

Making the Case for L.P. Evans Cascara Bitters

By Rick Whitney

One of the great aspects of our hobby is the discovery of new bottles to collect and research. Local bottles are no less exciting than a new rare colored flask or a green Radam's Microbe Killer!

Last September, I was able to acquire a previously unlisted and to my knowledge unknown label-only bitters from a town just north of Dexter, Maine, where I live. I had known about the bottle in a collection for about twenty years, and finally was able to acquire it. The bottle is a Cascara Bitters, put up by Liston P. Evans, a druggist of Dover, Maine.

The town of Dover is now Dover-Foxcroft, combining with the town of Foxcroft in 1922, and the county seat of Piscataquis County in north central Maine.

Liston Evans came out with his Cascara Bitters in the 1880s and probably marketed the bottle on a local basis. This is the only example I have seen or know to exist. Looking in Webster's dictionary, cascara comes from the cascara buckthorn tree or shrub found in northwestern North America. The bark is the source of cascara sagrada, used medically as a stimulant, cathartic and laxative.

Another interesting aspect of this bottle is the fact that Evans lists all the ingredients of the medication with the parts for each. It might be possible to re-create the bitters based on the label ingredients.

Liston P. Evans was born Aug. 2, 1852, in Brownville, Maine. This town is a few miles north of Dover-Foxcroft, and also in Piscataquis County. His father, David Evans, was a doctor, which may have influenced his becoming a druggist.

The first evidence of Liston P. Evans as a druggist comes from the *Maine Register* in 1874, where he is listed as an apothecary in Garland, Maine. Garland is located just southeast of Dover in Penobscot County. The two towns border each other.

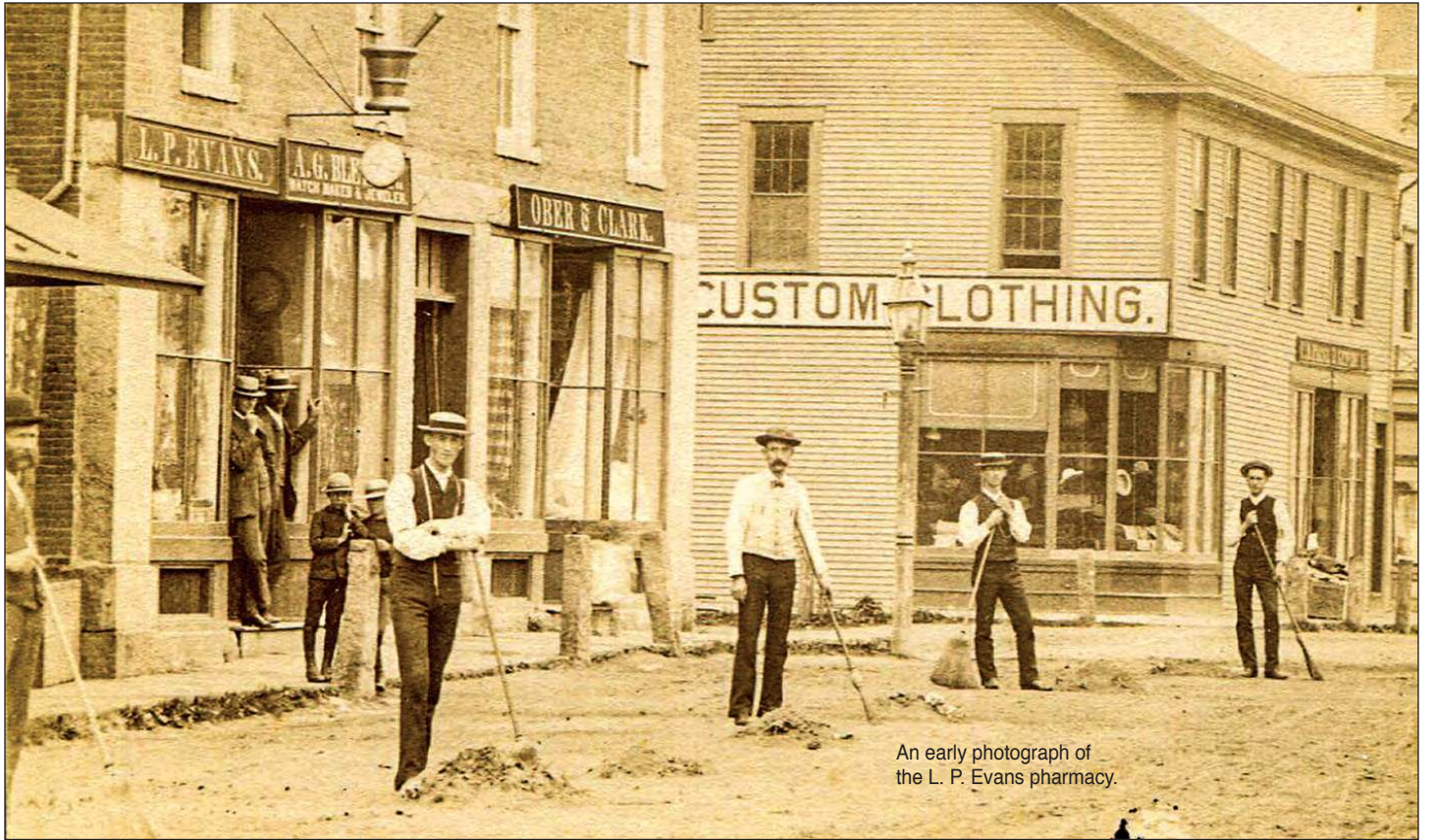
Liston was only in Garland a couple years at most, and no bottles, labeled or embossed, are known to exist from his Garland years.

