

# The Arcade Hotel Shoofly

By Steve Abbott



**Fig 1:** Arcade Hotel, Thos. Guinean Prop'r, Sacramento, Cal. Shoofly Flask in clear glass.



**Fig 4:** Arcade Hotel photograph, California State Library, circa 1875

Among western flasks, there probably isn't much argument that embossed amber ovals are the oldest. Clear glass took a little longer. And there is some doubt as to whether clear shoofly flasks are older than clear coffin flasks, though their age of manufacture probably overlaps. But what is indisputable is rarity. All one has to do is be able to count. Well, of course, one has to have access to the private hoards in order to know all of the known specimens.

When it comes to Sacramento Gold Rush flasks, there is probably none rarer than the Arcade Hotel shoofly flask (**Fig. 1**), no more than two known and one of those badly damaged. The diggers of both flasks are gone, so we don't know when or where the flasks were dug. We do know that the damaged flask was in the Peck Markota collection, a gift from the digger and collector Mike Dolcini. The whole specimen was dug by an early Sacramento digger, Ed Chang, an interesting and very intelligent guy, who attended the University of California at Davis for a time, lived in a Volkswagen camper and the streets, had no source of income, but dug some of the very richest holes around Sacramento. After many years, Ed sold the Arcade Hotel flask to a friend for a modest price, having rejected higher offers. Ah, the camaraderie of bottle collectors!

The flask embossed ARCADE HOTEL / THOMAS GUINEAN, PROP'R / SACRAMENTO, CAL has only been found in the pint size, but we can guess that there were also half pints, possibly even quarts. A Sacramento contemporary shoofly, the G.W. CHESLEY / IMPORTER / 57 FRONT ST. / SACRAMENTO, CAL. came in all three sizes, and though Chesley picnics are common, as picnics go, the shooflies are rare, probably 5+ 1/2 pints, 2+ pints, and 1+ quart. Both Guinean and Chesley were early in the game, Guinean from 1861-1882 and Chesley from

1869-90. My guess is the shooflies are from the 1870s. A lot is known about Chesley, but Guinean not so much.

Peter Guinean may have come to Sacramento from Quebec, Canada, but some researchers have pointed out that the records of his age are in doubt. For example, it has been pointed out that a fifteen year old immigrant from Canada probably did not have enough money to buy a restaurant in Gold Rush Sacramento. There was an Arcade Saloon on J Street as early as 1853. Be that as it may, a Thomas Guinean arrived in Sacramento in 1853 worked at the Cincinnati Restaurant, ran the Bank Exchange Oyster Chop House, and the Crescent City Hotel. By 1859, according to a file in the Center for Sacramento History, Thomas purchased these properties and ran one as the Arcade Oyster Saloon and Chop House (**Fig. 2**) on 2nd Street next to the B.F Hasting's building where the California Supreme Court first met.

Surprisingly by 1859, Thomas razed the oyster and chop house, hotel, and had built an elegant Arcade Hotel (**Fig. 3**). It was quite a palace and became headquarters for legislators, government officials, judges, lawyers, and their families. In one of the vanity biographies of 1878, Pen Portraits (R.R. Parkinson, San Francisco), Thomas was described as a very popular gentleman and one of the most enduring. An etching of the hotel made it into Thompson and West's 1880 *History of Sacramento* (**Fig. 4**), but for unknown reasons, the next year Thomas decided to move on.

In 1881, he sold the Arcade Hotel, a major bidder being G.W. Chesley, an old competitor in the booze business who bid \$12,000. but who was outbid at \$18,000. Thomas moved on to Portland, Oregon, which is beyond the scope of this article, but where an Oregon whiskey bottle collector may add a chapter to this story.

**THOS. GUINEAN,**  
 Proprietor,  
**ARCADE HOTEL**  
 SECOND STREET,  
 Between J and K, . . . Sacramento, Cal.

**Fig 3:** Arcade Hotel, Thos. Guinean, Proprietor, advertisement, *Sacramento City and County Directory*, 1868

**Fig 2:** Arcade Oyster Saloon and Chop House advertisement, *Sacramento City and County Directory*, 1868



**Extra:** 1857 Lithograph from Historic American Buildings Survey showing the Orleans Hotel, erected in 1852. The hotel served as a depot for stage companies and others and stood between the Union Hotel and the Adams and Company Building. The rightmost building was also the Arcade Hotel.

**ARCADE OYSTER SALOON AND CHOP HOUSE,**



**SECOND STREET, Bet. J and K,**

(Next door to Supreme Court;)

**SACRAMENTO.**



**Finest Wines, Liquors, Cigars, Oysters, Etc., Etc.**

Agency of **POTTER & Co.**, Oyster Dealers, San Francisco.

**OYSTERS AT WHOLESALE.**

Families Supplied. Orders Delivered to any part of the City.

**THOS. GUINEAN.**

