

Chapter 10

Conclusions



Willie Terrazas and Bill Lockhart – Looking at Willie’s collection in El Paso – 2011

Bill Lockhart
2015

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Although this study has focused on the prescription bottles of El Paso, Texas, it has also strayed into the areas of distilled water, “other” bottles, and containers from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico. Since this is my last book on El Paso bottles, I wanted to include everything that was not in my earlier books.

Prescription Bottles

The history of El Paso is rich in drug store information, bottles, and paraphernalia. I have been told that my collection of embossed drug store containers from El Paso was the most complete in existence. Despite that claim, I am certain that the bottles in this volume have only scratched the surface of marked containers used by the El Paso druggists. In addition, very few of the early bottles that were only marked with paper labels have survived.

Nineteenth century prescription bottles have a very low survival rate after deposition. They were produced during a time when the only way to make glass strong was to use more of it. Since prescription bottles were intended for single use and were not expected to be stored for long periods, they were made with thin glass walls. In addition, these early containers were mouth blown, so the glass distribution was frequently uneven. One side or corner could be *much* thinner than the rest of the bottle. This lack of consistency, coupled with thinness of walls, made destruction easy. Just the deposition of the bottles frequently caused breakage. Most of these did not survive intact in the archaeological record. Collectors use the term “attic mint” to describe the highest quality of bottles, and that is an apt descriptor. Two bottles in my collection described in this work were embossed as well as having the original paper labels. These virtually certainly came from someone’s attic or medicine cabinet.

I have also included a type of bottle that most collectors ignore, and most archaeologists never see. These were generic prescription bottles with paper labels. This type was probably the most common during all time periods, but they were generally the only solution after ca. 1925.

An exception was the occasional bottle with Applied Color Lettering. This was the most common form of labeling on soda bottles and milk bottles after 1940, but the process never caught on with prescription bottles. I have only seen a single example from southern New Mexico (Alamogordo) and none from El Paso.

Because this is not a representative collection, there were certainly other bottles in use, and many of those will surface as time passes. Collectors will find new examples – maybe even some that are attic mint – and archaeologists will excavate new ones. There are certainly other variations in El Paso houses right now. The future will always provide new information. Fortunately, there are several collections of El Paso city directories available and a rich fount of growing information on the internet.

Distilled Water Bottles

There were never many embossed distilled water bottles in El Paso, although there were certainly more variations than I have presented. Few seem to have survived, and I have only personally seen two of them. Table water bottles are even rarer, probably because they were only marked with paper labels. Again, more will appear in the future.

“Other” Bottles

Of course, this is a catch-all category that includes almost anything I did not deal with in the El Paso soda, beer, or milk bottle books. These bottles included oils, lotions, perfumes, iron filings, and almost any household product you can imagine. I have also added virtually any type of container that I ran across, including tin and paper cans or occasional cardboard products. As with the other categories, many more of these will surface in the future – although very few will be identifiable in excavations.

Bottles from Juárez

This is another catch-all category. I included any bottles I found from Juárez – excluding the beer and liquor containers and trays that I dealt with in the brewery book. Again, many new items will appear in the future.

A Personal Note

I finish this study with mixed feelings. This final book coincides with my final semester teaching at the Alamogordo campus of New Mexico State University. It is time to retire and time to move on to other fields of investigation – still within the umbrella of bottles, of course. From this vantage point, I am glad to be finished and turning my energy more into the study of manufacturer's marks on glass containers.

On the other hand, I am sad to see it end. The University of Texas at El Paso introduced me to archaeology and to the sub-field of bottles as an undergraduate in the early 1990s. When John Peterson hired me as a work study and gave me the task of washing and cataloging 379 bottles that had been excavated from the El Paso Coliseum parking lot, neither of us had an inkling of what an interesting door had been opened. El Paso has been good to me. Moving from Northern Virginia, it was the land of opportunity – including returning to college at the age of 44. The study of El Paso bottles has been an important part of my life for more than two decades. Although I will continue perusing eBay, I will never be as strongly involved again. It has been a good life.

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