

## Port Glass Co.

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The Port Glass Works or Port Glass Co. (known by both names) opened at Muncie, Indiana, in 1891 but moved to Belleville, Illinois, in 1902. The plant made a variety of bottles and jars, limiting its production to fruit jars only in 1900. Although there is no indication that the factory marked its bottles, the plant embossed fruit jars with “PORT” on the bases or “Port” (cursive) on the reverse. The Ball Brothers purchased the firm in 1904 and closed the plant three years later.

### Histories

#### **Port Glass Works/Port Glass Co., Muncie, Indiana (1891-1903)**

On October 9, 1890, Harry W. Streeter, John W. Port, Thomas Port, James R. Sprankle, William C. Bryant, and Fisher McCrieght all signed the Articles of Incorporation of the “Port Glass Works of Muncie” – with the plant located at the corner of Hutchinson and Van Vliet Avenues. With an initial team of 18 blowers and a total of about 70 workers, the factory lit its first fire on January 4, 1891, planning the initial melt on January 10 and commencing work on the 12<sup>th</sup>. The first production was planned for “several thousand flasks” (Roller 1999). Unlike most glass houses, Port had its own gas well drilled on its property (*Wheeling Register* 1/3/1891).

Streeter was president with John Port as secretary and Sprankle as treasurer, and the plant manufactured “fruit jars, bottles, etc.” at one five-pot furnace and a small tank. By 1895, John Port filled both the secretary and treasurer positions, although Streeter remained president. The non-union plant apparently replaced the furnace with a continuous tank at that time and primarily advertised fruit jars – both Mason jars and grooved-ring wax sealers – although it produced some bottles. Between June 1896 and October 1897, the factory was idle – probably because the market was saturated (Roller 1999).

In 1897, Port had “one continuous tank, 7 rings, in operation on fruit jars.” In 1897 and 1898, the plant was listed as using 21 “pots,” and that listing remained until at least 1902

(*National Glass Budget* 1897a:7; 1897b:5; 1898a:7; 1900:11; 1901:11; 1902:11). Thomas Port, by that time president of the firm, was killed by a passenger train on the morning of November 7, 1898. Slightly deaf, he did not hear a companion shouting for him to get off the tracks (*Bay City Daily Tribune* 11/8/1898).

On January 6, 1900, the firm announced that it would devote its entire production to fruit jars from then on. By 1901, John Port was president and treasurer, with Laura M. Port (wife of Charles Koontz) as secretary (Roller 1994:76-77; 1999). Although existing sources claim that Port Glass moved to Belleville, Illinois in late 1902, the new factory did not open until May 1903, and a June 25, 1903, letter from Port state that the firm was dismantling the Muncie factory.

### **Port Glass Co., Belleville, Illinois (1903-1904)**

According to Toulouse (1971:422), “John W. Port arrived in Belleville from Muncie, Ind., on Sept. 17, 1902, and deposited \$10,000 in a Belleville bank to finance the construction of a glass plant.” Work on the new Port Glass Co. factory at Belleville, Illinois, began shortly after October 20, 1902, although the plant did not actually open until sometime shortly before May 19, 1903, when representatives of the local newspaper visited the plant. At that time, the firm made Mason jars at five machines (*Belleville News-Democrat* 10/20/1902; 5/19/1903). The firm at the new location was apparently solely owned by John W. Port, but, on August 22, 1903, the *St. Louis Republic* announced that Port had sold a one-third interest in the company to Charles F. Koontz for \$18,000.

After the traditional summer shut down, laborers at both Port Glass and the nearby Adolphus Busch Glass Mfg. Co. refused to begin work without an increase in wages (*St. Louis Republic* 9/19/1903). We have been unable to discover how long the strike lasted, or whether it had any bearing on the decision, but the *Lexington Herald* reported on November 21, 1904, that F.C. Ball announced the purchase of Port Glass along with the Marion Glass Co., Coffeyville Glass Co., and Loogootee Glass Co. Ball paid \$75,000 for the Port partnership. Despite a disclaimer published in the *Belleville News-Democrat* on September 7, 1906, the Balls began dismantling the Belleville plant on August 3, 1907, and shipped the machinery to their Coffeyville, Kansas, location (Roller 1997).

