

The Pierce Glass Factories

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This study addresses two apparently unrelated glass business operated by people named Pierce. The story of Franklin M. Pierce began when Charles F. Fisler and his associates became dissatisfied with their place in the Moore Brothers glass business and created the Clayton Bottle Works at Clayton, New Jersey. Pierce purchased the firm ca. 1888 and operated it until 1913.

The other glass making Pierce – V. Mott Pierce – entered the glass business at the behest of his father, Ray V. Pierce. The senior Pierce made a career of selling various patent medicines of his concoction. His son first leased the Eagle Glass Works at Brockwayville, Pennsylvania, during 1904-1905 then gained control of the St. Marys Glass Mfg. Co. at St. Marys, Pennsylvania, later in 1905. Pierce formed the Pierce Glass Co. to produce bottles for his father's patent medicines, but the plant was so successful that other medicinal firms began requesting bottles. Pierce Glass became a major player in the field, moving to Hamburg in 1912 and Port Allegany (both Pennsylvania) in 1917. The firm remained at Port Allegany for the remainder of its existence. Indian Head gained control of the company in 1968, becoming Incon in 1986, although Pierce retained its individual identity through these changes. When Incon merged with Ball the following year, the Pierce Glass Co. ceased its individual existence.

Histories – Clayton Bottle Works and F.M. Pierce & Co.

The Clayton Bottle Works grew out of dissatisfaction between the operators of the Moore Brothers & Co. at Clayton, New Jersey, resulting in the establishment of a new glass house. The Automatic Fruit Jar Co. was apparently an offshoot of the firm, a sales outlet for the fruit jars it produced. F.M. Pierce & Co. assumed control ca. 1888 and continued in business until 1913.

Clayton Bottle Works, Clayton, New Jersey (1881-1888)

According to Pepper (1971:185), “Dr. Charles F. Fisler joined the Moore Brothers” in 1880 but withdrew later that year to “organize a new glassworks, Fisler & Morgan.”¹ Apparently, however, there was a second step in the process, when Charles and Albert Fisler (apparently only distantly related) created a partnership in 1880 – joining with the Morgans the following year. On July 18, 1881, Charles F. Fisler & Co., comprised of Charles F. Fisler and Albert S. Fisler, officially dissolved their partnership and entered into a new one consisting of Charles F. Fisler, Albert S. Fisler, Henry W. Morgan, and Walter I. Morgan (possibly brothers) – now known as Fisler & Morgan (Roller 1995; also shown by a letterhead in Creswick 1987a:9).²

Fisler & Morgan began with \$20,000 and constructed a factory on ten acres of land that included a steam mill, packing house, machine shop, office, and store. The plant was almost completed by September 8, 1881, and the firm expected to blow its first glass by mid-month. By the time Walter Morgan withdrew from the company, the firm employed ca. 100 workers (Pepper 1971:185; Roller 1995). Although Pepper claimed that Walter Morgan left the firm at some point prior to 1883, the *Dollar Weekly News* for March 31, 1883, called Fisler and Morgan “these enterprising young business men” – although the Morgan may have been Henry.

The Fislers incorporated the Clayton Bottle Works on November 9, 1886, although the papers were not filed until August 17 of the following year, apparently through a clerical error. A June 7, 1887, billhead showed that Charles Fisler was the president and treasurer with Albert Fisler as secretary. Henry Morgan was not mentioned, and he may have withdrawn prior to the incorporation or with Walter Morgan before 1883. The billhead was for the sale of “The Automatic Sealer Fruit Jar.” Charles F. Fisler received Patent No. 326,416 for this jar on September 15, 1885, and this patent may have been the impetus for the incorporation (*National Corporation Reporter* 1890:8; Roller 1995).

¹ We can find no evidence that Charles Fisler was a doctor, although his son became one.

² On January 8, 1881, the *Camden Democrat* reported that a new factory was “about to be put in operation” by Iszard, Fisler & Co. This was either one additional step in the process or a misunderstanding by the paper (Clayton Historical Museum n.d.). To help create confusion, Jacob Fisler’s glass factory was called the Clayton *Glass Works*, a name continued by John Moore. For more information, see the section on the Moore Brothers.

