

# Buck & Rayner's Mineral Waters from Chicago

By: Clint Powell

Paradise, California (again soon I hope)

My accidental interest in the Chicago pharmacy firm of Buck and Rayner, and Saratoga style mineral water bottles in general, began in the summer of 2018. I had gotten up early one morning and, after starting coffee for my wife, I sat down and thought I would see what interesting western sodas may have been listed on eBay over night. One of the first bottles I found under “newly listed” was a light cobalt Saratoga-style mineral water bottle embossed BUCK & RAYNER'S MINERAL WATERS CHICAGO. It was badly stained, had some chipping on the lower part of the double taper lip and a short flash in the base, but was buy-it-now priced at only \$18 plus postage. I didn't know much about these mineral water bottles, but knew that I had never seen a cobalt one. I quickly tried some research but found nothing. I decided that for such a small amount of money I would take the plunge. I hit the buy-now button and made my payment. Shortly, I got an email from the seller telling me that he had only listed it ten minutes before I purchased it, and was making sure that I wanted the bottle because of the chipping and staining. I assured him that I would take it even with the flaws. I eagerly waited to see what I had bought.

While waiting for this bottle to arrive, I started doing some research and found that Buck and Rayner were Chicago area pharmacists. George Buck and James Rayner met while working for Chicago druggist James Reed on Lake Street in the mid 1850s. They started their own pharmacy business in 1858 at the corner of Clark and Washington Streets. They became very successful, opening additional locations including one at the corner of State and Madison Streets. They had a mineral water bar





in at least one of their locations. They had been purchasing bottled mineral water for their customers, but in the mid 1870s they decided to bottle their own mineral water for sale.

They found a spring near Lake Michigan and started bottling their own mineral water in late 1875. For whatever reason, they decided to stop bottling after about 6 months and ceased bottling by mid 1876. Thus, they most likely made only one order for their bottles, making them quite scarce now. After a hundred and fifty years of breakage and loss, there can't be many of them left around today. I was surprised at the rarity of this bottle and how lucky I was to have one on the way. I have heard of only one other selling on eBay about 20 years ago. It had damage to the lip and a hole in the bottom, and it still sold for about \$500. I'm sure there are several stashed away in collections but they seldom come up for sale.

When I received this bottle a few days later, I was immediately impressed and very happy I had purchased it. The color was great and the damage was minor considering the rarity of this bottle. As with most Saratoga pints, it is just 7 inches tall. I have since had it cleaned, and it turned out great. Lucky for me it was with Lou Lambert being cleaned when my house and majority of my collection was destroyed in November by the Camp Fire in Paradise, California. I have since started my collection anew, and I must say the bottle collecting community has been an unbelievable support in those efforts and has my eternal gratitude.

The impressive Buck & Rayner bottle looked so great after cleaning that I have since started collecting a few other Saratoga style bottles because, as most collector know, you can't have just one of of anything.

