

The W.G.Co. Mark

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

As occasionally happens, we have discovered a variety of bottles with “W.G.Co.” heel or base marks. Because we have a plethora of glass houses with the initials, the user of the mark is not intuitively obvious. A bit of research disclosed that the Woodbury Glass Co. used the logo on milk bottles – along with the number “8” – so our search continued on the other bottle types with the mark. Several glass houses made the types of bottles that we have found with the logos, so whittling down candidates was process with no final perfect conclusion.

Containers and Marks

W.G.CO.

Jones (1966:18) noted the “WGCo” mark and suggested both Westford Glass Co. (1857-1876) and Wellington Glass Co. as possible users of the mark. Since she was the first to attempt manufacturer’s mark identification, she often guessed at the only glass houses she knew with the right initials. In this case, she was clearly off the (if you will pardon the expression) mark. Toulouse (1971:538) showed “WG” and “WGCo” marks that he listed under “maker and user unknown.” He stated that these marks were “found on separate bottles, which may or may not have any relationship with each other. These are unknown as to meaning.” Unfortunately, these cryptic remarks failed to describe what *type* of bottle he meant, leaving us no clue as to his intentions.

In addition, Toulouse (1971:538) identified another “WGCo” mark as belonging to the Wightman Glass Co., Parker’s Landing, Pennsylvania – without, of course, noting the type of bottle. He dated the mark ca. 1900 to 1930. Kroll (1972:4) also mentioned Wightman – without explaining his reasoning. He stated that “WGCo” “most likely refers to Wisconsin Glass Co., but could also mean Wrightman [*sic*] Glass Co., Parker’s Landing, Pa., 1900-1930.” His dates were almost certainly derived from Toulouse. Hawkins (2009:525, 527) also identified the mark as used by Wightman – again without explanation.

In published sources, on eBay, and through our own observation, we have discovered “W.G.CO.” marks on beer, soda, prescription, and milk bottles as well as on fruit jars. With a single exception (see milk bottles below), all of these marks had three things in common: 1) the “G” always had the same downward serif or “tail” (as opposed to the more common left-extending serif); 2) the “O” in “CO” was always capitalized; and 3) the mark had complete punctuation. With the exception of milk bottles (that exhibit ejection or valve scars) and Coca-Cola bottles, there are no indications in either photos or bottles we have examined for machine manufacture. Each bottle type needs to be addressed separately.

Beer Bottles

Although it is certain that all variations of the “WGCo” mark accompanied by “MILW” were made by the Wisconsin Glass Co. of Milwaukee, Ayres et al. (1980) illustrated a single variation with “W.G.CO.” in a slight arch (note capital “O” in “CO” – unlike the lower-case “o” in the Wisconsin Glass mark).¹ Unlike the Wisconsin marks, this one did not wrap around the outside edge of the post mold and had no city designation (Figure 1).



Figure 1 – Beer arch

When the Bottle Research Group (BRG) examined the Tucson Urban Renewal (TUR) collection at the Arizona State Museum in 2006, we discovered that the 26-ounce “quart” export beer bottle with the “W.G.CO.” mark was, indeed, different from those made by the Wisconsin Glass Co. All of the Wisconsin bottles had one-part applied finishes. The “W.G.CO.” bottle was made with a tooled crown finish. Since then, we have found another example with the same basal marking (including a “6” below the mark on both bottles) but with a one-part tooled finish. However, there are some noticeable differences in the mold marks between these two bottles. The “C” is especially different – much wider on the TUR bottle.

In addition, eBay sellers have provided several examples of “W.G.CO.” marks on beer bottles, and one of our members photographed a base with the mark at a bottle house wall. From these sources, it is obvious that the mark appeared in at least three formats:

¹ Ayres and his associates examined bottles from the TUR collection discussed in the next paragraph.

1. W.G.CO. horizontally across the center of the base; no other markings [Baltimore Loop finish] (Figure 2)

2. W.G.CO. in a slight arch across the center of the base with a dot below [finish unknown] (Figure 3)

3. W.G.CO. in a slight arch above the center; with a single-digit number below (at least 1-8) [Baltimore Loop, one-part (cork), and Crown finishes] (see Figure 1)



Figure 2 – Beer horizontal (eBay)

Although our sample is small, the third variation appears to be the most common. Some of the center-marked bottles were double stamped. This was a phenomenon associated with some mouth-blown beer bottles made during the ca. 1895-1914 period.

