

Neodesha Bottle & Glass Co.

Bill Lockhart, Beau Schriever, Bill Lindsey, and Carol Serr

Although only in business for a short eight years, the Neodesha Bottle & Glass Co. was nonetheless able to leave its mark on the pages of glass history. Like the majority of glass houses during the early 20th century, the factory did not use a logo on most of its bottles. However, the tradition of applying initials or logos to the bases or heels of beer bottles had been in practice for three decades by the time the firm began the production of beer bottles – the only known container bearing the distinctive Circle-NB logo.

Histories

Neodesha Bottle & Glass Co., Neodesha, Kansas (1904-1912)

The Neodesha Bottle & Glass Co. was located just off S. Granby Ave. in the northwestern part of Neodesha, Kansas, but was incorporated in Wisconsin on June 21, 1904, with a capital stock of \$20,000 divided among seven shareholders. Management of the operation fell to the Doolittle Brothers (W.A. Doolittle, W.D. Doolittle, and S.J. Doolittle – although someone named Swan was apparently also a stockholder), experienced glassmen from Muncie, Indiana – although W.A. had recently managed a Coffeyville glass factory. Construction of the plant began on July 5, 1904, and, in November, the initial output of the factory was three boxcar loads of whiskey bottles made for a distillery in El Reno, Oklahoma. The plant made lantern globes, gas light globes, and prescription bottles, all of flint (colorless) glass, along with its main line of whiskey bottles. These included shoo-fly and jo-jo flasks, along with “brandy” (i.e., cylinder whiskey) bottles – “all shaped larger at the top than at the bottom” (Rankin 2007).

The company increased its capital stock to \$40,000 on July 16, 1906, and noted that the nature of business conducted during the past year had been the “manufacture of glass bottles.” George Thompson was the president (Incorporation Records). By 1907, the plant made prescription, beer, soda, wine, and brandy bottles (Thomas Publishing Co. 1907:158; 1909:200). The corporation was apparently doing well as it again increased the capital stock to \$100,000 on June 23, 1908. The extra capital was needed to increase the capacity of the plant. The *Neodesha*

Daily Sun reported on September 20, 1910, that the factory had built a new ten-ring continuous tank – replacing the older six-ring one – along with a four-ring tank plus plans for another four-ring tank in the near future. The firm estimated that it would be in full production by October and intended to eliminate the summer shutdown and turn out bottles and jars all year. The 1912 statement noted that the company sold bottles in both Kansas and Oklahoma. Earlier, the charter only claimed a sales area in Kansas.

The 1913 Annual Report, however, noted that the corporation was only in business “part of year” in 1912, although it failed to mention exactly when operations ceased or why. The group filed a report in February 1914 stating that the firm had not conducted business in 1913. Thompson had remained president throughout the tenure of the company, 1904 to 1912 (Incorporation Records). A document from the Rankin Memorial Library claimed that the factory was dismantled in 1910, and the operational machinery was shipped to Sand Springs, Oklahoma. The date is unlikely in view of the information in the corporation records, but the relatively nearby Kerr Glass Co. at Sand Springs would be a logical buyer for the equipment.

Northwestern Bottle Co., St. Louis, Missouri (1902-present)

The Kransberg family opened the Northwestern Bottle Co. at St. Louis, Missouri, in 1902, and the firm continues in business in 2017 as Kranson Industries. Although occasionally listed as a glass plant, the firm was actually a bottle distributor, specializing in beer and soda bottles (Thomas Publishing Co. 1914:530; 1921:781). Despite its long life, we have found surprisingly little information on the company.

Containers and Marks

NB in a circle

Herskovitz (1978:9) unearthed two bases with this mark from the trash dump at the second Fort Bowie (1868-1894). Neither contained any associated numbers or letters, and he did not comment on mold lines or other markings. Herskovitz made no attempt to identify the maker or set a date range.

Ayres et al. (1980:unnumbered page) showed two variations of this basemark, both on export beer bottles. One variation had the NB centered and surrounded by a circle. The other was identical except that it included a 7 centered just above the mark and protruding slightly between the N and B (Figure 1). When the Bottle Research Group observed the Tucson Urban Renewal collection (the project reported by the Ayres group), we found three examples of the mark, one accompanied by the 7 as shown in the Ayres report (Figure 2). Each was aqua in color, made with a post-bottom base, and had a tooled, two-part finish. The tooled finish indicates a probable manufacture after 1890 and more likely post-1896 (see Lockhart 2007).

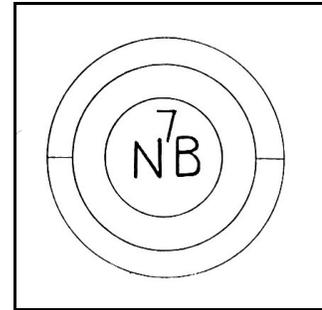


Figure 1 – Circle-N 7 (Ayres et al. 1980)

Another base with the mark (apparently amber in color) protruded from the Tom Kelly bottle house in Rhyolite, Nevada. The house was built ca. 1905 (National Park 2017). The NB was embossed in the center of the base in comparatively thin lines and surrounded by an embossed circle. The marks may or may not have punctuation.



Figure 2 – Circle-N (TUR & Parks California)

Toulouse (1971:377) attributed this mark to the North British Bottle Manufacturing Co., Ltd., Shettleston (Glasgow), Scotland, and claimed it was used between 1903 and 1937. Toulouse noted that “many of its bottles, filled with Scotch whiskey, found their way to the United States and are identified in collections here.” He further stated, “Green glass was produced by hand blowing in 1904.” Toulouse did not mention machine production for the company until the 1930s.

