

## Laurens Glass Works

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Although it had a rocky beginning, the Laurens Glass Works became one of the most successful glass houses of the American South. Opened in 1911, the factory did not become fully productive until 1913. Laurens specialized in soda bottles, and, when it became one of the plants manufacturing hobble-skirt Coca-Cola bottles between 1917 and 1919, its future was assured. The firm expanded to Henderson, North Carolina, in 1959 and to Ruston, Louisiana, soon thereafter. Indian Head Container Corp. acquired Laurens in 1968 but operated the plants under the Laurens name. The firm became a subsidiary of Ball-InCon in May 1987 and closed in 1996.

### History

#### **Laurens Glass Works, Laurens, South Carolina (1911-1968)**

The Laurens Glass Works incorporated on October 25, 1910, with a capital of \$50,000, although production did not begin until a year later. Nathaniel B. Dial was the first president. Quality problems forced the plant to close shortly after its initiation, but it reopened again in 1912 with Albert Dial (a nephew of Nathaniel) as president (Baab 2007:32; Hamer 2003:25). When the South Carolina Dispensary system ended in 1907, several counties instituted their own dispensaries for the purchase of distilled beverages. According to Teal (2005:117), “most of the counties with bottling plants bought bottles from the Laurens Glass Company after that company got into full production about 1912-13.” Laurens made whiskey bottles for at least four counties. By 1913, the plant was listed as using one continuous tank with six rings to make a “general line” of bottles (*Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913:954). The Thomas Registers (Thomas Publishing Co. 1914:532; 1921:782) did not pick up the company until 1914 and never listed any products.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Thomas Registers rarely discovered glass houses in the South. When it did, the listings were often late and sometimes sporadic.

Laurens made Coca-Cola bottles, probably as early as 1917, and, by 1919, the Coca-Cola trade was the firm's most important business. The plant also made bottles for Dr. Pepper, Pepsi, and numerous smaller bottlers. Specializing in soft drink bottles, the company grew so much that it opened a second plant in Henderson, North Carolina, in 1959, followed by a factory in Ruston, Louisiana, "a few years later" (Hamer 2002:18; 2003:25-33). The Henderson plant made bottles for "soft drinks, processed foods and household chemicals" (*Glass Industry* 1960:68).

By 1927, Laurens made "'flint and green beverage and sodas" on four automatic machines at two continuous tanks. The plant expanded in 1936 to five automatic machines, making "flint, green and emerald beverages and sodas, packers and preservers ware." The firm added an additional tank with a total of eight machines in 1938. By 1942, the plant used three continuous tanks with nine automatic machines to make the same product list (*American Glass Review* 1927:139; 1936:94; 1938:79; 1942:103).

As early as the 1930s, Laurens began to make fruit jars and other containers, but beverage bottles remained the mainstay until 1986, when the domination of the market by plastic soft drink bottles forced the company to discontinue soda bottles and focus on containers for medicines and foods along with jars. The firm sold to the Indian Head Container Corp, a Delaware corporation, in 1968 (Baab 2007:32; Hamer 2002:18; 2003:25-33). Indian Head formed in 1968 as a conglomerate of four glass houses – Laurens Glass Works, Northwestern Glass Co. (Seattle), Obear-Nester Glass Co., and Pierce Glass Co. as well as other business to deal in "glass containers, metal and automotive products, information technology, and specialty textiles" (*McKean County Democrat* 3/20/1969). By 1975, the firm also controlled the Madera Glass Co., Madera, California, and made glass containers consisting of "soft drinks, beer, wine, food, medicine, toiletries, and cosmetics" (*Bradford Era* 7/1/1975). Incon Packaging acquired Indian Head in 1983, and the company merged with the Ball Brothers in May 1987 to form Ball Incon.

The company had 14 tanks serving 29 machines at three factories in 1982, making "returnable and non-returnable beverage containers, food, chemical, medicinal and wine containers" (*Glass Industry* 1982:36). By 1985, the firm was called Laurens-Pierce, an Incon Company, with five plants using 16 furnaces to serve 40 machines. The factories made the same products listed in 1982 (Perrine 1985:27). The firm became a subsidiary of Ball-InCon in May 1987 and ceased operations in 1996 (Hamer 2002:18; 2003:25-33)

## Containers and Marks

As noted in the history section, Laurens specialized in making soft drink bottles for most of its existence. Its initial bottles were embossed, although the plant began making ACL bottles in the late 1930s. In its earliest days, Laurens had molds made at Toledo, Ohio, and “other midwestern factories.” However, management soon hired Adam Zupp and other mold makers to begin its own mold production (Hamer 2003:18, 29).

