

The Fairmont Bottle Co. and the Johns Brothers

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The Johns brothers, a West Virginia glass family, were involved in a series of three glass firms, all located at Fairmont, West Virginia, between 1892 and 1912. Although the initial firm – the Fairmont Bottle & Glass Co. – quickly dissolved into bankruptcy, John’s Bros. (1893-1906) was more successful, primarily producing fruit jars, soda and beer bottles. The final firm -- the Fairmont Bottle Co. – was a reorganization to form a corporate structure. Although the brothers attempted a move to machine-made milk bottles in 1905, the early machines were unsuccessful, and they never attempted to adopt others. By 1912, mouth-blown soda and beer bottles were obsolete, and the firm closed rather than shifting to automation.

Histories

The Johns family operated three different firms – all at the same location – during the 1892-1912 period.

Fairmont Bottle & Fruit Jar Co., Fairmont, West Virginia (1892-1894)

On February 14, 1888, John B. Johns and Robert Johns, both living in Massillon, Ohio, applied for a patent for a “Fruit-Jar” and received Patent No. 381,250 on April 17, 1888 (Figure 1). The patent document discussed the problems with wax-sealer fruit jars and how their new design would be the solution. This suggests that the brothers worked at Reed & Co., a glass factory that opened in 1880 (see the Reed & Co. section for more information about the firm).

The Johns family immigrated to the U.S. from Wales in 1863 and worked in bottle factories in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Findlay, Ohio, before moving to Fairmont, West Virginia, in 1892. E.J. Bebee, Robert Johns, Jonathan R. Johns,

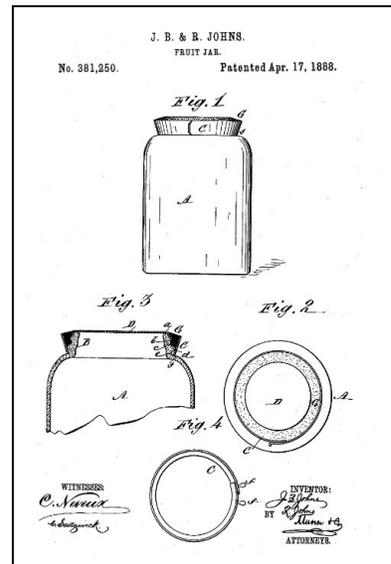


Figure 1 – Johns Bros 1888 patent

Jonathan E. Beebe, and Abram Kesley incorporated the Fairmont Bottle & Fruit Jar Co., on April 26, 1892. The plant had a single nine-ring tank, although it was not operational, however, until October. John E. Johns, possibly the father, was also involved (*Times West Virginian* 1998; Roller 1997; Six 1994:48-49; 1995:781; von Mechow 2015). An ad in the January 24, 1894, issue of *China, Glass & Lamps* still used the Fairmont Bottle & Fruit Jar Co. name and placed E.J. Beebe as president and Robert Johns as secretary.

The short-lived company went bankrupt. The Marion County Intermediate Court appointed W.B. McGregor as receiver for the company on October 21, 1893, but the firm renewed operations under an agreement with McGregor on January 15 of the following year. By that time, the factory operated two new tanks, although liabilities were set at \$30,000. By September 1894, however, the Fairmont Development Co. had absorbed the plant (Roller 1997).

Containers and Marks

The Fairmont Bottle & Fruit Jar Co. advertised “Fruit Jars, Oil Cans [actually glass containers] and Green and Amber Bottles of All Kinds” – although, the bottles were predominantly beer and soft drink containers. Along with the house specialty, THE COLUMBIAN, the plant made Mason jars and grooved-ring wax-sealer fruit jars (which they called STANDARDS).

