

Knights' Product Jar

By Barry Bernas



[Figure 1]
Decorative packer jar.

Figure 1 contains a photo of a decorative packer jar. It is just one example in a series of hand-blown or machine-made glass containers from different manufacturers with an elaborate outer design and a glass or metal screw or otherwise-fashioned cap that were made between 1890 and the 1920s.

Hand blown in a mold, this approximate quart-size edition is 6 1/16 inches in height (measured at the lip without the screw cap). Chrysanthemum-shaped eyelets on either side of the 1 1/2 inch tall glass screw cap with a swirled rib outer design serve as anchors for a wire-carrying bail. It has a base embossed with the inscription ALONZO A. KNIGHTS, BOSTON, MASS. **See Figure 2.**

Figure 3 illustration comes from a Specialty Glass Co. circa 1891-92 catalog, which was reprinted by the West Virginia Museum of American Glass, Ltd. in Weston, West Virginia. The caption accompanying this item indicated it was "entirely new" and could hold either 34 fluid ounces or 32 ounces of candy, preserves or something else.

Ancestry records indicate Alonzo Albert Knights was born on a farm in Irasburg, Vermont on September 4, 1841. He was the first child of Alphonus and Chole Stoddard (Robbins) Knights. Shortly thereafter, the family moved to the Boston, Massachusetts area. Alonzo grew up there and was educated in the public school system at Eliot Grammar and then English High School, where he was a meritorious Franklin Medal Scholar.

The 1860 *United States Census* recorded Alonzo as a 19-year-old clerk living with his parents in Boston's First Ward. Beantown City Directories for 1863-1864 listed Knights but without an occupation. During these two years, a Boston newspaper identified him as registering for the draft. Subsequently, he enlisted in the Massachusetts 6th Infantry in July 1864 as a private. Upon his honorable discharge 100 days later, his occupation was entered as a hackman.

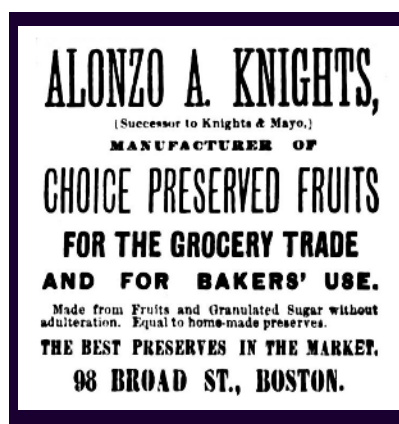
After his brief Civil War service, Alonzo likely went to the family farm in Woburn, Mass., and stayed there until 1868 when he married Sarah Little Knights, his cousin. The couple moved to Boston and Alonzo took employment as a clerk in Charles T. Hamblen's plumbers' supply business.

The 1870 *Boston City Directory* had Knights as a bookkeeper employed by Caleb Poole, Jr., & Co., a pickle manufacturer. Departing Poole in 1875, Alonzo took a position with John J. Richards & Co. (canned goods) up through 1877. While there, he met Nathaniel F. Mayo, a future business partner. The 1878 city directory showed him as a clerk back in the pickle trade with Caleb Poole. **See Figure 4.** When that business ran into financial trouble, Knights and Mayo formed and

[Figure 4]



[Figure 5]



[Figure 6]

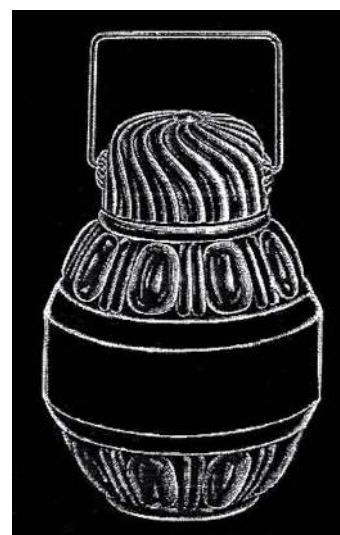


[Figure 2]

Base embossed with the inscription ALONZO A. KNIGHTS, BOSTON, MASS.

[Figure 3]

Illustration comes from a Specialty Glass Co. circa 1891-92 catalog.



ran the firm of Nathaniel F. Mayo & Co. in 1879, dealing vinegar and preserves from 12 India Square in Boston.

A year later, Knights and Mayo was established to manufacture and market jams and jellies from a 98 Board St. address. This partnership dissolved at some point in 1885. Mayo left and Alonzo created his own business—Alonzo A. Knights—making and selling jams, preserves, and jellies from the same Broad St. site in Boston. **Figure 5** announced the change.

By 1886, Knights relocated his business to 10 India St., where it would remain through 1895. From late 1891 to 1894, Alonzo was also the manager-agent for the Boston office of the American Preservers' Co., as **Figure 6** illustrates. Note the location was the same address as Knights' own business.

Up until 1893, Alonzo's firm was listed in *Boston City Directories* as a maker and marketer of jams, jellies and preserves. Starting in 1893, bakers' supplies and grocers' sundries were also noted as concern products. That same year up to 1896, Knights was advertising bakeries for sale. Whether he owned them or was simply acting as a broker isn't known.

On March 19, 1896, *The Boston Globe* announced Alonzo was taking on a partner, his son Harry. This action resulted in the formation and subsequent incorporation of Alonzo A. Knights &

Son (preserves, jams and bakers' supplies) with a new business address of 89 Commercial St. in Boston. Knights stayed active in this father-son enterprise until health issues took charge. He died in 1899 at only 58 years of age. His sons continued the business for several decades to come.

Considering the above background information and the date of the Specialty Glass catalog listing, it is possible to estimate when this stunning product jar could have been used by Knights to package any one of his products. It seems sensible that between 1891 and 1896, Alonzo contracted to have his business name and location embossed on the base of this packer jar. I would lean more toward the earlier part of this estimate because beginning in 1893 and continuing through most of this decade, the Panic of 1893 severely hampered growth in the business trade.

Identifying what Knights put in his proprietary jar is more problematic because no example has yet turned up with a label. Later ads from Alonzo A. Knights & Son showed earthenware crocks, glass tumblers and Phoenix-style jars as containers for their jellies and fruit sauces. Clues suggest Knights' product jar may have held preserves or some sort of baking ingredient. However, this is just a guess. The real answer may still be in hobby land, waiting to be reported.

