

Atlantic Bottle Co.

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Although the American Bottle Co. began as a jobber or distributor, it eventually became a major producer of milk bottles and tobacco jars. The plant used automatic machinery during its entire existence. As with many other glass houses of the early-to-mid-20th century, the plant was purchased by the giant Owens-Illinois Glass Co.

History

Atlantic Bottle Co., Brackenridge, Pennsylvania (1916-1923)

The Atlantic Bottle Co. began as a jobber in 1868 and did not actually manufacture bottles during the early period. By 1898, the firm sold flasks, bottles, lamps, lamp ware, chimneys, tableware, and saloon ware. The firm was located at 136 First Ave. from 1869 to 1879, then at 95 Water St. An 1885 billhead identified S.D. Strasberger & Co. as the proprietors (Hawkins 2009:37).

According to Toulouse (1971:28-29), Atlantic Bottle was chartered in New York “to manufacture bottles, bottle supplies, glassware, etc.” with a capital of \$10,000. Edward Glacken, John Delaney, and Jeane J. Delaney were the principals of the corporation. Unfortunately, Toulouse failed to mention the year of the incorporation; however, the Atlantic Bottle Co. paid a mortgage tax of \$5 in New York in 1909 (State of New York 1909:37). According to the 1915 New York City directory, this corporation – with the \$10,000 capitalization – was in place then. We have found no other early records.

Toulouse (1971:28) noted that the company was unable to secure milk bottles from its usual sources, so it bought the former Fidelity Glass Co. at Brackenridge, Pennsylvania, in 1916 and began actual production. This statement seems odd. Milk bottle production was booming in 1916. However, the Fidelity Glass Co., in operation since 1895, had run into financial difficulty during the year before the sale. Assuming that Fidelity had been an important supplier of the Atlantic Bottle Co., this could explain the Toulouse statement. Atlantic Bottle may have purchased Fidelity to ensure that its supply of milk bottles continued.

The Fidelity Glass Co. had built two continuous tanks with 19 rings by 1912 and had added semiautomatic machinery the following year. Almost immediately after the purchase of Fidelity, the Atlantic Bottle Co. increased its capital to \$60,000 to finance the renovation of the plant. Part of the renovation was the addition of automatic feeders to transform the operation to fully automatic production (Hawkins 2009:37, 212). Also see the Fidelity Glass Co. section.

Bristow (1917:1) noted in 1917 that the Atlantic Bottle Co. used “four 1-man machines on three shifts, on which milk bottles and tobacco jars are being made” at Tarentum, Pennsylvania. A second tank was not in operation at that time but normally also used “four 1-man machines” to make milk bottles. Bristow added, “This is one of the best equipped and up-to-date semi-automatic machine bottle plants to be found in the United States.”¹

A year later, along with milk bottles, “one shop [was] making tobacco jars and jar lids.” Apparently, the plant was having trouble finding sufficient boys to work, thus, “the company has solved its small help problem by the placing of girls in this department [i.e., tobacco jars and lids] and is getting excellent results.” By that time, the plant was “operating continuously on milks, with one shop making tobacco jars and jar lids” (*Glassworker* 1918:11).

The Thomas Register elaborated in 1918, stating that the plant made “prescription, packers’, and preservers” containers and milk jars, and the same listing continued until at least 1920, when a fruit jar listing first began² (Thomas Publishing Co. 1918:811; 1920:828, 830, 4616; 1921:781, 4572). The firm again increased its capitalization to \$600,000 in September 1921, installed two more Miller machines in August of the following year, and added two machines in October. By 1922, the plant operated two continuous tanks with ten bottle machines (*Bottle Maker* 1922:15; Toulouse 1971:29).

The *Bottle Maker* (1922:15) noted that the Atlantic Bottle Co. was erecting a new plant and building “a new 75 ton tank furnace” at the location of the former Tarentum Glass Co.

¹ The plant probably used Miller machines; those were certainly in use in 1921 – only four years later.

