

Ottawa Glass Co.

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The OGCo monogram has long puzzled the Bottle Research Group. One of our members first encountered the mark on the base of an export beer bottle while analyzing a bottle pit in San Elizario, Texas, in 1991 (see Lockhart & Olszewski 1992:39) and placed the mark in the “unknown” category. The monogram occasionally resurfaced in reports and our personal observations, and archaeological contexts placed the mark in use during the ca. 1880-1886 period.

We collected information on companies with “OGCo” initials and tried really hard to make the monogram fit with a couple of companies, but that approach just did not quite work. For a while, we followed a red herring when we tried to connect the OGCo monogram to the very similar monogram used by Carl Conrad & Co. We determined that the presumed connection was spurious – despite the close resemblance. We compared and contrasted the two marks in print (Lockhart et al. 2006) and concluded by means of elimination that the mark was used by the Olean Glass Co.

We were wrong. One of the difficult decisions in glass research concerns when to publish. Unlike an excavation report, our research is *never* finished. Instead of waiting until we die, we choose to publish continually. In this case, David Whitten, a former BRG member, found the answer. In an excited e-mail (11/1/2006), he called the Ottawa Glass Co. a “most intriguing company.” We certainly agree.

Histories

The history of the Ottawa Glass Co. is complicated by the presence in the same community of a company called the Ottawa Bottle & Flint Glass Co. Attempting to untangle the intertwined histories is further complicated by the use by primary sources of such terms as “Ottawa Bottle-works,” “Ottawa IL Glass Co.” (likely a mis-recording for “Ill.”), The Bottle Co. at Ottawa Ill.,” and “Ottawa Bottle Co.” The *American Glass Worker* (1885:2) noted that

“Ottawa, Ill., is becoming quite a glass producing center. It now has a chimney house, a bottle house, a flint house and three window houses all in operations, except one window glass furnace.”

Ottawa Glass Co., Ottawa, Illinois (1868-1889)

The Ottawa Glass Co. incorporated on January 29, 1868, with a capital of \$30,500 (*Daily Illinois State Register* 1/29/1868). There was an unnamed glass factory in Ottawa, Illinois, by at least 1869, that was visited by a group of commissioners on May 22, “where they witnessed the process of glass-blowing, a novelty to the entire party” (Newsbank.com 2006). The factory made “glass for windows, store fronts, railroad cars, skylights, showcases, etc.” according to its 1872 catalog (Romaine 1990:184). On August 15, 1873, the factory suffered a disastrous fire – \$20,000 damage with only half that covered by insurance (*Lake County Star* 8/28/1973).

The Ottawa Glass Co. was also mentioned in passing in 1883 (*Chicago Daily News* 8/31/1883) and 1885 (*Freeborn County Standard* 5/7/1885). The firm continued to make window glass, until it was absorbed by the United Glass Co. of Chicago, Illinois, in 1887 (Leonard 1905:131), although the *Wheeling Register* reported on October 18, 1889, that the sale was not yet complete. The United States Glass Co. offered the Ottawa plant at auction on April 28, 1896 (Roller 1998).

Ottawa Bottle & Flint Glass Co., Ottawa, Illinois (1881-at least 1895)

Opened in 1880, the “Ottawa Bottle-works . . . made its wares of such reputation that it ships bottles to cities where bottle making has long been the leading industry.” The city was delighted that “several Eastern Capitalists” were interested in expanding the factory (*Crockery & Glass Journal* 1881:8). The “Ottawa Bottle Co.” was also noted as making its own pots and “turning out 70 gross per day” presumably of bottles (Roller 1998). Roller (1998) recorded a company called the “Ottawa IL Glass Co.” that announced a decision to build a factory “immediately” in April 1880 to make “packing bottles, fruit jars, insulators and other specialties.” The *Daily Illinois State Journal* announced on September 16, 1881, that the “new bottle works of the Ottawa Glass Company have begun operations.”