An eBay seller offered a beer bottle embossed “THE LAIS BR’G. CO. (arch) / NORWALK, O. (inverted arch)” in a plate. The base was embossed “W.G.CO.” The Lais Brewing Co. was only open under that name from 1905 to 1912 (VanWieren 1995:285). Von Mechow (2018) listed five beer bottles and two soda bottles embossed with the “W.G.CO.” basemark and ascribed them to the Wormser Glass Co. All of these had tooled finishes – not associated with the Wisconsin Glass Co.



Figure 3 – Beer dot (eBay)

Soda Bottles

Auctions on eBay have included photographs of the “W.G.CO.” mark on two cursive, straight-sided Coca-Cola bottle bases (one amber in color, one aqua). Both marks were in inverted-arch formats on the base below a cursive “Coca-Cola” horizontally across the center (Figure 4). Straight-sided Coke bottles were generally used between ca. 1902 and the early 1920s (occasional later exceptions), and amber bottles were generally only used in the early to mid-teens (see Munsey 1972:20-25 for a discussion of how the Coca-Cola bottling process began).



Figure 4 – Coca-Cola (eBay)

Bill Porter (personal communication, 11/15/2010) reported that “W.G.CO.” was embossed on the bases of three straight-sided Coke bottles. One, from Richmond, Virginia, was amber in color and mouth blown. The other two, from Wilmington, Delaware and Statesville, North Carolina, were aqua in color and machine made.

The mark also appeared on the heels of some bottles. An eBay auction included a photo of “W.G.CO.” on the heel of a Hutchinson-style soda bottle from an Ohio soda bottler. Another heelmark was embossed on a Red Raven Splits bottles (hangover cure). Hutchbook (Fowler 2020) noted two Hutchinson bottles with “W.G.CO.” marks and suggested that the Wisconsin Glass Co. was the manufacturer – without explaining why.

Prescription Bottles

Hawkins (2009:525) noted that the “W.G.CO.” mark was embossed on the bases of some prescription bottles. We have two photographs (eBay) of the mark horizontally embossed on the base of different colorless Maine prescription bottles, and one on eBay was reported from Brooklyn (Figure 5). Prescription bottles with the “W.G.CO.” mark have been dug by collectors in Pittsburgh.



Figure 5 – Prescription (eBay)

Milk Bottles

Giarde (1980:139-140) dated the mark 1900-1930 and claimed that the Wightman Glass Co. was the maker. He noted that “in the early 1900’s the company manufactured some milk bottles. The extent of their milk bottle manufacture and the duration remains presently unknown.” Occasional milk bottles marked with WGCO have been offered on eBay, but only one auction included a photo of the mark. The photo actually showed a mark of “W.C.CO.” in very large letters, a size generally reserved for initials that referred to the dairy rather than the manufacturer.

In 2005, we recorded three milk bottles, all from the same Jersey Farm Dairy at Fresno, California, each embossed with a heel mark of 8 / W.G.CO. Each bottle had either nothing to the right the mark or had a 2 or 3, and all had an 8 inside the ejection ring on the base (Figure 6).

The “8” solidly identified the bottle as being made by the Woodbury Glass Co., despite the physical distance involved. The State of Wisconsin issued the number “8” to the Woodbury Glass Co. by at least 1916 (*Stevens Point Journal* 1916). An eBay auction offered a milk bottle embossed with “No.8 one pint, 8 Minn, T 8 W.G.Co.” All of these bottles were machine made. See the section on the Woodbury Glass Co. for more information.