Information provided by Roller (1997) showed that E.B. Ball had corresponded to J.W. Port, hoping to get Port to order a Beatty-Brady machine for the Ball Brothers, suspecting that the Beatty-Brady group would not sell the Balls a single machine. The Beatty-Brady machines were state of the art for jar production at the time, but Port politely declined on January 16, 1904 (see Lockhart & Bernas 2014 for more information on the Brady machines). On November 3, the Ball Brothers bought the entire Port operation, including the six machines (almost certainly the same five noted above – plus one). E.B. Ball got his wish.

## Containers and Marks

### PORT or Port [cursive] (1891-1904)

Toulouse (1971:422-423) included both block and cursive variations of the Port logos, but he did not discuss them and only dated them to the 1902-1904 period. However, jars made by the Port Glass Works may be divided into four broad categories with variations of all but the first one: 1) Wax Sealers; 2) Mason jars with PORT in block letters; 3) Mason jars with Port in cursive; and 4) Mason's "N" jars. In addition, the Ball Brothers made use of the molds that they inherited from Port Glass by altering the cursive "Port" to "Ball." We address each of these separately below. See Table 1 for a chronology of the jars.

### Wax Sealers (1891-1903)

Creswick (1987:177) noted that a grooved-ring, wax-sealer fruit jar was embossed "PORT" on the base but nothing on the body (Figure 1). She dated the jar to the entire tenure of the Port Glass Co. (1890-1904), although the plant made them by at least 1895, probably earlier. Since the Belleville plant only made ware by machine, the wax-sealers were most likely discontinued by the time of the 1903 move. She also noted a variation embossed "PORT Q" on the base. The Roller update (2011:427) included the wax sealer and dated it ca. 1890-1901. We have corrected the initial dates by one year to reflect the beginning of production.

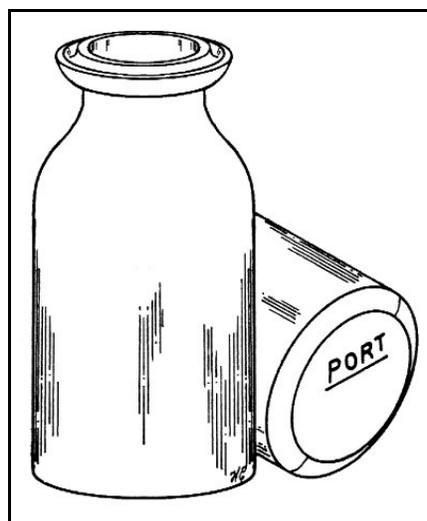


Figure 1 – PORT wax sealer (Creswick 1987:177)

**Table 1 – Jar Chronology: Port Glass Co.**

Markings*	Type	Plant**	Dates
PORT (b)	Wax Sealer	Muncie	1891-1903
no PORT (f); PORT — (b)	Masons’ Patent	Muncie	1891-1903
PORT above MASON’S (f); no basemark	Masons’ Patent	Muncie	1891-1903
PORT above MASON’S (f); PORT ∩ (b)†	Masons’ Patent	Muncie	1891-1903
PORT above MASON’S (f); PORT — (b)†	Masons’ Patent	Muncie	1891-1903
no PORT (f); PORT (b)	Mason’s N Patent	Muncie	1891-1903
Port (cursive) (r)	Masons’ Patent	Muncie	1900-1903
Port (cursive) (r)	Masons’ Patent	Belleville	1903-1904
Ball over ghosted Port (both cursive) (r)	Masons’ Patent	Belleville	1904-1907

\* b = base; f = front; r = reverse; — = horizontal; ∩ = arch

\*\* all Muncie – hand made; all Belleville – machine made

† Arched PORT above numbers; Horizontal PORT may be above or below numbers

**Mason Jars with PORT in Block Letters (1891-1903)**

The factory embossed “PORT” in block capitals in two locations on their jars: on bases and/or on the front above the word “MASON’S.” Some of the jars were embossed “MASON’S (arch) / PATENT / NOVEMBER 30<sup>TH</sup> / 1858 (all horizontal)” on the front with “PORT” on the base (Figure 2). Others included “PORT” above “MASON’S” as well as the “PORT” basemark or no basal embossing. All examples of either kind were mouth blown. The “PORT” on the front appears to have been added as an afterthought above the word “MASON’S.” The lines were much thinner than the other embossing (Figure 3).