² The location shifted to New York City in 1920, but that probably reflected the sales office rather than a factory.

factory – which had been destroyed by fire a few years earlier. They expected the new plant to be completed by April 1, 1923. This *may* explain the discrepancy present in the existing literature. Toulouse (1971:28), for example, had placed the Atlantic Bottle Co. at Brackenridge, Pennsylvania, while others (e.g., Bristow 1917:1) located the plant at Tarentum. Since the two towns are less than a mile apart, we initially assumed (as did Hawkins 2009:37) that this was a single factory. Possibly, the Brackenridge factory was the earlier one, while the firm built a new plant at Tarentum by early 1923.³

Atlantic Bottle Co., Tarentum, Pennsylvania (1923-1930)

The new factory at Tarentum was not only more modern, it showed great foresight on the part of the directors. The Brackenridge plant was razed by fire in 1923. At its peak, the plant operated 18 machines (although this may have included both factory locations). By 1927, the plant was completely run by machines (two continuous tanks with 12 feeders) and made milk bottles, tobacco and cigar jars (*American Glass Review* 1927:125; Hawkins 2009:37; Toulouse 1971:30). Adams (1927:210) further described the operation:

Each of the melting tanks . . . is equipped with six Miller feeders working in conjunction with the Miller P.D. Geneva model, electric-driven, eight mold, eight blank machine. Bottles from the machines are conveyed to the lehrs by equipment from the Automatic Machinery Company. . . . Natural gas is the fuel used.

One of the tanks had a capacity of 80 tons.

On November 4, 1930, the *Milwaukee Journal* announced that the Owens-Illinois Glass Co. had purchased the Atlantic Bottle Co. The sum was set about \$2,000,000, but “a substantial part of the purchase price is to be in stock of Owens-Illinois.” According to Toulouse (1971:30), the actual date of the purchase was November 25, and the plant continued to be listed as a “unit of Owens-Illinois Glass Co.” in 1931 (*American Glass Review* 1931:79). Toulouse (1971:395) noted an Owens-Illinois plant at Brackenridge from 1932 to 1940, but the initial date is incorrect. The Owens-Illinois annual reports listed the factory from 1930 to 1940, but it was idled in

³ Although this is by no means an absolute identification, we have elected to go with the two-plant hypothesis for explaining the Brackenridge/Tarentum controversy.

August 1931 and remained idle until the factory was reactivated during World War II to make land mine top covers.⁴

Containers and Marks

According to Toulouse (1971:29), in 1918, the Atlantic Bottle Co. “immediately began to install feeders and Miller wide-mouth machines, installing eight machines the first year, and two more the following year, when the adjoining, long-closed Richard & Hartley Glass Co. property was purchased.” Thus, we could expect most, if not all, marked Atlantic Bottle Co. milk bottles to have machine-made characteristics.

ABC

According to Toulouse (1971:28), ABC “letters not punctuated” was a mark used by the Atlantic Bottle Co. from 1918 to 1930. Giarde (1980:10-11) also noted the logo with the same date range, almost certainly following Toulouse. In contrast, Toulouse (1971:28) claimed that the mark *with* punctuation (A.B.C.) was used by the Albion Bottle Co., Ltd., Oldbury, Worcester, England from 1928 to 1969. However, it is unlikely that Giarde would have mistaken a British bottle for one used in the U.S. If this mark actually exists, it is probably found on mouth-blown milk bottles, made during the first two years that the factory was in operation. However, we doubt that this is a valid logo.

A.B.C.2 (1918-1931)

Giarde (1980:10-11) included “A.B.C.2” as a mark used by Atlantic Bottle and dated it, along with the “ABC” mark as being used between 1918 and 1930. However, in his text, he noted that “the A.B.C.2 mark has been confirmed on a variety of milk bottles . . . with dates ranging from 1927 to 1931.” In our sample, the A.B.C.2 mark was embossed, usually, on the

⁴ The World War II manufacturing information was supplied by Russell Hoenig, a former Owens-Illinois employee. Toulouse (1971:30) had noted that the property was sold in 1941, although he maintained that the usable steel was moved to the Owens-Illinois plant at Waco, Texas, in 1943, due to wartime shortages. It seems strange that Owens-Illinois would use steel from a property it had sold two years earlier.



Figure 1 – A.B.C.2 logo on milk bottle heel

front heels – although it appears on the reverse in some cases – and was often low on the heel roll (Figure 1). By at least 1927, Atlantic stamped outlined two-digit date codes on the ejection rods. These left a corresponding mark inside the ejection



Figure 2 – “27” date code in ejection scar (eBay)

(valve) scar on the bottle bases (Figure 2).