Figure 6 – Milk (California Parks)

Fruit Jars

Creswick (1987:220) showed two grooved-ring wax-sealer fruit jars, one embossed “W.G.&Co.” on the base, the other “W.G.Co.” She made no attempt to identify the maker of either jar. Unfortunately, Creswick only illustrated the “WG&Co” basemark above a cross or plus (+) sign. The mark was in a slight arch, matching the “W.G.CO.” arch on some beer bottle bases. For our purposes, the “W.G.Co.” mark would have been a better illustration, so we could compare it to the beer base marking. Since neither Creswick nor the BRG have found a good candidate for the “WG&Co” mark, it could well be a mis-strike that was intended to be “W.G.Co.” Roller (1983:379) also listed the wax sealer with “W.G.Co.” embossed on the base and also neglected to speculate on either the date or the maker. Unfortunately, he, too, failed to illustrate the mark. Since wax sealers were made between 1850 and the 1920s, the period was too long to be of any use in our assessment.

Glass House Histories

The following few glass factory histories are presented to provide examples of the information we have about many of these firms. This is not an exhaustive list of “WGCo” plants or their products. The ones below, however, were the factories with the correct initials that were in business during the ca. 1898-1915 period – the most likely time when bottles bearing the mark were produced.

Wagner Glass Co., Ingalls, Indiana (1895-1908)

Henry Wagner, John F. Wagner, and C. Thompson incorporated the Wagner Glass Co. at Ingalls, Indiana, in April 1895. Their earliest letterhead advertised prescription vials, flasks, and ointment jars. The plant added brandy bottles by at least 1897 and used two six-ton tanks at that point. In early September of that year, the Wagner Glass Co. purchased the Quick City Glass Co., of Frankton, Indiana. By 1899, the factory used one furnace with 10 pots and one continuous tank with six rings to make its products, which included flint prescription bottles, druggists' ware, flasks, medicine and packers' ware. The firm added fruit jars by at least 1902 (Roller 1994:30, 49; 1998).

By 1904, the plant had added a second continuous tank (while retaining the furnace), bringing the total rings to 16 and adding liquor ware to the inventory. The International Glass Co. purchased the holdings in mid-1905. The company continued to be listed in some sources until 1908, although the listing often included "out of operation" as early as 1906. It is likely that the factory actually ceased production in 1905 (Roller 1994:50; 1998; *American Glass Review* 1934:155).

Warwick Glass Co., Warwick, Ohio (1902-ca. 1909, possibly as late as 1915)

The Warwick Glass Co. was a short-lived company that made beer and mineral water at Warwick, Ohio. The company was only listed in directories for 1902 and 1903 (Roller 1996). In 1902, the plant used 12 pots to make its glass (*National Glass Budget* 1902:11).

The company was a corporation that made beer and wine bottles at two day tanks with 12 rings by 1904 (*American Glass Review* 1934:163). The plant made soda, beer, wine, brandy, and proprietary medicine bottles from 1905 to at least 1909, but it was no longer listed in 1912 (Thomas Publishing Co. 1905:104; 1907:159; 1909:201). Lehner (1978:67) dated the company ca. 1903-1915. She claimed that the company made "bottles in greenish blue bottle glass and amber."

Thomas Wightman Glass Co., Pittsburgh and Parkers Landing (1893-1917)

Upon the death of Moses Lorenz in 1871, Thomas Wightman became the sole owner of a series of Pittsburgh glass houses, renaming his business Thomas Wightman & Co. After starting a new plant at Parker, Wightman had closed all the Pittsburgh factories and moved his headquarters to the new location by 1883. He began expanding the business, changing the name to Thomas Wightman Glass Co. but retired in 1907. At that point, four of his sons divided the two factories between them, and one left in 1913 to make his own territory. James and Algernon Wightman (sons of Thomas) renamed the Parker plant as the Wightman Glass Co. in 1907 and produced bottles until 1915, when all but one of the remaining Wightman sons had retired – the final one following in 1917. See the section on the Wightman glass companies for more information.

Williamstown Glass Co., Williamstown, New Jersey (ca. 1904-1917)

Joel F. Bodine became a partner of Gabriel Isard at the Williamstown Glass Works, Williamstown, New Jersey, in 1839, taking over the operation in three years. In 1846, he brought his sons into the business, operating as Bodine & Sons. When the senior Bodine retired in 1855, the works became Bodine & Brothers – although the family split at that time, one branch moving to Bridgeton, New Jersey, operating as Potter & Bodine. Although the Williamstown branch went through more changes, it eventually emerged as the Williamstown Glass Co. in 1904, producing a general line of bottles. By 1915, however, the plant had reduced its primary line to beer bottles, and increasing Prohibition led to the closing of the factory in 1918. See the section on the Bodine Glass Companies for more information.

