

Obear-Nester Glass Co.

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The Obear-Nester Glass Co. grew out of the short-lived Allison-Obear Glass Co. (1891-1892) and the Obear Glass Works (1892-1894), when the three Nester brothers bought into Thomas J. Obear's glass business. Located at East St. Louis, Illinois, the plant primarily made drug store containers, although it also produced a variety of other bottles. Obear-Nester obtained a factory at Kansas City, Missouri, from 1903 to ca. 1928, and purchased a plant at Lincoln, Illinois, in 1952. Indian Head, Inc. bought the business in 1967.

Histories

Allison-Obear Glass Co., East St. Louis, Illinois (1891-1892)

Obear Glass Works, East St. Louis, Illinois (1892-1894)

The Allison-Obear Glass Co.¹ founded a plant at the Claremont Addition of East St. Louis in 1891 at the junction of Airline and Belt Railways using a 14-pot Gill furnace. The plant was reported as open on October 14 but did not begin production until November 16. On January 5, 1892, the office stove set fire to the building, immediately burning the telephone wires and cutting off communication to the fire department. The factory was totally destroyed at a loss of \$60,000, only \$40,000 of which was insured. Fortunately, the furnaces suffered little damage, although Allison withdrew from the partnership by March. Obear rebuilt the plant and was back in operation by April 6 as the Obear Glass Works at 405 N. Main. Thomas J. Obear was the president of the corporation with William F. Obear as secretary (City directory 1893; *Commoner & Glassworker* 1892:3; Roller 1997).

A thorough search of the internet and secondary sources failed to reveal the first name of Allison. Newspapers and journal articles consistently referred to him as "Mr. Allison." He may

¹ In a really cute misunderstanding, Toulouse (1971:373) called the firm the Allis & Obear Co. – actually the Allison-Obear Glass Co.

have been James W. Allison, listed in 1891 and 1893 in the St. Louis directory as a manufacturing agent, as a glass manufacturer in the 1899 and 1901 issues, and in the 1900 census as a glass manufacturer. Allison's obituary noted that he was the former head of the Allison Window Glass Co. and entered the glass business in 1872 (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 4/18/1925).

Obear-Nester Glass Co., East St. Louis, Illinois (1894-1978)

When three brothers – Joseph, Fred, and Michael Nester – joined the operation in 1894, the corporation became the Obear-Nester Glass Co. (Toulouse 1971:373). The 1895 city directory listed Thomas J Obear as president and William F. Obear as secretary. In 1897, the plant operated “one 14-pot furnace and two tanks of 6-pot capacity on flint green and amber bottles,” but a second listing for the same year stated that the plant used 14 pots on flint glass bottles and 4 pots to make “green” containers. The number of pots for flint glass remained steady at 14 in 1898, but neither green nor amber glass were listed. The 14-pot listing remained in 1900 but was reduced to eight pots in 1901 and that remained steady the following year (*National Glass Budget* 1897:7; 1897:5; 1898:7; 1900:11; 1901:11; 1902:11).

The firm had incorporated by 1904 with Thomas J. Obear as president, Joseph Nester as vice president, and William F. Obear as secretary and treasurer. The plant operated two furnaces with 40 pots and two day tanks, making flint prescription, beer, liquor, and mineral bottles. Later that year, the plant was listed as having one continuous tank with eight rings. By 1906, however, the firm had expanded, using two furnaces with 30 pots and three tanks with 28 rings, although one tank had disappeared by the following year. In 1908, the plant had one less furnace, leaving one furnace with 15 rings and two continuous tanks with 20 rings (Roller 1997).

In 1913, Obear-Nester made a general line of bottles at three continuous tanks with 26 rings and one furnace with 15 pots – at automatic and semiautomatic machines as well as by hand. (*Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913:952). Toulouse (1971:374), however, claimed that the company installed semiautomatic bottle machines in 1915 and adopted the N in a round-cornered square mark at that time. Thomas Obear remained president until 1913, but Joseph Nester occupied that position by the following year. Joseph K. Nester was the vice president, general manager, and plant manager, with D.W. Bagby as secretary and Samuel H. Wyss (who joined the firm in 1895) as treasurer (Toulouse 1971:374-375).

Apparently, Obear-Nester had developed its own fully automatic machine by June 6, 1921, when Lax & Shaw, Ltd., a British glass house ordered two “Nester No-Boy Machines” (Court Listener n.d.). The “No-Boy” was probably the “Glass Blowing Machine” patented (No. 1,458,454) by J.M. Young on June 12, 1923 (Figure 1). Young applied for the patent on October 21, 1916, and probably began marketing the machine within a year or two. Young also designed at least three bottles for the firm, including the second Rex Oval (see below). By 1922, W.A. Redenburg was the vice president and the plant made prescription, vials, beers, minerals, patent, proprietary, liquors, and flasks in amber, green, and flint colors (Toulouse 1971:374-375).

