

Wheeling, Worms, and The History of Laughlins & Bushfield

By Zack Baer



A lineup of five Laughlins & Bushfield Druggists bottles (both pontil and smooth base), from the collection of John Leonard.

After moving to Canonsburg, Pennsylvania in the spring of 2016 with my wife, I was very excited to learn that the Washington County Antique Bottle and Glass Club held their monthly meetings less than 10 minutes from our new home. Though we were both new bottle collectors at the time, my wife and I attended our first meeting and became official club members shortly thereafter. Eventually, I was invited to my first privy dig and soon my collection, and bottle knowledge, started to grow.

Through happenstance, I started to focus my collection on early vermifuge bottles (for the uninitiated, a vermifuge is a medication used to kill and expel intestinal parasitic worms). I also started to gravitate toward early Wheeling, West Virginia bottles as our new home was now so close to this historic city. Slowly, through digging, and purchases from fellow collectors, I began to add these types of bottles to my collection. When our bottle club's annual show approached in the spring of 2017, I had high hopes of finding another bottle or two to add to my shelf.

THE FIND

My wife and I arrived at the show early to help with set up and to carry in boxes for some of the venders. After the work was done, the doors were opened and the early buyers rushed into the building. My wife and I followed suit and quickly made our first trip around the tables. We completed this preliminary search as fast as we could to make sure we did not miss out on any “once in a lifetime” deals that would swiftly be gobbled up by other buyers. We saw a number of great bottles, and I am sure there were a few good deals, but I didn’t see anything that jumped out at me as a “must buy”. We then commenced our second search. This time we walked around the tables slowly, taking our time to inspect each bottle to make sure we didn’t miss something on the first pass. But alas, we found nothing that fit into my niche collection. By the end of the second lap the initial rush of adrenaline was starting to die off and I was beginning to lose hope. The general admission buyers started to filter into the building as I sulked my way over to the complementary refreshments table to drown my sorrows in free coffee and donuts.

Just as it seemed I would be returning home empty handed, I glanced over to a nearby table. There, on a series of shelves between beautiful cobalt sodas and apple green medicines, sat a small aqua bottle which caught my eye. Walking closer, I saw that the bottle was embossed “Worm Powder”. As I leaned in to pick the bottle up, I couldn’t help but feel like Indiana Jones when he reaches past the hundreds of golden chalices to pick out the wooden cup that he knew to be the Holy Grail.

I rotated the bottle in my hand in order to read the next embossed panel: “Wheeling, VA” (West Virginia was not granted statehood until 20 June 1863). My heart leapt and my mind instantly flashed to Jim Holst’s *The Pontiled Medicine Price Guide* which includes a bottle embossed “Laughlins & Bushfield / Worm Powder / Wheeling VA”. When I first came across this bottle in Jim’s book, I decided this was to be my holy grail as it combines both of my collecting focuses. I never thought I would actually find it though, as there are less than ten known to exist.

I rotated the bottle again and was surprised to read “Laughlin & Smith Co.”, not “Laughlins & Bushfield.” This was intriguing. I knew that Laughlin & Smith Co. were the successors to Laughlins & Bushfield, but I was pretty certain all of their bottles were produced after West Virginia became its own state. Why then would this bottle be embossed Virginia?

A check of the bottle’s base revealed it to be a non-pontiled, hinge mold. Again, not what I was expecting. Unfortunately, closer inspection revealed a half inch crack running from the bottle’s lip down the neck, and an internal open bubble behind the embossed proprietors’ name. Not great, but I knew I would never find another one, so I decided I could overlook the damage. I purchased the bottle, and walked away from the table as high as a kite.

Curious about my new purchase, I showed the bottle to a few of the more experienced West Virginia collectors at the show. They confirmed my suspicions that this was indeed a rare bottle. They had seen the Laughlins & Bushfield worm powder bottle before but had only heard rumors of the Laughlin & Smith Co. variant.

They offered to buy it from me on the spot, but having just found a variant of my holy grail bottle, I couldn’t even consider parting with it.