Woodbury Glass Co., Parker, Indiana (1893-1904)

Woodbury Glass Co., Winchester, Indiana (1904-1920)

Woodbury Glass Co., Shirley, Indiana (1910-1915)

The Woodbury Glass Co. incorporated in 1893 and made a variety of bottles. In 1904, the plant made prescription, proprietary, and packers' bottles. When the Parker factory burned in 1904, the firm moved its operation to Winchester, Indiana. By 1915, the firm had added liquor bottles to the list and used machines as well as hand production – and shifted most of its

production to milk bottles that year. Woodbury sold the operation to the Thatcher Mfg. Co. in 1920. There is no question that Woodbury used the “W.G.CO.” logo on the heels of milk bottles between 1915 and 1919 – but no evidence that it had used any mark prior to that time. See the section on the Woodbury Glass Works for more information.

Wormser Glass Co., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (ca. 1885-1928)

Ephraim Wormser partnered with Jacob Burgraff and William Frank in 1854 as Wormser, Burgraff & Co. to build the Pittsburgh Green Glass Works. Burgraff left the partnership in 1857, and the firm became E. Wormser & Co. Wormser traded his share to Frank in 1866, and William Frank & Son operated the factory until it closed in the late 1870s. In late 1882, Wormser reentered the glass business as E. Wormser & Co., Ltd., building a new plant at Pittsburgh.

Around 1884, he reorganized as the Wormser Glass Co. The plant made a variety of bottles but seems to have specialized in beer bottles during first and second decades of the 20th century. The advent of Prohibition in 1920 may have adversely affected the firm, forcing its closure for several years. By 1927, the firm was again listed as the Wormser Co., Inc., producing a variety of bottles. The sources debated the final closure of the plant, although it was ca. 1928. For more information, see the section of the Wormser Companies.

Discussion and Conclusions

The company number (8) clearly identified Woodbury as the user of the “W.G.Co.” mark on milk bottles. The plant began making milk containers in 1915, and this was almost certainly the reason why Thatcher bought the plant in 1920. Since Woodbury was therefore certainly a user of the W.G.CO. logo, it is tempting to identify the firm as *the* user of the mark. However, we need to look at the other bottle styles.

The 26-ounce “quart” export beer bottles were first used in 1873 but were pretty much phased out by ca. 1915 in favor of 12-ounce bottles and occasional actual 32-ounce quart bottles. Applied finishes were the industry standard until ca. 1896 and probably continued to be made for a few years after that. Tooled finishes began phasing in ca. 1890 or so but were uncommon until

at least 1895. By 1900, they had become the industry standard. The crown finish was patented in 1892 but did not become popular on beer bottles until ca. 1900 or later in some areas. The Baltimore Loop finish was used between 1885 and ca. 1905 (Lockhart 2007:53-56). Significantly, the “W.G.Co.” mark was not listed on the bottles or bases found at any of the Western forts where we have found existing reports. All of these closed during the 1890s. In addition, we have only found double-stamped bases on bottles made during the ca. 1895-1915 period. Thus, the “W.G.Co.” mark was probably used on beer bottles sometime between ca. 1898 and ca. 1915, although it could have been used slightly earlier or slightly later.

Although the drug store (prescription) bottles could have been made any time between the late 1870s and 1924, the straight-sided Coke bottles were mainly used between ca. 1900 and ca. 1920. The amber bottles were only used during the early to mid-teens. Currently, we have no way to date the fruit jars.

