

1887 Tibby Brothers letterhead.

# Tibby Brothers of Sharpsburg and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

(1866 to ca. 1914)

by Jay W. Hawkins

Most bottle and glass collectors outside of the Pittsburgh region have little knowledge of the glass manufacturing firm of the Tibby Brothers. Except for the sheaf of wheat pint and half-pint flasks in clear (flint) glass (GXII-33 and GXII-33a) embossed “TIBBY BROS PITTS PA.” on the bottom, most collectors have never seen anything with their name or marks on it. That group includes me to some extent, a Pittsburgh glass collector, who until fairly recently had not seen other bottles with their name embossed on them. First a little history of the glass company, then we will see some new pieces that have come to light.

James Jr., John, William and Mathew Tibby began operations as the Tibby Brothers on June 19, 1866, at their newly-constructed glassworks located at Twenty Second Street between Smallman and Mulberry Streets (Twelfth Ward) in Pittsburgh. One of the many famous William McCully glassworks was located

across Twenty Second Street from Tibby Brothers (Hawkins, 2009).

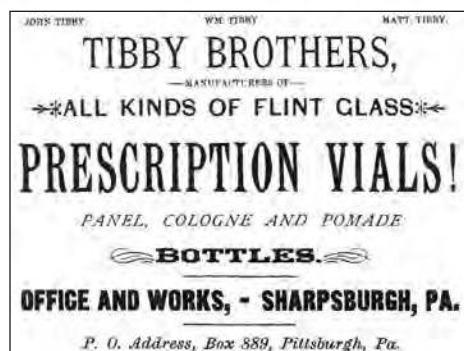
At the time of the company’s start-up, the Tibby Brothers were already experienced glassmen. Both John and William had been listed as glassblowers in the 1857/58 Pittsburgh city directory. The name Tibby was also spelled Tibbey at various times. William Tibby would have been 35 years old at the start of glass manufacturing by the brothers.

Initially, their offices were located at 90 Water Street but were moved to 84 Water Street by 1870. The glassworks consisted originally of a single six-pot furnace (Innes, 1976), but they expanded to ten pots a short time after the company started. By 1872, the glassworks comprised three mid-sized structures covering about two-thirds of a small city block.

They specialized in flint prescription ware, mainly bottles and vials, but they are also known to have produced smaller amounts of catsup and beer bottles, milk bottles,

pickle jars and flasks. Their advertisement in the *Atlas of Allegheny County* of 1876 listed the manufacture of “all kinds of Flint Glass Prescription Vials, Panel, Cologne, and Pomade Bottles.” Other than the aforementioned flask and a couple of bottles that will be discussed later in this piece, I have never seen any other glass bottles or flasks with the Tibby Brothers mark.

After operating the glassworks at Twenty Second and Smallman (near Penn) Streets for six years, the Tibby Brothers in 1872 constructed a new glassworks four miles up and across the Allegheny River on the western side at Sharpsburg. The new glassworks were a single ten-pot furnace, but the entire operation covered four acres and employed 180 hands. The Tibby Brothers operated both the Pittsburgh and Sharpsburg glassworks, a total of twenty pots, simultaneously for several years. The Tibby Brothers were not a small company by 1876. They were employing 175 men and boys at that



TOP: Tibby Bro's druggist bottle.

BOTTOM: 1882 advertisement.

time (Durant, 1876). The Tibby Brothers subsequently built a new glasshouse in Sharpsburg, which was completed by June of 1879.

The April 15, 1880, edition of the *Crockery & Glass Journal* noted that the company relocated their offices and management of the operations to Main Street in Sharpsburg, while all previous office addresses had been in Pittsburgh. The Pittsburgh glassworks were abandoned when the company management moved to Sharpsburg. In 1881, they constructed a third ten-pot furnace in Sharpsburg. They were still using a P.O. Box 889, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, address as of 1882 (Polk & Co., 1882).

In January 1883, they were working all three furnaces at the Sharpsburg location. They were still employing upwards of 180 men and boys by this time with an annual payroll nearing \$58,000 and a yearly sales of \$180,000 (Innes, 1976). The 1876 *Atlas for Allegheny County* showed the glassworks, which consisted of five buildings located beside the Allegheny River near Guyasuta Station of the Western Pennsylvania Railroad. Their 1882 *Pennsylvania Gazetteer and Business Directories* listing showed them as manufacturers of flint prescription ware, while their advertisement listed prescription vials, panel, cologne and pomade bottles in addition to "All Kinds of Flint Glass."

Their glassworks were briefly idled by a flood on the Allegheny River in February 1884 (*Crockery & Glass Journal*, February 21, 1884). Periodic flooding of the Allegheny, Monongahela and Ohio Rivers at that time was common because upstream flood-control structures and dams had not yet been built.

It is interesting to note that flooding of the Tibby Brothers and other glass factories situated on the flood plain usually only shut down production for a short time following a flooding event, sometimes as little as a week. In fact, prior to the installation of the lock-and-dam

system on the rivers, many glass manufacturers would wait for the high water events during the spring to ship much of the inventory produced during the year downriver to markets, because the rivers were often too shallow otherwise.

In January 1885, the Tibby Brothers began using natural gas as fuel at their Sharpsburg prescription glassworks, but had not yet converted all three factories to gas. They were still operating the three factories at the Sharpsburg glassworks with 230 employees in 1896. The Tibby Brothers were manufacturing glass for ten months a year and using 400 cars of coal, 100 cars of sand, 35 cars of soda ash, 15 cars of lime and 10 cars of nitrate during that period. Their annual output was valued at \$225,000 (\$7 million today). They listed a mailing address of P.O. Box 1022, Pittsburg, Pa., even though they were located completely in Sharpsburg by that time, including their offices.