Figure 2 – Mason’s Patent jar (eBay)

Roller (1983:239; 2011:350) briefly discussed a variation without “PORT” on the front but with “PORT” embossed on the base in block letters – although he did not discuss the configuration of the basal logo. He dated the jar 1890-1902 – the Muncie



Figure 3 – PORT above (MASON'S)  
(Creswick 1987:177; North American Glass)

era of the Port Glass Co. Creswick (1987:138, 177) illustrated the front logo as well as variations embossed with “PORT” basemarks in both

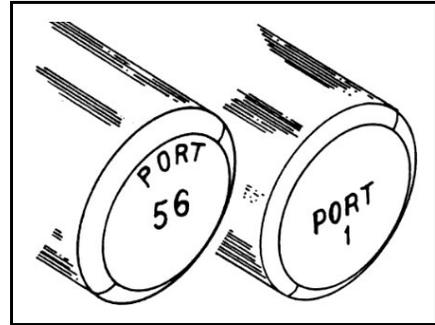


Figure 4 – PORT basemarks (Creswick 1987:138)

arched and horizontal formats, with the horizontal variation in the center (Figure 4). Both had a number below the name, and each was mouth blown. She also added a cryptic

“PORT (star)” – possibly a star or asterisk below the word – although we have never seen an example of the last one. She noted the jars as made by the Port Glass Co., although she did not specifically outline the dates for this jar. An additional jar, offered at a North American Glass auction, was embossed with a number above the horizontal “PORT” mark (Figure 5).



Figure 5 – PORT basemarks (North American Glass)

### **Mason Jars with Port in Cursive (ca. 1900-1904)**

Toulouse (1969:244) was the earliest to report jars marked “MASON’S (arch) / PATENT / 1858 (all horizontal)” with “Port” embossed in a cursive format with an underlining tail on the reverse – both mouth-blown and machine made. Note that these did not include “NOV 30<sup>TH</sup>” on the front embossing. He also discussed a variation with “Port” – still in cursive) below “1858” – although we have yet to discover an example of the second one. His final variation included an “N” between “MASON’S” and “PATENT” as well as a cursive “Port” on the base. See the next entry for more on this variation.



Figure 6 – Port cursive (eBay)

Roller (1983:224) confirmed the machine-made variation with “Port” on the reverse but did not list the other two discussed by Toulouse (Figure 6). He added a variation noted as “Reverse unembossed, aqua, clear” – although the meaning of this is unclear. Creswick (1987:127, 136) illustrated the same example, dating the mouth-blown variation 1890-1902 and the machine-

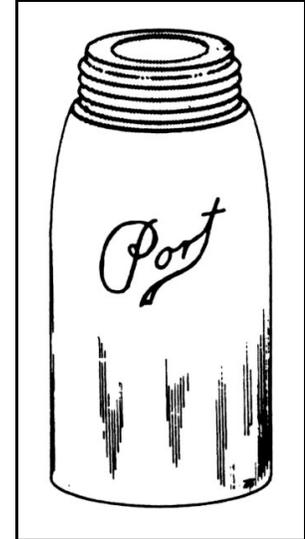


Figure 7 – Port cursive (Creswick 1987:136)

made style 1902-1904 (Figure 7). Since these jars were both mouth blown and machine made, they almost certainly spanned the period when Port moved from Muncie (only hand production) to Belleville (machine manufacture). John Port very likely adopted the new design after Thomas Port died in 1898 but implementation may have waited until the firm announced its shift to only jar production in January of 1900.