Apparently, however, all was not well. The *West Jersey Press* reported on February 8, 1888, that “the Fislser & Morgan Glass Works were sold by the assignees to Mrs. Fislser, for \$8,100.00” (Clayton Historical Museum n.d.). The term “the assignees” suggests that this sale was a result of bankruptcy proceedings, and it marked the end of the Clayton Glass Works as a corporation. The Mrs. Fislser noted in the article was Caroline R. Pierce Fislser, the wife of Albert and the sister of Francis (Frank) M. Pierce. She, in turn, sold the plant to John M. Moore, Wilson D. Moore, and her brother, Frank Pierce, on February 14, 1888 (*Trenton Evening Times* 2/14/1888).

Containers and Marks

CLAYTON BOTTLE WORKS (1885-1888)

Toulouse (1969:27) listed the Automatic Sealer fruit jar, which he described as “handmade round, very crude ground lip, in flint and sun-colored.” He did not know the maker, which probably means that the jar was reported to him by a collector (Figure 1).

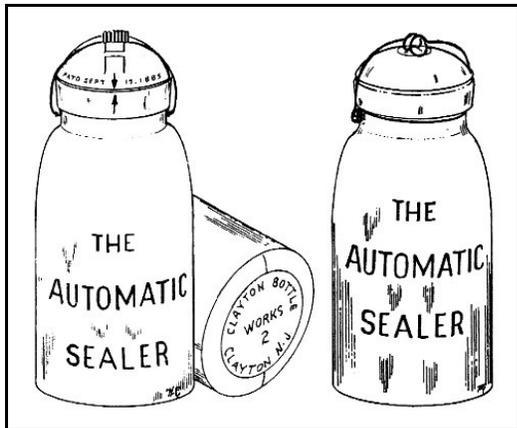


Figure 2 – Automatic Sealer Creswick (1987a:9)

APLD. FOR” or “PAT. SEPT. 15, 1885.” The lid was embossed with an arrow that pointed to a matching arrow on the finish to properly align the two (Figure 3). The number on the base could vary. A second variation had a slightly different lid and wire arrangement. Creswick dated the jar ca. 1885.

Creswick (1987a:9) illustrated a jar embossed “THE / AUTOMATIC / SEALER” on the front and “CLAYTON BOTTLE (arch) / WORKS / 2 (both horizontal) / CLAYTON, N.J. (inverted arch)” on the base (Figure 2). Two variations of the glass lid were embossed “PAT.

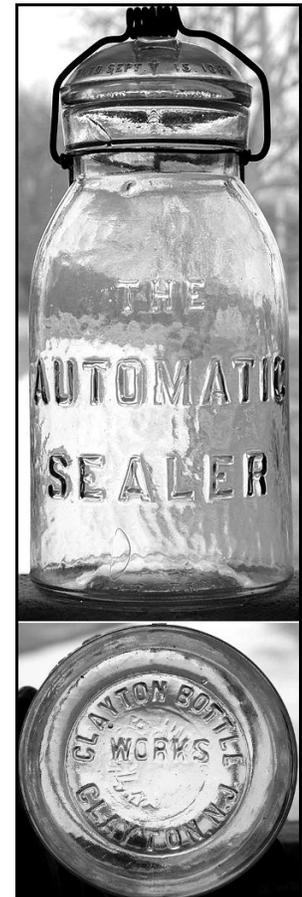


Figure 1 – Automatic Sealer (North American Glass)



Figure 3 – Automatic Sealer lid (North American Glass)

As noted above, Charles F. Fisler applied for a patent for a “Fruit Jar Fastening” on July 14, 1885, and received Patent No. 326,416 on September 15 of the same year (Figure 4). Fisler’s patent used a swinging bale with coiled wire in the center where it fit into a groove in the dome-shaped glass lid. Fisler did not assign the patent to anyone.