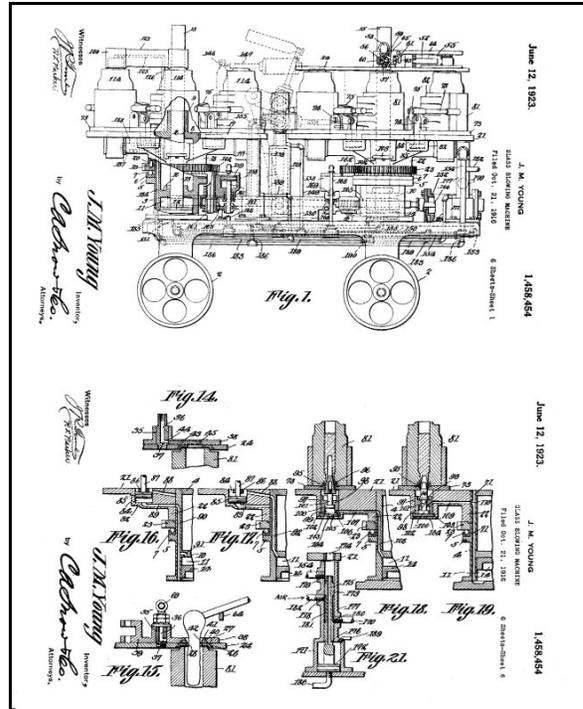


Figure 1 – Young 1923 Patent

By 1927, the plant made “prescriptions, vials, beers, minerals, patent, proprietary, liquors, [and] flasks” by both machine and hand methods at three continuous tanks with 16 rings. Creditors tried to force Obear-Nester into bankruptcy on October 7, 1927, but Joseph Nester, the president, convinced the authorities that it would be in everyone’s best interests to allow the firm to work its way out of financial difficulties. The panic may have been caused by the news that on October 6, 1928, that Federal Judge C.G. Fairs had ruled that Obear-Nester had “infringed glass manufacturing patents of the Hartford-Empire company of Hartford, Conn.” (*American Glass Review* 1927:141; *Bellevue News-Democrat* 10/7/1927; *San Diego Union* 10/7/1928). Although we have found no specific reference, Obear-Nester obviously weathered that particular storm. Newspapers reported various labor strikes by employees of Obear-Nester during the 1930s-1940s period, but they were all settled within a day or two.

The factory reorganized in 1933, dropping vials, patent, proprietary, and flasks, using two continuous tanks and two day tanks with four rings, all by machine. The company compacted the listing to “prescriptions, beers, packers and preservers, bottle specialties” in 1935, and that remained through 1936. By 1937, the plant made “prescriptions, flint and amber beers, liquors,

toilets and cosmetics, bottle specialties” by machine at three continuous tanks with 21 rings, and that listing remained until at least 1944 (*American Glass Review* 1933:69; 1935:89; 1937:89).

On May 23, 1967, *the Boston Traveler* reported that “Indian-Head, Inc. and Obear-Nester Glass Co. have signed their merger agreement which now will be put up to stockholders for approval.” The *Omaha World-Herald* described the final legal hurdle for the merger on September 17, 1967, noting that Obear-Nester would “continue to operate as an independent division.” The *Springfield Union* (4/15/1968) however, dated merger at September 15, 1967. Thyssen-Bornemisza purchased Indian Head in 1975. According to former employees, the plant closed on December 31, 1978 (Ancestry.com 2012; Roller 1997).

Obear-Nester Glass Co., Kansas City, Missouri (1903-ca. 1928)

Obear-Nester purchased the Interstate Glass Co. at Kansas City, Missouri, in early 1903, and Michael J. Nester resigned from the Western Glass Mfg. Co. at Denver to become the manager of the factory (see the Other I section for a discussion of the Interstate Glass Co. and the transition). The plant used one continuous tank with eight rings. The listing for 1906 included two furnaces with 30 pots and three continuous tanks with 28 rings. In 1908, however, there was only a single furnace with 15 pots, along with two continuous tanks of 20 rings. By at least 1909, the plant made beer bottles (Roller 1998; Toulouse 1971:374).

On January 24, 1910, the *Bridgeton Evening News* reported that “two machines are in operation at the Obear-Nester Glass Co., Kansas City, Mo., and six shops on each shift are making blownware.”

The *Kansas City Star* followed up with an Obear-Nester ad on May 5, 1910, informing that the firm produced “in our Kansas City plant a full line of

liquor, soda water and beer bottles. At our East St. Louis plant a full line of druggists’ prescription bottles, private mold ware, extract bottles, liquor and soda water (Figure 2). This is the first inkling that the factories manufactured different products.

