

# The Enigmatic F.G.MFG.CO Logo

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

This enigmatic mark has only been reported in two venues – most notably on the bases of bottles for Primley’s Iron & Wahoo Tonic and on a single beer bottle base. Although the contexts for both bottles were during the 1880s to early 1890s, we have been unable to find a single glass house with the correct initials that was open during that period. The manufacturer was almost certainly only open for a brief period of time.

## Containers and Marks

### F.G.MFG.CO (ca. 1883-late 1880s)

As noted in the introduction, we have only discovered two contexts for this manufacturer’s mark: Primley’s Iron & Wahoo Tonic and an export beer bottle.

#### Primley’s Iron & Wahoo Tonic



Figure 1 – F.G.Mfg.Co. logo

A bottle in our possession – square in cross section – was embossed “PRIMLEY’S / IRON & / WAHOO / TONIC” on one of four sunken side panels, “JONES & PRIMLEY CO. / ELKHART, IND.” (read with the finish of the bottle facing left) on the opposite side, and “F.G.MFG.Co” on the base (Figures 1 & 2). The basemark had a few

interesting characteristics. The letters “FG” in “MFG” and “o” in “Co” are smaller than the other letters. The tail on the “G” appears to have been added as an afterthought – as if the engraver used a “C” then



Figure 2 - Primley’s

corrected his mistake. In order to fit the period after the “G,” he then had to place it below the “M” – almost making the “M” appear as if the first leg were longer than the others. Finally, the engraver ran out of room; there was no period after the abbreviation “Co” on the base.

This bottle has all the diagnostic characteristics of a mid-1880s bottle – crudely applied finish, single larger bump air venting (not the later smaller than a pinhead types) on the two shoulders opposite the mold seams, post-mold base, and an off-amber color that one just does not see much after the 1880s. Primley’s bottles with the F.G.MFG.CO marks were also made in some unusual color variations, such as yellow, olive green, or olive amber.

There are two different sizes of the Primley's bottles – about 8 3/4" and 9 1/4" – with the taller one holding probably 25% more than the shorter one. Both sizes are found in versions with the F.G.MFG.CO logo on the post mold base and with smooth, unembossed bases. At least the smooth base large bottles had cup-mold bases, usually with tooled finishes – without a doubt a later mold and bottle than those with the F.G.MFG.CO marks. The smaller size was also made with a smooth base but only in amber or yellowish amber colors. These smaller bottles were also produced with tooled finishes, but the older ones had applied finishes. There is also a large size variation embossed “PRIMLEY’S / IRON & / WAHOO / TONIC” on one sunken side panel and “SHERMAN PRIMLEY” / MILWAUKEE, WIS.” (read with the finish of the bottle facing left) on the opposite side. instead of “Elkhart, IND.” These were only made with unembossed bases.

Paper labels on the bottles identified Jones & Primley, Elkhart, Indiana, as the manufacturers (Fike 1987:236). Griffenhagen and Bogard (1999:123) noted that the F.G.MFG.CO mark was used by Jones & Primley, Elkhart, Indiana, in the 1890s – almost certainly referring to Fike. Seth Jones and Jonathan Primley started the company of Jones & Primley in 1883 at 623 S. Main St., Elkhart, Indiana. On November 14, 1895, Primley retired and his brother, Sherman, bought out Jones. Sherman Primley relocated the business to 306 E. Waters St., Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on June 2, 1897, operating under his own name. By 1902, the plant had moved to 424 S. Washington St., Peoria, Illinois, and apparently remained in business until at least 1911 (Bottle Pickers 2015; Fike 1987:218, 236; Wilson & Wilson 1971).<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Despite misspellings and interesting grammar, information from the Bottle Pickers website came from local newspaper articles and directories – our most accurate source to date.

According to an 1886 wholesale druggist catalog from Chicago, Wahoo (*Euonymus atropurpureus*) was a “tonic, hydragogue, cathartic, diuretic.” and was good for “fevers, dyspepsia, hepatic congestion, and dropsy.” The bark sold at 35 cents a pound but was also available as a powered product (65 cents), Pilular extract (at \$3.60 lb.), Concentration (\$1.10 oz.), Bitter principle (green) at a dollar a gram, and Elixir (at 12 pint bottles for \$10.50) (Frederick Stearns & Co. 1886). Fike (1987:236) also noted that Devner’s book<sup>2</sup> listed an advertisement for Primley’s tonic from 1883.

The above evidence suggests that the applied finish, F.G.MFG.Co bottles date from 1883 to the late 1880s. Bottles embossed “JONES & PRIMLEY Co.” and “ELKHART, IND.” with no embossing on the cup mold bases were probably used from the late 1880s to the move to Milwaukee in 1895. From 1895 to 1902, the bottles were embossed “SHERMAN PRIMLEY” and “MILWAUKEE, WIS.” After 1902, the bottles almost certainly had paper labels – with no embossing.

### **Export Beer Bottle**

Herskovitz (1978:8) noted the FGMfgC<sup>o</sup> mark in his beer bottle section. He found only one example with no accompanying letters or numbers on the base. All bottles and fragments he examined came from Fort Bowie, Arizona, in operation between 1863 and 1894, but he made no guesses as to the manufacturer of this bottle. We have been unable to find this mark listed on beer bottles by any other source. Although Herskovitz recorded the mark with an underlined, superscript “o” in “Co,” all Primley’s bottles (see below) have a normal, lower-case “o.”

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

We have only discovered two glass houses with the correct initials to fit the “F.G.MFG.Co” logo: Farmers Glass Manufacturing Co., Clarksburg, Massachusetts (ca. 1814) and Florida Glass Manufacturing Co., Jacksonville, Florida (1926-1947). Neither of these were open even remotely close to the period when the tonic and beer bottles were made. The

---

<sup>2</sup> A search through both of Devner’s books (1968; 1970) failed to turn up the ad. It is, however, possible that the ad was on a back cover. Both of our copies are photocopied.

“F.G.MFG.CO.” mark must therefore be listed as unknown, although both examples of bottles with the logo may be dated to the ca. 1883-late 1880s period.

## Sources

### Bottle Pickers

2015 “Sherman Primley:primley’s Iron and Wahoo Tonic & Primley’s Sarsaparilla & Primley’s Speddy [*sic*] Cure. [http://www.bottlepickers.com/bottle\\_articles216.htm](http://www.bottlepickers.com/bottle_articles216.htm)

### Devner, Kay

1968 *Patent Medicine Picture*. Tombstone Epitaph, Tombstone, Arizona.

1970 *At the Sign of the Mortar*. Tombstone Epitaph, Tombstone, Arizona.

### Fike, Richard E.

1987 *The Bottle Book: A Comprehensive Guide to Historic, Embossed Medicine Bottles*. Peregrine Smith Books, Salt Lake City.

### Frederick Stearns & Co.

1886 *Retail Druggist Diary and Want Book 1886*. Frederick Stearns & Co., Detroit, Michigan.

### Griffinshagen, George and Mary Bogard

1999 *History of Drug Containers and Their Labels*. American Institute of the History of Pharmacy, Madison, Wisconsin.

### Herskovitz, Robert M.

1978 *Fort Bowie Material Culture*. University of Arizona Press, Tucson.

### Wilson, Bill and Betty Wilson

1971 *19<sup>th</sup> Century Medicine in Glass*. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Hobby & Publishing Co., Washington, DC

Last updated 7/15/2015