Automatic Fruit Jar Co., Clayton, New Jersey (ca. 1885-ca. 1889)

Roller (1983:23) noted that the Automatic Fruit Jar Co. advertised the jar ca. 1888, but the company “was probably formed as a marketing firm.” Creswick dated the Automatic Fruit Jar Co. from 1882 to 1889, possibly suggesting that the firm was organized after the Clayton Glass Co. ceased manufacture – possibly as an outlet for jars in a warehouse at that time. The Roller revision (2011:44) added that a “billhead from the Clayton Bottle Works dated June 7, 1887 indicated pint, quart and half gallon ‘Automatic Sealer’ jars were sold to George M. Davis.” Davis may have opened the Automatic Fruit Jar Co., or he may just have been a retailer.

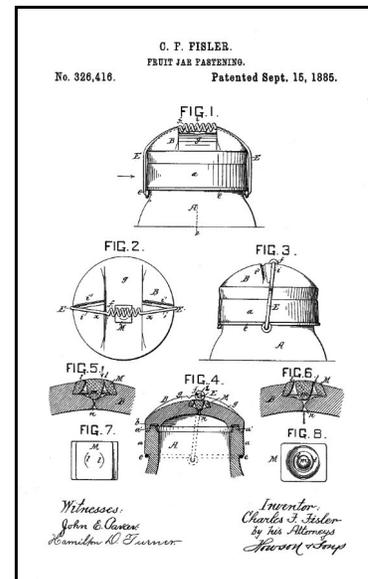


Figure 4 – Fisler 1885 patent

Containers and Marks

THE AUTOMATIC SEALER

See the section on the Clayton Bottle Co. (above) for more on these jars.

F. M. Pierce & Co., Clayton, New Jersey (ca. 1888-1913)

According to Pepper (1971:185), Franklin M. Pierce purchased the firm of Fisler & Morgan (opened in 1880) “a few years after its founding,” renaming the company F.M. Pierce &

Co. As noted above, the transfer was much more complex than Pepper indicated. Although the Moore brothers remained involved, the business had been renamed F.M. Pierce & Co. by August 11, 1890, when the *Sun* noted that the Pierce firm had “signed the union scale and have engaged their blowers for the next blast.” Although the operating company may have been called Moore Bros. & Co. for the first two years, it instead may have been styled F.M. Pierce & Co. from the beginning in 1888. To distinguish his business from the Moore Brothers other plant, Pierce called the factory the North Clayton Glass Works.

On February 14, 1895, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* announced that “the firm that has been running the North Clayton glass works has been dissolved. F.M. Pierce becomes sole owner” – heralding the departure of the Moore Brothers. Francis M. Pierce died on May 12, 1895, possibly suddenly. His will addressed his wishes but failed to specifically name a new owner – although he obviously intended for his brother, William M. Pierce, to continue the operation. In his will, Pierce expressed his desire that the firm of F.M. Pierce & Co.

be continued under the same Firm Name . . . so long as it can profitably be done. . . . If the business is started in any year, I desire that it be continued through that season and not stopped because of temporary unfavorable conditions . . . much of the larger share of the work and responsibility . . . must necessarily be assumed by my brother William M. Pierce. . . . he . . . be paid in addition to his share of the legal provisions the sum of Eighteen Hundred Dollars per year in equal monthly installments and higher centum of the profits, if any, derived from said business.

The *Bridgeton Evening News* added on on February 1, 1896, that Pierce had received a boxcar load of clay pots from the Cumberland Glass Co. a day earlier, but we have not discovered the relationship between the two firms. In 1897, Pierce was listed as using five pots under the “Green Bottle and Hollowware” category. The listing remained unchanged until at least 1902 (*National Glass Budget* 1897:7; 1898:7; 1900:11; 1901:11; 1902:11).

On May 6, 1899, the *Evening News* announced that F.M. Pierce Co., Elmer, New Jersey, had been absorbed into the National Glass Co., a combine composed primarily of bottle manufacturers. This is the only reference we have discovered for an Elmer address, so this may have referred to an office or showroom rather than a second factory. The *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported on February 26, 1903, that a fire had destroyed the packing house for the Clayton plant

the previous day, causing \$3,000 worth of damage. The plant operated a single furnace using five pots in 1904 with William M. Pierce listed as executor (Roller 1995). It seems odd that William would still bear the term “executor” nine years after Franklin Pierce had died.