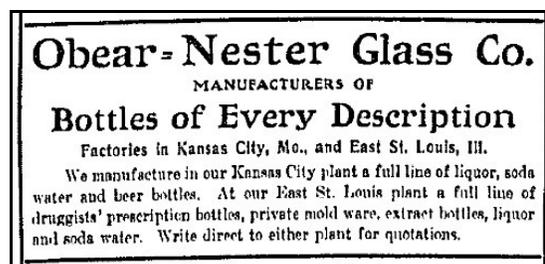


Figure 2 – 1910 ad (*Kansas City Star* 5/5/1910)

On March 3, 1914, the *Evening News* noted that two tanks were “running and making three kinds of glass, amber, green and flint. The large tank is divided into two parts, one turning out green and the other flint glass.” It followed up with a blurb on October 28, 1914, that “the ten-ring tank [operated] seven machines, two block shops and one stem.” The term “block shops” probably indicated mouth-blown molds, but we have never run across “stem” shops before. We could guess at tableware, but Obear-Nester was a container firm, making no tableware that we have discovered.

A report from the *Kansas City Star* on March 10, 1925, described an incendiary fire that burned “almost an acre of warehouse buildings” at Obear-Nester on March 10, 1925. The main building was unharmed. The Kansas City factory remained in operation until at least 1928 (Roller 1998; Toulouse 1971:374).

Obear-Nester Glass Co., Lincoln, Illinois (1952-1978)

Obear-Nester purchased the Lincoln, Illinois, plant of the Knox Glass Co. in 1952 and renamed it the Lincoln Container Corp. (Toulouse 1971:296, 298, 374-375). The plant remained open until at least 1971 and probably until the end of the company. See the section on Knox Glass for more information. The *State Journal-Register* provided a post script on April 29, 1977, when it reported that the Pierce Glass Co. had “expanded to include operation of Obear-Nester’s Lincoln, Ill. plant.” Both firms were part of Indian Head, Inc.

Containers and Marks

Toulouse (1971:375) noted that the company made “prescriptions, vials, beers, minerals, patent, proprietary, liquors, and flasks in flint green and amber.” Information in the history section (above) also clearly indicates that the Kansas City plant made soda bottles.

A&O (1891-1892)

Corbin & Russell (2010:210) discovered “on one of the unidentified bottle bases [in their study of Yellowstone National Park] a manufacturer’s mark “A&O.” Since no mention of these initials is found in reference guides, there is no clear indication of Allis & Obear Co. [*sic*]

manufacturing this piece.”² Although the evidence is far from absolute, we suggest that “A&O” would logically fit Allison-Obear. Unfortunately, Corbin & Russell did not describe the type of bottle nor the manufacturing characteristics.

According to Connie C. (2012), “Bottles from this year are likely embossed ‘A & O’ (the ‘A & O’ glass maker’s mark resembles no other glass bottle company’s mark), but there are no official records to confirm this.” Unfortunately, we have been unable to locate an example.

ASEPTIC (ca. 1915-ca. late 1920s)

This mark was shown on page 4 of the 1922-1923 Obear-Nester Glass Co. catalog. Page 1 described the Aseptic Oval as “our leading prescription bottle” (Figure 3). The fancy, graduated bottle was available in ½- to 32-ounce

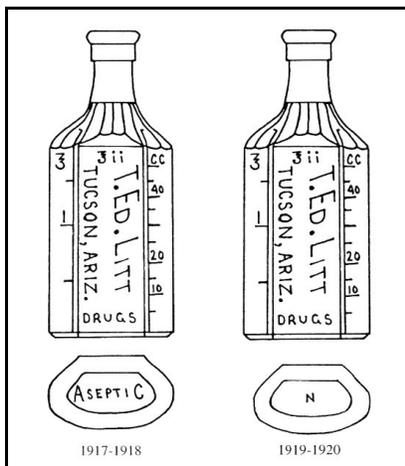


Figure 4 – Aseptic (Miller 2008:239)

sizes in either sterilized-and-corked or regular packing. Although date ranges are currently uncertain, Miller

(2008:239) illustrated two examples from Arizona

that he dated between 1917 and 1918 (Figure 4). Interestingly, in each case, Miller illustrated the bottle embossed “ASEPTIC” alongside an identical bottle only embossed with an “N” on the base. He dated the second bottle 1919-1920 (see discussion of “N” marks below).

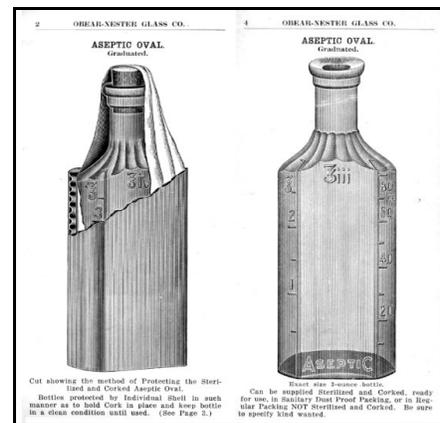


Figure 3 – Aseptic Oval (Obear-Nester catalog 1922)

Preble (2002:530) showed a single example dated ca. 1905. Steven Van Wormer (personal communication, 7/6/2007) has found the bottles in a 1920-1925 context. The earliest graduated ovals we have found were advertised in 1902, but all examples we have seen of the Aseptic Oval have had reinforced finishes. This probably indicates that the bottles were not

² The authors undoubtedly used Toulouse as a reference – hence, the incorrect “Allis & Obear rather than Allison-Obear.

produced earlier than ca. 1915. Since the 1922-1923 catalog listed the bottle, it was certainly used until that time, and we have both mouth-blown and machine-made examples, suggesting a continuation into 1930 or later (Figure 5).