The Tibby Brothers had brought four of their sons into the business by that time, but only the brothers, John, William and Mathew, were listed on their advertisements and letterheads since 1882. As of March 24, 1896, the company letterhead stated that the office and glassworks were located at Guyasuta Station of the Western Pennsylvania Railroad, but the Pittsburg post office box address was still being used.

A catalog of their wares dated 1893 showed them offering 53 styles of prescription bottles with a choice of five lip styles. They also offered Union (strap-sided) and Shoo Fly (coffin-shaped) whiskey flasks (Innes, 1976). An 1896 advertisement had illustrations for citrate of magnesia, milk, beer and prescription bottles. The prescription bottles were made as plain label-only and embossed bottles. They additionally mentioned the manufacture of catsups, brandies and flasks.

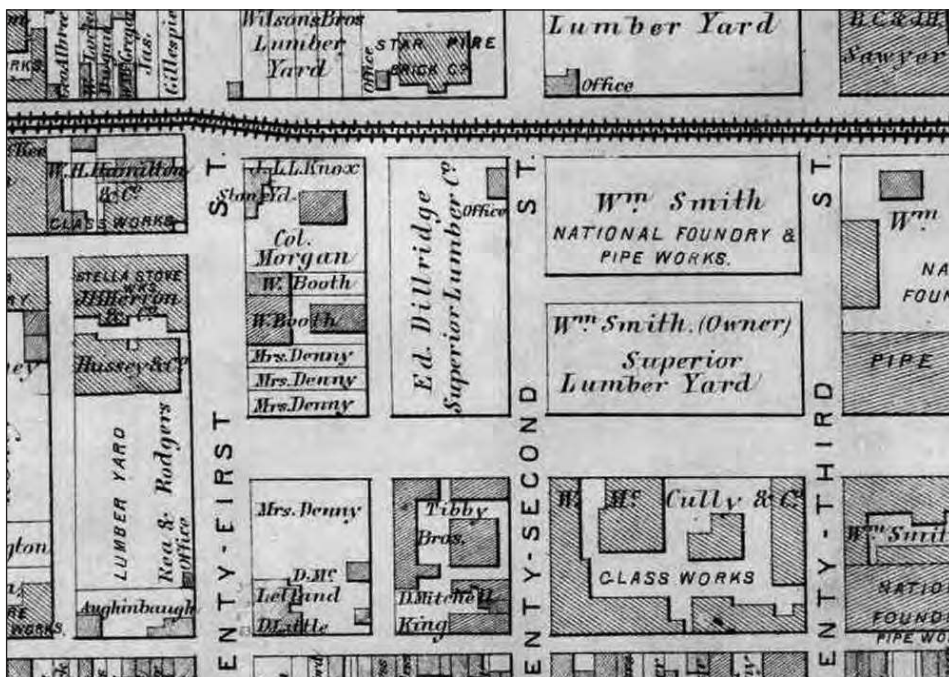
The Tibby Brothers were working thirty pots at their Sharpsburg operation in

1900. However, the final city directory listing for Tibby Brothers is in 1901. No mention of them in the city directories was found after that date. They were still listed in the *National Glass Budget* in September 1903. McKearin and Wilson (1978) indicate that they may have continued until at least 1904. Stephenson (1989) reported that they began operating the glassworks of the old Saltsburg Flint Bottle Co. in Saltsburg, Pennsylvania in 1907. All information indicates that they operated these glassworks for no more than a year.

The Tibby Brothers Glass Co. was listed as operating only the Sharpsburg glass works as of 1912. However, the factory was listed as idled. The Sharpsburg factory had three furnaces firing thirty pots. They were shown as producing fruit jars, milk bottles, a general line of bottles and hollow ware at that time. However, the Thomas Registers listed them until 1914. There was a Tibby-Brawer Glass Co. in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania as of 1920 that may have been a successor to the Tibby Brothers Glass Co. (Thomas Publishing, 1920).

Marks known or attributed to Tibby Brothers include: "Tibby Bros. Pitts. PA." found on the bottom clear pint and half-pint flasks embossed with a sheaf of wheat on the side of the flask. Use of a "T" on the bottom of clear glass liquor and druggist's bottles has been attributed to the Tibby Brothers as well.

As mentioned in the beginning of this article, a couple of bottles that were clearly made by Tibby Brothers have come to light recently. The first is an early-style, tin-top pint milk bottle embossed "MFG FOR A. H. REID 30TH & MARKET ST. PHILA." in a slug plate with "TIBBY BROS. MAKER PITTSBURGH PA." on the bottom of the bottle. The second bottle appears to be a salesman's sample of a square druggist's bottle embossed "TIBBY BRO'S MANUFACTURERS PITTS. PA." with the double-lined initials "T" and "B" intertwined on the front of a slug plate.



McCully map, circa 1872.

Given that the Tibby Brothers were in business for a considerable length of time and operated numerous furnaces with dozens of pots at several factories, it is interesting that they marked very few of their wares. Given the highly competitive nature of the glass industry during the period that they were in business, you would have thought that they would have wanted every advantage that they could get, including the advertising of their wares at essentially no cost.



Tibby Bros - Maker - Pittsburgh PA embossed on base of milk bottle.

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Base of Tibby Bros Lettered Flask.