Ayres et al. (1980:28) suggest that “bottles made with [these marks] are most likely American, and based on the dates of manufacture of associated beer bottles, were probably made sometime in the c. 1915 period.” The Ayres group (1980:29) noted that “these could be the marks of the North Baltimore Bottle Glass Co. or its apparent predecessor the North Baltimore Bottle Works” or an unknown glass maker.

Hurst (2005:257) listed a beer bottle with NB embossed on its base. The aqua bottle was mouth blown. Holder noted:

To date, the NB trademark has not been positively attributed to a specific glasshouse. It is believed that the NB trademark (from a reported labeled beer) was used by the National Union of the United Brewery Workers of St. Louis, Missouri. The label used by the Union Workers was a complex geometrically styled trademark with the A.F. of L. initials flanked by the words “Union Beer” first registered in 1895 (TM 26,726). NB has not been found on the bases of aqua soda bottles indicating that, if it is a Union Beer, the brewery workers bottled only beer.

We doubt that NB is a union mark. All union marks we have observed on beer bottles appeared on the paper labels. The few union marks we have seen embossed on glass containers (including one shown in Hurst 2005:262) referred to labor unions connected to glass manufacture, rather than brewing or bottling.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although the identification of this mark is not absolutely conclusive, we believe that the Neodesha Bottle & Glass Co. is the best choice. The mark is uncommon, generally indicating a glass house that was both small and not in business for a long period of time. The type of beer bottle bearing the Circle NB mark was made during the time period when the company was in business, and the plant was listed as making beer bottles in 1907. Although the plant initially only made flint (i.e., colorless) bottles, it almost certainly included aqua and possibly amber bottles, more typical colors for beer and soda containers – especially after the installation of a second tank. Indeed, this expansion into other color realms may have been the reason for building the extra tanks.

Limiting our search to factories with “NB” initials, the only other choices that we have found are unlikely. The New Boston Glass Works, Perryopolis, Pennsylvania (ca. 1816-ca. 1837), New Bremen Glass Manufactory, Frederick County, Maryland (1784-1795), and New Brooklyn Glass Works, Marshallville, New Jersey (ca. 1848-ca.1876), were all in business far

too early. The Noblesville Bottle Co., Noblesville, Indiana (ca. 1904-ca. 1905), in business during the correct period, was only known to make medicine bottles. The North Baltimore Bottle Glass Co., North Baltimore, Ohio (1885-1926), was also in business during the proper time frame and certainly made beer bottles. However, the plant made large quantities of beer bottles and had begun using its NBBGCo mark during the earlier era of beer bottle manufacture and continued using that mark. The Toulouse solution, the North British Bottle Manufacturing Co., is unlikely because the bottles do not show any of the characteristics of British bottles from the period, but they *do* exhibit the attributes of American export beer bottles of the time.

One detail does not fit. Two of these bottles were found in a context that predates Neodesha (Fort Bowie 1868-1894). However, the superintendent, Larry Ludwig, at Fort Bowie told us that there were several groups that made use of the old fort after it closed. It is likely that these bottles were left by one of these latecomers. The manufacturing characteristics of the Circle-NB bottles *could* have come from the very end of the fort sequence but was much more likely from the early 1900s.

Another contender as a user of the mark, while less likely, cannot be completely ignored. This was the Northwestern Bottle Co., St. Louis, Missouri (ca. 1914-at least 1921). As a distributor or jobber, Northwestern was much less likely to have had its initials embossed on bottles. Thus, Neodesha remains the best choice for the mark.

Acknowledgments

Our gratitude to Wanda Wakkinen for tireless proofreading.

Sources

Ayres, James E., William Liesenbien, Lee Fratt, and Linda Eure

1980 "Beer Bottles from the Tucson Urban Renewal Project, Tucson, AZ." Unpublished manuscript, Arizona State Museum Archives.

Herskovitz, Robert M.

1978 *Fort Bowie Material Culture*. University of Arizona Press, Tucson.

Hurst, Gwen

2005 “Appendix B: Mascot Saloon Group Container Glass Identification and Dating.” In *The Mascot Saloon: Archaeological Investigations in Skagway, Alaska, Volume 10*. By Catherine Holder Spude, pp. 257-286. United States Government Printing Office, Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Anchorage, Alaska.

Incorporation Records

1904-1914 Incorporation Records, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin.

Kelly’s Bottle House

2008 “Kelly’s Bottle House.” <http://www.agilitynut.com/h/rhyolite.html>

Lockhart, Bill

2007 “The Origins and Life of the Export Beer Bottle.” *Bottles and Extras* 18(3):49-57, 59.

National Park Central Reservations

2017 “Tom Kelly’s Bottle House.” *National Park Central Reservations.
<http://www.nationalparkcentralreservations.com/activity/tom-kellys-bottle-house>

Rankin Memorial Library, W. A.

2007 Packet of information provided by the W. A. Rankin Memorial Library, Neodosha, Kansas. The packet included newspaper clippings and pages copied from at least three (uncited) books.

Thomas Publishing Co.

1907-1908 *Thomas’ Register of American Manufacturers and First Hands in all Lines: The Buyers Guide*. Thomas Publishing Co., New York.

1909 *Thomas’ Register of American Manufacturers and First Hands in All Lines: A Classified Reference Book for Buyers and Sellers*. Thomas Publishing, New York.

1914 *Thomas’ Register of American Manufacturers and First Hands in All Lines: A Classified Reference Book for Buyer and Sellers*. Thomas Publishing, New York.

1921 *Thomas Register of American Manufacturers and First Hands in All Lines*. Thomas Publishing Co., New York.

Toulouse, Julian Harrison

1971 *Bottle Makers and Their Marks*. Thomas Nelson, New York.

Last updated 1/16/2018

