

# Millville Bottle Works

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Separating from the family business – T.C. Wheaton Co. – W. Scott Wheaton and James E. Mitchell created the Millville Bottle Works in 1903 and operated the hugely successful firm until Wheaton's death in 1924. The firm then sold the plant to the T.C. Wheaton Co., and Wheaton maintained the operation until 1930. Although the factory used the same logo – M.B.W. – during the entire life of the plant, the firm maintained two different configurations of the mark concurrently.

## History

### Millville Bottle Works, Millville, New Jersey (1903-1930)

In 1888, Dr. Theodore Corson Wheaton rescued a foundering glass house at Millville, renaming it T.C. Wheaton & Co. Although we have not discovered the date that he became involved, the doctor's younger brother, Walter Scott Wheaton (always known as Scott) opened a branch office at Denver in 1891.<sup>1</sup> Frank H. Wheaton, the eldest son of T.C., joined the firm in 1899, soon followed by his younger brother, Theodore C. Wheaton. When the firm incorporated in 1901, Frank became a member of the board of directors and was elected Secretary and Treasurer by 1903 (Encyclopedia.com 2016). The seeds of dissatisfaction appear to have been sown.

On January 20, 1903, Agent George G. Tennant filed for a charter to incorporate the Millville Bottle Works. The firm capitalized at \$25,000, although only \$8,500 of that sum was

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<sup>1</sup> The 1900-1920 censuses listed Scott Wheaton as "Walter D. Wheaton" and the name was sometimes recorded as T. Scott Wheaton. His actual name, however, appears to have been Walter Scott Wheaton – possibly named for the poet, Walter Scott.

Although the Wheaton boys grew up at Cape May, New Jersey, a glass town, we can find no evidence that either of them was involved in the glass business prior to the rescue of the factory that would take his name by T.C. Wheaton in 1888.

subscribed at the beginning of the business. James E. Mitchell and W. Scott Wheaton, two top executives from the T.C. Wheaton Co., apparently defected to start the new glass house – in direct competition with their former employer. Although the actual opening date is unclear, the plant was probably in operation by September 1903 – the date later claimed as the first use of the trademark – discussed below (Millville Municipal League 1915:19; New Jersey State Library n.d.:428).

Located along the West Jersey & Seashore Railroad tracks at Seventh and Main Streets, the plant originally used an eleven-pot furnace to make prescription and proprietary bottles. The firm increased its capital stock to \$50,000 on April 7, 1904, with Mitchell as president and manager. Wheaton was president by 1906 with Mitchell as secretary, treasurer, and general manager. Although it was not listed in the 1905 edition, the Thomas Registers first noted the Millville Bottle Co. in 1907. The plant made prescription and proprietary medicine bottles, and the Bureau of Statistics pointed out in 1908 that the plant could not keep up with the orders pouring in. That listing remained until at least 1921 (*American Glass Review* 1934:157; Bureau of Statistics 1909:357; Millville Municipal League 1915:19; Thomas Publishing Co. 1907:159; 1916:660; Toulouse 1971:349).

James E. Mitchell died in 1920, and his son, Foster (possibly Forrest) V. Mitchell, became involved in the firm – although when he joined the company or his exact involvement are both unclear. According to the 1920 census, Foster was a department manager of a glass factory at that time (before his father’s death), although the firm was not named. In 1922, the plant capacity increased to two furnaces with 22 pots (Millville Municipal League 1915:21; Toulouse 1971:249). Toulouse (1971:350) noted that “it would appear that Millville never modernized, or at best used semiautomatic equipment.” However, a few bottles offered on eBay show distinct machine scars (see, e.g., Figure 4 below), so the plant must have employed at least a single machine at some point, probably very near the end of the firm.

Scott Wheaton died on January 22, 1924 (Pepper 1971:247; Toulouse 1971:350). The operation of the firm during the next two years is unclear. Toulouse (1971:350) noted that the next president after Scott Wheaton’s 1924 death was “C. Corson” with W.H. Townsend as secretary and treasurer. He commented that “the Millville Bottle Works may not really have been as independent from the T.C. Wheaton Company as indicated,” because Thomas Corson Wheaton (possibly the “C. Corson” after 1924) was president of T.C. Wheaton. It seems much

more likely that “C. Corson” was a typographic error for “T. Corson Wheaton” – and this indicated the acquisition of the Millville Bottle Works by T.C Wheaton, rather than an earlier association. Unfortunately, Toulouse failed to note the date of “C. Corson” as president – although someone sold the firm to T.C. Wheaton by at least 1926.

