

Bell Bottle Co.

Pete Schulz, Bill Lockhart, Beau Schriever, Carol Serr, and Bill Lindsey

The Bell Bottle Co. was a short-lived firm, best known for its milk bottles – even though they appear to be scarce. The firm only made milk bottles for a year and a half at most. Evidence suggests that the firm rarely used manufacturer’s marks on its bottles.

History

Bell Bottle Co., Fairmount, Indiana (1910-1915)

Alvin B. Scott and two associates, John Borrey and a “Mr. Cleveland,” established the Bell Bottle Co. in the summer of 1908. The group took over the plant of the American Window Glass Co. – also known as the Bell Window Glass Co. (founded in 1893) – at Fairmount, Indiana, intent on converting it into a bottle factory. The project, however, languished until the beginning of 1910 (*Commoner and Glassworker* 1908; Toulouse 1971:73; Whitson et al. 1914:714).

In May 1910, Alvin B. Scott, one of the principals of the firm and president of the Model Glass Co. of Summitville, Indiana, acquired the interests of his other associates – John Borrey and Edward Welsch¹ – and incorporated the enterprise with a capital of \$50,000. The firm continued to operate as the Bell Bottle Co. Scott noted that the factory would feature a 12-ring continuous tank, and he expected to have the plant “equipped and ready for operating” within four months (*Commoner and Glassworker* 1910; Giarde 1980:13-14; *National Glass Budget* 1910).

It is unclear how soon production began, but the 1910-1911 blast (i.e., firing of the furnace) reportedly reflected a “prosperous season,” and the fires were banked in May 1911 (Figures 1 & 2). Since later sources generally listed brandy and liquor bottles as the output of the

¹ Edward Welsch may be the actual “Mr. Cleveland” mentioned in the 1908 *Commoner and Glassworker* blurb. Some of the correspondents were less reliable, and this may have been one of them.

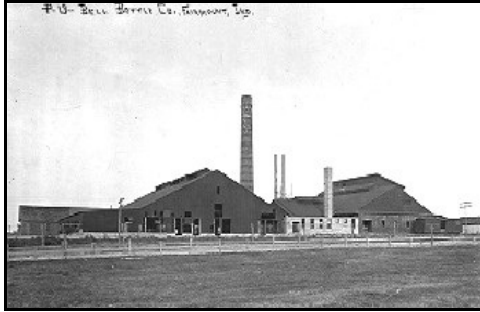


Figure 1 – Bell Bottle Co. (Trent 2011)

factory, we assume that this was the case from the beginning (*Indianapolis Star* 1911a; *Thomas Publishing Co.* 1912:478; 1916:659; *Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913). According to the company letterheads, however, the factory made “panels, prescription bottles” and considered “private molds a specialty” (Roller 1994:23).

The following two blasts, however, were plagued with labor unrest, and these troubles were linked to problems at other plants. In September, 1911, the non-union blowers at Bell struck in the face of wage cutbacks, asserting that they were acting in coordination with workers at other non-union glass plants. Although some returned to work when the owners remained adamant, most did not, and the Glass Bottle Blowers Assn. (GBBA) supported the strikers (*Indianapolis Star* 1911b; 1911c).

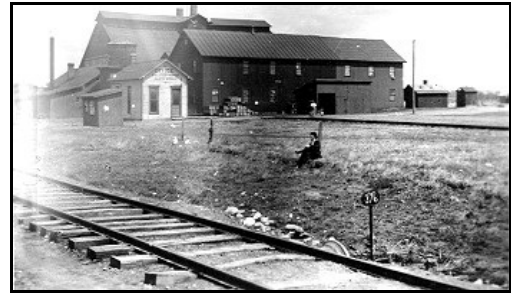


Figure 2 – Bell Bottle Co. (Trent 2011)

By the end of the year, lawlessness as a result of the strike had reportedly “reached a serious stage.” With local police inadequate to the challenge, the sheriff intervened. At the request of local citizens who did not wish “to take sides with the warring factions,” the county officials asserted that they “would enforce the law without fear or favor.” The workers at the Model Glass Co. – Scott’s other operation – were on strike as well. The following spring, the strike spread to the Upland Flint Bottle Co., when blowers there walked out because management attempted to hire strikebreakers from Bell. The impasse was not resolved until the fall of 1913, when the management at Bell and Model recognized the union (*Indianapolis Star* 1911d; 1913; *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette* 1912).

One of the factors that resolved the strike, was the transfer “from a factory at Chicago Heights” of seven union shops equipped with semi-automatic machines in the fall of 1913. This clearly represented the transfer of the milk bottle business from the Chicago Heights Glass Co. (see that section). If all of the machines were involved in milk bottle production, this must have accounted for more than half of the factory’s product. The effort seems not to have gone well. In the fall of 1914, a county inspector in Wisconsin condemned 11,520 Bell milk bottles as being

under volume. Given the number of bottles condemned in this single lot, there is no reason to think this event was unique (*Indianapolis Star* 1913; *Oshkosh Northwestern* 1914).