F.B.&F.J.CO. (1892-1894)

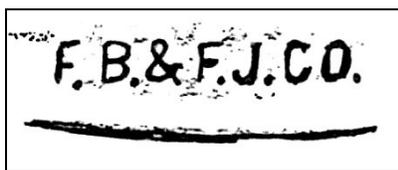


Figure 2 – FB&FJCo rubbing (Dean Six)

Rydquist (2002:5) noted the “FB&FJCo” mark “on a [Baltimore] Loop beer or soda,” and Dean Six (personal communication) maintained a rubbing of the F.B.&F.J.CO. mark on the heel of a beer bottle from the Reymann Brewing Co. (Figure 2). Peterson (1968:47) claimed a date of 1893 for the Fairmount [*sic*] Bottle & Fruit Jar Co., and he typically obtained his information from trademark records. The plant was in business from 1892 to 1893 (see



Figure 3 – FB&FJCo arch (eBay)

History section above). Von Mechow (2015) listed eight examples, all on beer bottle bases. Two were embossed in an arched format (Figure 3), but the other six were horizontal across the center, three with single-digit numbers below the initials. A very interesting bottle



Figure 4 – FB&FJCo and JOHNS BROS. (eBay)

offered for sale on eBay was embossed “JOHNS BROS. F.W.VA.” on the heel and “F.B.&F.J.CO.” on the base (Figure 4). This was obviously the use of a mold from the older firm with the name of the new one added to the heel.

Hutchbook (Fowler 2015) listed 31 examples of Hutchinson bottles embossed with the FB&FJCo logo. The vast majority of these (28) were basemarks. Fourteen of those had single-digit numbers embossed below the mark, and six had a single-digit number following the logo. A single oddity was embossed “FB&FS / 8 / Co,” and two had heelmarks. Most were made for West Virginia bottlers, but others were for bottlers in surrounding states: Virginia, Ohio, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Maryland.

THE COLUMBIAN (1892-1894)

According to Peterson (1968:47), a fruit jar was made by the “Fairmount [*sic*] Bottle and Fruit Jar Co, Fairmount [*sic*], W.V.” He dated the jar at 1893. Creswick (1987:34) reproduced an

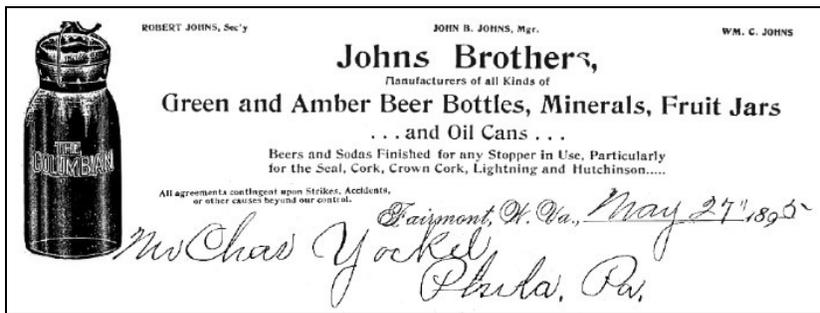


Figure 5 – Columbian letterhead (Dean Six)

illustration of “THE COLUMBIAN” taken from a letterhead, and Dean Six provided a letter from the firm, dated May 27, 1895, showing the jar (Figure 5). Creswick stated that “patent #471,483 was issued on March 22, 1892 to John B. Johns. . . . An actual example

of this jar is not yet known.”¹ She further noted that the jars came in half-pint, pint, and quart sizes. John B. Johns applied for a patent for a “Fruit Jar Cover and Lock Therefor” on April 13, 1891 and received Patent No. 471,483 on March 22, 1892 (Figure 6).

The Fairmont Bottle & Fruit Jar Co. advertised the jar in the January 24, 1894, issue of *China, Glass & Lamps* (Figure 7). The ad illustrated three examples of the jar and noted that the factory made Mason jars and “STANDARDS” (wax sealers), but the firm obviously intended to specialize in THE COLUMBIAN. When Johns Brothers. took over the factory in 1893, they continued to advertise THE COLUMBIAN but discontinued the production of all jars between early 1894 and mid-1895.

