

Ohio Fruit Jar Co.

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

A.W. Brinkerhoff founded the short-lived and ill-fated Ohio Fruit Jar Co. in 1876, only to declare bankruptcy the next year. His line of a dozen jars of various types and sizes leave a legacy of interest for collectors and archaeologists alike.

History

Ohio Fruit Jar Co., Upper Sandusky, Ohio (1876-1877)

Alexander W. Brinkerhoff arrived in Upper Sandusky, Ohio, in 1857 and formed a partnership with his son, Milford, to sell organs, pianos, sewing machines and later talking machines, most – if not all – patented by Brinkerhoff. He patented a Self Sealing Fruit Jar in March 1876, and invented “a brass cornhusker, a Common Sense Inkstand, several corn planters and other utilitarian items.” Brinkerhoff organized the Ohio Fruit Jar Co. on March 27, 1876, just 13 days after he received the patent. Brinkerhoff was the president, with T.E. Beery as treasurer and M.H. Brinkerhoff (his son) as secretary – with the office on the north corner of S. Wyandot Ave. and E. Sandusky Ave. The jars were produced by a Pittsburgh glass house, with the wire for the closures manufactured in Waterbury, Connecticut (1877 city directory; Gillingham & Talcott 1877:37; Matteson n.d.).

Brinkerhoff received Patent No. 174,769 on March 14, 1876 (just seven days after the patent application was filed) for an Improvement in Fruit Jars. The invention actually centered around the sheet metal lid and wire clamp. Both the description and drawings suggest that the closure device was to be used on existing grooved-ring wax-sealer fruit jars. A second drawing and description, however, applied the clamp to a glass lid and a finish with no groove (Figure 1). The patent appears to have only been used by the Ohio Fruit Jar Co. Actual jars seem to have been made with both finish types (see Containers and Marks section below).

Terry (2006:60-61) noted that the Brinkerhoff jars were made in a large variety of sizes and styles, each requiring the manufacture of an expensive mold. The scarcity of all sizes and

variations of the jars – combined with the short duration of the firm – suggests that Brinkerhoff probably did not have the jars made (or sell) them in large quantities. Terry further speculated large investments in molds (and we might add excessive embossing, another high-cost investment), coupled with limited sales led to Brinkerhoff’s known bankruptcy in 1877. After the bankruptcy, Brinkerhoff became a traveling “physician” and remained in that profession until his death on March 13, 1887, never dabbling again in glass production.

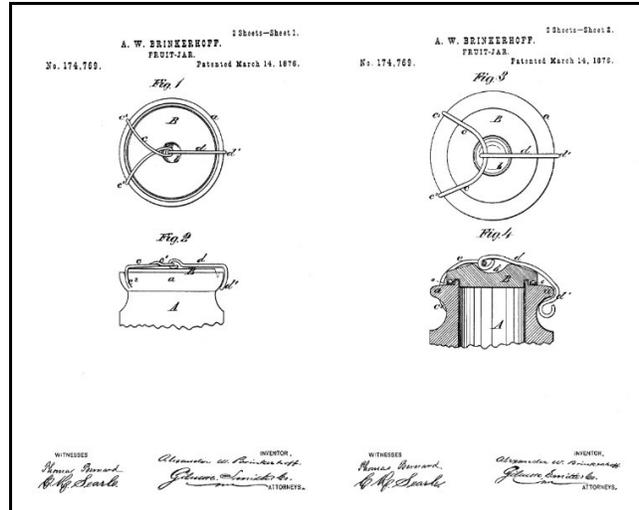


Figure 1 – Brinkerhoff 1876 patent

Since there seems to be no record of a glass factory in Upper Sandusky, it is highly likely that Brinkerhoff was, indeed, a jobber, although there is probably no way to trace the Pittsburgh factory that made the jars. With the patent date to establish the beginning of the Ohio Fruit Jar Co. and the bankruptcy effectively providing an end date, we can comfortably claim a manufacturing period between 1876 and 1877 for Brinkerhoff jars.

Containers and Marks

OHIO FRUIT JAR CO. (ca. 1876-1877)

The Ohio Fruit Jar Co. embossed its full name on a series of jars, all made to the Alexander W. Brinkerhoff patent. As explained above, Brinkerhoff applied for the patent on March 7, 1876, and received Patent No. 174,769 just a week later, on March 14, 1876. As noted by Creswick (1987:165), the patent was for two closures, one for a lid and clamp that fit on the wax sealers, the other for a similar clamp that held a conical glass lid on a jar with the same shape as a wax sealer but with no groove. The jars were sequentially numbered 1-12, but 6, 7, and 9 have apparently never been found. The firm probably made jars for each of these numbers, but the jar body was unembossed. Below are the ones discussed and/or illustrated by Roller (1983:117, 158, 201, 267-268; 2011:395-396) and Creswick (1987:165-166).