After the show, I brought the bottle home and placed it on my shelf. I was extremely excited to add this bottle to my collection, but something still bothered me: why was the bottle embossed Virginia and not West Virginia? I needed to know the history behind this bottle. Once again, I found myself going down the research rabbit hole, and though I didn’t find much about my bottle specifically, I did find a lot of information about the company that made it. So even though some of the history included below doesn’t pertain to my bottle, I included it in the off chance someone else will find it useful.

THE HISTORY

Laughlins & Bushfield

Laughlins & Bushfield was founded as a wholesale druggist by Samuel B. Bushfield and brothers Samuel and Alexander Laughlin in 1854 after purchasing the merchandise stock of the earlier firm of Bushfield & Robinson located at 25 Monroe Street. After moving into Monroe Street storefront, Laughlins & Bushfield initially offered general drugs, chemicals, paints, dyes, spices and other sundries. However, as they found their footing in the market, they also started developing their own line of proprietary products.



One of Laughlins & Bushfield first newspaper advertisements, 1 October 1855; from, *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*.

Their Tasteless Worm Powder was one of their earliest proprietary products and is the hero of our story. This patent medicine was first advertised in “The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer” newspaper in April 1859. The advertisement boasts that over 6,000 bottles of the medicine were sold the previous year. While I am sure that is intended to sound like an impressive number, compare that to McLane’s American Worm Specific, another popular vermifuge of the day. An 1838 advertisement for McLane’s medicine proclaimed 1,750 bottles had sold over a 15-day time span. I think this illustrates why these Tasteless Worm Powder bottles are so rare.

Though the worm powder was quite regularly advertised in the Wheeling newspaper in 1859, I could find only one other newspaper advertisement for the medicine after that year. The ad, which

SPECIAL NOTICES.

TASTELESS WORM POWDER.

Children, thousands of them die,
Their disease a mystery;
Worms, the foul insidious crew,
Half these silent murders do.
Save your babes, ye mothers; why
Will you see them waste and die?
Tasteless Worm Powder will save
Hosts of infants from the grave!

Sold by **LAUGHLINS & BUSHFIELD, Druggists.**

HEAR WHAT THE DOCTORS SAY!

FREEPORT, June 8d, 1859.
Gents:—I have used your Worm Powder in my practice with almost unheard of success, and recommend them as a very superior remedy, being prompt in action, mild and perfectly harmless to the most delicate of children.
Respectfully, **H. C. BLACK, M. D.**

FREEPORT, May 8d, 1859.
Gents:—I am using your Worm Powder in my practice and without hesitation say, that it is the most efficient medicine I have ever met with, and doubt not but it will exterminate ultimately all the present nauseating verminages now so much in use.
[y14] Respectfully, **H. M. CARVER, M. D.**

Laughlins & Bushfield Tasteless Worm Powder advertisement, 26 July 1859; from, *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*.



Samuel, Alexander, and William Laughlin (left to right), circa 1855; from the Glessner House archives.

**A Chemical Writing Fluid,
A Chemical Writing Fluid,**

EQUAL TO ARNOLD'S LONDON INK.
EQUAL TO ARNOLD'S LONDON INK.

MADE BY LAUGHLINS & BUSHFIELD.
MADE BY LAUGHLINS & BUSHFIELD.

It flows freely from the Pen,
It Does not corrode Steel Pens,
It does not gum or clog the Pen,
It never moulds,
It is perfectly limpid,
It is 30 per cent cheaper than Arnold's,
It is permanently black.

This Fluid is made by the most approved Chemical process, and is offered to the public as equal to any imported Ink. We do not claim for it any superiority to Arnold's, but we do claim it is equal, which we will prove to any unprejudiced mind. We guarantee it will give satisfaction. If it does not we WILL REFUND THE PRICE of every bottle sold.

Put up in Quarts, Pints and Half Pints. For sale by the manufacturers.