BANNER (1899-ca. 1920s)

BANNER appeared on the base of a bottle in an Obear-Nester ad from 1901, although the ad failed to provide any further information about the bottle style (Bethman 1991:83). Griffenhagen and Bogard (1999:44, 103, 122) noted that BANNER was used by Obear-Nester from 1899 to 1920. The trademark was registered in 1900 and had been used since July 13, 1899. We have only seen one example (Figure 6).

Toulouse (1971:69), however, claimed that BANNER was “a brand name used by [Fisher-Bruce Co., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania], including fruit jars, as made for them by Ball Bros. Co., of Muncie, Ind. He dated the mark ca. 1910 to 1930. Since the bottle use is so different – fruit jars versus prescription bottles – both of these may be correct, and there should be no problem in identifying the correct glass house..

L in a round-cornered square (1952-1978)

According to Toulouse (1971:375), the L-in-a-round-cornered-square mark was used by the Lincoln Container Corp., a subsidiary of Obear-Nester (Figure 7). Obear-Nester bought the former Knox Glass Co., Lincoln, Illinois, plant in 1952. Presumably, the mark continued in use until Obear-Nester ceased operation in 1978. See the Other L section for more information.



Figure 5 – Aseptic bases (TUR)

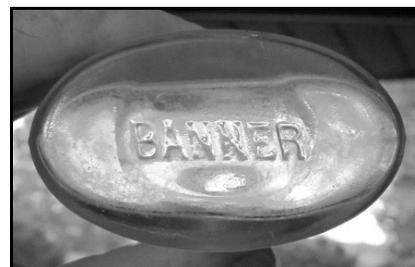


Figure 6 – Banner (Kevin Dougherty)



Figure 7 – Box-L

O-N or ON (ca. 1910-1920s)

Miller (1980:5) illustrated a crown-finished soda bottle from the Artesian Bottling Works, Belleville, Illinois, marked on the front heel with “O-N.7,” larger than the typical font size found on heelmarks. He noted that “the letters O-N probably refer to the Obear-Nester Glass Co. of East St. Louis, which was in business from 1894 to 1978” and dated the bottle, itself about 1913. We have observed a soda bottle from Roswell, New Mexico, marked “O-N 7” on the front heel as well as examples with other numbers (Figure 8). The bottle was probably used during the 1910-1920 period.



Figure 8 – O-N

Bill Porter discovered a total of nine Coca-Cola bottles embossed on the heels with “ON” (no hyphen). Each base was embossed with a one- or two-digit number between 5 and 24 (Figure 9). Unlike the logos on the non-Coke bottles, these were embossed in a smaller font. The bottles were made for Coke franchises at Kansas, Louisiana, Arkansas, Illinois, and Iowa – all states adjacent to the Obear-Nester plant at East St. Louis.



Figure 9 – ON (Bill Porter)

Although this mark does not fit with the other Obear-Nester logos, it was probably used by the firm during the teens and 1920s. We have found no other logical explanation for the letters. Also see the Discussion and Conclusions section.

OBEAR-NESTER GLASS (1975-1977)

Roller (1983:194; 2011:597) listed the Longlife ® MASON with an embossed drawing of fruits and vegetables in a circular plate on the back body. The base was embossed “OBEAR-NESTER / GLASS” (Figure 10). The jars were made between 1975 and 1977. Variations of the same jar from Pierce Glass Co. and Laurens Glass Co. (all part of Indian Head, Inc.,



Figure 10 – Longlife Mason (eBay)

by that time) were embossed PIERCE GLASS and LAURENS QUALITY GLASS SINCE 1910 respectively on the bases. The Longlife WIDE MOUTH was also made during the same period with OBEAR-NESTER GLASS on the base. Creswick (1987b:83) illustrated and discussed four variations of the Longlife Mason and Longlife Wide Mouth, including two that had bodies that tapered down – similar to a tumbler shape. These had embossed fruit medallions on the reverse (Figure 11).

N (ca. 1920s)

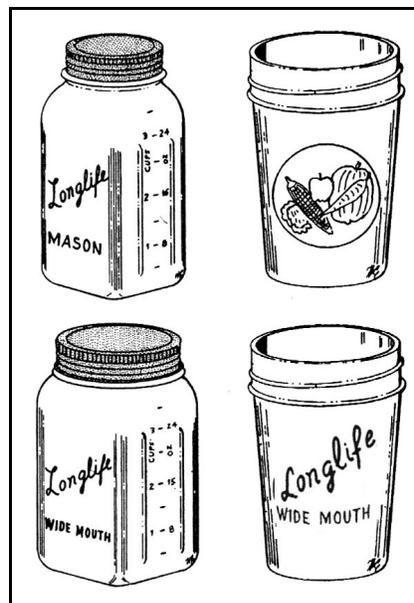


Figure 11 – Longlife Mason (Creswick 1987b:83)

Whitten (2018) noted that a simple “N” was one of the marks for the Obear-Nester Glass Co. We recorded two of these sans serif “N” logos on the bases of one rectangular medicinal or household bottle at Fort Bliss and one prescription bottle in our possession (Figure 12). The prescription bottle was an exact match for the ASEPTIC bottle illustrated on page 4 or the 1922 Obear-Nester catalog, except that the actual bottle had six flutes on the front half of the shoulder, and the one in the catalog had eight.