By 1914, a Stewart Luther of Terre Haute (Alvin's father-in-law) was the president of the firm, with Irvin Scott (Alvin's brother) as vice president, and Alvin B. Scott as secretary, treasurer, and manager. The plant now operated a single continuous tank with 16 rings and employed ca. 400 people. The plant made "bottles of all kinds used in the commercial trade" (Whitson et al. 1914:714).

The firm discontinued making bottles in 1914. At the beginning of 1915, the factory was reported as "closed down indefinitely," its machines were being shipped elsewhere, and 250 men and boys were out of work (*Indianapolis Star* 1915). Toulouse (1971:74) reported that the milk bottle equipment was sold to the Essex Glass Co., Woodbury Glass Co., and Thatcher Mfg. Co.

With the end of bottle manufacture in 1914, the company contracted with the Russian government to manufacture three-inch shells for use in WWI. Alvin Scott soon after formed the Bell Manufacturing Company to manufacture 4.7-inch shells for the U.S. government. In March, 1916, a fire destroyed part of the plant, which was being converted into a munitions factory to make shell casings to meet the demand created by the World War in Europe. It was noted that the plant "had been idle as a glass factory for several months," perhaps an understatement (Dairy Antique Site 2013; *Fort Wayne Sentinel* 1916; *Indianapolis Star* 1915).

Although entries in the Thomas Registers continued through 1919, the listings for the company and its products (brandy and liquor bottles) were unchanged from previous years and may well represent the information lag common to such sources.

Containers and Marks

BBCo (1913-1915)

Toulouse (1971:70, 73) attributed the BBCo mark to the Berney-Bond Glass Co., "circa 1900" but also suggested that the mark was used by the Bell Bottle Co. from 1910 to 1914 on milk bottles. Whitten (2010a) dated the mark 1905-1930 and attributed it to Berney-Bond with a possibility that it was used by either the Bell Bottle Co. (1910-1914) or the Bellaire Bottle Co. of

Bellaire, Ohio. Although Jones (1966:15) suggested Baker Bros. Co. as the user, that company always had an ampersand in the name (Baker Bros. & Co.), and is therefore an unlikely choice (see Baker Brothers section for more details).

Milk Bottles.

According to Giarde (1980:13), the BBCo mark was used by the Bell Bottle Co. Giarde (1980:13-14) also noted that:

Bell extensively manufactured milk bottles during the limited period of 1912 to sometime in 1914 when it sold off its milk bottle machinery. There is some danger of confusing this mark with Berney-Bond Glass Company which was using the same and similar marks during the same time period. Reference to the Berney-Bond entry will disclose that on milk bottles Berney-Bond may not have used the identical mark as Bell. When the mark is BBCO rather than BBGCO, the mark should be attributed to Bell unless other factors cause the manufacturing date to prove inconsistent with the 1912 to 1914 milk bottle period of Bell. It is doubtful that during this period Berney-Bond was making milk bottles.

The Dairy Antique Site (2013) provided further evidence for Bell Bottle as the user of the BBCo logo. The authors

have confirmed [the BBCo] mark on an amethyst milk bottle which would date to the short period from 1912² to 1914 when Bell Bottle Company was manufacturing milk bottles. This same mark has been reported as an early mark of the Berney-Bond Glass Company however since Berney-Bond Glass Company did not manufacture milk bottles until 1920 we believe that if Berney-Bond Glass Company ever used the mark it would not have been on milk bottles.

² The Dairy Antique Site followed the Toulouse (1971:74) report that the milk bottle business of the Sheldon-Foster Glass Company was transferred to the Bell Bottle Company in 1912. Toulouse was off by a year (see the section on the Chicago Heights Glass Co.).

The logo may very well have been used by Bell Bottle on milk bottles for a period of only about a year, between the arrival of the milk bottle equipment from Chicago Heights in the fall of 1913 and the apparent closing of the plant in late 1914 or early 1915.

Catsup Bottles

Curtice Brothers catsup bottles were made with a large variety of manufacturer's marks that are not found on any other bottle types – including other brands of catsup bottles. Although the study of such bottles is in its infancy, it appears that Curtice Brothers required their bottle manufacturers to emboss the initials or logos of the glass houses on bottle bases. This likely began ca. 1900, although it may have been slightly earlier or later. The earliest Curtice Brothers bottles had unmarked bases, but the firm soon required an embossed number. The use of logos or initials followed and continued until such marks had become commonplace on all glass containers. The use of logos began on mouth-blown bottles and continued into the machine era.



Figure 4 – BBCo on a catsup bottle base (eBay)

Although our sample is very small, we have only found BBCo logos in two formats, both on Curtice Brothers catsup bottles (Figure 3) that were mouth blown into a two-piece mold. One was embossed “BB Co 2” in sans serif letters horizontally across the base (Figure 4). Unfortunately, the embossing was weak, and the single numeral may be another number. The other example was embossed on the base with “BBCo” in an

elongated diamond (see next entry).



