

Collecting New York City Slugplate Strap Flasks

There is a whole world of color, diversity and history around these 'orphan' bottles

By Mark R. Smith

Hard to say exactly when it all began, but safe to say it was a long time ago, at least 45 years, likely a few more.

As a young digger and collector, in my region local bottles such as blob tops, Hutchs, druggists and milk bottles were quite popular, and remain so to this day. However, rarely did anyone encounter embossed flasks.

I believe the first flask I ever owned, and still do, is a half-pint coffin flask from Patchogue, a town about five miles to the

east of where I reside. I found this flask to be quite fascinating, given the large amount of embossing on it, along with the interesting shape.

Sometime after this, prowling the shops helped me add several embossed flasks from the town of Greenport, located at the end of Long Island's North Fork. To me these were most interesting, and these flasks, along with several from another Long Island town, Huntington, followed me home.

One thing that intrigued me from quite early in the bottle hobby was that these flasks seemed to be, for lack of a better word, orphans. Many in the hobby were looking for local blob tops, milks, and Hutchs, yet these flasks could be had at shops, club meetings and shows for what was, in my mind, a song. I would add variants as they would appear, but just from Long Island. The flask collection grew slowly, but steadily.

Now this is not to say that I did not collect other bottles. I certainly had my share of local blob tops, Hutchs, and milks. Oh, and how could I forget local pottery, principally from the Huntington, Long Island area.

About 1991 or '92, a long-time friend and mentor in the hobby was retiring and

downsizing their formidable collection and gave me a call. Would I have an interest in his flasks, both from Long Island, and Brooklyn? I was quite honored that he would think of me, and naturally an enthusiastic YES was my reply, and a deal was quickly struck.

There were examples from New York City that he threw in. So I now had a few dozen of each, Long Island and Brooklyn strap flasks. The amber examples from Brooklyn really caught my eye, as prior to this I had only seen clear examples from out here on Long Island.

With my collection of Long Island stoneware growing, and a collection of flasks expanding, something needed to give to make some space, and my local blob tops and Hutchs were sold, reserving only those very, very near to my town of Sayville. It was a master stroke on my part, as I gained much needed shelf space for more flasks and stoneware.

Attending bottle shows in the tristate area I would continue to pick up Brooklyn flasks as I saw them. The prices were quite reasonable, yet rarely was a duplicate seen, which was an added attraction. Chatting with the diggers in the bottle club revealed that they did not find many of these flasks either. While scanning tables for Brooklyn flasks, I could not help but

PHOTOS (previous page):

Meyer's Hotel (Harry D. Meyer): "WARRANTED / MEYER'S HOTEL / 119 SOUTH STREET / COR. PECK SLIP / NEW YORK" Half pint; clear / SCA; strap side. Listings found: 1902-15: Harry D. Meyer Retail Wine & Liquor dealer at 119 South St. No listings for 1916.

The Old Homestead: "THE OLD HOMESTEAD / H. DITTMER / COR. WYTHE AVE. & / SO. 5TH ST. / BROOKLYN, N.Y." Half pint, clear, strap side flask. Listings found 1902-1905, Liquors and Lager Beer saloons at 57 S. 5th St. In 1906, Henry Dittmer is now at Norstrand Cor, Clarkson Ave. Peter Dittmer is listed at 57 S. 5th St.

Retired Champion (Ernest Roeber): "WARRANTED / E. ROEBER / RETIRED CHAMPION / 499 SIXTH AVE / COR. 30TH / NEW YORK" Half pint, clear, strap side. Listings found 1902 - 1906. Note: Mr. Roeber was in fact one of the fathers of today's professional wrestling. He was a professional wrestler, and the holder of the European Greco-Roman heavyweight title, 1894-1900, 1900-1901. He also held the American championship from 1887-1890.



Ford's Hotel: "FORDS / 620 8TH AVE / COR 40TH ST / NEW YORK" Half pint, amber, strap-sided. Listings found: 1885 - 1895: Liquor Dealer, 620 8th Ave; 1902 - 1903: Retail Wine and Liquor Dealer, 620 8th Ave (no listing in 1904.)



Angelbecks Hotel:
"ANGELBECK'S HOTEL / 2274-8TH AVE / COR. 122ND ST. / N.Y." Pint, amber, strap side, c. 1902-1906.



Forster House: "FORSTER HOUSE / W.D. GARLICH'S / PROPR. / 138-140 EAST 59TH ST. N.Y." Half pint amber, strap side flask.

Hotel Borough: "HOTEL / BOROUGH / JULIUS SIMON / 98 LEXINGTON AVE. / SW COR. 27TH ST. / N.Y. CITY" Half pint, amber, strap side. Listings found: 1902-1906, retail wine and liquor dealer. 1910: Retail Wine & Liquor Dealer at 98 Lexington Ave. and at 200 St. Nicholas Ave.



The Owl: "HENRY KLINKER, JR / THE OWL / 748-10TH AVE / S.E. COR. 51ST ST / NEW YORK / ONE HALF PINT / FULL MEASURE"

Amber, strap side. Note: Base embossed: "L. & M. G. / 182 FULTON ST. / N.Y." Listings: 1875 - A Henry Klinker is listed in the grocery business at 748 10th Ave; 1880 - Listed as a feed dealer at 456 W. 15th St. and liquor dealer at 78 10th Ave. Possible typesetting error on the 748 10th Ave. address.