Although Hamer’s (2003:27) description of early bottle manufacture at the factory is a bit confused, it is apparent that ca. 1920, automatic production began. Mouth-blown bottles continued to be made at the plant until ca. 1925 when “bottle production was completely mechanized.” According to Toulouse (1971:324-325), however, the factory first installed Jersey Devils (semi-automatic machines) in 1913. By that time, the plant made “flint prescriptions, minerals, vials, liquors, flasks, packers, and preservers.” Hamer’s reference to 1920 probably referred to the initial date that the plant installed fully automatic machines. By 1927, the factory was making “flint and green beverage and sodas” with “4 automatic machines” (*American Glass Review* 1927:139).

### **LGW (1919-1968)**

Hamer (2003:34) noted that “Laurens Glass did not identify its bottles until 1919. Starting at this time and continuing until the early 1960s, it affixed an embossed ‘LGW’ on the base or corner-base [i.e., heel] of each bottle produced.” The company ceased using the mark “in the sixties.” Toulouse (1971:324) dated the LGW mark “since 1913.” Since this is a six-year discrepancy from Hamer’s date of 1919, it may be a typo, although Toulouse may have thought that the firm used the logo from the 1913 reorganization. Unfortunately, the mark was not listed by Peterson (1968), so we have no additional source to compare the dates.

Although not specifically stated, it is almost certain that all bottles embossed with the LGW logo were machine made. The LGW mark still appeared on a table of glass trademarks compiled by Owens-Illinois in 1964 (Berge 1980:83). Hanlon (1971:6-17) verified the later use of the mark with his 1971 chart. By 1982, however, the mark had been reduced to a simple “L” (Emhart 1982:75).

## Coca-Cola Bottles

Porter ([2009]) supported the 1919 date with “19” as the earliest date code found on hobble-skirt Coca-Cola bottles (Figure 1). The logo “LGW” was embossed prominently on the heels of the bottles, followed by the date code. Laurens



Figure 1 – LGW 19 (eBay)



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made dated hobble-skirt bottles in the PAT'D NOV. 16, 1915, variation from at least 1919 to 1927 (Figure 2). Beginning 1928, all hobble-skirt bottles were in the PAT'D DEC. 25, 1923, style. Laurens continued to use the heelmark and date code until the Coca-Cola main office called for a change of location for the logo and codes to the skirt of the bottle during 1934 (Lockhart & Porter 2010).

By 1913, Laurens manufactured sky blue, straight-sided Coca-Cola bottles. Laurens was also the only factory to produce mouth-blown hobble-skirt Coca-Cola bottles. These were sky blue in color (see Figure 2) but were only made with city/state codes for Florida, Georgia, and both Carolinas (Lockhart & Porter 2010; Porter 2012). To



Figure 3 – 1916 Coke - colorless (eBay)

add to the list of oddities, Laurens was one of the few glass houses to make Coca-Cola bottles in colorless glass (Figure 3).

## Pepsi-Cola Bottles

Pepsi-Cola also had its own ideas about codes, beginning in 1940. Each Pepsi base during the 1940s, into the 1950s, was embossed “DES. PAT. 120,277 (the patent number for the “wave” Pepsi bottles) / L.G.W. (both arched)” with codes, such as “2 B 43 15” or “7 A 45 15” in



Figure 4 – Pepsi codes (eBay)

an inverted arch (Figures 4 & 5). The “2” or “7” was almost certainly a mold number. The “B” or “A” is an unknown code, but the letters extend on Pepsi bottles at least D – possibly others – and those do *not* correspond to glass

houses. The date code (43, 45, or others) indicates the year (1943, 1945). The final number “15” is also found on bottles from various glass houses, so it, too, is an unknown.

### Other Soda Bottles

Date codes accompanying LGW marks on soda bottles appear to follow three major patterns, although current data are sparse (date ranges represent the codes we have seen in person, in collections, or on eBay):

1. LGW followed by a two-digit code (1919-1934). The earliest known date at present is 1919, followed by codes from 1920 to 1934. This pattern was most prevalent on hobble-skirt Coke bottles, although it appeared on other soda bottle styles (Figure 6).

2. Date code to the left of the LGW logo (ca. 1925-1926). The logo was sometimes followed by a single-digit number. A single exception was marked 34 / LGW / 4 (Figure 7).

3. Two-digit date code surrounding the mark (e.g., 3 LGW 6) (1935-1968). This was certainly the most common code system (Figure 8).

