

# Orphan Jar with a Story

By Barry Bernas

A fruit jar luminary coined the term Orphan Jar. He defined it as a jar so common that no one notices it or one so rare no one has ever seen it. The latter comment and some of the former apply to the object of this brief article.

Although sans a maker's logo on the base, the sloped shoulder but otherwise cylindrically bodied 28-oz. clear jar in Figure 1 has a lid with a single "wedged shaped recess" on its side. It is top embossed 'TO OPEN PRY OUT RUBBER AT NOTCH' (Figure 2). More than likely, both were products of the Capstan Glass Co. made at separate times between late 1924 to late 1928. Capstan, a South Connellsville, Pennsylvania-located packer tumbler, bottle, and jar producing firm, held the exclusive contract to make glassware between December 1, 1924 and April 15, 1927 for the Vacuum Seal Co., Inc., a Delaware corporation with a business office in New York City. Thereafter, the Capstan Glass workforce continued to do some work for Vacuum Seal until late in 1928, when an action by the former caused the customer to go shopping for a new glassmaker to furnish their jars, containers, and accompanying lids and covers.

The **Figure 1** example is 6 5/8 inches tall with a 3 3/4 inch base diameter. Its mouth is large enough (80mm) for a hand to fit easily down into it. The underside is embossed 'VACUUM SEAL COMPANY INC. NEW YORK' around the abbreviation 'PAT'D' above seven dates between 1911 and 1917, which supposedly identify the patents associated with this jar. See **Figure 3**.

New York Supreme Court records indicate that besides this shoulder-type jar, which originally came with a three-notch lid (**Figure 4**), 8 and 16 oz. versions were also ordered by Vacuum Seal administrators. In addition, an 8 oz. tumbler with a three-notch lid (**Figure 5**) and 8, 16 and 28 oz. express jars (undefined but possibly straight-sided) with three-notch lids were also desired by Vacuum Seal officials under the initial contract. Capstan sales personnel estimated it would take twenty-five railcars to fill the Vacuum Seal order over the first one-year period.

Upon a Capstan Glass Co. recommendation in the spring of 1926, Vacuum Seal executives decided to change the appearance of their lid from three edge indentations (**Figures 4-5**) to only one that was more concealed. Capstan pattern and mold workers experimented with a new lid design to meet Vacuum Seal specifications for a recessed notch lid. Between June 1926 and November 1928, Capstan produced a single or underslung notch lid (likely **Figure 2**) for the Vacuum Seal jars, totally funded by the New York City firm. In addition, after the Capstan contract expired in mid-April 1927, Vacuum Seal officers had their underslung notch lid made by another glassmaker as well. This style of lid was advertised in 1927 and 1928. **Figure 6** contains one example from 1928.

Shortly after Capstan lid production began and while further design experimentation continued at a Vacuum Seal facility, a Capstan employee, Louis P. Piazzoli, Jr., filed a patent request on July



[Figure 1]



[Figure 2]



[Figure 3]



[Figure 1]

North American Glass

"Vacuum Seal" Glass Cap and Ring



[Figure 4]

The Standard Fruit Jar Reference



[Figure 5]

Bottle News, June 1974

15, 1926, for a Sealed Package and Closure Cap Therefor. Unbeknownst to their Vacuum Seal client, this application was for a single “wedged shaped recess” on the side of a bottom flanged glass lid. This feature was identical or very similar to the single or underslung notch that Capstan employees were currently making for their Vacuum Seal customer.

The text of Piazzoli’s patent request reads in part: “...The means now commonly used is the formation of three notches 120 degrees a part about the periphery of the cap. These notches are cut completely through the flange so that a pin or other instrument may be pressed downwardly along the shoulder of the cap to break the seal thereof. In operation, it is difficult to force the pin back of the gasket because of its tendency to engage the gasket, in which case it is difficult to form a leak sufficient to break the vacuum because immediately upon removal of the pin the rubber expands to close the opening; whereas if the pin follows the shoulder of the cap along the side of the gasket it may be used as a small lever to press the gasket away from the shoulder and form a leak...” **Figure 7** contains two drawings of the Piazzoli lid. One of which is on a jar with the same finish as the Figure 1 model made for Vacuum Seal.

Come November 27, 1928, Piazzoli’s request was approved as patent No. 1,693,250. At this point, Vacuum Seal folks were still in the dark as to what had happened; believing the single notch lid in current production was their property. Because Piazzoli’s patent rights were assigned to Capstan Glass, leaders there warned rival glassmakers that they couldn’t make this lid under threat of patent infringement proceedings. Any work done by Vacuum Seal’s new supplier to perfect the concealed one notch lid was for naught.

With concealed single notch lids in hand from both Capstan and another glass manufacturer, the Capstan threat caused Vacuum Seal decision makers to discontinue use of both the Capstan and second glassmaker’s lids. This action generated a pause in Vacuum Seal’s marketing campaign until they signed on with the Owens-Illinois Glass Co. of Toledo, Ohio, in December 1928 to have that firm manufacture their containers, covers, jars and lids. To get around the Capstan threat, Vacuum Seal personnel used a Gray Staunton 1917 patent (No. 1,212,274) for which they held the rights and a later Randolph H. Barnard one assigned to them in 1934 (No. 1,956,555) for the jar’s lid design.

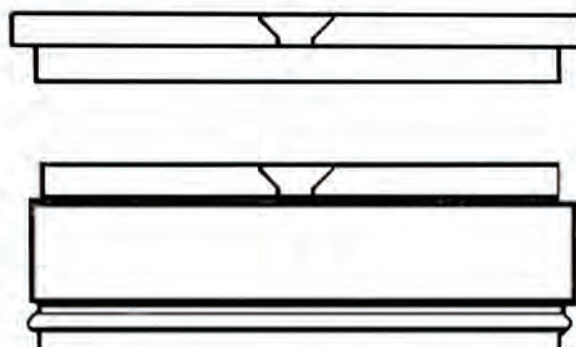
Naturally, Vacuum Seal leaders took Capstan Glass to court to get Piazzoli’s patent rights reassigned to them, professing they had paid for all of the developmental work so the lid design was rightfully theirs. However, they were unsuccessful, and Capstan Glass got away with what appears to be a blatant act of design piracy.

Despite nearing the century mark in age, the Figure 1 jar still begs for hobby-land attention whenever an example can be found. Even though it was advertised for use by either a commercial packer or home preserver, this all-glass, vacuum-sealed jar still goes unnoticed by the majority of fruit and packer jar advocates. I guess its plain appearance, lack of color, and simplistic closure has relegated it to the backwater bin of inattention. That’s a shame because the jar is uncommon, is crowned with a lid that hasn’t been documented in the current fruit jar reference books, and comes with a story.

*No Cap Liners Needed  
with the VACUUM SEAL*



[Figure 6]  
*The Glass Packer, January 1928*



[Figure 7]  
Illustration