By 1907, the plant was using 12 pots, still at a single furnace, but, at some point during late 1908 or early 1909, the factory added a second tank. The “small help” (i.e., boys) struck in early April of 1913 for higher wages. After three days, the young workers and management reached an agreement, and the boys returned to work (*Bridgeton Evening News* 9/29/1908; 6/7/1909; 4/15/1913). At some point during the year, the firm apparently experienced some difficulty that we have not yet discovered. The *Evening News* reported on October 16, 1915, that the plant had been idle for two years, but other glass houses were considering taking over the factory. On April 25, 1916, the *Woodbury Daily Times* reported that F.M Pierce was considering establishing a glass plant at Montgomery, Alabama, but we have found no indication that the plans ever achieved fruition. There is no indication that Pierce ever used a manufacturer’s mark.

Histories – Pierce Glass Co. and Dr. R.V. Pierce

World Medical Assoc., Buffalo, New York (ca. 1874-ca. 1928)

Dr. Ray Vaughn Pierce moved to Buffalo, New York, in 1868 and began developing a series of patent medicines that he sold successfully for the rest of his life. One of his earliest was Doctor Pierce’s Favorite Prescription, that he described as “a tonic nervine” that both “quiets nervous irritation” and “strengthens the enfeebled nervous system, restoring it to healthful vigor” (quoted in Nickell 2014). By 1869, he added Dr. Pierce’s Golden Medical Discovery along with others, such as Dr. Pierce’s Extract of Smart Weed and Dr. Pierce’s Pleasant Pellets later (Figures 5 & 6). The Golden Medical Discovery was an all purpose tonic that contained “cinchona (quinine), colombo, guaiacum, licorice (mostly for flavoring), opium (narcotic), podophyllin (laxative), and alcohol” (Goodwin 1999:237).



Figure 5 – Favorite Prescription (eBay)

Although sources disagree about the date, Pierce founded the World Medical Association ca. 1874 morphing the business into the World Medical and Surgical Institute (a six-story manufacturing facility at 664 Washington St.) and the Invalids Hotel at Buffalo. Pierce's ads until at least 1870 did not mention the World Medical establishment, but articles in 1874 devoted large space to the building (e.g., a full column in the *Times-Picayune* for August 27, 1874 that quoted an earlier article from May of that year). Typically, such lengthy articles appeared at the installation of such businesses. A staunch defender of patent medicines, Pierce advertised extensively, including using both newspapers and the sides of barns. In 1888, Pierce wrote the *People's Common Sense Medical Advisor in Plain English*, and later published other similar works (Bergsangs n.d.; Griffenhagen & Bogard 1999:82).



Figure 6 – Golden Medical Discovery (eBay)

When the Ladies Home Journal blasted Pierce in 1903 with an article claiming that his Favorite Prescription and Golden Medical Discovery contained opium, Pierce sued and won because the magazine staff could not find a bottle of either product containing opium. The magazine should have acted earlier; the Massachusetts State Board of Health had examined the products in the 1880s and *did* find opium. Pierce's son, Valentine Mott Pierce, managed the World Medical and Invalids Hotel after his father's death on February 4, 1914. World Medical continued to produce the most popular cures (Pierce's Favorite Prescription and Golden Medical Discovery) until 1928, and the successor firm, Pierce's Properties, made the nostrums until 1945 (Goodwin 1999:237; Wilson & Wilson 1971).

Brockwayville Glass Co., Brockwayville, Pennsylvania (1897-1904)

On September 15, 1897, the Brockwayville Glass Co. incorporated with a capital of \$25,000. The new bottle factory contained a single continuous tank with six rings primarily producing patent medicine bottles. J.H. White purchased the plant in 1898 and operated it under his own name until William Bryant acquired the factory in 1904 (Roller 1998; *Star* 3/9/1898).