In addition, Miller (2008:239) illustrated two identical prescription bottles used by the T. Ed. Litt Drug Store at Tucson, Arizona. One, however, was embossed “ASEPTIC” on the base, while the other had a sans serif “N.” Miller dated the bottles “1917-1918” and “1919-1920,” respectively (see Figure 4). It is highly likely that the “N” was used on various types of Obear-Nester prescription and similar bottles during the 1920s. Although our sample is small, all of the “N” bottles we have seen were machine made. It is possible that these were engravers’ errors – intended to be the Box-N logo discussed below.

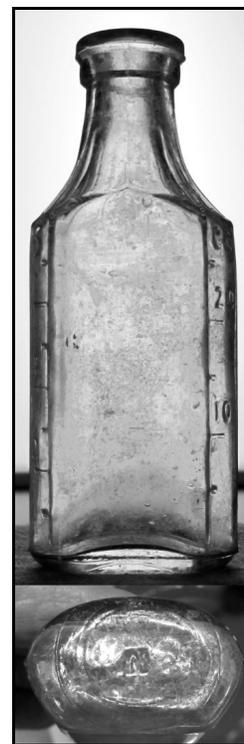


Figure 12 – N

N in a circle or oval (1895-mid-1920s)

According to Toulouse (1971:373-374), there were four variations of the “surrounded” mark. The first three variations (circle, oval, and rectangle) were used “up to 1915 on hand operations.” Peterson (1968:43) illustrated a mark consisting of a cursive “N” in an “O” with the curled ends of the “N” extending outside the “O.” He noted that Obear-Nester claimed the mark as molded into the glass and used by 1895.³ Toulouse (1971:373) also illustrated this early mark, stating that it was registered on January 3, 1905, and used since January 1895 (Figure 13). However, Toulouse also mentioned that Obear-Nester used the more elaborate logo “mainly on letterheads and bottle boxes, although the registration also specified bottles.” This was probably the first use of the Circle-N mark. We have found no descriptions of the oval mark in the literature (except Toulouse). The oval marks are rare – if they exist at all – but these should be dated the same as the circle logos if found. Although our sample is admittedly small, we have only discovered the circle marks on mouth-blown bottles, but the rectangle appears to be on bottles during the same period as the fourth variation (the square – see below).



Figure 13 – Oval N (1922 Obear-Nester catalog)

The Circle-N mark appeared in the drawing of a St. Louis Oval bottle on page 12 of the 1922-1923 Obear-Nester catalog. This brings up an interesting question about the mark (Figure 14). Toulouse (1971:373) noted that the mark was only used on bottles made by “hand operations” prior to 1915. Since the mark shows up at least seven years later in a catalog, something is amiss. Although Toulouse was unaware, Obear-Nester continued some hand production until at least 1933 – as noted in the history section above.



Figure 14 – Circle N (El Paso Coliseum)

A pharmaceutical bottle used by H.F. Bader, East St. Louis, Illinois, was also marked on its base with a Circle N. Miller (n.d.:3) attributed the mark to Obear-Nester and dated the bottles 1894 to 1915. The end date was probably based on Toulouse. Preble (2002:729) recorded an example of the Circle-N mark on a drug store bottle used during the 1900-1907 period.

³ Peterson obtained all of his data from Patent Office records.

Griffenhagen and Bogard (1999:126) attributed the Circle-N variation to Obear-Nestor (1895-1915) and noted that it was also used by the Lambert Pharmacal Co., adding no further information. Our online search, however, disclosed no such logo on Lambert bottles or advertisements – although some Listerine bottles (a Lambert product) had both Circle-N and Circle-M logos, but these were the marks of Obear-Nester and the Maryland Glass Corp.

N in a square or rectangle (1915-1978)

Beginning ca. 1913, with the inception of semiautomatic bottle machines used by the company, the rounded-cornered square was adopted (Toulouse 1971:373-374). The only variation listed in the 1964 table of glass trademarks compiled by Owens-Illinois, however, was an N in a round-cornered rectangle (Berge 1980:83). The mark was still illustrated in 1971 (Hanlon 1971:6-17) but was no longer listed in 1982 (Emhart 1982:74-75). Obear-Nester registered the N in a rectangle on June 15, 1948, claiming a first use in February of 1895 – although we have found no evidence that the logo was actually used that early. This was almost certainly a reference to the Oval-O logo use.