We have discovered a total of 19 factories with “W.G.CO.” initials, but most of these can be eliminated easily (wrong dates of operation, did not make bottles, etc.), and these were not included in our discussion of glass houses with the correct initials above. However, eight companies with the correct initials were in business during the ca. 1898-1915 period when bottles bearing the mark were likely used. These firms (all summarized above) were:

Wagner Glass Co., Ingalls, Indiana (1895-1908)
Warwick Glass Co., Warwick, Ohio (1902-ca. 1909, possibly as late as 1915)
Thomas Wightman Glass Co., Pittsburgh (1893-1917)
Williamstown Glass Co., Williamstown, New Jersey (ca. 1904-1917)
Woodbury Glass Co., Parker, Indiana (1893-1904)
Woodbury Glass Co., Winchester, Indiana (1904-1920)
Woodbury Glass Co., Shirley, Indiana (1910-1915)
Wormser Glass Co., Pittsburgh (ca. 1885-ca. 1928)

The similarities of the marks suggest that beer, soda, and prescription bottles were all made by the same company (although the marks of these three types also look like the ones on milk bottles). We simply have too little information about the fruit jars to tell whether they should also be included. So, assuming that a single company was the user of the mark on beer,

soda, and prescription bottles, the factory had to have made both green (aqua) and amber glass, as well as soda and beer bottles, prescription bottles, and (possibly) grooved-ring wax-sealer fruit jars – either during the same period or sequentially with machine production.

A comparison of these characteristics is revealing. Table 1 shows that the Wightman factory was highly unlikely to have made the types of glass and bottles that are associated with the W.G.CO. mark. According to Hawkins (2009:523), Wightman produced amber and aqua containers during the 1893-1900 period, although Wightman specialized in prescription bottles. Woodbury, Williamstown, and Wormser fit all categories.

Table 1a – W.G.CO. Mark Contenders

Categories	green & amber	soda & beer	medicinal	fruit jars
Wagner	no	no	yes	yes
Warwick	green (prob. amber)	yes	no	no
Wightman	no	no	yes	no
Williamstown	almost certainly	yes	some	yes
Woodbury	no	no	yes	no
Wormser	yes	yes	yes	yes

Both the Woodbury Glass Works and the Williamstown Glass Co. certainly produced beer, soda, and prescription bottles during the correct period. Woodbury began specializing in milk bottles toward the end of its reign, leading the powerful Thatcher Mfg. Co. to purchase the firm in 1920. There is no evidence that Woodbury used a mark of any kind until forced to do so as a milk bottle producer in 1915. See the section of the Woodbury Glass Works for more information.

The Williamstown Glass Co. was the final firm operated by the Bodine family. In its long tenure as a glass producer, the Bodine family only marked its name on fruit jars and a few early sodas. Toward the end of its business life, the firm specialized in beer and liquor bottles, leading to its demise at the beginning of Prohibition.

Wormser had a somewhat different story. The plant began using the Wormser Glass Co. name ca. 1884. However, the plant had a period of idleness and apparently began a different production set when it resumed business in 1899 – making beer, soda, prescription, and other containers. By at least 1909, the factory began specializing in beer bottles, apparently leading to a closing in 1918. Production of beer and soda bottles would have extended for 19 years.

Geographically, we have beer and soda bottles from Ohio, a beer bottle from Iowa, a beer bottle from Wisconsin, and two drug store bottles from Maine – hardly a cluster effect. Wormser (Pittsburgh – western Pennsylvania) was in a much better position to have served the Midwestern states – both via railroad and canal/lake systems. Williamstown – in southern New Jersey, just south of Philadelphia – would have been better able to have served Maine (by sea), but would have been at a disadvantage with the Midwestern states.

Although this remains somewhat inconclusive, Wormser had a slight edge geographically, and von Mechow (2020) and Hawkins (2009) suggested Wormser as the user of the mark. Wormser also had the strongest showing in Table 1. Although our reasoning is somewhat intuitive rather than purely objective, we agree with Hawkins and von Mechow that Wormser was the most likely user of the “W.G.CO.” logo.

Finally, it is entirely possible that the wax-sealer fruit jars were made by a different company from the one that made the other bottle types. However, since production of this type of jar extended into the 20th century, either Williamstown or Wormser may have briefly made the jars. Wormser may even have produced the jars prior to its ca. 1891 period of idleness.