To add to the complications, the Bureau of Statistics (1908:360) noted in 1907 that

Charles Corson, a stopper grinder employed in the Millville Glass Works at Millville, developed “tetanus” from a severe cut of the hand, inflicted by a steel instrument which he was using while at work. The hand will probably have to be amputated even if his life is saved.

Could this be the “C. Corson” of almost two decades later? In any event, the company apparently continued to operate as the Millville Bottle Works – under the aegis of T.C. Wheaton – until 1930 (Toulouse 1971:350; von Mechow 2017).

## **Containers and Marks**

### **M.B.W.**

The T.C. Wheaton Co. registered the M.B.W. Trademark (No. 282,075) in an arch on April 7, 1931, claiming that it was first used in September 1903 (Creswick 1987:154; Peterson 1968:45). Toulouse (1971:349) and Whitten (2017) both attributed the mark to the Millville Bottle Works. Toulouse dated the mark 1903-1930. Although Fike (1987:95) repeated the Toulouse dates for the bottles, he noted that one customer’s medicine was advertised as “H.W. Brown’s Blood Cure until 1916, thereafter as Blood Treatment.” He noted that the Cure bottles were emerald green and amber and that the base was marked “M.B.W. / U.S.A.” Griffenhagen and Bogard (1999:126) followed the Fike information.

At this point, we have not seen a prescription bottle with only the M.B.W. mark. All bases that we have observed included either “MILLVILLE” or “U.S.A.” The two variations were apparently used concurrently throughout the life of the firm. See below for configurations. Apparently, the mark always included punctuation, although it may be faint in some cases. The

vast majority of prescription or shop furniture bottles with “M.B.W.” basemarks were generic – made for paper labels – although some were embossed with the names of various drug firms.



Figure 1 – Hutch bottle (eBay)

Although no sources mentioned soda bottles, an MBW mark – with no punctuation – has been reported in large letters on Hutchinson bottle bases. Although Lincoln (1970:28) did not reveal the configuration of the mark, he noted MBW on the base of a blob-top bottle made for a bottler in Concord, New Hampshire. Other than that, he provided no information. Von Mechow (2017) recorded two Hutchinson-style soda bottles embossed “MBW” on the base, one from the Concord Bottling Co., Concord, New Hampshire (Figure 1). This bottle was also featured in several eBay auctions. The second was used by A.R. Williams, Blairstown, New Jersey (Figure 2).

The mark on the soda bottles is in much larger letters with a “fatter” font than logos on the drug store bottles or any of the typical glass manufacturer’s logos. We have been unable to trace any history for either bottler, but A.R. Williams may have had a son named M.B. Williams – although the connection to a Concord bottler seems quite tenuous. Still, we believe that the MBW initials on the Hutchinson bottles belonged to someone connected with the bottlers rather than the Millville Bottle Works.



Figure 2 – Hutch bottle (Larry Grantz)

### **M.B.W. / MILLVILLE (1903-1930)**

Miller (1999:112; 2008:248) illustrated a drug store bottle with “M.B.W. / • / MILLVILLE” embossed on the base. He dated the container’s use at 1912. Colcleaser (1966:24) showed a similar mark without the dot. It, too, was on a prescription bottle, but Colcleaser made

no attempt to provide a date. Bethman (1991:575, 786) illustrated two examples of this mark, but both lacked the dot shown by Miller. His dates ranged from 1914 to 1916. Both authors showed both lines of the mark in a horizontal configuration.

Based on photos at eBay auctions, however, the most common configuration, regardless of bottle shape, was “M.B.W. (arch) / MILLVILLE (inverted arch)” – although the arches could be very slight in rectangular bases (Figures 3). Both designations were also shown embossed horizontally (only on rectangular or square bases), and one rectangular base had “M.B.W.” in an arch, but “MILLVILLE” was horizontal.



Figure 3 – MBW / Millville (eBay)

The vast majority of these bottles were mouth blown, but a few bases from eBay auction photos exhibited machine scars. As noted in the history section, we have found no documentary evidence for machine production, but these scars could not have been produced by hand methods. In our admittedly small sample, only generic bottles were machine made.