In an unpublished study of beer bottles from a ca. 1941-1942 context, Lockhart (2000:2-3) examined fourteen bases or fragments that displayed the N-in-a-round-cornered-square mark. Although six fragments did not contain dates, the remaining eight were marked with two-digit date codes between 1936 and 1941 with frequencies of 1936 (1), 1939 (1), 1940 (2), 1941 (4). It is worth noting that three of the undated bases contained a single digit (9) and one showed a single digit (0) in the area where some other Obear-Nestor bases displayed two-digit dates. These may indicate dates of 1939 and 1940. We have seen double-digit codes to 1952.

It seems probable that there is no *real* difference between the square and rectangle marks. The rectangle, for example, may be horizontal or vertical, and all had rounded corners. It is probably that the perceived differences in these examples were caused by the whims of mold makers (Figure 15).



Figure 15 – Box-N (eBay)

It is possible that Obear-Nester applied two (or more) different date code styles during the 1930s and into the 1940s. This is not unheard of, although it is unusual. Obear-Nester codes on beer bottles were certainly two-digit by at least 1936, but the company may have continued to use single-digit codes on soda bottles (and some beer bottles) until 1940. Miller (2008:75) illustrated soda bottles embossed with the Rectangle-N mark also with codes of 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8. However, these were on bottles for a company that opened in 1937. It is possible that different Obear-Nester factories used different date code systems. Although unusual, this has been noted with other companies (e.g., Owens-Illinois, during the transition period between single- and double-digit date codes).

REX (cursive) (1896-ca. 1930s)

Peterson (1968:43) noted that Obear-Nester had used the cursive Rex mark “blown or cast in the bottom” of a style of drug store bottle since 1896 (Figure 16). Bethman (1991:76) added that the style was used from ca. 1895 to ca. 1903. Bethman (1991:498, 712) only illustrated two examples of the mark. The bottle styles appear to be identical in both cases. Bethman’s date range for the bottles was 1896-1901. Miller (1999:61, 95, 122) showed two examples of this mark on bottle bases dated 1898-1901. He suggested that the mark was used from the late 1890s to 1903. The bottles in Miller’s drawings are identical to those found in Bethman.



Figure 16 – Rex base (TUR)

Griffenhagen and Bogard (1999:103, 127) expanded the date range from 1896 to 1920 and noted that the mark was placed on bottles used by Fanny Briggs Carr. Miller (n.d.:4, 6) added three more examples with date ranges of ca. 1900, 1877-1905, and “1890’s or later.” Preble (2002:528, 681, 697) showed three examples of the mark with combined date ranges of 1895-1915. Griffenhagen and Bogard (1999:44) noted that the trademark had been used by Obear-Nester since January 2, 1896. The actual trademark document stated that “the word ‘Rex’ is blown or cast in the bottom of the bottle. The style of letters used is not essential.”

The 1922-1923 Obear-Nester catalog (page 6) showed an illustration of the REX bottle with the cursive mark embossed on the base (Figure 17). Bottles were advertised as “both sides flat” and were available in ½- to 32-ounce sizes. The logo was “Trade Mark Registered” (No. 35,303). This suggests that the cursive mark may have been used until the 1937 patent of the block-lettered REX logo. Although our sample is small, all examples of the cursive Rex we have seen were mouth blown. Since Obear-Nester continued hand production until that date, it likely made all of cursive bottles by hand. A 1940 lawsuit by Obear-Nester against Walgreen’s Drug Store for the use of “Pyrex” and “Rex” on nursing bottles confirmed that the mark had been used

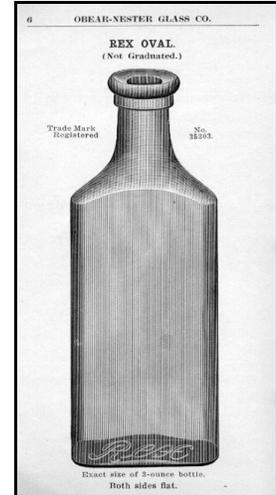


Figure 17 – Rex bottle (1922 Obear-Nester catalog)

prior to January 2, 1896, at which time it adopted the trade-mark “Rex,” and molded it into or affixed it to glass bottles; that it registered its trade-mark “Rex” October 23, 1900; that it re-registered it August 23, 1927, and that it continued to use the trade-mark on its goods. (Justia 2018)

REX (block letters) (1937-1978)



Figure 18 – Rex bottle (eBay)

Patricia Brown sent us information on a prescription bottle embossed on the base with “DESIGN PAT’D. (inverted arch) / REX {Box N mark} / 104574” along with an Owens scar (Figure 18). William A. Nester applied for a patent for “Bottle” on March 25,

1937, and received Patent No. 10,574 on May 18, 1937 (Figure 19). The bottle had a continuous-thread finish. We have also seen