Future research should concentrate on the discovery of a larger sample of bottles with both the “W.G.CO.” logo and a city/state designation for each end user. A large enough sample should give us a good picture of geographical location – which may lead to the discovery of which company used the mark.² In addition, a photo or an actual fruit jar with the W.G.CO. mark would possibly show a similarity to (or major difference from) the logos used on beer,

² Kroll (1972) actually provided a large sample of Wisconsin beer bottles and was kind enough to note manufacturer’s marks. Out of ca. 917 entries, only two (pages 49 and 116) had the W.G.CO. mark – and both were rare. It is safe to say that the W.G.CO. mark on Wisconsin bottles can be considered outliers.

soda, and drug store bottles. Finally, future research may uncover some evidence that will either make a more positive case for the marks all being used by a single firm or show that more than one firm used the logo.

Acknowledgments

Our gratitude to Wanda Wakkinen for proofreading our endless studies.

Sources

American Glass Review

1934 Glass Factory Yearbook and Directory. *American Glass Review*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Includes reprint of the Glass Trade Directory for 1904. Commoner Publishing Co., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Ayres, James E., William Liesenbien, Lee Fratt, and Linda Eure

1980 “Beer Bottles from the Tucson Urban Renewal Project, Tucson, AZ.” Unpublished manuscript, Arizona State Museum Archives, RG5, Sg3, Series 2, Subseries 1, Folder 220.

Creswick, Alice

1987 *The Fruit Jar Works, Vol. I, Listing Jars Made Circa 1820 to 1920's*. Douglas M. Leybourne, N. Muskegon, Michigan.

Fowler, Ron

2020 “Hutchinson Bottle Directory.” Seattle History Co., Hutchbook.com.
<http://www.hutchbook.com/Bottle%20Directory/>

Giarde, Jeffery L.

1980 *Glass Milk Bottles: Their Makers and Marks*. Time Travelers Press, Bryn Mawr, California.

Hawkins, Jay W.

2009 *Glasshouses & Glass Manufacturers of the Pittsburgh Region, 1795-1910*.
iUniverse, Inc., New York.

Jones, May

1966 *The Bottle Trail, Volume 6*. Nara Vista, New Mexico. [MM, S,]

Kroll, Wayne, L.

1972 *Wisconsin Breweries and Their Bottles*. Privately Published, Jefferson, Wisconsin.

Lehner, Lois

1978 *Ohio Pottery and Glass Marks and Manufacturers*. Wallace-Homestead Books
Co., Des Moines, Iowa.

Lockhart, Bill

2007 "The Origins and Life of the Export Beer Bottle." *Bottles and Extras* 18(3):49-57,
59.

Munsey, Cecil

1972 *The Illustrated Guide to the Collectibles of Coca-Cola*. Hawthorn Books, New
York.

National Glass Budget

1902 "Complete List of Glass Factories in the United States and Canada." *National Glass
Budget* 17(52):11.

Roller, Dick

1983 *Standard Fruit Jar Reference*. Privately published.

1994 *Indiana Glass Factories Notes*. Acorn Press, Paris, Illinois.

1996 "Massillon, OH Historical Notes." Unpublished manuscript on file at the Massillon
Museum, Massillon, Ohio.

1998 “Ingalls, IN History Notes.” Dick Roller files.

Stevens Point Journal

1916 “Milk and Cream Bottles.” *Stevens Point Journal* [Stevens Point, WI] August 18, 1916:2.

Thomas Register of American Manufacturers

1905-1906 *The Buyers' Guide: Thomas' Register of American Manufacturers and First Hands in all Lines*. Thomas Publishing Co., New York.

1907-1908 *Thomas' Register of American Manufacturers and First Hands in all Lines: The Buyers Guide*. Thomas Publishing Co., New York.

1909 *Thomas' Register of American Manufacturers and First Hands in All Lines: A Classified Reference Book for Buyer and Sellers*. Thomas Publishing, New York.

Toulouse, Julian Harrison

1971 *Bottle Makers and Their Marks*. Thomas Nelson, New York.

Van Wieren, Dale

1995 *American Breweries II*. East Coast Brewiana Association, West Point, Pennsylvania.

Von Mechow, Tod

2020 “Soda & Beer Bottles of North America: Bottle Attributes - Beer & Soda Bottle Manufacturers.” <http://www.sodasandbeers.com/SABBottleClosures.htm>

Last updated 10/2/2020