Peter H. Leighton, of Wheeling, West Virginia, was in charge of the Ottawa Bottle & Flint Glass Co. by November 17, 1881. The plant was noted as “not in operation” in 1889. The company was reorganized with Warren C. Riale, Solomon E. King, Wm. H. Hull, E. de la Chapelle, and Lorenzo Leland as members of the board of directors and C.D. Trimble as manager, as announced on October 12, 1892. The plant apparently had two furnaces, but leased one in 1893 due to reduced trade. An 1895 letterhead noted that the firm specialized in “Druggists & Proprietary Bottles, Lettered Prescription Ware” (Roller 1998). The company had advertised “letter prescription ware our specialty” by at least 1891, although the plant had closed by 1899 (Griffenhagen & Bogard 1999:103).

Although we have not been able to track down either the date or the details, the Ottawa Bottle & Flint Glass Co. sued a brewery or brewer named “Gunther” apparently for non payment. “Gunther” in turn claimed that Ottawa sent them faulty export beer bottles. Ottawa, of course, claimed that the amount of breakage was not in excess of the 2% expected (Ottawa Bottle & Flint-glass Co. v. Gunther n.d.). We have been unable to determine the outcome of the case, but this clearly indicates that the company made export beer bottles.

In September 1883, The “Ottawa Glass Co., Ottawa, Ill.” was represented at a meeting of the Western Vial and Bottle Manufacturers’ Association in Chicago. The group discussed low sales caused by competition from the flint (colorless) glass houses, imported beer bottles, and the manufacture of “a supply far beyond the market demands. The market has been glutted.” Just two months later, a representative from the “Ottawa (Ill.) Flint Glass Co.” attended the meeting of the Western Flint Bottle Association in Cincinnati. The flint business was apparently going well (*Crockery and Glass Journal* 1883a:35-36; 1883b:20).

Wilson and Caperton (1994:70) recorded all beer bottle advertising in *The Western Brewer* between 1883 and 1890 as well as samples from issues between 1878 and 1882. They noted that the “Ottawa Bottle Co./Ottawa Glass Co.” advertised in the journal from 1881 to mid-1883, and the Ottawa Bottle Works advertised for about five months during middle of 1885. In 1885, a “large number” of bottle blowers left Pittsburgh for Ottawa, Illinois, because the bottle trade had been so bad (*Crockery & Glass Journal* 1885:15). Although business in Ottawa appeared to have been booming at that time, beer bottle production apparently died down shortly thereafter. This all fits well with both the initials and timing for the manufacture of the export beer bottles embossed with the OGCo monogram.

Containers and Marks

It is very clear that the Ottawa Bottle & Flint Glass Co. did not use any kind of a manufacturer's mark on its products. We also have found no evidence that the Ottawa Glass Co. made any bottles.

OGCo monogram (1880-1885)

The OGCo monogram is superficially very similar to the much more common CC&Co monogram used by Carl Conrad & Co., used from 1876 to 1882. Both are composed of very thin-lined letters, with a large central character, flanked on both sides by smaller letters. Unlike the CC&Co mark, however, the OGCo monogram had a "tail" on the lower part of the initial "C" to form a "G"; the ends of the central "C" had been joined to form an "O"; and the ampersand (&) was missing (Figures 1 & 2). Even though the OGCo monogram has been frequently mistaken for the CC&Co monogram (e.g., Baxter 1998:4), they are clearly two distinct marks. Another difference is that all reported Carl Conrad marks (and all we have been able to find on eBay and other sources) were on aqua glass, where the OGCo monograms were usually on amber bases.¹



Figure 1 – OGCo monogram (Hillsboro, NM & San Elizario)



Figure 2 – CC&Co monogram

¹ We have never seen the OGCo monogram on beer bottles of any color but amber. It is highly likely that Jones' report of the "clear azure blue" base was from a fruit jar.

The mark has been reported on amber export beer bottles in several datable contexts, including Wilson (1981:114) [1863-1891], Lockhart & Olszewski (1994:39) [ca. 1880-1886], and Lockhart (2008) [ca. 1880-1886]. All of these authors plus Jones (1968:8) noted a scattering of one-to-four small x's around the monogram. There are also occasional small numbers above the mark, notably 5 and 7 (e.g., Ayres et al. 1980; Wilson (1981:114-15). It is possible that the x's counted up to four, with numerals 5-7 and possibly higher. The contexts suggest that the mark was used during the ca. 1880-1885 period, immediately following and slightly overlapping the 1876-1882 time frame when the CC&Co monogram was in use.