#### Port altered to Ball (1904-1907)

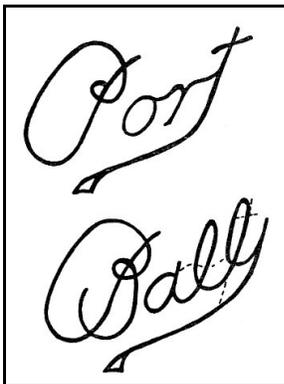


Figure 8 – Port-Ball (Roller 1983:224)

Roller (1983:224) only briefly noted this variation as “Ball over ghosted Port embossed on reverse.” Even though he did not specifically state that the words were cursive, he illustrated the conversion (Figure 8). Roller dated the jar 1902-1904. Creswick (1987:127) illustrated both the cursive “Port” and “Ball” reverses, noting each as machine made and dating “Port” 1890-1904 and “Ball” ca. 1902 and later (Figure 9). The Roller

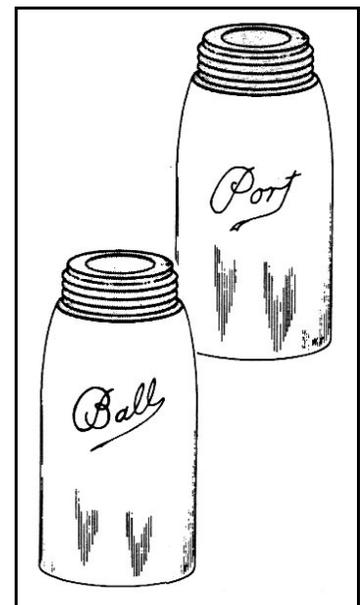


Figure 9 – Port-Ball (Creswick 1987:177)

update (2011:342) contained essentially the same information, rewording the entry to read “Reverse: ghosted Port through Ball.”

Kath (1998:41) illustrated the cursive Port Mason jar alongside an identical jar embossed “Ball.” She explained that the Ball Brothers added a loop to the “P” (forming the “B”) and cut “‘ALL’ over the remains of the ‘ORT’ lettering” after they acquired the Port Glass Co. in 1904 (Figure 10). In many examples, some ghosting of the “ORT” letters remained. Kath further claimed that “all MASON’S PATENT 1858 jars with this particular form of script BALL were made in altered PORT molds!” (her emphasis).



Figure 10 – Port-Ball (Jessica Jenkins)

Although we have dated these jars 1904-1907, they were certainly only made until the molds wore out. Since the molds were obviously made in 1903, when Port adopted machine production, they may have been new enough to last until 1907, depending on how often they were used by Ball.

### Mason’s N Jars

Toulouse (1969:223, 244) claimed that the Port Glass Co. made the jars embossed “MASON’S (arch) / N / PATENT / NOV 30<sup>TH</sup> / 1858 (all horizontal)” apparently based on reports that some Mason jars with the “N” between “MASON’S” and “PATENT” were embossed “PORT” on the reverse or below “1858” (Figure 11). Toulouse (1969:36; 1971:369) suggested that Ball probably acquired the “N” Mason’s jars when the brothers purchased the Port Glass Co. – although he incorrectly believed that Ball operated the plant until 1913. He noted that one Ball variation was embossed “‘Ball’ in slanting script, ‘N’” above MASON’S, the other “Ball Brothers” (also in cursive) on the reverse. Aside from the basic jar – without any “PORT” designation – we have not found an example of *any* of these variations.



Figure 11 – Mason’s N (North American Glass)

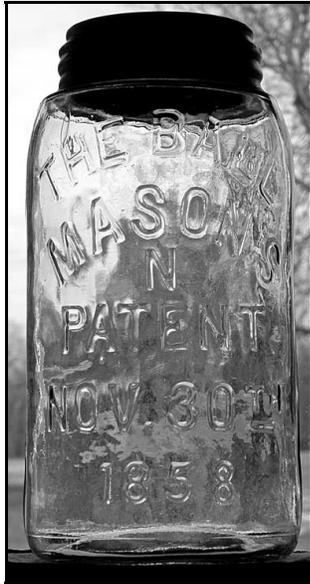


Figure 12 – THE BALL (North American Glass)