LAUGHLINS & BUSHFIELD, DRUGGISTS,
mh2 **No. 25 Monroe St., Wheeling, Va.**

Laughlins & Bushfield Chemical Writing Fluid advertisement, 27 April 1860; from, *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*.

was from 1861, stated Laughlins & Bushfield's manufacturing of "ink, Tasteless Worm Powder & c., have commended them highly to the drug public". It would seem the worm powder was at least being represented as a popular medicine, but if it was so popular why wouldn't Laughlins & Bushfield regularly advertise it as they did their other products? The last mention of the worm powder was from "The Daily Fair Journal" published in July 1864, where it was listed as one of many products being sold by Laughlins & Bushfield (Or was it? Keep reading to find out).

One of Laughlins & Bushfield's more infamous products was their Chemical Writing Fluid, which

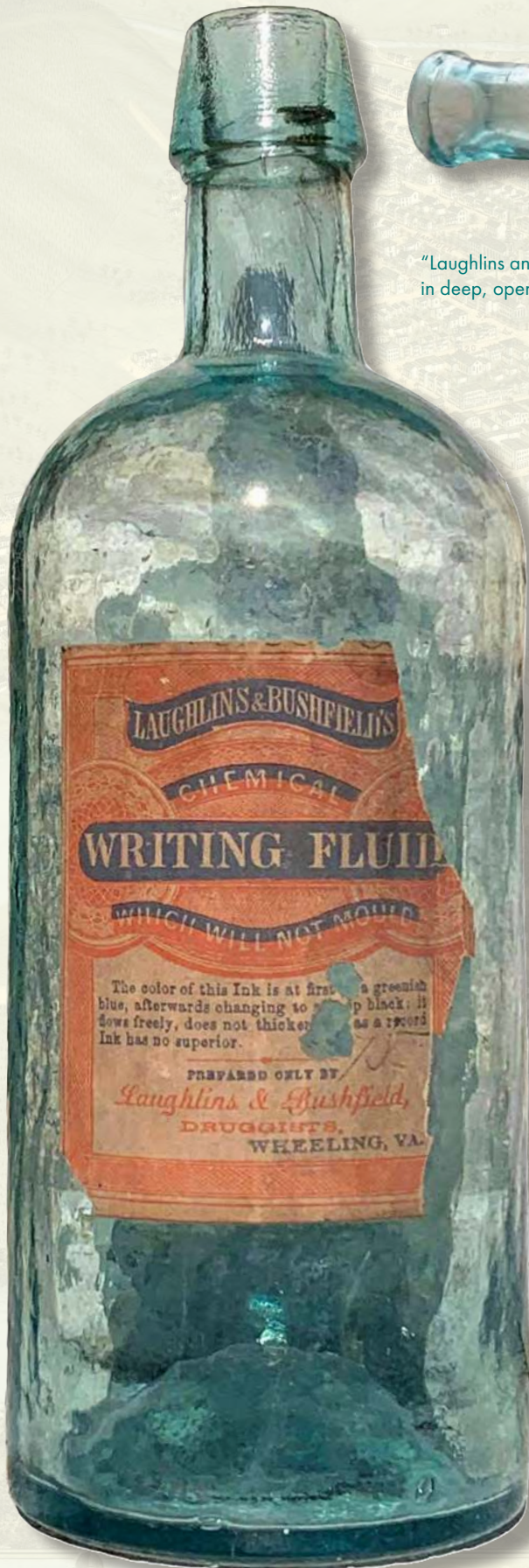
was first advertised in March 1860. This proprietary ink would go on to become one of the company's most popular products, being sold by a number of business not only throughout Wheeling, but in Pennsylvania, and Maryland as well. A number of other proprietary products were offered by Laughlins & Bushfield over the years as well. These include Laughlin's Diarrhea Cordial, Laughlin's Expectorant Syrup, Laughlin's Speedy Pain Cure, Oil of Grapevine, Cocoa Cream, and Boush's Worm Candy. Perhaps the most interesting product that Laughlins & Bushfield produced, at least to us modern-day bottle collectors, was their Laughlin's Old Home Bitters. First advertised in July 1863, these bitters were put up in stylish semi-cabin bottles which are quite desirable today.

