

## **John B. Brooke and the Gem Bottle & Supply Co.**

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John B. Brooke was a bottle jobber and early milk bottle dealer in New York City. Originally working ca. 1894 only under his name, he incorporated in 1901, and reorganized as the Gem Bottle & Supply Co. in 1902. Although his last listing was in 1913, the firm used at least six logos on milk bottles.

### **History**

**John B. Brooke, New York** (at least 1894-1901)

**John B. Brooke Co., New York** (1901-1902)

**Gem Bottle and Supply Co., New York** (1902-ca. 1913)

John B. Brooke advertised himself as “a dealer in and manufacturer of bottles” by 1894 and placed a help wanted ad for a salesman to sell milk jars in 1896. Despite the ads and bottles embossed with the word “MAKER,” Brooke was a jobber, wholesaling bottles and probably other dairy supplies at 86 Fulton St., New York City. Brooke incorporated the John B. Brooke Co. in August 1901 (Dairy Antiques 2016).

Brooke reorganized the firm as the Gem Bottle and Supply Co. in March of 1902. By 1906, the city directory listed the firm at 117 Fulton St. (probably an incorrect street number), with John B. Brooke as president, Robert T. Wilson as secretary, and Emerson H. Corwin as an additional director. By 1909, Rena V. Westbrooke had become secretary, with W.L Wright as the other director. The address was now 86 Warren St. – probably indicating a change in the name of the street rather than a move. The firm continued to be listed until 1913 (Dairy Antiques 2016).

## Containers and Marks

A John B. Brooke Co. 1901 ad offered various types of milk jars with or without metal tops. Typically, their ads listed multiple types of milk bottles ( jars) – with “tin-tops” and without – although the firm’s specialty area consisted of milk bottles (called jars in the ads) and dairy supplies. Although the firm claimed to have the largest factories in the world, this probably actually referred to its suppliers – although we have no clue who those may have been (Dairy Antiques 2016). It is possible that Brooke made some or most of the non-bottle supplies he sold.

The site also noted “that there are strong similarities between the base embossing on early J.B. Brooke milk bottles and early A.V. Whiteman milk bottles.” Not only was the configuration the same on both bases, the two firms were located on the same street. It is possible that Aries or Homer Brooke (see below) made the molds for both companies. See the section on Whiteman for more information on that firm (Figure 1).

### **BROOKE** (early 1890s)

Dairy Antiques (2016) noted that they had “seen a small mouthed bottle with a dairy name that was marked BROOKE on the base. This would probably predate conventionally shaped milk bottles.” This was also likely the original mark of the firm, probably used in the early 1890s. We have not discovered an example.

### **J.B. BROOKE** (ca. 1894-1901)

Dairy Antiques attributed this logo to the John B. Brooke Co. The base was embossed “J.B. BROOKE (arch) / MAKER / 86 FULTON ST. (both horizontal) / NEW YORK (inverted arch)” (see Figure 1). The bottle was similar in style to those sold by A.V. Whiteman – note the connection mentioned above. These “tin-top” milk bottles were used extensively during the



Figure 1 – Comparison of Brooke & Whiteman bases (Dale Murschell & eBay)

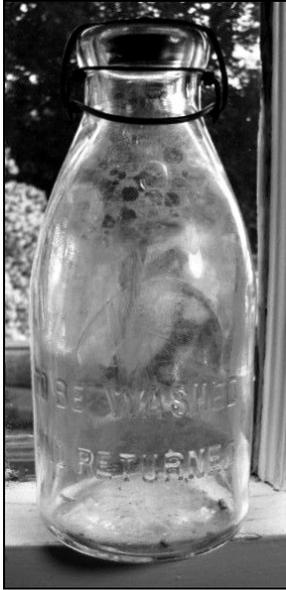


Figure 2 – Brooke bottle (eBay)

1890-1910 period, gradually phased out by the more popular and practical disk-capped milk bottles (Figures 2-4).

**THE BROOKE CO.** (1901-1902)

The Dairy Antiques site (2016) also reported a base embossed “THE BROOKE CO. (arch) / MAKERS (horizontal) / N.Y. (inverted arch)” – almost certainly from the J.B. Brooke period (1901-1902).