Jones (1968:28) mentioned the monogram being on both bottles and jars, including one that was “clear azure blue.” Creswick (1987:165) confirmed the Jones observation, illustrating an OGCo monogram on the base of a grooved-ring wax-sealer fruit jar that was identical to the ones found on beer bottles (Figure 3). Roller (2011:395) only noted that Creswick had reported the jar. Leybourne (2014:360) priced the jars at \$75-100, but McCann (2017) did not even acknowledge the jar's existence. Wax-sealer fruit jars also fit into the same time period as the export beer bottles. Creswick identified the maker as the Olean Glass Co. (Works) and dated it 1887-1915, probably influenced by Toulouse. The lack of mention by Roller (1983) and McCann (2017) and the citation of Creswick as the only source by the Roller editors (2011) questions the very existence of the jar. Some collector may have erroneously reported a beer bottle base and body to Creswick.

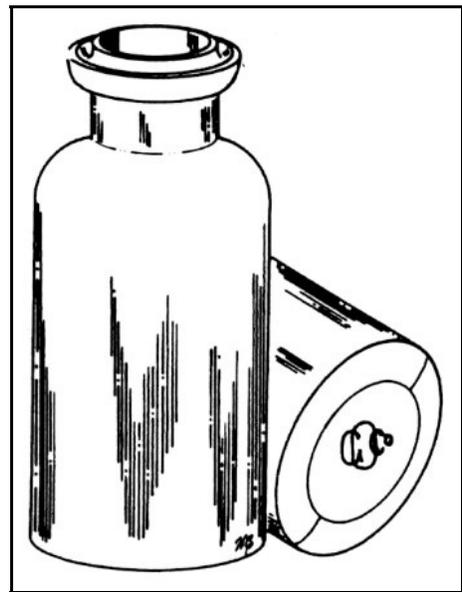


Figure 3 – OGCo jar (Creswick 1987:165)

The mark is virtually identical to one identified by Toulouse (1971:400) as belonging to the second Olean Glass Co. of Olean, New York, in business between 1929 and 1942 (see the Olean section for more information).

Discussion and Conclusions

We discovered a total of 11 other glass companies with “OGCo” initials. Most of these made tableware, illumination glassware, or flat glass, and several were in business either too early or too late for the context of these marks. Only one, the Olean Glass Co. made beer bottles, but the only listing we have found for beer bottle production by Olean was in the 20th century.

Before we discovered the Ottawa Glass Co., we had grudgingly accepted the Olean Glass Co. as the best choice. Although Olean was in business by 1883, the factory was closed more than it was open until 1887. The firm remained in business until the Acme Glass Co. purchased the company in 1913. A second Olean Glass Co. opened in 1929, but the successful plants were in business too late to have used the OGCo monogram. See the Olean section for more information.

The problem with the identification is that the Ottawa Glass Co. made window glass, and the Ottawa Bottle & Flint Glass Co. does not have the correct initials for an OGCo monogram. However, the advertisements noted by Wilson and Caperton (1994:70) in the *Western Brewer* mention both the Ottawa Glass Co. and the Ottawa Bottle Co. The ads were placed during the dates that our sources suggest that the bottles with the OGCo monogram were made.

Beer bottle factories identified as the Ottawa Glass Co. and Ottawa Bottle Co. advertised during the 1881-1883 period, and the Ottawa Bottle Works advertised in 1885. Evidence shows that the Ottawa Bottle & Flint Glass Co. made beer bottles. We thus have three names from Ottawa that were associated with beer bottles. It is unlikely that all these names refer to different glass houses located in Ottawa, Illinois. The most logical explanation is that the Ottawa Bottle & Flint Glass Co. also used the other names (including Ottawa Glass Co. – despite the name being used by the window-glass factory) for its beer bottle production unit. It is even possible that the firm adopted the Ottawa Glass Co. name for advertising purposes *because* it was using the monogram (see discussion about a possible reason for the adoption below).