The initials, of course, indicated the Atlantic Bottle Co., but the number “2” requires a bit more explanation. Beginning January 1, 1910, the state of New York required “the name or initials and a designating number” to be embossed on the milk bottles by any glass manufacturer wishing to sell dairy containers within its borders (*Orange County Times-Press* 1910). In just a few years, many states required some form of factory logo *and* designated plant number to be embossed on all milk bottles sold within their boundaries. Most glass houses that made milk bottles began including the number as a standard part of their logo – regardless of where their bottles were sold. The Lockport Glass Co. received the number 1, and the Fidelity Glass Co. was granted number “2.” The Atlantic Bottle Co. inherited number “2” when it purchased Fidelity. See Lockhart et al. 2010 for more information on the system.

Although Toulouse (1971:30) stated that Owens-Illinois purchased the Atlantic Bottle Co. on November 25, 1930, we can confirm Giarde’s claim for a 1931 date code. H.P. Hood & Sons required its bottle suppliers to emboss four-digit date codes on its bottles as early as 1904. We have a pint bottle embossed with the A.B.C.2 Massachusetts seal (see below), an A.B.C.2 heelmark, “31” stamped in the ejection scar, and the Hood date of 1931 on the base (Figure 3). Owens-



Figure 3 – “31” date code in ejection scar and “1931” date on base

Illinois likely continued to use the A.B.C.2 logo until it had filled all the existing orders for Atlantic bottles or until the molds wore out. Such one-year dating extensions of bottle marks are fairly common (see Lockhart et al. 2005).

A.B.C.2 Massachusetts Seal

From 1910 to 1947, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts required that all glass factories selling bottles to dairies within the state mark their containers with a Massachusetts seal. From ca. 1914, factories embossed the seal on the shoulder of each milk bottle, usually in a circular form as “MASS (arch) / {factory designator} / “SEAL (inverted arch).” These often appeared in a small circular plate. The mark used by American Bottle was “ABC2” (Blodget 2006:8; Schadlich [ca. 1990]). The use of the logo within the seal most likely reflects Giarde’s original date range of 1918 to 1931 (Figure 4).



Figure 4 – A.B.C.2 Massachusetts Seal

A.B.C.30

Giarde (1980:123) noted a single bottle embossed “A.B.C.30” (probably on the heel) as well as the Inverted-Triangle-T mark on the base. This combination makes no sense. The Inverted-Triangle-T logo was used by the Travis Glass Co., and the Thatcher Mfg. Co. purchased Travis in January 1920. Travis Glass and Atlantic Bottle were located in different states, and there is no reason whatsoever to connect the two logos. It is, of course, remotely possible that Atlantic Bottle somehow received an old Travis baseplate and used it.

The “30” immediately following the “A.B.C.” was similarly unlikely and was probably a misreading or a typographic error by someone. Atlantic Bottle used the number “2” as its manufacturing code. The number “30” had been assigned to the DuBois Glass Co. Unfortunately, we have been unable to determine the ultimate outcome of DuBois. It remains within the bounds of possibility that Atlantic bought DuBois and used the number. Since Giarde received much of his information from a network of collectors, it seems more likely that a communication went askew, and an “A.B.C.2” heelcode with a “30” date code on the base was recorded as “A.B.C.30.”

Discussion and Conclusions

It is virtually certain that the Atlantic Bottle Co. used the A.B.C.2 mark, probably from 1918 to 1930 and that the Owens-Illinois Glass Co. continued to use the logo until the molds wore out or until the factory was idled in August of 1931. In every context we have been able to view, the three initials have had full punctuation and were accompanied by the number “2.” The firm used two-digit date codes on the bases of milk bottles beginning in 1927, and some (possibly all) were stamped on the ejection rod, leaving the numeric code inside the ejection or valve scar. It is possible that some date codes were embossed on baseplates.

We have discovered no evidence for any Atlantic Bottle Co. logos on containers other than milk bottles – although the plant certainly made tobacco jars and some other containers. Since many states required both the glass house logo and an identifying number on milk bottles by at least 1916, and other bottle types had no similar restrictions, it is unlikely that Atlantic bottle embossed its logo on its other containers.

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