Eagle Glass Works, Brockwayville, Pennsylvania (1904-1905)

William Bryant, E.R. Owens, and others operated the former J.H. White plant, now called the Eagle Glass Works, for a short period during 1904, then Dr. Valentine Mott Pierce (always called Mott), then secretary of the World Medical Assn. of Buffalo, New York, leased the factory, having it operational by December. Pierce entered into the glass business to produce containers for the family's patent medicine trade (see above). Although the lease extended into 1905, the Pierce family was almost certainly already in the process of setting up its own operation at St. Marys, Pennsylvania (Roller 1998; *Standard Remedies* 1921:16). The factory went on to become the original home of the Brockway Glass Co. (see that section for more information).

Pierce Glass Co., St. Marys, Pennsylvania (1905-1912)

As noted above, Dr. V. Mott Pierce, son of Dr. Ray V. Pierce, and then secretary of the World Medical Assn. incorporated the Pierce Glass Co. in 1905, gaining control of the former St. Marys Glass Mfg. Co. in St. Marys, Pennsylvania (Toulouse 1971:412). St. Marys Glass had incorporated in 1902 with a capital of \$20,000. William Kane, B.E. Wellendorf, Charles A. Lion, Thomas W. Flower, Edgar Devoran, William G. Fox were the directors (Roller 1997a).³ The firm had taken over a glass factory with a very unclear history.

Mott Pierce was the president with Marion Pierce as vice president and Charles G. Herger as treasurer. The factory made flint and amber glass at two continuous tanks with eight rings. The plant had one continuous tank with six rings, one day tank with three rings in 1906 (Roller 1997a; Toulouse 1970:412). Initially, the factory only produced bottles for the World Medical Assn., "but soon the quality of the bottles became noised around and other proprietary medicine manufacturers began to ask for prices. A few bottles were sold to outsiders at first, but soon the demand became so large it could not be filled with the then existing equipment" (*Standard Remedies* 1921:16). *Standard Remedies* (1921:16) added:

³ Toulouse (1970:412) incorrectly stated that the firm operated as the Pierce Medical Co. of Brockwayville, Pennsylvania. Dr. R.V. Pierce was the principal of the Medical Co. We have not determined whether the two were related.

The Pierce people believe in making quality bottles rather than quantity. They keep close tabs on the batch, the machines, lehrs, and the ware that goes into the packing cases. Anyone who urges them to go in on a heavy manufacturing scale is met with the statement that their output is not being permitted to outstrip their quality.

Pierce made “Prescription; Proprietary Medicine” bottles in 1907 and used one furnace with five pots to make “medicine, beer, and water” bottles and vials by 1913 (*Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913:952; Thomas Publishing Co. 1907-1908:159). In 1910, the plant operated a single tank with eight rings supporting 16 shops. Management was considering adding a second tank for amber glass (Meyer 1910:4). The factory was destroyed by fire in 1912, and the firm moved to Hamburg, New York, where it constructed a new plant (Toulouse 1971:412).

Pierce Glass Co., Hamburg, New York (1912-1917)

After the St. Marys factory was destroyed by fire in 1912, the company moved to Hamburg, New York (Toulouse 1971:412). Unfortunately, we have found no information on the move or whether the firm built a new plant or took over an existing one. In 1913, the Hamburg plant used one continuous tank with 16 rings to make “medicine” bottles by both semiautomatic and hand methods (*Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913:953). However, a 1917 listing only placed the number of rings at seven (Roller 1997b).

Hamburg is ca. 15 miles south of Buffalo, and the company was listed in Buffalo by the Thomas Registers. Pierce may have taken over the plant of R.G. Wright & Co., a Buffalo firm that made prescription and druggists’ bottles. Although the Thomas Register listings continued until 1921, Pierce had closed the Hamburg unit and moved the equipment to the new Port Allegany plant in 1917 (Thomas Publishing Co. 1912:480; 1917:730; 1921:781).