Out of all of the Laughlins & Bushfield bottles known to exist today, only their Tasteless Worm Powder and Laughlin's Old Home Bitters bottles are known to be embossed with their specific contents. It seems all of the company's other products were put up in generically embossed bottles and identified with paper labels. These generic bottles come in a variety of shapes and sizes, from cylinder bottles, to paneled druggist bottles with the majority embossed Laughlins & Bushfield Druggists Wheeling. V.A. (or something similar).

By May of 1860, Laughlins & Bushfield's success had caused them to outgrow their Monroe Street building and a new larger building was selected at 72 Main Street. On 1 January 1865, the company admitted Samuel and Alexander's nephew, John L. Smith as a partner. Though the name of the company did not change with this new partner, John would play an important role in this story later on.

Again in 1865, the Wheeling newspaper announced that Laughlins & Bushfield were planning to relocate to a new location. This time to a newly planned building located at 82 Main Street so that they could "enter more largely into the manufacture of their celebrated proprietary articles". This building was to be three stories high, and divided into two separate warehouses, each 130 ft in depth, and 31 ft in width "with an iron front and all modern improvements". It was anticipated that construction would be completed by June 1866, however, Laughlins & Bushfield never relocated to this new building. The company dissolved by mutual consent on 1 September 1866.

The new building would see use by one half of Laughlins & Bushfield though. Upon the dissolution, John L. Smith, and Samuel and Alexander Laughlin moved to the newly completed building at 82 Main Street. Together the men



"Laughlins & / Bushfield / Druggists / Wheeling. VA" bottle with original label (9¼ in. tall, 3¼ in. diameter, iron pontil), from the collection of James Viguerie.



"Laughlins and Bushfield // Whole Sale Druggist // Wheeling, VA" bottle (5¾ in. tall, 1 ½ in. wide, 1 in deep, open pontil), from the collection of Jeff Mihalik.



Laughlins and Bushfield Wheeling VA ink bottle, from the collection of Jeff Mihalik.



"Laughlins / and Bushfield / Wheeling West VA" bottle; from the collection of Rodney Funkhouser.

- 13 Baptist.
- 14 Episcopal.
- 15 Evangelical.
- 16 Lutheran.
- 17 Methodist.
- 18 Catholic.
- 19 Mont de Chantal.
- 20 Presbyterian.

WHEELING
WEST VIRGINIA 1870

S. B. BUSHFIELD. GEO. K. M'MECHAN.
JOHN WALLACE, JR.
Bushfield, Wallace & Co.,
 Successors to
LAUGHLINS & BUSHFIELD,
WHOLESALE DRUGGISTS.

WILL KEEP CONSTANTLY ON HAND
 at the old room, No. 72 Main street,
 Wheeling, a large and well selected stock of
 goods in their line, consisting in part of
 Drugs, Chemicals, Patent Medicines, Oils,
 Paints, (dry and in oil), Dyestuffs, Druggists
 Groceries, Perfumeries, Pomades, Hair Oils,
 Fancy Soaps, &c., &c., to which they would
 invite the attention of the former patrons of
 the house and the public generally, assuring
 all who call on them that they will always
 sell at lowest prices, and use their best in-
 deavors to render entire satisfaction. sep18-tt

Bushfield, Wallace & Co. advertisement, 29 September 1866;
 from, *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*.



"Laughlin's / and / Bushfield / Wheeling / VA" bottle (on the left) beside a
 "Bushfield's / Chemical / Writing / Fluid / Wheeling / W. VA" bottle (on the
 right); from the collection of Rodney Funkhouser.

NOTICE.

MR. S. B. BUSHFIELD, SO LONG AND
 favorably known in connection with the
 firm of LAUGHLIN & BUSHFIELD, and
 more recently of BUSHFIELD, WALLACE &
 CO., has this day become a member of our firm.
 The business will hereafter be conducted under
 the firm name of "McCABE, BUSHFIELD &
 KRAFT."