Figure 3 – Tin-Top (eBay)

**GEM-BROOKE** (1902-ca. 1905)

Dairy Antiques (2016) also reported a bottle embossed “GEM-BROOKE NEW YORK“ on the base, and this was probably in the same format (with “MAKER” in the center). This was likely the earliest mark during the “Gem” period, apparently noting a transition period (Brooke and Gem) possibly used from 1902 to ca. 1905. We have not found examples of any of the Gem marks.



Figure 4 – Tin-Top (eBay)

**GEM** (1902-ca. 1909)

In addition, Dairy Antiques (2016) recorded a bottle embossed “GEM (arch) / MAKER / 86 FULTON ST. (both horizontal) / NEW YORK (inverted arch).” This was probably made between 1902 and the change of the street name to Warren ca. 1909.

## **GEM B & S CO. N.Y.** (ca. 1902-1913)

The final bottles reported in this series by Dairy Antiques (2016) were embossed “GEM B&S CO. N.Y.” on the heel. Dairy Antiques noted that some of these bottles also had the BP17 heelmark of the Belle Pre Glass Co., in business from 1902 to 1911. Dairy Antiques noted a 1913 connection between Gem and the J.T.&A. Hamilton Co., so Gem apparently shifted its business to Hamilton after Belle Pre closed.. Therefore, the “GEM B&S CO” logo may also have appeared on the Hamilton bottles. See the sections on Belle Pre and the Hamilton family firms for more information on those companies.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

Dairy Antiques (2016) made one other relevant note:

John B. Brooke may have had another connection to glass manufacturing. In the 1890's John B. Brooke shared the 86 Fulton Street address with Aries P. Brooke who advertised himself as a glass mould maker specializing in private and experimental moulds. Aries P. Brooke was issued patents in 1872, 1875 and 1883 for glass molds and presses all of which he assigned to James or William Brookfield of the Bushwick Glass Works (later to become the Brookfield Glass Company) of New York. Bushwick Glass Works had their offices in the early 1890's next door to Brooke at 83 Fulton Street. Aries was the brother of Homer Brooke who was also a glass mould maker and held numerous patents for glass bottle and insulator manufacturing. This connection may explain some of the detailed private molds that John B. Brooke used for his milk bottles.

According to the 1882 Philadelphia city directory, Aries was working for Charles Yokel and Co., while Homer was in New York working for himself. In 1883, there is an A.P. Brook in Deptford, New Jersey, working as a machinist. A.P. had a a son named John. Possibly, Aries was the father of John B. Brooke.

The firm was obviously a jobber rather than a manufacturer of bottles – although it may have actually produced some other dairy-related products. The company cycled through three

clearly defined periods – John B. Brooke (ca. 1894-1901), John B. Brooke Co. (1901-1902), and Gem Bottle & Supply Co. (1902-ca. 1913) – making the dating of its markings relatively straight forward. The only caveat we would add is that Brooke certainly used all bottles until the molds wore out – *unless* he only ordered bottles from the factories on an as-needed basis. If that were the case (and we will probably never know), the date of each reorganization would be an absolute cutoff.

We have no way of being certain of the manufacturers of Brooke’s earliest bottles or of when he began using bottles with his name embossed on their bases. The connection with Aries P. Brooke and the Bushwick Glass Works suggests Bushwick as the early maker for Brooke milk bottles. The Bushwick Flint Glass Works was in business from 1868 to 1898 and could have made all of the early “BROOKE” and “J.B. BROOKE” dairy bottles. When the Brookfield Glass Co. took over the Bushwick business in 1898, it could have produced the remaining “J.B. BROOKE” and “THE BROOKE Co.” bottles. The only problem with these speculations is that we have not found any evidence that either Bushwick or Brookfield ever made milk bottles.

The change of name to the Gem Bottle & Supply Co. in 1902 is intriguing. That was also the year that the Belle Pre Bottle Co. opened – and the timing suggests that these two events may have been related. Brooke may have reorganized with the intention of shifting his business to Belle Pre. Of course, the two events may have been totally unrelated and coincidental. Since Belle Pre’s bottles were very specialized, the glass house may have only been one of the suppliers for Gem (rather than *the* supplier). Either Brookfield or Hamilton may have made the other bottles.

## **Acknowledgments**

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## **Sources**

Dairy Antique Site

2013 “Doug & Linda's Dairy Antique Site: Milk Bottle Manufacturer’s Marks.”

[http://dairyantiques.com/Milk\\_Bottle\\_Marks.html](http://dairyantiques.com/Milk_Bottle_Marks.html)

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