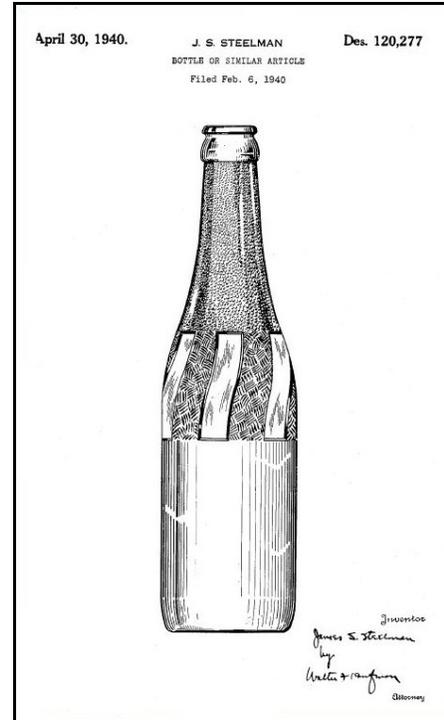


Figure 5 – Pepsi patent



Figure 6 – L.G.W. 24 (eBay)



Figure 7 – 34 L.G.W. (eBay)

At some point, Laurens used the LGW mark in conjunction with three-digit numbers (or slight variations), all embossed on the base (e.g., LGW 852; LGW 688-1; LGW 1 494). These probably represented catalog or model codes, a format that was popular on soda bottles from the late 1890s to ca. 1920, although model numbers were used



Figure 8 – 5 LGW 3 (David Whitten)



Figure 9 – Model code (eBay)

on other types of bottles as well. On the mark “394 4 LGW 51,” for example, “394” is the model number; “4” is a mold code; LGW is the manufacturer’s mark; and 51” is the date code. Occasionally, the two-digit date code could be below the logo. An RC bottle offered on eBay was marked 430 / LGW / 31 on the base. Or, it could sometimes appear above the logo as on the base of a Dr Pepper bottle embossed 34 / LGW from another eBay auction. Model codes also appeared on bottles with the split date code, such as “6 LGW 2 / 10 2744” (Figure 9).

The logos were embossed on either the heels or bases of soda bottles, occasionally in both locations on the same bottle. The mark may appear with or without punctuation. On bases, it may be arched or horizontal, although we have only seen the horizontal configuration on



Figure 10 – L.G.W. (eBay)

heels. Although soda bottles were the main line of production, the mark appeared on other types of bottles as well, generally on bases (Figures 10 & 11).



Figure 11 – Med bottle (eBay)

### Jars

Date codes on jars followed a slightly different pattern. Jars offered on eBay and Etsy auctions were embossed “J 49 S / 11 / L.G.W,” “J 49 S / 7 / L.G.W.,” and “J 48 S / 2 / L.G.W.” on their bases (Figure 12). The “48” and



Figure 12 – Jar base (Etsy)

“49” were likely date codes for 1948 and 1949. Many of these – possibly all – were embossed on the sides with a “screen-wire” pattern – almost certainly to provide a gripping surface (Figure

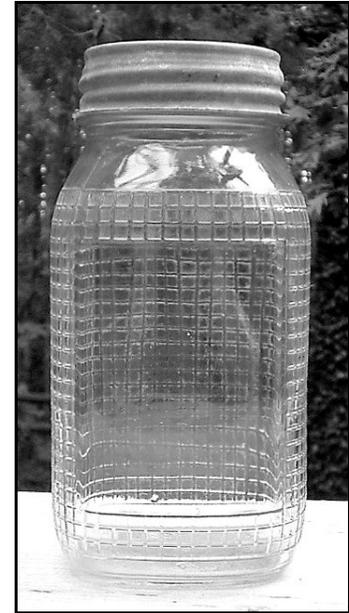


Figure 13 – Jar (Etsy)

13). J could possibly indicate “jar.”

### L (1968-ca. 1990)

Hamer (2003) discussed the “L” logo:

In the sixties the bottle identification changed to distinguish Laurens-produced bottles from those of its branch plants in Henderson, North Carolina, and Ruston, Louisiana. These new marks were “L” for Laurens-produced bottles [i.e., the original factory], “L\*” for those made in Henderson, and “L\*\*” for those that came from the Ruston plant.



Figure 14 – Henderson code

Actual examples show that the Henderson mark was sometimes L followed by a star – “L★” – and others noted by a dot – L. (Figures 14 & 15). The Ruston logos were probably also made in both formats, but we have only found the dot variation (Figure 16).



Figure 15 – Henderson code

Emhart (1982:75) still showed the L mark as being used by Laurens in 1982. Despite the listing of the LGW mark in 1971 (see above), it is likely that the mark was dropped in favor of the “L” in 1968, when the company was sold – or shortly thereafter. Powell (1990) did not list Laurens in 1990, probably because a reorganization that created Ball-Incon in May 1987.

## Coca-Cola



Figure 17 – L skirt code

As often happens, the Coca-Cola system differed from the one in general use. Porter (1996:3) stated that the L mark was used on Coca-Cola bottles from 1934 to 1951, with the “L” and a date code on the skirt, but

that should not be generalized to other bottle types, including other soda bottles (Figure 17). Porter (personal communication 3/26/2008) further noted that a larger “L” was embossed on the *bases* of some Coke bottles made by Laurens from 1951-ca. 1953.