We take this occasion to thank our friends
 for their liberal patronage in the past, and to ask
 a continuance of the same for the new firm.
 Having largely increased facilities for the trans-
 action of the Wholesale Drug Business, we can
 offer superior inducements to buyers.
McCABE, KRAFT & CO.

Referring to the above notice, I would say to
 my old friends and customers that I shall be
 most happy to see them at my new place of bus-
 iness, No. 50 Main street, where they will, at
 all times, find a complete stock of Pure Drugs
 and Medicines, at low figures. I desire to thank
 my friends for the generous patronage that
 they have bestowed upon me during a long bus-
 iness career, and ask a continuance of the same
 for our new firm.
S. B. BUSHFIELD,
 Of McCabe, Bushfield & Kraft.

We are sole proprietors of
LAUGHLINS & BUSHFIELD'S
CHEMICAL WRITING FLUID
BUSHFIELD'S EXTRACT OF GRAPEVINE,
 For the Hair.

Boush's Worm Candy,
 Oriental Hair Oil,
 Kraft's Diarrhea Compound,
 Reed's Cough Syrup,
 Dr. Stahl's German Relief,
 Improved Nerve and Bone Liniment.

We are exclusive Agents for "TODD'S
 PILLS," in the United States and the Canadas.
McCABE, BUSHFIELD & KRAFT.
 nov1-lw

McCabe, Bushfield & Kraft advertisement, 2 November 1867;
 from, *The Wheeling Daily Register*.

started their own company taking with them the rights to the majority
 of Laughlins & Bushfield's proprietary medicines. Bushfield on the
 other hand, stayed in their old store location at 72 Main Street and
 formed a new wholesale drug company while keeping the rights to
 Laughlins & Bushfield's Chemical Writing Fluid, and Boush's Worm
 Candy.

Bushfield

After the dissolution of Laughlins & Bushfield, Bushfield stayed at
 the 72 Main Street building, and by 18 September 1866, had formed
 Bushfield, Wallace & Co. This was not a long-lasting partnership
 however, as the company dissolved on 1 November 1867. That
 same day, it was announced that Bushfield had joined the existing
 firm of McCabe, Kraft & Co. located at 50 Main Street. With this
 new partnership, the firm changed its name to McCabe, Bushfield &
 Kraft. Again, this partnership did not last, and on 2 November 1868
 Bushfield announced that he had sold his interest in the firm. After
 Bushfield's departure the company reverted its name back to Mc-
 Cabe, Kraft & Co.

At this point, Bushfield becomes a harder man to track down. In
 1871, there are a few mentions of a drug company by the name of
 Bushfield & Yarling, but I couldn't find any other information on this
 firm. The next solid evidence I could find was from the Wheeling
 business directory of 1871-72 which lists a company by the name of
 Bushfield & Co. being located at 50 Water Street. This company was
 owned by Samuel B. Bushfield and Charles Day and was noted for
 selling chemical writing fluids and druggist sundries.

The last mention of Bushfield I found was from a "trustee's sale"
 newspaper advertisement published on 23 September 1872. The
 advertisement stated that there would be a public sale at the store
 room of S.B. Bushfield on Water Street in which "all of his stock in
 trade in a certain ink manufactory now owned by him including all
 fixtures, drugs, writing and chemical fluids, oils, acids and vessels
 for holding the same and all of the appurtenances belonging to this



"Bushfields / Chemical / Writing Fluid / Wheeling, W. VA" bottle; from the collection of Rodney Funkhouser.



"Laughlins Smith & Co. // Drug-gists // Wheeling WV" bottle with original label; from the collection of Corey Markley.

said business" would be sold.

Though Bushfield changed companies multiple times over the years, he always managed to retain the rights to his Chemical Writing Fluid. In the years immediately following the dissolution of Laughlins & Bushfield, Bushfield continued to market his ink as Laughlin & Bushfield's Chemical Writing Fluid. Eventually though, Bushfield did drop Laughlin's name from his product's advertisements. There are cylinder bottles embossed Bushfield's Chemical Writing Fluid. To my knowledge, there are no bottles known to be embossed with the company names of Bushfield, Wallace & Co., McCabe, Bushfield & Kraft, Bushfield & Yarling, or Bushfield & Co.