The early ads also stated that the factory would send out samples of the jar upon application, and the *Pottery and Glassware Reporter* (11/10/1892) claimed that the firm was “enjoying a good trade on their self sealing fruit jar, the ‘Columbian.’” The next year, *China, Glass & Lamps* (3/1/1893) added that Fairmont was “pushing their ‘Columbian’ fruit jar for all it is worth, and it is rapidly coming to the front as the most useful & popular jar in the market” (Roller 1997). Despite all this hopeful rhetoric, the Johns Brothers wrote to Charles Yockel, the Philadelphia mold maker, on September 18, 1894, that they had “never used any of those molds [i.e., the Columbian] even for a single day yet” (Roller 1997).

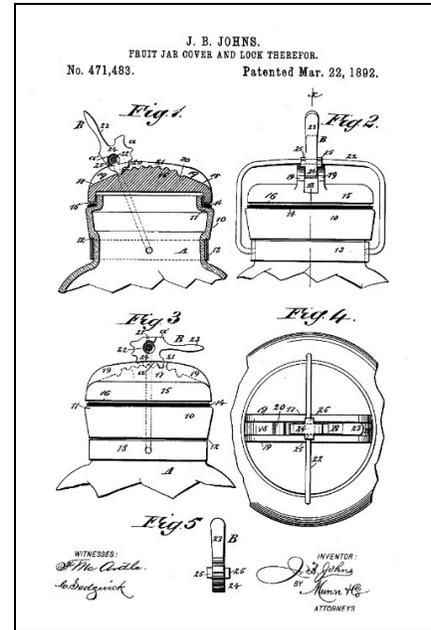


Figure 6 – JB Johns 1892 patent



Figure 7 – Columbian 1894 ad (Dean Six)

¹ Both Roller editions (1983; 2011) missed or ignored this jar, possibly because no examples are known to exist.

Oddly, Ripley & Co (by this time Factory F of the United States Glass Co.) also advertised a jar called the Columbian on October 30, 1892. The gigantic jar held 5-6 gallons, measured 32 inches in height by 12 inches in diameter, and weighed 16 pounds. Both jars were named and timed to correspond with the 1892-1893 Columbian Exposition (Six 1995:782). Production of the jar (by either or both companies) may have ended in 1894 because the exposition was over, and the public was no longer interested in the name.

IMPROVED STANDARD (1892-1894)

Roller (1983:167) illustrated this jar, embossed
 “IMPROVED STANDARD / PATENTED (both arched) / APRIL
 17TH / 1888 (both inverted



Figure 9 – Finish & Lid (North American Glass)

arches)” on the side (Figure 8). The jars were mouth blown (ground lip), and he described the closure as “wax seal, using tinned iron lid and tinned iron band curled around jar top to form

channel for wax, band held in place by wire across top.” (Figure 9). Patent No. 381,250 was issued to John B. Johns and Robert Johns, both of Massillon, Ohio, on April 17, 1888 (see Figure 1). Roller noted the maker as possibly Massillon Glass Works, probably based on the address of the Johns brothers. Creswick (1987:90) suggested either the Standard Glass Works, Wellsburg, West Virginia, or the Massillon Glass Works at Massillon, Ohio, as manufacturers (Figure 10). Roller (2011:256) added the likelihood that the Johns brothers made the jar, and we concur.



Figure 8 – Improved Standard (North American Glass)

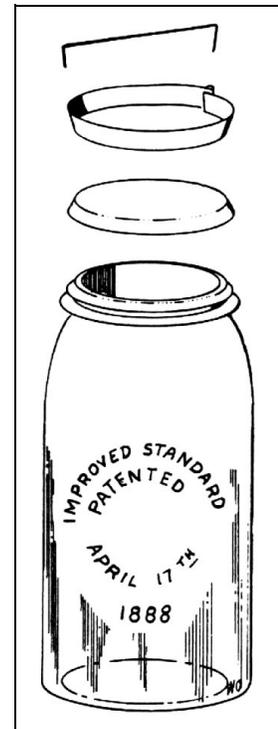


Figure 10 – Improved Standard (Creswick 1987:90)

Johns Brothers, Fairmont, West Virginia (1894-1906)

The Johns family formed a company called the Johns Brothers – with Robert Johns as secretary, John B. Johns as manager, along with Will and Ben Johns – and leased the former Fairmont Bottle & Fruit Jar Co. plant in October 1893. Initially, the brothers made beer and soft drink bottles primarily for local companies, but they eventually expanded their market to include breweries as far away as New York, Milwaukee, St. Louis, and even Savannah, Georgia (*Times West Virginian* 1998).