No. 1

Roller (2011:396) noted a jar embossed “N^o 1 / OHIO / MADE BY (all horizontal) / THE OHIO FRUIT JAR CO. (arch) / OF / UPPER SANDUSKY, O. (both horizontal)” on the front and “A.W. BRINKERHOFF’S (arch) / PATENT / MARCH 14 1878 (both horizontal)” on the reverse. This jar was probably intended for a metal lid. Creswick’s (1983:165) metal-lid jar was probably the No. 1 instead of No. 2 – as noted in the next entry (Figure 2)

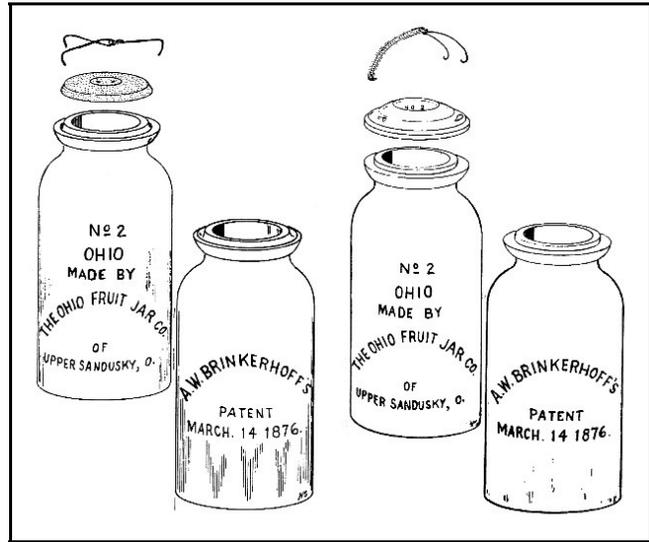


Figure 2 – No. 2 (Creswick 1983:165)

No. 2

Roller (1983:268; 2011:396) noted a jar embossed “N^o 2 / OHIO / MADE BY (all horizontal) / THE OHIO FRUIT JAR CO. (arch) / OF / UPPER SANDUSKY, O. (both horizontal)” on the front and “A.W. BRINKERHOFF’S (arch) / PATENT / MARCH 14 1878 (both horizontal)” on the reverse. Creswick (1987:165) illustrated two variations of this jar, both with identical embossing (see Figure 2). One was a true grooved-ring wax-sealer jar *with* the groove in the finish, sealed with a metal lid held in place by a three-pronged spring wire. The other lacked the groove and was topped by a domed glass lid embossed “No. 2” near the top. It is possible that one of Creswick’s informants misread the “1” as a “2” on the jar with the grooved ring and metal lid; this may actually be the No. 1 described above.



Figure 3 – No. 3 (North American Glass)

No. 3

Roller (1983:267; 2011:396) discussed a jar embossed “THE OHIO / N^o 3 - 1876 S.S. / MADE BY (all horizontal) / THE OHIO FRUIT JAR CO. (slight arch) / OF (horizontal) / UPPER SANDUSKY, O. (inverted arch)” on the front and “PATENTED MARCH 14 1878 BY A.W. BRINKERHOFF on the reverse (Figure 3). Creswick (1987:166) illustrated the jar, including the domed lid



Figure 5 – No. 3 base & lid (North American Glass)

embossed
“No. 3”
(Figure 4).

Roller had

noted that “No. 3” was embossed on the underside of the lid. A photo from North American Glass, however, showed a metal lid and a base embossed with a “B” (Figure 5).

