

Nu-Grape "Mae West" Bottle, The True Story

by Mike H. Brown

The design shown below was patented on May 9, 1920. This is the patent date commonly found on the Nu-Grape bottle that is often referred to as the "Mae West" or "Pinch-Waist" bottle. Source: U.S. Patent Office. Clearly, this design is not exactly like the Nu-Grape bottle. The famous "3 Rings" and the "belt" are missing.

DESIGNER: C. J. ROOT
BOTTLE OR SIMILAR ARTICLE
APPLICATION FILED SEPT. 29, 1919
Patented Mar. 9, 1920.
UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.
CHAPMAN JAY ROOT, OF TEBRE HA'UTE, INDIANA.
DESIGN FOR A BOTTLE OB SIMILAR ARTICLE.
U 54,682. Specification for s Patented Mar. 9, 1920.
Application filed September 29, 1919. Serial No. 327,327. Term of patent 14 years.

To all whom it may concern: Be it known that I, CHAPMAN JAY ROOT, thereof. a citizen of the United States, residing at Terre

Haute, in the county of Vigo, State of Indiana, have invented a new, I claim original, and ornamental Design for Bottles. The accompanying drawing, forming a part, the figure is a side elevation of a bottle showing my design.

This had always puzzled me! The straight sided bottle featuring a leaf and cluster of grapes had a later patent date, January 23, 1923, yet it appeared to be the earlier of the two bottles. I have finally solved this puzzle.

The straight sided bottle was designed by none other than Alfred E. Kelley, the first President of Nu-Grape.

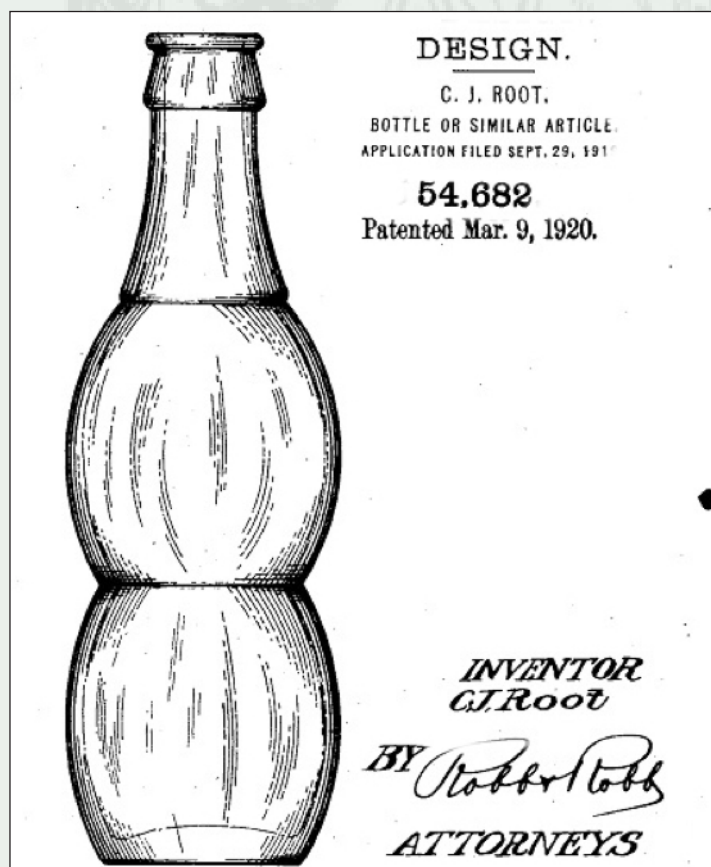
He filed the patent application on February 2, 1922 and had to wait almost a year before the patent was granted.

The patent information and accompanying drawing submitted by A. E. Kelley is depicted below.

DESIGN FOR A BOTTLE

Application filed February 2, 1922.

Serial No. 504.



This is the patent date commonly found on the Nu-Grape bottle that is often referred to as the "Mae West" or "Pinch-Waist" bottle.



The straight sided bottle was designed by none other than Alfred E. Kelley, the first President of Nu-Grape.

Term of patent 14 years.

Patented Jan. 23, 1923. Des. 61,830

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE

ALFRED E. KELLEY, OF ATLANTA, GEORGIA, ASSIGNOR
TO NUGRAPE COMPANY OF AMERICA, OF ATLANTA,
GEORGIA, A CORPORATION OF GEORGIA.