Figure 16 – Ruston code

The Coca-Cola main office mandated that the “L” migrate to the base in 1951. Initially, Laurens (like the other factories) simply added an “L” to the existing bases (Figure 18). However, the new system required a different configuration. The city designation was placed at the top of the base in an arch, with the



Figure 19 – Small L base code

full state name at the bottom in an inverted arch, forming a circle. Between the names were two

evenly spaced arced lines – although those could be

abbreviated to dots if the two names were too large (Figure 19). The manufacturer’s mark – an “L” in this case – occupied the

center. Although Laurens used the “L” on Cole bottles beginning in 1934, it was not used on other bottles until ca. 1968.



Figure 18 – L base code

## LGW Monogram

The MASON’S IMPROVED jars came in a variety of monograms embossed on the front between the two words. One of these was embossed on the front of a machine-made jar with an

LGW monogram between “MASON’S” and “IMPROVED.” These jars were probably not made by Laurens – although the possibility cannot be entirely discounted. See the section on the Lockport Glass Works for a discussion.

**LAURENS (1975-1977)**

Roller (1983:194) listed the “Longlife (slightly upward cursive) / ® (below the ‘e’) /



Figure 21 – Long Life base (eBay)

MASON” with an embossed drawing of fruits and vegetables in a circular plate on the back body (Figure 20). The base was embossed “L 75 LAURENS QUALITY GLASS SINCE 1910” (Figure 21). The jars were made

between 1975 and 1977 by Laurens. Variations from Pierce Glass Co.

and Obear-Nester were embossed PIERCE GLASS and OBEAR-NESTER GLASS respectively on the bases. Creswick (1987:83) illustrated the jar and noted a variation that was “sold as a jar for sprouting seeds for ‘Sprout Cookery’, and has a paper label

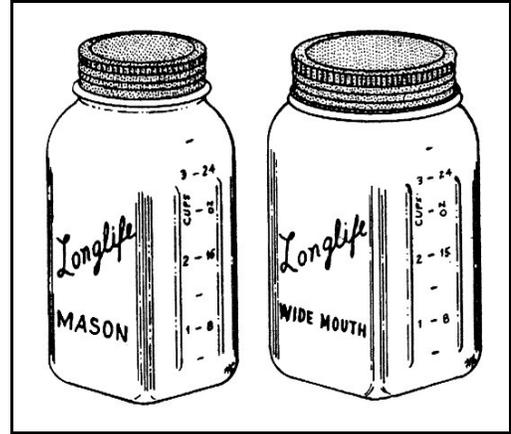


Figure 20 – Long Life Masons (Creswick 1987:83)

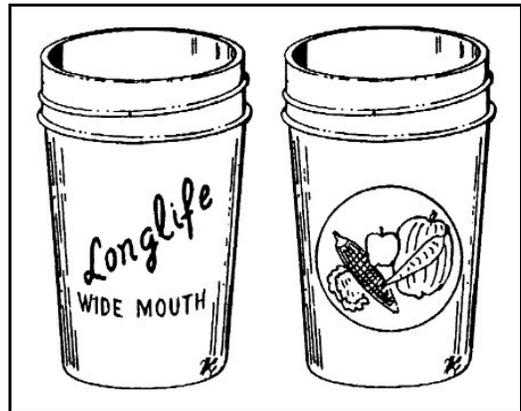


Figure 22 – Long Life jar (Creswick 1987:83)

around jar giving directions” (Figure 22). The Roller update (2011:297) added that the cap was labeled “BERNARDIN DATE FILLED \_\_\_\_\_ STANDARD MASON SNAP LID” (Figure 23). The three glass houses (Pierce, Obear-Nester, and Laurens) were by that time all divisions of the Indian Head Container Corp.



Figure 23 – Long Life lid (eBay)

## Discussion and Conclusions

The “LGW” and “L” marks are fairly well dated and generally self explanatory, but we need a larger sample to solidify the date ranges for the various patterns of date codes that accompany “LGW” marks. This, however, is irrelevant from an archaeological viewpoint, as any base found can be precisely dated by its date code. Bottles with model codes instead of date codes, unfortunately, must be dated to the full tenure of the “LGW” mark. Despite the inclusion of the logo in Hanlon’s 1971 table, it is very likely that the “LGW” mark was discontinued in 1968, when the original company sold to Indian Head Container Corp. The “LAURENS” mark is equally self explanatory.

The LGW monogram, however, was probably not used by Laurens. The jar with the monogram was likely made by the Lockport Glass Works, Lockport, New York. See the Lockport Glass Works section for a discussion.

## Acknowledgments

Our gratitude to Doug Lebourne for allowing us to reproduce the drawings from the Alice Creswick books and to Wanda Wakkinen for proofreading these pages.

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Last updated 4/22/2017