Figure 3 – Curtice Brothers catsup bottle

Prescription Bottle

We found a single prescription bottle – embossed BBCo on the base – at the Tucson Urban Renewal collection (Figure 5). Since prescription bottles were listed on a Bell Bottle Co. letterhead, this bottle could have been made by Bell. We have not, however, seen the BBCo mark on any liquor bottles – another early type produced by Bell.

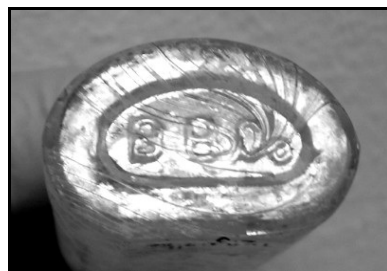


Figure 5 – BBCo on prescription bottle base (Tucson Urban Renewal collection)

Soda Bottles

Caution must be taken if this mark is found on a soda bottle. A BBCo mark was embossed on bottle bases by the Bludwine Bottling Co., Columbia, South Carolina, and clearly indicates the bottling company – *not* a manufacturer. It is highly unlikely that any manufacturing company with BBCo initials ever made soda bottles, so just noting the bottle style should clarify whether BBCo is a manufacturer’s mark on a bottler’s identification. In the case of base fragments, the thickness of the glass should suffice as an indicator of a soda bottle.

BBCo in an elongated diamond

A photo of this mark appeared on an eBay auction for a mouth-blown Curtice Brothers catsup bottle. On this basemark, the two “Bs” expand in size to the center of the diamond, then contract again in “Co.” (Figure 6). We have not found any type of documentary evidence to explain this logo, but this, too, may have been a Bellaire Bottle Co. logo. Also see the entry on catsup bottles above.



Figure 6 – BBCo in a diamond – catsup base (eBay)

6 (milk bottle code) (1913-1915)

A 1916 Wisconsin newspaper reported that “6” was the factory code assigned to the Bell Bottle Co. for use on milk bottles sold in that state. The list of Wisconsin codes published three years earlier did not include Bell, but the 1913 blurb was published in April – probably six months or so prior to the arrival of Bell’s milk bottle machines. The number was therefore

probably assigned later that year. Given other indications that milk bottle production – and possibly all bottle production – ceased at the beginning of 1915, the 1916 newspaper list presumably indicates that the code was still listed for Bell, even though the factory had not used it for over a year (*Stevens Point Journal* 1913; 1916).

Interestingly, Waldron (1913:17) reported that in New Jersey, the number “6” belonged to the Fairmount Bottle Co. of Fairmount, West Virginia. Occasionally, different states gave out the same number to different glass houses. This seems to have eventually been resolved, although the resolution may have waited until one of the firms ceased production. In this case, the Fairmount Bottle Co. was in operation during the same period – closing in 1914 (see the section on Fairmount Bottle Co.).

Discussion and Conclusions

It is highly likely that the Bell Bottle Co. only used logos on its bottles when either state laws or one of its customers required such markings. It is fairly certain that the Curtice Brothers demanded initials or logos from the manufacturer’s of its bottles. There is solid documentary evidence that the state of New York required initials or logos, along with an assigned number, on any milk bottles sold within the state in 1910. By 1913, when Bell Bottle began making milk bottles, at least three states had such a statute, and Bell Bottle had registered in Wisconsin. Its milk bottles were accordingly embossed with the firm’s initials.

Although the Bell Bottle Co. was in business from 1910 to ca. 1915, it only made milk bottles from late 1913 to late 1914 or early 1915. The firm initially made brandy, liquor, and prescription bottles, although it reportedly manufactured “bottles of all kinds” by 1914. We have only found a single prescription bottle with the BBCo mark, but we have discovered the logo on two Curtice Brothers catsup bottles – including an unusual variation inside an elongated diamond. Virtually identical Curtice Brothers bottles, both types solarized to a dark amethyst, had “B.B.” marks (see the Bellaire Glass Co. section).

Hypothesis

Based on our admittedly small sample, we hypothesize that similar bottles for Curtice Brothers catsup were made by three separate firms, each with a different logo:

BBGCo – Berney-Bond Glass Co.

BBCo (in a diamond or alone) – Bell Bottle Co.

B.B. – Bellaire Bottle Co.

The Berney-Bond assignment is fairly obvious due to the inclusion of “Glass” in the name and “G” in the logo. The only catsup bottles we have found with “BBCo” basemarks were mouth blown, and we have discovered no evidence for small-mouth bottle machines at the Bell Bottle Co. Catsup bottles embossed “B.B.” on the base, however, are found in both mouth-blown and machine-made configurations, and the Bellaire Bottle Co. added narrow-mouth machines by at least 1914. This needs to be tested with a larger sample of B.B. and BBCo catsup bottles.

On milk bottles, a BBCo mark would almost certainly belong to the Bell Bottle Co. because there is no evidence that the Bellaire Bottle Co. ever made milk bottles. The lack of an example, of course, is not surprising, considering the short period (fall 1913-late 1914 or early 1915) when the plant made milk bottles and the apparent poor quality of the containers. We would also expect for a milk bottle to be machine made and to include a “6” in the logo – possibly, “BBCo6.”

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