Pierce Glass Co., Port Allegany, Pennsylvania (1917-1987)

In 1917, Pierce moved to 663 Main St., Port Allegany, Pennsylvania, and installed Lynch machines with Howard feeders when it took over the former plant of the Wightman Co-

Operative Glass Co. (Bureau of Statistics and Information 1922:286; Roller 1997b; Toulouse 1971:412-413). Bristow (1917a:16) added more details about the 1917 Port Allegheny operation:

The two tanks are in blast here and are being worked by three Lynch and five Jersey machines and six hand blow shops on two shifts which are making numerous kinds of green and amber bottles. Two more Lynch machines were on the ground and are to be put in commission soon. . . . The firm's plant at Hamburg, N.Y., was closed down and dismantled and a large amount of the equipment was moved to this factory.

Eventually, the firm added more Lynch machines – Lynch no-boy, Lynch B, Lynch L, Lynch LA, Lynch 10 – as well as Hartford-Empire feeders. The factory operated ten machines at two continuous tanks by 1921 and employed a hundred workers (*Standard Remedies* 1921:16; Toulouse 1971:413). By 1927, the plant made “prescriptions, beers, minerals, patent proprietary” in “flint and light green glass” only by machine at two continuous tanks with ten rings. The factory decreased to a single continuous tank with six rings in 1931 and substituted “sodas” for “beers” – and that listing continued until 1941. In 1942, the plant added another ring and made “prescriptions, sodas, narrow neck ware, beers, bottle specialties, private mould work” Light green glass” (*American Glass Review* 1927:143; 1931:88; 1942:106).

For currently unknown reasons, Pierce leased the Bond Glass Co. plant at Hazel Hurst, Pennsylvania, during 1928 and 1929, but Bond closed the factory at the end of the lease (Smethport History n.d.). See the section on Berney-Bond for more information. M.L. Pierce became president in 1942, followed by H.C. Herger in 1944 (Toulouse 1970:413).

Just as H.M. Herger became president in 1968, the Indian Head Corp. (Obear-Nester) purchased the Pierce Glass Co., but the plant retained its own identity (Haas 1970:110; Toulouse 1970:413). In 1982, the factory was still located at Port Allegany, Pennsylvania, making “food, chemical medicinal, cosmetic, liquor, wine and beverage containers” with 19 machines at five tanks. The same listing remained in 1985 (*Glass Industry* 1982:36; Perrine 1985:27). Indian Head, with its subsidiary, the Pierce Glass Co., became Incon in 1986. Incon merged with Ball to form Ball-Incon in 1987, and Pierce lost its individual identity (Owens-Illinois 2002).

Containers & Marks

Standard Remedies (1921:16) noted that the glass house initially only produced bottles for Dr. R.V. Pierce and the World Dispensary, opening up to other patent medicine venues at an unspecified date. A study of ca. 100 bottles for the various Dr. Pierce's remedies on eBay failed to find a single manufacturer's mark on any embossed bottle (e.g., Figure 7). However, this apparent contradiction between the empirical evidence and documentary information may have one of two logical explanations.



Figure 7 – Dr. Pierce's base (eBay)

First, the simple explanation is that the plant did not use manufacturer's marks on its early products. With the Brockwayville, then the St. Marys plant, as the sole supplier for the World Dispensary and the dispensary as the only customer, there was simply no need for logos. The Circle-P marks (see below) may have only been applied to bottles sold outside the family. Second, the *Standard Remedies* piece (1921:16) also suggested that Pierce "hired a glass manufacturer to run [the factory] for him." This manager may have convinced Mott Pierce that the cost of embossing the name of each product (e.g., Pierce's Favorite Prescription) on his father's bottles was not worth the cost on a bottle made to be discarded. Paper labels, alone, would serve to identify the product. Thus, all the embossed bottles *may* derive from the period prior to Pierce's entry into bottle production.

P

Toulouse (1971:412) noted that the "P" mark was used by Pierce "since 1917." This, however, is apparently incorrect. We have never seen the individual "P" mark on any bottles, especially none of the type made by Pierce.

