

The California Glass Co. of Pennsylvania

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

The California Glass Co. made bottles and jars sporadically at California, Pennsylvania, during the late 19th century. Despite a lucrative contract to furnish flasks and bottles for the South Carolina Dispensary, the plant was beset by problems that ultimately led to its closing in 1900. Five years later, the factory reopened under new management as the California Bottle Co. This arrangement was more stable, continuing until ca. 1913, when the C.L. Flaccus Glass Co. apparently leased the plant.

History

California Glass Co., California, Pennsylvania (1886-1900)

The earliest name for this firm appears to have been the California Flint Glass Co.¹ The plant – the California Glass Works – began production on October 11, 1886. This was typical of 19th century glass firms, where the operating company had one name, and the factory had another. W.G. McGraw, formerly with the Richards & Hartley Glass Co. of Tarentum, Pennsylvania, was the primary promoter. The company incorporated with a capital of \$20,000 but had problems almost immediately by using pots for its glass that were incompatible with its furnace (Hawkins 2009:104).

The business next had financial difficulties that climaxed in a sheriff's sale on August 16, 1887. The former creditors apparently operated the factory at that point, using a single furnace with ten pots by 1890. The group continued to have problems, and the factory was returned to receivership in March 1892. This business failure probably contributed to the suicide of the plant manager, Jacob V. Auth, who threw himself under a train in July (Hawkins 2009:104; Roller 1997).

¹ Although the original name seems to have been the California Flint Glass Co., the term “Flint” seems to have been dropped after the 1887 sheriff's sale.

Although we have discovered nothing about the managing firm of this incarnation, the factory became a non-union operation in 1896. The following year, the plant was “operating one 10-pot furnace and two tanks of three pot capacity, each, on flint bottles” (*National Glass Budget* 1897b:4). A slightly earlier 1897 list claimed that the plant made flint bottles with 12 pots, but that had increased to 16 pots in 1898 (*National Glass Budget* 1897a:7; 1898:7). The number of pots could vary with each season of operation. The firm gained the lucrative contract to furnish containers for the South Carolina Dispensary in 1898 and 1899.

By 1899, the plant operated one ten-pot furnace and two four-ton tanks. In an uncomfortable repeat of history, the company went bankrupt in August 1900. The court appointed J.A. Letherman and L.T. Claybaugh as receivers, although the factory continued production. The works went up for sale in August, with a full list of real estate and equipment, including five acres of land, a ten-pot furnace, 179 molds, and an unspecified amount of “South Carolina [Dispensary] Quart and Pint Bottles.” Glass factory lists showed the plant as “Not in Operation” in 1900 and 1901 (Hawkins 2009:104; Roller 1997).

California Bottle Co., California, Pennsylvania (1900-ca. 1913)

The plant was probably closed during the period between 1900 and ca. 1905, when Robert Campbell – along with his three sons – purchased the plant and reopened it as the California Bottle Co.² Campbell had learned his glass making skills at the earlier California Glass Co. Although Campbell died in 1909, his sons continued the operation, making a variety of bottles and jars. After his father’s death, Robert Campbell, Jr., became the president of the corporation, with John Campbell as treasurer and Frank Campbell as one of the directors. The factory employed 50 men, including 15 glass blowers, by 1910. The business was never very successful and – like the earlier firm – exclusively made colorless (flint) jars and bottles (Hawkins 2009:104; McFarland 1910:1289).

² McFarland (1910:1289) created some confusion. In one paragraph, he discussed Robert Campbell, Sr., noting that “in 1905 he and his three sons established the California Bottle Company.” The next paragraph discussed Robert Campbell, Jr. – although he failed to make a clear distinction between the two men. He noted about Robert, Jr., that “in 1905 in partnership with his brothers and father, he bought the plant of the California Glass Company.” Thus, the senior Robert Campbell and his sons established the firm.

The California Bottle Co. was not listed in the 1905 or 1907 Thomas Registers but did appear in 1909 at California, Pennsylvania. The firm was last listed in the 1914 Register (Thomas Publishing Co. 1909:202; 1914:532). We have not found the company listed in other sources. Unfortunately, the Register did not list the products the factory made.

The *Charleroi Mail* of February 1, 1913, reported that the plant was preparing to restart in February to make bottles for the Larkin Soap Co. However, the *Glassworker* (1919:1) stated that C.L. Flaccus, owner of the C.L. Flaccus Glass Co. at Tarentum, had leased the California Bottle Co. plant, continuing to operate the works, evidently until 1919. We have found no indication of the final dispensation. It seems likely that the Flaccus lease began after the Larkin Soap contract, possibly later in 1913. The plant likely closed soon after 1919.

Containers and Marks

The California Glass Co. only used a single mark during its sporadic production history.

C.G.Co. (1898-1899)

The C.G.Co. logo – in general – is very difficult to classify. It was used by at least three factories and may have been used by several more. The trick, of course, is deciphering which firms used the mark on which bottles and for how long. The logo was used on soda, beer, and liquor containers. The California Glass Co. is one firm where we have virtually impeccable evidence for the use of a C.G.Co. logo on South Carolina Dispensary bottles and flasks as well as a means to distinguish it from other C.G.Co. marks.