However, it is also possible that Ottawa Glass Co. had a beer bottle unit for a few years. A final possibility is that the “4-pot green bottle factory in the north end of Ottawa” built by H. Heckenstein & W.W. Baker, thrown out of work by the closing of the bottle houses” in early

November 1882 was a third factory in town. This plant could have been named the Ottawa Bottle Co., but it could have also been called the Ottawa Glass Co. – despite the name of the window-glass company.

We discussed the possibility that the Conrad and OGCo monograms were conceived by the same mold maker in our article on the two marks (Lockhart et al. 2006), and the possibility is even stronger now that we know a better date range for the OGCo monogram. The Conrad monogram was first in use ca. 1876 and continued until the end of the company in January 1883. The OGCo monogram appeared ca. 1880 and could have used until 1885. The timing makes their connection likely. Since virtually all glass houses of that period used external mold making services, it is reasonable to assume that the molds were conceived and possibly even carved initially by the same person.

Maker's marks were not commonly used until ca. 1880, although Conrad required his monogram on bottle bases during most if not all of the time he was in business – 1876-January 1883. We have devised a hypothesis that explains all the known information about the logo and Ottawa Glass. The hypothesis rests on the idea that the Ottawa Bottle & Flint Glass Co. landed a contract to furnish Conrad with a load of slick-side (or generic) beer bottles embossed with the Conrad monogram. Located in St. Louis, Conrad would have been likely to deal with the closer venue – Ottawa, Illinois – rather than Olean, New York, although that would not necessarily be the case. Ottawa was about 200 miles northeast of St. Louis, on the Illinois River – which joins the Mississippi just north of St. Louis – a perfect shipping venue in the early 1880s.

Prior to the assumed contract with Carl Conrad & Co., Ottawa (like most glass house during the period) almost certainly did *not* use a manufacturer's mark. Conrad, however, required a monogram embossed on the bases of its beer bottles, so Ottawa embossed its version of the monogram on the bottle bases.

With the loss of the Conrad contract (or the bankruptcy in January of 1883), Ottawa would have been stuck with export beer molds – including the monogrammed bases. We know from numerous references that glass houses did everything possible to use existing molds until they wore out. To solve the dilemma, Ottawa apparently altered the monogram to form an OGCo logo – even advertising briefly as the Ottawa Glass Co. instead of the Ottawa Bottle & Flint Glass Co.

Altering the molds would have been a simple task. The large, center “C” – with no serifs – needed only to have the two ends connected, a small serif added to the left “C” to create a “G,” and the ampersand (&) peened out. At least two of our examples (one from the Tucson Urban Renewal



Figure 4 – Altered monograms (TUR & eBay)

collection, the other from eBay) seem to show the line that connects the two ends of “C” or form the “O” slightly out of kilter with the rest of the letter. The line that forms the “G” also appears to be an afterthought (Figures 4 & 5).



Figure 5 – Altered closeup (TUR)

The CC&Co monogram came in many variations, including some with thin lines and narrow letters – the configuration found in the OGCo monogram (Figure 6). In addition, some had very weakly embossed ampersands. Unfortunately, we have never found an exact match – the equivalent of a smoking gun. Of course, Ottawa Glass was a small firm, so we may never have discovered one of its CC&Co bases. In addition, most collectors sell and collect bottles with “BUDWEISER” embossed on the sides rather than the “slick-sided” bottles that were more likely made by Ottawa Glass.

This hypothesis falls into the classification of speculation until/unless we find the “smoking bottle” – a Conrad monogram logo that is a close match in size and configuration to the OGCo monograms. The major flaw with the hypothesis is that it fails to explain *anything* about the monogram on the fruit jar. However, as noted in the text above, lack of confirmation of the Creswick citation questions the very existence of the jar. If an example exists at all, it may have been made in a beer bottle mold and hand finished.



Figure 6 – CC&Co thin line (eBay)

Acknowledgments

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