P in a Circle (1905-1987)

According to Toulouse (1971:412), the P-in-a-circle mark was used by Pierce from 1905 to 1917. That would have been during the pre-machine period, so no machine-made bottles

should carry the logo. Toulouse was incorrect. Colcleaser (1965:34, 69) showed a fancy oil bottle (with handle) embossed 184 / Circle P / 2 on the base and a more typical medicinal bottle with “Circle-P 6” on the base. Both were machine made.



Figure 8 – Circle-P

The Circle-P mark was still listed in 1940, 1964, and 1982 but was no longer enumerated in 1990 (Berge 1980:83; Emhart 1982:75; Powell 1990; Scholes 1941:129). The logo was almost certainly used until 1987, when Pierce lost its individual identity in the Ball-Incon merger (Figure 8). It is possible that Pierce did not use the Circle-P logo during the early years of the firm (see the discussion above).



Figure 9 – Liquor Bottle (Moonbrook)

Sellers at eBay auctions have offered wine glasses and bar bottles embossed with the Circle-P mark. Most have attributed the logo to the Pierce Glass Co. Pierce also must have obtained a federal number for liquor bottle manufacture after 1933, possibly number 20. Although we have not discovered earlier examples of Pierce liquor bottles, a base embossed with the Circle-P logo and “20 72” was made in 1972 (Figures 9 & 10).

Aside from the liquor bottles/flasks, Pierce seems to have used few codes. Most of the bases we have examined only had a single-digit code, probably a cavity indicator. The three-digit code on the Colcleaser example above may be a “mold” (i.e., catalog number) code. Our first indicator of liquor bottle production was in 1980 (see above), although the “72” code on the base described here indicates an earlier manufacture. If all of the liquor ware was manufactured after the repeal of the 1934-1964 code requirement, the date code may be all we will be able to glean.



Figure 10 – Liquor base (Moonbrook)

PIERCE GLASS (1975-1977)

Roller (1983:194) listed the Longlife ® MASON jar with an embossed drawing of fruits and vegetables in a circular plate on the back body. The base was embossed PIERCE GLASS. The jars were made between 1975 and 1977. Variations from Laurens Glass Co. and Obear-Nester were embossed LAURENS QUALITY GLASS SINCE 1910 and OBEAR-NESTER GLASS respectively on the bases. Thus, the Pierce variation almost certainly represents the Pierce Glass Co.

Creswick (1987b:83) only listed and illustrated the Laurens and Obear-Nester jars and showed the Longlife Mason as being square in cross-section (Figure 11) She also discussed the wide-mouth versions. Although we could not find an example with the

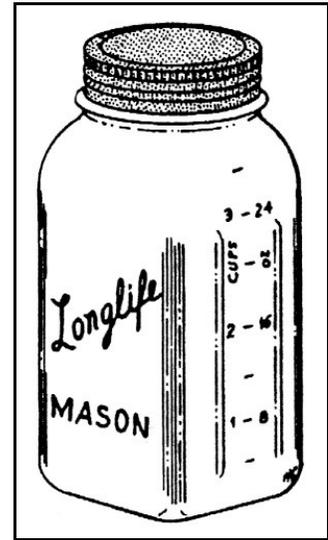


Figure 11 – Longlife Mason (Creswick 1987b:83)



Figure 12 – Longlife Mason (eBay)

Pierce embossing, several from Laurens and Obear-Nester (especially the latter) were offered on eBay (Figure 12).

Apparently, Pierce only produced the Longlife Mason jars (not the wide-mouthed variations) as noted in the Roller update (2011:297). The update confirmed the 1975-1977 production range and noted that “these pint and quart jars were sold in boxes marked ‘Indian Head’ which was the parent company for the three glass companies that made these jars.”

Discussion and Conclusions

F.M. Pierce & Co. was not connected with the Pierce Glass Co., and, apparently, the company never used a manufacturer’s mark. Its predecessor, however – the Clayton Glass Co. – produced the Automatic Sealer fruit jar.

The Pierce Glass Co. used the Circle-P mark for the entire duration of the company (1905-1987) – with the possible exception of the earliest period – and the designation “PIERCE GLASS” on a single type of fruit jar during the 1975-1977 period. The letter “P” without the circle was apparently not used.

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