Liquor Containers

The South Carolina State Dispensary regulated all liquor sales within its jurisdiction from 1865 to 1915, and the C.G.Co. mark was almost certainly embossed on bottles due to Dispensary regulations. According to Teal (2005:130), all glass house supplying bottles to the Dispensary were required to have their initials blown into the bottle from 1897 until the system was abandoned.

Freeman (1964:110) listed a flask marked with “C.G.Co.” and both Huggins (1997:11) and Teal (2005:100-108, 149) confirmed that the the C.G.Co. marks on bottles and flasks used by the South Carolina Dispensary were embossed by two separate companies: the Carolina Glass Co. and the California Glass Co. According to Teal (2005:109), the California Glass Co. shipped 14 boxcars full of Jo-Jo pint flasks and round quart Dispensary bottles in 1898 and 1899 (Figure 1).



Figure 1 – Jo-Jo flask with palmetto tree motif (eBay)

Dispensary bottles may be divided into two major embossing styles: the palmetto tree and the SCD monogram logos (see the C.L. Flaccus file for full description). Although there are numerous minor variations of the palmetto tree logos (see Teal 2005:149-176), they are not relevant for this study.



Figure 2 – Round quart with monogram motif (eBay)

The first order (1898-1899) of flasks and bottles from the California Glass Co. were of the palmetto Dispensary logo style (see Figure 1).

In 1899, the Dispensary adopted the monogram style logo (Figure 2). The California Glass Co. produced two carloads of colorless, half-pint and pint Jo-Jo flasks, along with round quart bottles for the Dispensary during that year (Teal 2005:101). As noted above, the glass house still had quite a few unshipped Dispensary containers on hand when it ceased operations. Thus, the California Glass Co. made both types of Dispensary bottles and flasks. In contrast, the later Carolina Glass Co. – using the same initials – only produced the second, monogram style. Therefore, any Dispensary container with the C.G.Co. initials and the palmetto tree motif had to have been made by the California Glass Co.

In addition to the bottle/flask characteristics, the marks used by each company had certain features that help in matching a specific mark to a specific maker. According to Teal (2005:101), both sets of C.G.Co. initials were embossed on the reverse heels of Dispensary flasks in a slight inverted arch, while the round bottles had the mark in a horizontal format (Figures 3 & 4). However, the initials on



Figure 3 – C.G.Co. in an inverted arch – flask heel (eBay)



Figure 4 – Horizontal C.G.Co. on round bottle heel (eBay)

California Glass

Co. bottles and flasks – on either style of Dispensary logo – were notably larger than their counterparts on Carolina Glass Co. containers (Figure 5). In our sample, all of the larger C.G.Co. marks on flasks had a lower-case “o” in “Co.” – although the “O” in “CO” on round bottles was capitalized.

Containers made by the California Glass Co. are notably more scarce than similarly marked bottles and flasks from the Carolina Glass Co. California Glass shipped a total of 16 boxcars full of bottles to the South Carolina Dispensary during the 1898-1899 period. However, the Carolina Glass Co. shipped 1,000 boxcar loads between 1902 and 1906, more than all other manufacturers combined!³ Carolina Glass produced 62.5 times as many bottles as California Glass, so the chances are great that any given bottle will have been made in Carolina. Despite these odds, our sample included several examples from the California Glass Co.



Figure 5 – California (l) and Carolina (r) logos (eBay)

³ Between 1893 and 1906, all companies combined shipped 1,725.5 boxcar loads of bottles to the dispensary. Thus, the Carolina Glass Co. produced 58.1% of all bottles used by the dispensary.

Discussion and Conclusions

We have a positive identification for the use of the C.G.Co. logo – in large-letter version – on bottles and flasks made by the California Glass Co. for the South Carolina Dispensary system during 1898 and 1899. However, we do not know the dispensation of an unspecified quantity of unshipped Dispensary bottles (and/or flasks) that remained at the factory when the firm ceased operations. These were probably destroyed, although we have found no historical reference for such destruction.

Since the Carolina Glass Co. also used the C.G.CO. logo, there is reasonable cause for concern about correct identification. Fortunately, three differences between the logos are apparent. First, the California Glass Co. initials are notably larger than those used by the Carolina firm. Second, with one possible exception, California Glass logos on flasks all had a lower-case “o” in “Co” – while those from Carolina used a capital letter. The upper-case “O” was used on all round quart bottles. Finally, all Carolina bottles had the monogram Dispensary logos, while California Glass containers had both styles. Therefore, all bottles and flasks with palmetto tree Dispensary logos *and* C.G.Co. initials were made by the California Glass Co. It is virtually certain that California Glass did not mark any of its other containers.

Future research should refine the parameters of this study. Our sample was composed mostly of eBay auction photos. With a sample of actual bottles and flasks, future researchers can measure the height of letters on both half-pint and pint flasks as well as round, quart bottles. This could result in a table of logo size comparisons that would allow future archaeologists to date these marks according to manufacturing firm on fragments of Dispensary bottles and flasks.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank the Washington County Historical Society (Pennsylvania) for help with sources for the California Glass Co.

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