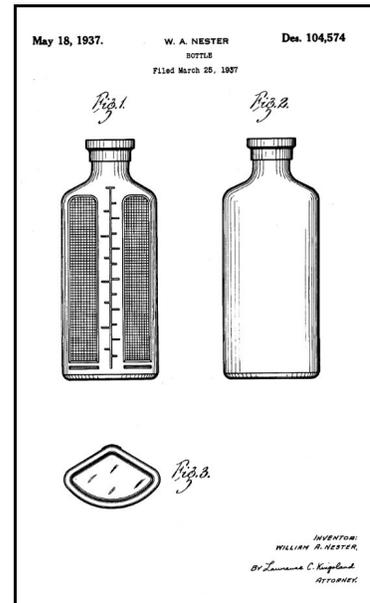


Figure 19 – Nester 1937 patent

these offered on eBay auctions. This is clearly an updated variation of the older cursive REX bottle and mark. Note that the original trade mark registration did not require a cursive “Rex.”

usona (1902-early 1930s)

The word “usona” is occasionally found embossed on the bases of drug store bottles in lower-case, back-slanted letters. The word was sometimes embossed to be read with the plate side of the bottle up, others with the plate side down (Figure 20). All known bottles were marked with graduations on both sides of the front plate. Thus far, the earliest record for colorless, graduated bottles is the 1902 Whitall Tatum Co. catalog, and such bottle types were used into the 1930s. The usona bottles, however, were mouth blown, suggesting a date range of ca. 1902 to the mid-1920s (late 1930s for Obear-Nester).



Figure 20 – usona bases

One such bottle was used by the Economical Drug Co. in El Paso, Texas. The store was open from 1915 to 1930 (Figure 21). Burggraaf and Southard (1998:332,365, 427, 432, 468, 471, 528, 621) showed drawings of nine bottles marked on the bases with usona. All but one are the same style (as is the one used at El Paso). Two of the Iowa druggists that used the bottles were in business only from 1905 to 1909 and 1905 to 1911. This indicates that the bottle style must have been offered during the ca. 1905 to ca. 1910 period. The second style, shown only once (Burggraaf & Southard 1998:631), was similarly marked with a central plate and graduations on each side. It only showed minor differences, such as a one-part finish instead of two-parts. The druggist, J.W. Schroeder, Webster City, Iowa, was only in business from 1910 to 1917. This suggests that there may have been a slight change in the style of the bottle ca. 1910.



Figure 21 – usona bottle

Griffenhagen and Bogard (1999:44, 103, 129) attributed the usona mark to the Obear-Nester Glass Co. Henry Forest applied for a patent for a “Design for a Prescription Bottle” on May 10, 1902, and received Design Patent No. 36,001 for the Usona Oval on August 12, 1902, assigning his invention to Obear-Nester (Figure 22). Obear-Nester registered the trademark on August 5, 1902, and claimed a usage since May of the same year. Griffenhagen and Bogard set a use range from 1902 to 1920. This range is in keeping with other data known about the bottles.

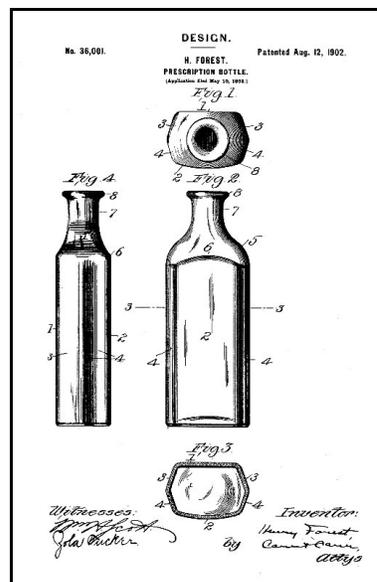


Figure 22 – Forest 1902 patent

Two questions remain about the name usona. First, what does it mean, and where did the name come from? One explanation is that it stands for United States of North America. It has been attributed to Frank Lloyd Wright:

What does Usonian mean? Who knows? Some suggest that Wright came up with the name during his first trip to Europe in 1910, when there was some discussion about referring to the USA as “Usona” in order to distinguish it from the new Union of South Africa. (In those days, as for much of the century, it’s easy to see how the two nations could be confused.) Wright once said he took the name from Samuel Butler’s utopian novel Erewhon. But no one’s been able to track it down there (St. Clair 2002).

The second question (for which we have found no answer) is: Why is it all in lower case, back-slanted letters?

VICTOR (1909-ca. 1920)

According to Griffenhagen and Bogard (1999:129), VICTOR was used by Obear-Nester from 1902 to 1920 (Figure 23). The authors showed a photo of the graduated bottle and the base with slightly back-slanted letters on page 44. Obear-Nester initiated a contest in 1908 to see

which pharmacist could send in the best name for the “Nu-est Oval” prescription bottle. They stated that “apparently the winner was the Victor Oval with the name blown in the base and available either plain or graduated.” The new bottle was available on January 1, 1909 (Griffenhagen and Bogard 1999:45). Obear-Nester patented the Nu-est Oval in 1907, but there is no indication that bottles were ever marked with the name (Griffenhagen and Bogard 1999:103). The VICTOR was not listed in the 1922-1923 catalog.