Laughlin Brothers

Upon the dissolution of Laughlins & Bushfield, John L. Smith, and Samuel and Alexander Laughlin formed a new company at 82 Main Street under the name of Laughlin, Smith & Co. Another partner, Charles H. Odbert (who owned his own drug business before selling it in 1867) was added to the company in January of 1868. Laughlin, Smith & Co. extensively advertised their Laughlin's Infant Cordial and, to a lesser degree, their Laughlin's Old Home Bitters, Oil of Grapevine, and Laughlin's Expectorant Syrup. Interestingly, I could not find a single mention of them selling Tasteless Worm Powder. Obviously, they continued to sell it or my bottle wouldn't exist, but it must not have been popular enough to spend advertising money on. Again, it seems the only bottles used by Laughlin, Smith & Co. that were specifically embossed with the products names were their Old Home Bitters and the Tasteless Worm Powder. The rest



"Laughlin / Smith & Co. // Worm Powder // Wheeling V.A" (31/8 in. tall, 1 1/4 in wide, hinge mold), from the authors collection.

New Drug House.
 SAM'L LAUGHLIN. ALEX. LAUGHLIN.
 JMO. L. SMITH.
LAUGHLIN, SMITH & CO.,
 Late of Laughlins & Bushfield.
WHOLESALE DRUGGISTS,
 No. 82 Main street, WHEELING, W. Va.,
 adjoining List, Morrison & Co.
THE ATTENTION OF THE PUBLIC IS
 invited to our stock—comprising every-
 thing in the
DRUG LINE,
 Which will be sold very low.
OUR POWDERED DRUGS
 We guarantee pure and sound.
OUR CHEMICALS
 Are of the best manufacture.
OUR ESSENTIAL OILS
 Are sweet, fresh and unadulterated.
OUR PERFUMERY,
 Is new, rare and elegant.
OUR SPICES
 Are ground especially for family use.
OUR FANCY GOODS
 Are of new styles and patterns.
THE STOCK
 Is entirely new and complete in all respects.
JUST PURCHASED
 From importers and first hands.
CONTAINS NOTHING OLD,
 Unsound or unsaleable.
IN OUR NEW ROOM,
 The finest business room in the State.
MOST COMMODIOUS AND COMPLETE
 With an extensive stock of goods we intend
 to please our old and new customers.
CALL AND SEE US,
 As seeing is believing.
 sep21

Laughlin, Smith & Co. advertisement, 29 October 1866; from, *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*.

C. H. ODBERT. JOHN L. LAUGHLIN. P. L. LAUGHLIN.
Laughlin Bros. & Co.,
WHOLESALE DRUGGISTS,
 1208 Main Street.
 Proprietors of
 Dr. A. S. Todd's Pills,
 Laughlin's Expectorant Syrup,
 Laughlin's Worm Syrup,
 Laughlin's Infant Cordial.

Laughlin Bros. & Co. advertisement, 24 April 1885; from, *The Wheeling Daily Intelligencer*.

of their products were packaged in generically embossed bottles.

On 2 January 1871, it was announced that John Smith was retiring and that the remaining partners (Charles Odbert, and Samuel and Alexander Laughlin) would carry on the whole-sale drug business in the same location under the new name of Laughlin Bros. & Co. This

LAUGHLIN BROTHERS & CO.
WHOLESALE DRUGGISTS, WHEELING, WEST VA.
PROPRIETORS OF
Dr. A. S. TODD'S PILLS.
 Also, of the
 Tasteless Worm Powder,
 Laughlin's Worm Candy,
 Oil of Grapevine,
 Laughlin's Essence of
 Ginger,
 Laughlin's Old Home Bitters,
 Laughlin's Diarrhoea Cordial,
 Laughlin's Expectorant Syrup,
 Laughlin's Infant Cordial,
 Odbert's Cholera Antidote.