### **M.B.W. / U.S.A. (1903-1930)**

Numerous eBay auctions have featured drug store bottles with “U.S.A.” embossed below the M.B.W. mark. These are found in at least two configurations: “M.B.W. (arch) / U.S.A. (inverted arch)” and both designations horizontal. Once again, the horizontal embossing only seems to appear on square bases, although some of those have arched versions. Also, as in the above configurations, some of the arches are slight (Figure 4). These are much more common than any other variation. We have hypothesized in various other sections of this work that the term “U.S.A.” was used predominantly for bottles exported to other countries. This seems to be a logical explanation for the second “M.B.W.” variation as well. As with the above logo, some of these were machine made (see the lower base in Figure 4).



Figure 4 – MBW / U.S.A. (eBay)

## MBWCo

Toulouse (1971:349) noted that the MBWCo mark was rare but dated it 1903 to 1930. We have not yet observed an example of this mark.

## MILLVILLE BOTTLE WORKS (ca. 1970s)

This mark appeared on the sides of variously colored (red, amber, green, light blue) Weiss-style bottles with one-part finishes and Hutter-style ceramic stoppers. The front of each bottle is embossed

“MILLVILLE  
BOTTLE (arch) / 1888  
/ WORKS / THIS  
BOTTLE NOT / TO  
BE SOLD” with  
everything below the  
arch embossed  
horizontally (Figure 5).  
The bottles were  
machine made and had  
the Circle-W logo of  
the T.C. Wheaton Co.  
on the bases. These



Figure 5 – 1970s bottle (eBay)

bottles are quite common and were probably made to commemorate the opening of Wheaton Village, a reproduction of the T.C. Wheaton original 1888 factory. The Village opened on July 5, 1976, just in time for the bicentennial celebration of the United States.

The name chosen by Wheaton brings up a perplexing question. Was the original plant called the Millville Bottle Works? If so, it brings to mind interesting ramifications. First, the MBW on Hutchinson soda bottles used by the Concord Bottling Co. *may* have been made at the plant. We still consider this unlikely, but it cannot be entirely eliminated. Second, when the

Millville Bottle Co. used the name, it may have been quite a deliberate insult to the Wheaton family. The break plus the use of the name suggests a possible major falling out in the ranks of the Wheaton company in 1903. It is more likely, however, that whomever selected the name merely misunderstood the significance of the term in Millville history.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

This seems to be another case – commonly recorded in these histories of glass houses – where a family disagreement led to the formation of a new company in direct competition with the older family business. In this case, Scott Wheaton seems to have had a falling out with other family members and convinced James Mitchell to join him in a defection from the T.C. Wheaton Co. to form the Millville Bottle Works. Although the Millville plant was quite effective, it does not seem to have harmed T.C. Wheaton, since the older firm eventually engulfed the upstart – although that was only after the death of Scott Wheaton.

After Scott Wheaton's death, the reorganized firm probably sold the plant to the larger Wheaton enterprise rather than retool the entire factory for machine production. T.C. Wheaton had prided itself in its hand manufacture, only moving to machine manufacture when industry demands forced the change. Virtually, the entire prescription industry continued with hand production into the mid-1920s – with the notable exceptions of the Owens Bottle Co. and the Illinois Glass Co. Even the giant Whitall Tatum Co. continued hand manufacture into the 1920s.

A few of the early sources called the firm the Millville Bottle Co., but this was almost certainly just a common usage rather than a separate name actually used by the company. Since the M.B.W. logo had a claim of 1903 for first use, Millville Bottle *Company* simply makes no sense. The firm was almost certainly called the Millville Bottle Works from the beginning until ca. 1925, when the T.C. Wheaton Co. purchased it – retaining the name until it closed the plant in 1930. The plant probably used “MBW” with “MILLVILLE” and the logo with “U.S.A.” concurrently during the entire life of the firm. The “MBWCo” mark is probably a mis-recording.

Bottles embossed “Millville Bottle Works” and “1888” on the side are *all* of recent manufacture, probably only during the 1970s, possibly only in 1976. The embossed date is commemorative only and bears no connection to the actual date of manufacture. The MBW

initials on Hutchinson soda bottle bases were probably the initials of someone connected with the bottling operation rather than a manufacturer's mark.

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