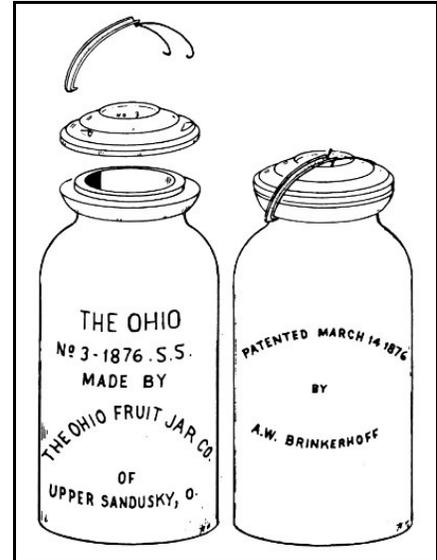


Figure 4 – No. 3 (Creswick 1983:166)

No. 4

Roller (2011:396) described a jar embossed “OHIO / MADE BY / THE OHIO FRUIT JAR CO. / N^o 4 1876 / OF / UPPER SANDUSKY, O.” on the front and “A.W. BRINKERHOFF’S / PATENT / MARCH 14 1876” on the reverse. Although not noted in this book, Roller (1983:117) identified a lid embossed “No. 4.” that was applied to a No. 8 jar.

No. 5

Roller (1983:158; 2011:396) included another jar embossed “HONEY JAR / 1876 / N^o 5 / MADE BY (all horizontal) / THE OHIO FRUIT JAR Co (arch) OF / UPPER SANDUSKY, O. (both horizontal)” on the front and “PATENTED / MARCH 14 1876 / BY / A.W. BRINKERHOFF” on the reverse. This jar was sealed by a flat-topped glass lid, held in place by a three-position wire clamp. Creswick (1987:166) illustrated the jar (Figure 6).

No. 6 and No. 7

None of the sources identified either jars or lids embossed with “No. 6” or “No. 7.” It is probable that these jars had no embossing and the lids either also lacked any number, or the numbers on the lids have not been recognized by researchers as belonging in this series.

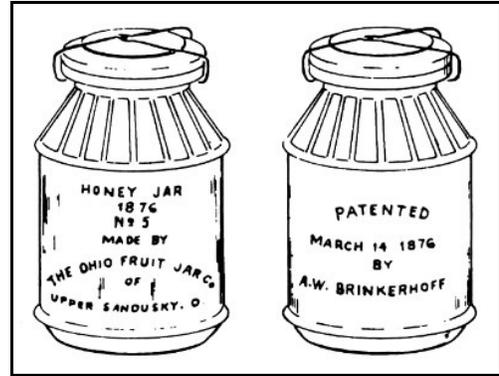


Figure 6 – No. 5 (Creswick 1983:166)

No. 8

Roller (1983:117; 2011:396) discussed a jar embossed “EUREKA! / N^o 8 / 1775 - 1876 / MADE BY (all horizontal) / THE OHIO FRUIT JAR Co (arch) / OF / UPPER SANDUSKY, O. (both horizontal)” on the front and “OHIO A.W. BRINKERHOFF’S PATENT MARCH 14 1878 FOR HONEY BUTTER LARD SYRUP FRUIT &C” on the reverse. He noted that the lid was embossed “No. 4.” This suggests that there was an unembossed jar intended for the No. 4 lid. Creswick (1987) did not include this jar. We have not seen an example of the back embossing, so we cannot address the spacing.

No. 9

No. 9 was probably another case where the lack of embossing has resulted in an inability to recognize the product.

No. 10

Roller (1983:267; 2011:395) discussed a jar embossed “N^o 10 / OHIO (both horizontal) / EUREKA (in a wave in a banner) / TRY (left of “1876” vertical) 1876 ME (right of “1876” vertical) / THE OHIO FRUIT JAR / COMPANY / UPPER SANDUSKY OHIO (all horizontal)” on the front and “FOR / FRUIT / BUTTER / HONEY / LARD / EGGS &c (all horizontal) / A.W. BRINKERHOFF’S PATENT MARCH 14, 1876” on the reverse.

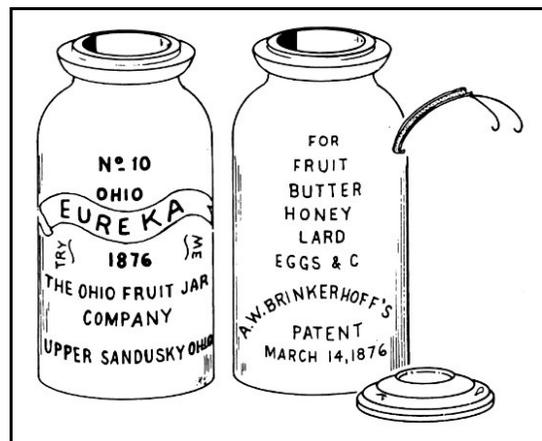


Figure 7 – No. 10 (Creswick 1983:166)

BRINKERHOFF'S (arch) / PATENT / MARCH 14 1876 (both horizontal) ” on the reverse. Creswick (1987:166) illustrated the jar with a dome-shaped lid and the typical three-position wire clamp (Figure 7).