Although she failed to illustrate any of them, Creswick (1987:147) discussed four variations of the “N” jars. One had only the Mason’s Patent information on the front. Her second example was embossed “L&W” on the base, with “PORT” on the base of number three. The final one was embossed “THE BALL JAR” above “MASON’S” on the front. The Roller update (2011:348, 355, 790) described one variation of the jar as “THE BALL arched / JAR” above the Mason’s designation and noted the base could be embossed with a large serif “W” or



Figure 13 – THE BALL JAR (North American Glass)



Figure 14 – BALL on reverse (North American Glass)

be unembossed and agreed that a variation had only the “N” plus “PORT” on the base, dating the jars ca. 1890-1901. Other variations had “THE BALL JAR” or “BALL” on the reverse, and one was embossed “THE BALL” above “MASON’S” (Figures 12, 13, & 14). See the Discussion and Conclusions section for a way to make sense of this information.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Both the grooved-ring, wax-sealer and mouth-blown “MASON’S (arch) / PATENT / NOVEMBER 30<sup>TH</sup> / 1858 (all horizontal)” jars were all made by the Port Glass Co. at the Muncie plant between 1891 and 1902. Mouth-blown Mason jars included three variations with the block-letter “PORT” basemark. The basemark appeared in three configurations: 1) PORT

(horizontal) above a one- or two-digit number (on jar with or without “PORT” embossed above “MASON’S”); “PORT” (horizontal) below a number (on jars with “PORT” above “MASON’S”); and 3) “PORT” (arch) above a number (on jars with “PORT” above “MASON’S”). Unfortunately, we have no way to date each individual variation, although the one without “PORT” on the front may have been the earliest. These differences may have been at the whim of the individual mold maker.

About 1900, Port changed its Mason jar design. The firm eliminated the month and day designation (NOVEMBER 30<sup>th</sup>), simplifying the front embossing to “MASON’S (arch) / PATENT / 1858 (all horizontal)” and adding “Port” in cursive to the reverse. The initial jars remained mouth blown, although the new machine-made jars retained the same design at the Belleville plant. These were only produced between January 1903, when the factory opened, and 1904, when Port sold to the Ball Brothers – although the Balls may have made a few of the jars to honor outstanding orders.

Following the typical glass house practice, Ball altered the cursive “Port” molds to “Ball” – also in cursive – until the molds wore out. Jars produced after that point probably had no marks to distinguish them from other Ball products. Ball closed the plant in 1907.

Toulouse created the only real dating/identity crisis for Port jars when he listed a series of almost certainly fictitious jars embossed “Port” in cursive on Mason jars with “N” on the front between “MASON’S” and “PATENT” (see the section on the “N” series above). While Creswick (1987) was generally accurate, she sometimes relied on input from other collectors rather than always seeing a jar or photo. The Roller editors (2011) went to great pains to verify jars, but they, too, were not totally infallible. While both Creswick and the Roller editors suggested that a single example of the “N” jar was embossed “PORT” on the base, we have been unable to find an example in Google searches.

Toulouse (1971:245) speculated, “Evidently PORT originated the use of ‘N’ with the MASON’S PATENT wording, first without the PORT identification, then with it, and finally adopted by BALL under their own identification.” The main problem with this speculation is that all of the examples listed in the sources were mouth blown. Port Glass ceased hand production when it moved to Belleville in 1902. Since Ball bought the firm to acquire its machines, it would be *highly* unlikely to have continued to manufacture a mouth-blown jar.

To complicate the already confused situation, Creswick (1987:147) claimed that a variation was also embossed “L&W” on the base. These lines of evidence/speculation lead us to one of two conclusions. First, the sources may be incorrect about the existence of both the “L&W” (Lorenz & Wightman) and “PORT” variations, so the “N” jars may have originated with Ball. Second, the three companies may have used the “N” designation during roughly the same period, although we have no explanation for *why* any of them chose that letter. The only certain conclusion we have reached is that the Ball Brothers produced “N” jars.

### **Acknowledgments**

We would like to express our gratitude to Doug Leybourne for letting us copy the Alice Creswick drawings, to Greg Spurgeon for allowing us to reproduce the North American Glass photos, and to Wanda Wakkinen for proofreading. All of you help make our studies much better.

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Last updated 11/8/2018

