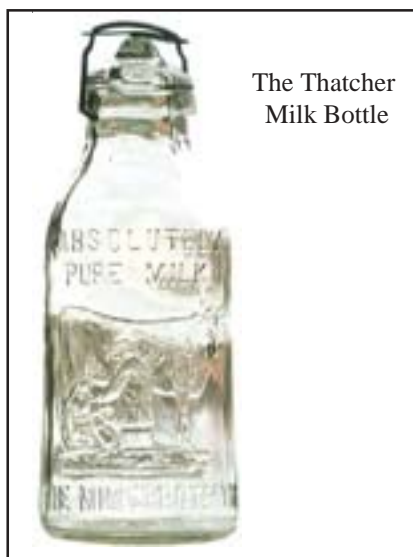
This is very unusual, as most milk bottle collectors will tell you, the Thatcher bottle is usually not embossed with a dairy name, especially West of the Mississippi River. The pint-size bottle also has the glass lid and wire bale, with a flat metal piece to hold it secure. The lid is embossed with the 1886 patent date.

This bottle is at the least, elusive. In my 30 years of looking, I have never found one for sale, or even dug a piece of one. I know of only four examples, three of which are damaged or incomplete. Two of them are in local museums and the other two are in private collections.

About the author: Randy Taylor lives in Chico, CA., and has collected bottles and jars since 1968, mainly the colored fruit jars, midget pints and early free-blown jars.

Other areas of his interest include jar-ring boxes, and other fruit jar related go-withs, odd Worcestershire sauce type bottles, Bixby Shoe polish bottles and an odd selection of miscellaneous bottles that he says "just strike my fancy." Randy also collects local bottles from his area of Northern California, as well as postcards, photographs, tokens, calendars and other assorted knickknacks.

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The Thatcher  
Milk Bottle



Drawing of the Bidwell Thatcher bottle