Figure 9 – Finish & Closure (North American Glass)

A North American Glass auction showed a flat lit on the jar (Figures 8 & 9).

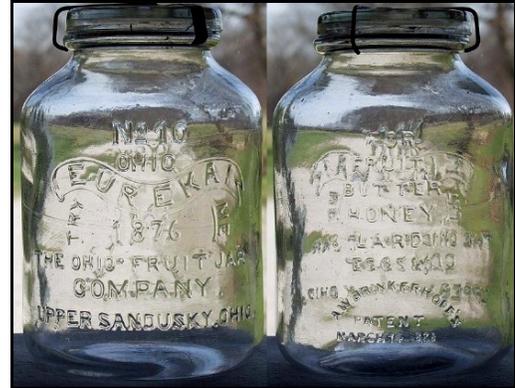


Figure 8 – No. 10 (North American Glass)

No. 11

Roller (1983:201) listed a final jar lid embossed “MADE BY THE OHIO FRUIT JAR CO. OF UPPER SANDUSKY, OHIO” in a circle around “PATENTED MAR 14 1876 LABEL



Figure 11 – No. 11 (North American Glass)

(“LABEL” in a curved rectangle)” in a circle around “OHIO / N° 11 / JELLY” (Figures 10 & 11). Creswick (1987:166) described the lid but did not illustrate it. She noted that the “4” in the date was sometimes reversed.

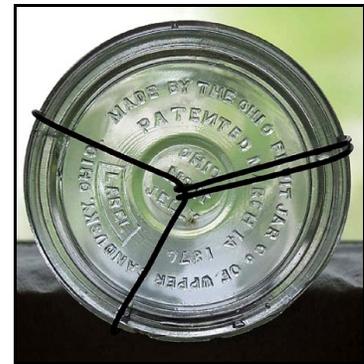


Figure 10 – No. 11 lid (North American Glass)

No. 12

Roller (2011:396) described a lid that was almost identical with the No. 11 one described above. The slight differences were in the final line: “MADE BY THE OHIO FRUIT JAR CO. OF UPPER SANDUSKY, OHIO” in a circle around “PATENTED MAR 14 1876” in a circle around “OHIO / N° 12.”

Discussion and Conclusions

It is obvious from both the scarcity of the remaining jars and the documentary history of Alex Brinkerhoff that the Ohio Fruit Jar Co. was short-lived, apparently only from 1876 to 1877. As a jobber only for his own patented jars, Brinkerhoff limited his product line in a field already overcrowded with competition. In addition, he commissioned too large a variety – twelve variations on the same theme – and increased his mold costs by his excessive use of embossing. The combination of these factors, along with possible other considerations we cannot imagine, almost certainly induced his 1877 bankruptcy – closing yet another small chapter in the history of fruit jar production.

Acknowledgments

Our thanks to Greg Spurgeon for allowing us to reproduce the photos from North American Glass and to Doug Leybourne for granting us permission to copy the drawings from the Alice Creswick books. Gratitude also to Wanda Wakkinen for proofreading.

Sources

Creswick, Alice

1987 *The Fruit Jar Works, Vol. I, Listing Jars Made Circa 1820 to 1920's*. Douglas M. Leybourne, N. Muskegon, Michigan.

Gillingham & Talcott

1877 Wyandot County directory. 1877. Comprising city directories of Upper Sandusky, Carey and Nevada; business directories of Marseilles, Kirby, Sycamore, McCutchenville, Little Sandusky, Belle Vernon, Whartonsburg ... Gillingham & Talcott, Upper Sandusky, Ohio.

Matteson, Ellen

n.d. "Museum Note." Unpublished manuscript, on file with the Wyandot County Historical Society, Upper Sandusky, Ohio.

Roller, Dick

1983 *Standard Fruit Jar Reference*. Privately published.

2011 *Standard Fruit Jar Reference: 2011 Update*. Edited by Jerome McCann and Barry Bernas. Fruit Jar Annual/Phoenix Press, Chicago.

Terry, Joe

2006 "I'll take Patent Potpourri for Thousand, Alex." *Bottles and Extras* 17(2):58-62.

Toulouse, Julian Harrison

1969 *Fruit Jars*. Thomas Nelson & Sons, Camden, New Jersey.

Last updated 3/18/2018