Continental Hotel - MERRIFIELD, E. L. (Edward L.): CONTINENTAL HOTEL / 20TH St & BROADWAY / N.Y. / E. L. MERRIFIELD Half pint, amber, strap side, threaded neck with ground lip. Note: retains the original cap marked: "Hastings & Hahn / Glass Manfrs / 55 Murray St. NY." Listings found 1875 - 1903.



The Franklin - (SCHUMACHER, AUGUST F): "A. F. SCHUMACHER / THE / FRANKLIN / 237 WILLIS AVE. / COR. 138TH ST. / NEW YORK" Half pint, amber, strap side. Listings found 1902-1905.



Park & Tilford (Joseph Park & Charles Tilford): "PARK & TILFORD / NEW YORK" Half pint, amber, picnic style, private mold, applied top. Listings were found from 1875 through 1915 at various addresses on Broadway, as well as on 5th and 6th Avenues. While no further listings could be found after 1915, the Park & Tilford name did exist on whiskey bottles into the 1930s or 1950s. Note: some of the listings were found under Grocer, others in Wine & Liquors. Even though the bottle may be embossed, "Hotel", may not appear in the hotel section.



Central Hotel (WILKING, HERMAN): "CENTRAL HOTEL / 272 & 273 / WEST ST. N.Y. / HERM. WILKING, PROP." Half pint, amber, strap side, threaded neck, ground lip. Listings found 1885 - 1902.

notice that there were all manner of flasks from New York City: pumpkinseed, shoo-fly, coffin and strap-sided examples, and like the Brooklyn examples, rarely was a duplicate spotted.

My wife and I could attend a show, and bring home ten or fifteen new flasks at a time. Man, this was awesome in my mind. I would constantly notice that there were very few duplicate flasks seen, as I did not want every one I saw, but only what was different. Many mental notes were made.

I found the flasks absolutely fascinating. Sizes ranged from one half ounce to quart, and there were a wide variety of colors, from clear and aqua to shades of amber and citron. The variations in the form of the flasks were also eye-catching. There is a noticeable range in the size of the flasks, thicker, wider, taller, shorter. There are drippy applied tops, refired tooled tops, and even the occasional oddity, such as a citrate or whiskey finish on a flask. Perhaps the glassblower grabbed the wrong lipping tool a century ago.

In 1998, we purchased a computer and went online. Oh, what fun that was, learning how to search on eBay in the early days for flasks and to research them. Learning about them is just as interesting and rewarding as collecting them. I could learn that this address was on the waterfront, or that another was where the World Trade Center used to stand in lower Manhattan. This firm was a grocery store, a tea merchant, another a saloon.

Not all who used these flasks were liquor stores or bars. Some were in business for many years, a few survive to this day, others just one year and were never seen again. Others changed addresses every few years, and some addresses hosted multiple owners over the years.

Hotels and theaters had their names embossed on flasks, sometimes even former professional athletes. Other flasks are tied in to either railroads, such as the Central Rail Road or railroad stations, such as Grand Central Terminal (which are among my favorites).

It seemed that in New York City there was a business of some kind selling liquor on every street corner, and in the middle of each block as well. Some clever names were created too, such as "The Owl."



Central Rail Road House: "CENTRAL R.R. HOUSE / COR. LIBERTY & WEST STS. / HERMAN RAUB / NEW YORK" Pint, amber, strap side. Listings found: 1902 - The Central R.R. Hotel at 146 Liberty St; 1902-03: A listing for the Raub Hotel Co. a retail wine and liquor dealer at 38 E. 14th St. & 41 Franklin. Subsequent listings at other addresses through 1910.

Others are "The Two Owls" and "Gee Whiz It's Good" (what a name!).

As part of the embossing other flasks offer "1 cent for return." Our deposit laws of today seem more like a flashback than an advance, and that penny was a heck of a lot more at that time than a nickel is today.

Some flasks read like a menu, offering brandy, whiskey, cordials, wines, imported and domestic, all on a slug plate. The craftsmen who cut some of these were amazing to get all of this information on, and make it look good to boot. There are others where either it was Friday at 4:59 and the craftsman was rushing, or it was 8:01 on Monday morning after a very rough weekend. Others were in script, and some are cut on an angle.

The diversity and quantity of slugplate flasks from New York City is perhaps unparalleled anywhere else in the country. Having collected and researched them for now a good thirty years, it is both fun and a learning experience with every new example added.

Oh, and that reminds me. I have to visit the home center for some wood, as I need some more shelf space.

Editor's note: Per Wikipedia: Greenport was a major port for its area, having developed a strong fishing and whaling industry in the past, although currently there are only a handful of

commercial fishing vessels operating out of Greenport. The village port, settled in 1682, was called Winter Harbor, Stirling and Green Hill and was incorporated in 1838. Greenport, since 1844, has been the eastern terminal station on the north fork for the Long Island Rail Road. During Prohibition, rum running and speakeasies became a significant part of Greenport's economy. Many of the village's older structures are included in the Greenport Village Historic District, added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1986.