Mr H. C. Hoagans
Brandouville
N. Va

Laughlin Brothers & Co. advertising cover (dating from between 1871 to 1886) which includes a lists of the company's proprietary products. The second medicine on the list is their Tasteless Worm Powder.

COMPLIMENTS OF
LAUGHLIN BROS. & CO.,
Wholesale Druggists,
 1208 Main Street,
 WHEELING, W. VA.

Laughlin Bros & Co. advertising booklet cover.

company continued to sell their existing proprietary medicines, while also introducing new ones such as their Laughlin's Worm Syrup, and Odbert's Cholera Antidote. They continued to expand their product line by investing \$25,000 to purchase the sole rights to manufacture and sell Dr. A.S. Todd's Liver Pills (an already popular medicine at the time). These pills would go on to become one of the company's flagship medicines. Laughlin Bros. & Co. almost exclusively used generically embossed bottles for their products. The exception to this again being their Old Home Bitters, of which only one example is known to exist today.

At this point I think it's time to circle back around to the auspicious "Or was it?" (referring to the 1864 date as being the last time I found Tasteless Worm Powder advertised). The day I was planning to submit this article for publication I came across a Laughlin Brothers & Co. advertising cover which dates (because of the company's name) from between 1871 to 1886. On the cover there is a list of Laughlin Bros. & Co. proprietary products and wouldn't you know it, the second medicine listed was their Tasteless Worm Powder! This shows that the company was at least selling this medicine up until 1871. As far as I know, there are no worm powder bottles with Laughlin Brothers & Co embossed on them, but maybe there is one out there still waiting to be found?

A Warning.

Randolph Enterprise.

A young man at Huttonsville, recently drank a bottle of "Old Home Bitters," a patent medicine which wastes its sweetness on the desert air at \$1, a bottle, more or less. The result was that in a short time the young man was completely paralyzed. He was unable to speak for three days and is now perfectly helpless. A warning to those who drink these "bitters" as a substitute for liquor, which is really not much less poisonous.

The last newspaper mention (albeit not a very favorable one) of Laughlin's Old Home Bitters, 6 Augusts 1877; from, *The Wheeling Daily Register*.



"Laughlins Smith & Co. // Druggists // Wheeling. W.V" bottle (on the left) and "Laughlin Bro's & Co. // Druggists // Wheeling. W.V" bottle (on the right; both 5½ in. tall, 1¾ in. wide, 1⅛ in. deep, hinge mold). The Laughlin Bro's & Co. bottle was made from the reworked Laughlin Smith & Co. mold; from the authors collection.



Laughlin / Bro's & Co. // Old Home / Bitters // Wheeling W. VA." bottle. Notice the apostrophe and the peened area where the "S" would have been after Laughlin, as well as the obviously reworked Bro.'s & Co. panel; from Glass Works Auctions Catalogue #137, Lot 119.

- 1 Court House
- 2 Market House
- 3 Post Office
- 4 Seminary
- 5 School Houses
- 6 Hospital

- 7 Water Works
- 8 Cemetery
- 9 Fair Ground
- 10 B.A.O.
- 11 C.A.P. R.R. Depot
- 12 Hempfield

W H B

LAUGHLIN BROS. DRUG CO.

WHEELING, W. VA. Established in 1851.
Geo. A. Laughlin, Prest., Jas. A. Stewart, V.
Prest., J. S. Mather, Manager, S. O. Laughlin,
Secretary.

WHOLESALE DRUGGISTS,
PROPRIETORS OF
DR. A. S. TODD'S PILLS,
LAUGHLIN'S EXPECTORANT SYRUP,
LAUGHLIN'S WORM SYRUP,
LAUGHLIN'S INFANT CORDIAL.

Laughlin Bros. Drug Co. advertisement, 20 May 1887; from,
Shepherdstown Register.