According to the U.S. Patent Office, Obear-Nester Glass Co. registered the word “VICTOR” for use on flasks. Obear-Nester claimed the name had been used since September 4, 1900. The term was to be “blown or cast into a flask,” but “the style of the letters used is not essential.” The accompanying drawing showed a flask with ten visible panels on the lower half. This could not have been the bottle illustrated by Griffenhagen and Bogard (1999:44), although the two containers may be unrelated. The fact that the VICTOR logo was already registered by the company may have been a deciding factor in the acceptance of the name for the drug store bottle.



Figure 23 – Victor bottle

Although the back-slanted lettering is very similar to marks used by Dean, Foster & Co., Dean, Foster never sold a graduated drug store bottle.

H.M.&P. (1909-ca. 1921)

Griffenhagen and Bogard (1999:45) noted, “Victor ovals marked *H.M.&P.*, instead of *Victor* on the base were made for the wholesale house of Hornick, More & Porterfield in Sioux City, Iowa. In 1911 the Victor oval was available sterilized, washed, and corked.” Note that the H.M.&P. mark was actually back-slanted rather than in italics (Figure 24).



Figure 24 – H.M.P.

Discussion and Conclusions

Many of the basemarks used on prescription bottles by Obear-Nester were names for the model of container (e.g., Rex, usona, etc.). Their use is self-evident and requires no discussion here. Similarly, the jars marked “OBEAR-NESTER GLASS” are pretty obvious. The Rectangle-L, used by the Lincoln Container Corp. also leaves little to the imagination.

An exception to “self-evident” for the “model” names on the bases is the Victor oval. Griffenhagen and Bogard stated on page 129 that the VICTOR was used by Obear-Nester from 1902 to 1920. This ties it to the August 2, 1902, design patent by Henry Forest, assigned to Obear-Nester. However, on page 45, Griffenhagen and Bogard discussed a contest in 1908 to rename the Nu-est Oval with the winner being the name “VICTOR.” They also claimed on page 103 that Obear-Nester patented the Nu-est Oval in 1907. This ties the VICTOR to the September 24, 1907, patent by Thomas S. Obear.

To further confuse the issue, the firm registered a trade mark for the use of the word “VICTOR” on flasks on September 4, 1900. It is possible, of course, that the previous registration of “VICTOR” in 1900 influenced the decision to choose that name in 1908. The dilemma settles even deeper when photos of bases from the VICTOR and HM&P bottles are compared with both of the patent drawings. The photos confirm that VICTOR and HM&P are the same bottle. However neither bottle looks like either the 1902 or 1907 patent drawing. However, we have discovered on several other occasions that actual bottles may be very different from the patent drawings. Unfortunately, this leaves us with no solid conclusion, although we have accepted a range from 1909 to ca. 1921 for both the VICTOR and HM&P marks.

Other marks are not as clear cut. Even though Toulouse included the Rectangle-N mark with the Circle-N and Oval-N as the early logos used on mouth-blown bottles, we have not seen the Rectangle-N mark on any mouth-blown bottles, finding it only on machine-made ones. The timing for the early marks is probably not as certain as Toulouse made it sound. He used as his beginning date the year the company went into business, which is close, but the firm registered the Oval-N trademark in 1895, claiming first use in January of that year. His end date however, is tied to the year the company acquired machines, yet it is almost certain the hand production continued until 1937. Thus, an end date of ca. 1937 is a better choice for the oval and circle

marks. There is also the possibility that one of these marks was used earlier than the other. It is highly probable that the only difference between the circle and oval logos was the whim of the individual mold maker.

However, this continuance of mouth-blown bottles to 1937 brings up another possibility. Toulouse may have seen mouth-blown bottles with the rectangular logo. Ca. 1915 may really have been the time when Obear-Nester switched to the rectangular and square marks, using those on the few mouth-blown bottles made *after* ca. 1915. This needs more study, especially since we have not yet seen a square/rectangular logo on a mouth-blown bottle.

Even though the Box-N mark is more common than the Rectangle-N, they were probably both used from the beginning of machine manufacture in 1915 to the end of production in 1978, probably at the whim of the mold maker.

A more interesting path of conjecture, however, concerns the Kansas City plant. Obear-Nester purchased the factory in 1903, and the presence of two plants may explain why there are two marks during each phase, both pre- and post-machine production. Thus, the Circle-N might have been used only by the East St. Louis plant, with the Kansas City factory using the Oval-N (or, of course, vice versa). Once again, however, we have not found an oval example.

The final mystery is the O-N mark on soda bottle heels. We see no intuitively obvious reason for such a logo. Possibly, Obear-Nester designed the mark only for use on soda bottles – the only type of container we have found with this type of mark. It is also possible that this was the mark of an entirely different company, although we have not located any glass house from the period with initials that fit. Alternatively, as mentioned above, the mark may have had some other meaning entirely. Obviously, more research needs to be conducted on these marks.

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