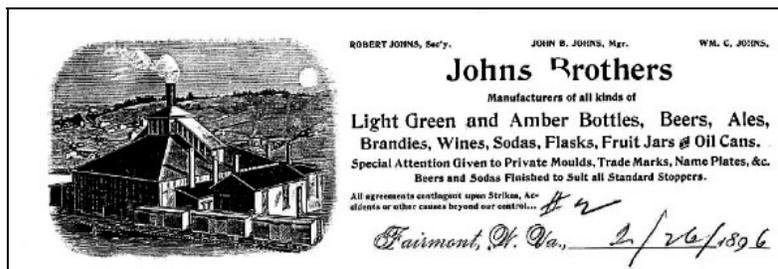


Figure 11 – 1895 letterhead (Dean Six)

A letterhead from September 20, 1894 listed Robert, John B., Will, and Ben Johns as principals (Roller 2011:265; Tyson 1971:21). The same letterhead noted that the plant made “Green and Amber Beer Bottles, Minerals, Fruit Jars . . . and Oil Cans . . . [ellipses in original] Beers and Sodas Finished for any Stopper in use, Particularly for the Seal, Cork, Crown Cork, Lightning and Hutchinson” (see Figure 5). Several letterheads illustrated the factory (Figure 11).

In October, 1896, a disastrous fire destroyed the green glass factory, although the plant was quickly rebuilt (Roller 1997). The brothers used nine pots to make their bottles in 1897, but the number had decreased to four in 1898. In 1899, the plant used 12 rings at two day tanks, and the number dropped to eight rings the following year – then jumped to 23 in 1901 and remained at that number the next year (*National Glass Budget* 1897:7; 1898:7; 1900:11; 1901:11; 1902:11; Roller 1997). The estimated 1901 output of the plant was 5,760,000 bottles, and, in 1904, the factory made liquor bottles and fruit jars at one continuous tank (Roller 1997).

An article in the *National Glass Budget* (1912a:1) indicated that five semi-automatic milk bottle machines were operating in Alexandria, Virginia, Mannington, West Virginia, Olean, New York, San Francisco, California, and Fairmont, West Virginia, in 1905. The article described “one bottle machine making milks” in Fairmont. This was almost certainly the machine described as an unacceptable experiment. According to Six (1993:27-28), only one

factory in Fairmont made milk bottles in 1905. Johns Brothers ran into financial difficulties in late 1906 and reorganized as a corporation with Robert Johns as the manager of the Fairmont Bottle Co. and a member of the board of directors (*American Glass Review* 1934:171; *Times West Virginian* 1998; Fones-Wolf 2007:159; Six 1994:49).

Containers and Marks

When Johns Brothers began production in the former Fairmont Bottle & Fruit Jar plant in 1893, they continued to make “Green and Amber Beer Bottles, Minerals, Fruit Jars ...and Oil Cans... Beer Finished for the Seal, Lightning or Crown Cork Stoppers” (Six 1995:781-782). The firm discontinued the production of oil bottles and fruit jars in early 1894 to concentrate on the more profitable beer and soda bottles. Except for the brief experiment with milk bottles, the Fairmont Bottle Co. also apparently only produced beer and soft drink bottles, all hand blown (*Times West Virginian* 1998).

The Johns Brothers ad in the 1901 Fairmont City Directory noted, “Beers Made to Stand Steaming. Soda to Stand Pressure.” Letterheads from the 1900s stated, “Special attention given to private moulds, name plates, and trade marks. Beers and sodas finished to suit all standard stoppers.” Interestingly, the letterheads also warned: “All agreements contingent upon strikes, accidents, or other causes beyond our control.” The company made “light green and amber bottles, beers and sodas, ales, brandies, and wines” (Figure 12).