In 1875, he settled in Dover, and in 1878 purchased the drugstore of John K. Chase, which he operated until 1895, when the business was consolidated with Elmer E. Cole & Co. Evans remained part of the company, despite the fact he had purchased the local newspaper, *The Observer*, in 1890 and became its sole proprietor. He went on to become much better known as a newspaperman than a druggist.

Evans was president of the Maine Press Association in 1924, president of the Dover-Foxcroft Trust Co. and a Mason. Evans died in 1949, six years after his wife, Clara, and is buried in Dow Cemetery in Dover-Foxcroft. The town has a population today of about 4,300.



The possibly unique Cascara Bitters put up by Liston P. Evans of Dover, Maine.



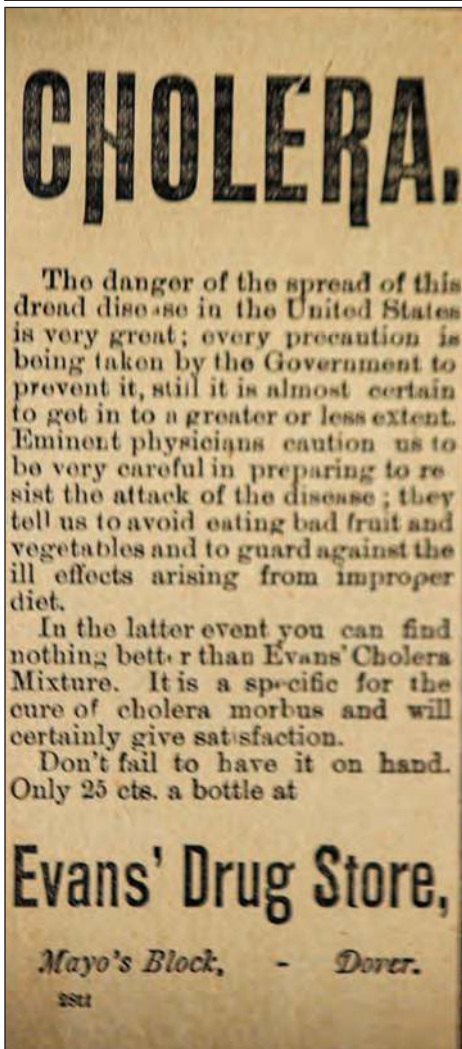
An early photograph of the L. P. Evans pharmacy.



An impressive collection of L.P. Evans druggist bottles.



Liston P. Evans



Newspaper ad for Evans' Drug Store

The bitters bottle carries two labels. The front label is printed Cascara Bitters put up by Liston P. Evans, Dover, Maine, on a standard square bottle with three indented panels, 9 1/2 inches tall, with an applied tapered-collar lip with ring and an indented smooth base. The bottle is in a deep, golden amber. The label goes on to state, “Useful as a tonic and restorer for invalids and females, imparting vigor to the system and promoting a healthy appetite.”

It seems a pretty familiar sales pitch for a bitters marketed to invalids at a time following the Civil War, and to women, who were portrayed as the weaker of the species. The label goes on to list the ingredients, which some of you may find interesting:

Cascara Sagrada – 4 parts, Dandelion Root – 2 parts, Gentian – 4 parts, Camomile flowers – 2 parts, Stillingia Root – (unreadable), Orange Peel – 1 part, Spirit of Cloves – 1 part, Spirit of Orange – 1 part, Spirits of _ ine – 32 parts, Simple Syrup – 8 parts, Water – 88 parts (by weight).

It would appear the 32 parts ingredient might be wine, but part of the label is missing on that edge. The dose is: “One-half to one wineglassful, either immediately before or one hour after each meal. Invalids and children may take proportionately smaller doses.”

The bottle also carries an interesting back label, which acts as a testimonial. It is dated March 20, 1881, which would indicate the earliest time at which the bitters could have been marketed. It is an “official decision” of Green B. Raum, United States Internal Revenue Commissioner concerning Cascara Bitters. He goes on to say that, after examining the formula, he states that it does not qualify as an alcoholic beverage, but as a medicine.

I have not looked up Green B. Raum to see if he was a real person or not, but Evans seemed very concerned that people might think his bitters more of an alco-

holic drink and he was trying to dispel that thought. Given the local nature of the bottle and the limited market (Dover only had 1,687 inhabitants in 1880), and the fact that it is a label-only bottle, I feel that this is a very scarce bottle, and although I hate to use the term, unique. It would be nice to see another example or two show up.

Also, based on the manufacture of the bottle, I would say the bottle dates sometime in the 1880s, starting in 1881. However, Evans did run the drugstore until 1895, which would indicate the latest date the bitters might have been sold.

Also, no price is stated on the label. Liston P. Evans also had embossed drugstore bottles as well. His bottles carry a distinctive horseshoe design on the front slug plate panel, which comes in several sizes, and is also marked from Dover, Maine. I also have in my collection another drug bottle from Evans drugstore with an LPE monogram embossed on the front panel. In addition, an 1892 ad from the local paper advertised Evans’ Cholera Mixture for sale at 25 cents per bottle. My guess is that it is a label-only bottle.

That pretty much concludes the story of Evan’s Cascara Bitters, an interesting and rare bitters. The number of local paper-label-only bitters from around the country could number in the hundreds at least, which gives collectors something to look for in their collecting travels. In fact, I am still looking for a Robinson’s Jaundice Bitters from my hometown of Dexter, which I am sure was label only. I keep hoping one will show up, but for a label example to survive might be too much to ask.

SOURCES

Webster’s II New College Dictionary.

Maine Register, 1880 and 1930.

President Mary Annis and The Dover-Foxcroft Historical Society.

The Early History of Dover-Foxcroft, Page 56 (1902) Dover-Foxcroft, Me.

Moca-me.org >resources>documents>Piscataquis County.