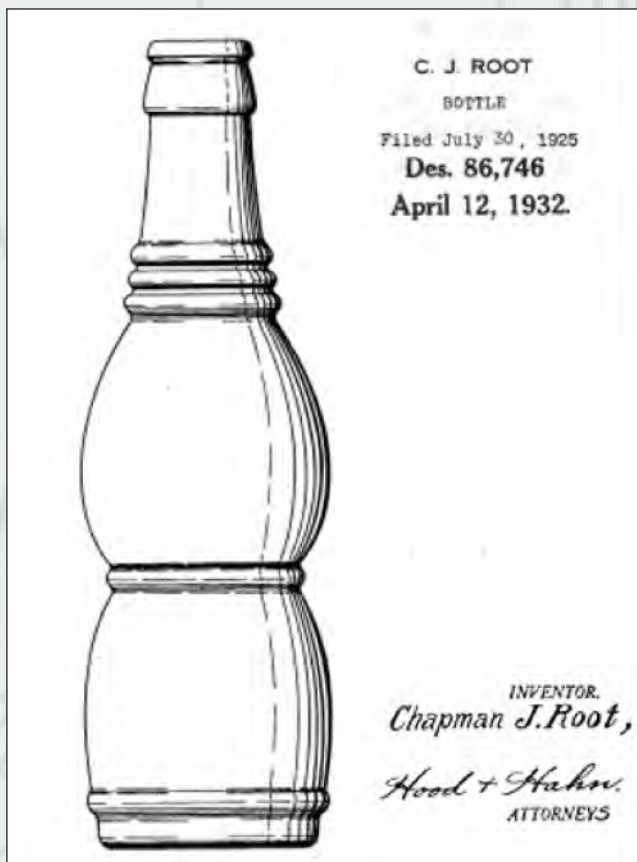
The drawing is an elevation of a bottle embodying my new design.

I claim: The ornamental design for a bottle as shown.
ALFRED E. KELLEY.

So what about the design Nu-Grape "actually" used, the one with the "3 Rings" and "belt" around the waste??? When was it actually designed, and by whom. It was designed by C. J. Root prior to April 1924, but he did not file for the patent until July 30, 1925 and it was not granted until April 12, 1932, almost seven years later...Why so long?

The "Mae West" design is clearly a modified version of Mr. Root's May 9, 1920 design Pat. # 54,682. I can only speculate as to the reason for claiming the earlier date, May 9, 1920, but it seems likely that Root modified his original design specifically for the Nu-Grape Company long before he applied for a patent. The first ad I have verified for this bottle design is April 5, 1924 and it had completely replaced the A.E. Kelley design in most markets by no later than 1926.

The A. E. Kelley design had the "3 Rings", and as is obvious



It is clearly the design that was chosen as the basis for the "Mae West" bottle and is unique in design to soda bottles of that time period.

from the many newspaper ads and the Nu-Grape Twins song, "Three rings around the bottle is a genuine", Nu-Grape was plagued by "copy-cats" almost from its very beginning. So it is logical that any new design would have to feature the "3 Rings" that Nu-Grape had put so much time and money into promoting. Also, their newly designed bottle must be unique, so as to stand apart from any of the copy-cats bottles.

How and why the 1920 Root bottle was chosen, I can only guess. But given the patent date match, it is clearly the design that was chosen as the basis for the "Mae West" bottle and is unique in design to soda bottles of that time period.

Nu-Grape ran hundreds of ads "Warning" people to BEWARE of inferior brands and emphasizing the "3 Rings" bottle as the ONLY assurance of getting genuine Nu-Grape. I have seen ads as early as April 1922 and as late as May 1925.

The patent information and accompanying drawing submitted by C. J. Root is depicted below.

DESIGNER: C. J. ROOT

DESIGN FOR A BOTTLE

Application Filed July 30, 1925

Patented Apr. 12, 1932 Des. 86,746

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

CHAPMAN JAY ROOT, OF TERRE HAUTE, INDIANA

Serial No. 14,274. Term of patent 14 years.

The bottle and patent information shown to the left "IS" without a doubt, the Nu-Grape "Mae-West"/ "Pinch - Waist" bottle. It matches every contour perfectly, "3 Rings" and all. As for the patent date, April 12, 1932, look at a "Mae-West" bottle below. It shows the same date that appears on Root's 86,746 patent, April, 12, 1932! This bottle is generic (no town).



I have also seen this date on a "Mae West" from the Dr. Pepper Bottling Company in Opp, Alabama, and on some Nu-Icy bottles. "Mae West" bottles were in production for around eight years before this patent was granted, and bore the 1920 patent date during that time. I do not have any information on how many bottles were cast from molds made after this date, nor the bottling companies that had them made, but it seems likely that there are far more 1920s than 1932s. Molds are expensive and many of the 1920s molds were probably used well beyond 1932.

The Nu-Icy bottle of the same design is usually seen in the taller 9 oz. size but there are smaller, Nu-Grape sized versions as well. I have one in my collection from Georgetown, Delaware, and a 9 oz. Nu-Grape bottle from Detroit, Michigan.