Now back to the history. Between 1874 to 1879 Laughlin Bros. & Co.'s address changed twice. As stated above, the company was originally advertised as being located at 82 Main Street. However, starting in late-1874, newspapers were also simultaneously advertising their address as 1281 Main Street. By the latter half of 1875, the 82 Main Street address had been entirely replaced by 1281 Main Street. Again, the address changed in 1879 to 1208 Main Street. It is possible that at least one of these changes in address (if not both) were not the result of the company relocating, but rather the biproduct of a city-wide street renaming and renumbering initiative which was carried out by the city of Wheeling in the mid 1870's.

In 1879, Laughlin Bros. & Co. was proclaimed to be the largest drug house in West Virginia. At the time, the company was said to employ 18 people, and "do a business of some \$275,000 per year". To put that in perspective, that is about \$7,000,000 in today's money. Though new partners would join (and leave) Laughlin Bros. & Co. over the next few years, business continued on successfully and without much change. Eventually though, a change did occur on 20 August 1883 when Samuel and Alexander Laughlin decided to step down from the company. The men sold their shares to the three remaining partners: C.H. Odbert, John L., and Frederick L. Laughlin, who continued to run the business as usual. Others were added to the company, and in January 1886 Laughlin Bros. & Co. was incorporated as Laughlin Brothers Drug Company by C.H. Odbert, and Samuel, John L., Frederick L., and George A. Laughlin.

In a sad turn of events, both Samuel and Frederick Laughlin died later that year. Another blow to the company came in early 1887 when C.H. Odbert decided to retire. An attempt was made to continue the company in spite of these losses, but to no avail. It was decided in early 1888 to close the company for good. The rights to the Laughlin's proprietary medicines were sold to the company of John G. McLain & Son at 1205 Market Street and the rest, as they say, is history.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED

I now knew the history behind Laughlin, Smith & Co., but I was no closer to solving the Virginia embossing mystery on my worm powder bottle. I was actually more confused than when I started. My research had confirmed that Laughlin, Smith & Co. didn't form until three years after West Virginia became a state. I brought this up to my friend and fellow collector Jeff Mihalik when he came over to visit one day. As he was looking the bottle over, I told him about the results of my research. During the conversation, I also pointed out the odd fact that after Laughlins & Bushfield dissolved, and the new company of Laughlin, Smith & Co. was formed, the "S" was dropped from Laughlin. Jeff took a closer look at the bottle, then turned to me and said "there is an S on the end of Laughlin on here". He handed me the bottle and sure enough, when held in the right light, there did appear to be a faint peened-out S on the end of Laughlin. We both had a bit of an "aha!" moment. Looking even closer, I could faintly make out the ghosted letters of Bushfield underneath the Smith & Co. embossing. Such an obvious answer to the mystery but it had not occurred to me!

The puzzle pieces of history now fit into place. As was customary at the time, it seems Laughlin, Smith & Co. didn't want to invest in new bottle molds when the company's name changed in 1866. Instead, they simply had the bottle manufacturer "peen-out" Bushfield from the mold, and cut in the new name of Smith & Co. The new company must not have wanted to spend the additional money to update the state abbreviation, or the thought to update it never occurred to them.

Looking at other Laughlin bottles backs this reworked mold theory, as there are a number of their bottles that come from reworked molds. The best example of this can be seen in their Laughlin's Old Home Bitters bottles. This bottle's mold was originally made for Laughlins & Bushfield, was reworked when the company's name changed to Laughlin, Smith & Co., and was again reworked when the name changed to Laughlin Bros. & Co. So even though there are three separate variants of this bottle, they all came from the same mold! I'm sure the Laughlins never expected anyone to think twice about these reworked molds. So, it's funny to think that their reworked Laughlin, Smith & Co. Worm Powder bottle was the exact reason I spent countless hours researching their company's history.



"Laughlins / & / Bushfield
// Worm / Powder //
Wheeling V.A." bottle; from
the collection of Rodney
Funkhouser.

I want to thank all of the individuals who contributed information and photos for this article. I also want to thank my wife for her photography skills (I didn't forget to credit you this time!). If anyone has questions, or would like to talk about early Wheeling druggists or vermifuge bottles, feel free to send me an email at zackbaer5014@gmail.com