Figure 12 – 1905 billhead (Dean Six)

In discussing a fruit jar mark possibly from Fairmont, West Virginia, Toulouse (1971:141) left a very cryptic statement: “I have not been able to trace any other Fairmont, W.Va., glass company except Johns Bros. about the same time.” He may have referred to an 1893 date claimed by Peterson (1968:47) for the Fairmount [*sic*] Bottle & Fruit Jar Co.

JOHNS BROS. F.W.VA. (1893-1895)

According to Rydquist (2002:5) “JOHNS BROS. W Va.” was “found on circa 1890s applied top Anheuser Busch from D.C.” Six (1994:48) noted that “their bottles are often marked” Johns Bros. Von Mechow (2015) listed five examples of beer bottles that were all embossed “JOHNS BROS F.W.VA.” on the reversed heels.

A letter to Charles Yockel (the company that made molds for Johns Brothers) dated September 20, 1895, stated, “Put our name on the bottom thus [drawing] and number them 8 & 9.” The drawing showed a circle with “JOHNS (arch) / 8 / BROTHERS (inverted arch).” However, the “THER” had been scratched out of “BROTHERS” as had the “OHNS” in “JOHNS”

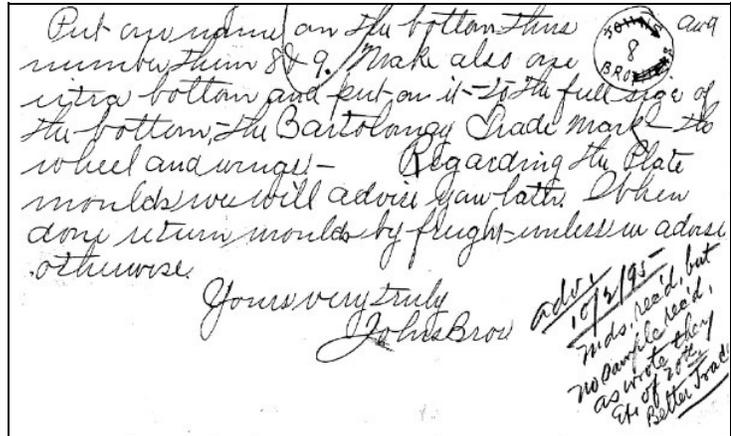


Figure 13 – 1895 letter (Dean Six)

(Figure 13). This suggests that 1895 was the year the brothers changed from marks using the full company name to the shorter version described below, although we have not discovered any examples with the full name. As noted above, a bottle offered for sale on eBay was embossed “JOHNS BROS. F.W.VA.” on the heel and “F.B.&F.J.CO.” on the base – the obvious use of an old mold (see Figure 4).

J BROS (1895-1907)

Rydquist (2002:5) stated that the “J BROS” mark was “found on brown beers,” and Dean Six provided a rubbing that showed the “J BROS” mark embossed in an arch on the base of a beer bottle – identical to the Rydquist configuration (Figure 14). Von Mechow (2015) listed nine examples of beer bottles embossed “J. BROS” in an arch on the bases, often



Figure 14 – J Bros basemark (Dean Six)



Figure 15 – J Bros heelmark (eBay)

with a one- or two-digit number below it. An eBay auction showed the logo as a heelmark (Figure 15). A September 28, 1896, letter to mold maker, Charles Yockel, asked that the engravers “change the lettering on the bottoms to read thus – J. BROS. and number them 8

& 9” (Figure 16).

JB

According to Rydquist (2002:5), the JB mark was believed to have been used by the Johns Brothers, although he did not show the shape of the mark or describe where it was located on the bottle. Von Mechow (2015) listed five examples of this mark on the reverse heels of beer bottles.

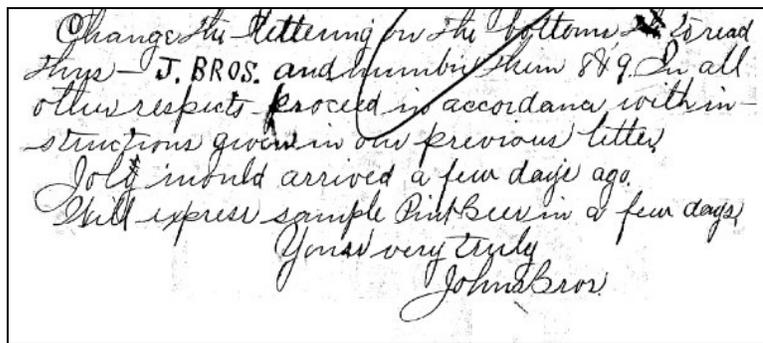


Figure 16 – 1896 letter (Dean Six)

JB Monogram

David Whitten is in possession of a bottle with what appears to be a “J” with a tiny “B” superimposed on the stem of the “J” and we found another one on eBay (Figure 17). This may be another mark of the Johns Brothers. The mark is on the heel of an amber, crown-finished beer or soda bottle from Louisville, Kentucky, ca. 1900. Von Mechow (2015) included four examples of the monogram on the reverse heels or beer bottles and two examples on bases.



Figure 17 – JB monogram (eBay)

Fairmont Bottle Co., Fairmont, West Virginia (1906-1914)

The business reorganized as the Fairmont Bottle Co. on October 24, 1906, with a capital of \$44,000. The firm intended to make “bottles, fruit jars, plain, ornamental and decorated glass and glassware, and all other kinds, forms and character of glass and glassware.” The stockholders consisted of James O. Watson, J.C. Hall, John O. Morgan, C.H. Jenkins, and Thomas F. Robey, all of Fairmont. Even though none of the Johns brothers were stockholders, Robert Johns was the manager of the plant by at least 1913 (Von Mechow 2015). By 1912, semi-automatic machines were successfully making soda and beer bottles, and the Fairmont factory’s hand-blown bottles could no longer compete in the market. The plant was apparently absorbed by the Monongah Glass Co. in 1914 (*Times West Virginian* 1998; Fones-Wolf 2007:159; Six 1994:49).

Containers and Marks

FBC

Von Mechow (2015) included a single example of a Hutchinson bottle embossed “FBC” on the base that he attributed to the Fairmont Bottle Co. The bottler was located at Grey’s Flat, West Virginia. We have not found this attribution from any other sources, and we ascribe the logo to the Findlay Bottle Co. See the Findlay Bottle Co. section for more information.

THE F.B.CO. / FAIRMONT, W.VA.

A single base from an amber bottle embossed “THE F.B.CO. (arch) / FAIRMONT, W.VA. (inverted arch)” on the base was offered on eBay. Although all sources that deal with the logo attribute it to the Findlay Bottle Co., the inclusion of the city/state location make this identification certain.

Discussion and Conclusions

There is no question that the “FB&FJCo” logo was used by the Fairmont Bottle & Fruit Jar Co. during both years (1892-1893) of its existence.

It is very clear that the “JOHNS BROS.” and “J BROS” logos belonged to the Johns Brothers (1893-1906). Although we agree with von Mechow that “JB” and the JB monogram were most likely marks of the Johns Brothers, there is some chance that the initials belonged to some other firm. Unless the initials are demonstrated to indicate someone else, we will continue to support von Mechow’s identification.

The F.B.Co. mark was also almost certainly used by the Findlay Bottle Co. on beer bottles with crown finishes. However, the Fairmont Bottle Co. appears to have used the identical mark – with the inclusion of “FAIRMONT, W. VA.” It is surprising that we have only discovered a single example of the logo from a company that was in business for eight years (1906-1914). However, we disagree with the idea the “FBC” was used by the Fairmont plant; the logo was likely used by the Findlay Bottle Co.

Acknowledgments

We wish to express our gratitude to Dean Six for providing most of the historical information used in this section. Dean has been exceptionally open to sharing his research. As always, our thanks to Doug Leybourn for allowing us to reproduce the drawings from the Alice Creswick books and to Greg Spurgeon for permission to use the photos from North American Glass. Thanks also to Wanda Wakkinen for proofreading.

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Johns Bros to Charles Yockel, May 27, 1895. [Letters courtesy of Dean Six]

Johns Bros to Charles Yockel, December 31, 1903 [Letters courtesy of Dean Six]

Johns Bros to Charles Yockel, January 15, 1904 [Letters courtesy of Dean Six]

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