

Rhodes Glass & Bottle Co.

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The Rhodes Glass & Bottle Co. opened in 1901 and remained in production specializing in beer bottles until it became a victim of Prohibition ca. 1920. The firm used two logos – “R.G.&B.CO.” and “RGBCo.”

History

By May of 1881, Charles M. Rhodes became president of the recently founded Nail City Glass Co., Bridgeport, Ohio. William M. Wallace of Pittsburgh received Patent No. 264,379 on September 12, 1882, for a Glass Screw Cap for a fruit jar. He immediately assigned half the patent rights to Charles M. Rhodes. When the Nail City Glass Co. reorganized to form the Ohio Valley Glass Co. on December 6, 1883, Rhodes continued as president until the factory closed in 1886 (Roller 1997a).

We have not discovered the relationship (if any) between Charles M. and Ebenezer P. Rhodes (president of the La Belle Glass Co.) and Felix Rhodes Shepley, the president of the Rhodes Glass & Bottle Co. of Massillon (Roller 1997a), although the repeated presence of name Rhodes connected to the glass industry in a small town is unlikely to be coincidence. See the section on the Ohio Valley Glass Co. for more information on these earlier firms.

Rhodes Glass & Bottle Co., Massillon, Ohio (1901-ca. 1920)

The *Repository* announced on December 31, 1900, that Felix R. Shepley, George W. Henrich, Otto E. Young, Andrew Boerner, and Jerome F. Shepley had incorporated the Rhodes Glass & Bottle Co. that morning with a capital of \$50,000. Construction was in progress in January 1901, and management hoped to begin production by March. The *Repository* added on August 25, 1901, that the plant had lit its fires that day to begin the fall blast.

The Rhodes Glass & Bottle Co. of Massillon, Ohio, was built on the site of the former Stoehr-Keech factory on Coal Ave., east of the railroad tracks – established in 1880 to make

tableware. The fires were first lighted in September 1901, and the plant made beer and mineral water bottles. Just a month later, on October 7, the carrying-in boys went on strike, closing down the factory along with Reed & Co., the other major beer bottle producer in the town (*Repository* 10/8/1901).

By 1904, Felix Rhodes Shepley was president and treasurer, and the plant had two continuous tanks with 12 rings (adding wine bottles to the production list). On December 14, 1906, the *Dollar Weekly News* reported that “two tank furnaces in operation,” both “making amber beer bottles exclusively.” The *Repository* speculated on June 28, 1908, about an announced delay in fall openings by the beer bottle makers in town. The newspaper worried that “the fact that there has been a great deal of temperance legislation makes the disposal of bottles slower than usual.” Although the plant continued production, business remained slower than usual throughout 1909.

The 1909 Thomas Register listed beer, soda, wine, and brandy bottles as the factory’s products, and that listing continued until at least 1920. In an amusing aside, the *Plain Dealer* reported on May 14, 1911, that the plant was only in partial production because the boys failed to show up for work – to see a circus that had come to town! The paper lamented that the 16-20-year-old boys were “able to completely control the operation of the factories.” The *Repository* told an interesting story on June 30, announcing the end of the season at Rhodes and the American Bottle Co.:

When the whistle blows for the last time this year . . . the men who have carried their dinners and suppers in the faithful dinner pail will discard their old friends by throwing them away or smashing them up. This is a ceremony that attends the closing of the glassblowing season in bottle houses all over the country.

By 1912, a Rhodes letterhead noted that “beer bottles are our specialty” in amber and light green color. Felix remained as president and treasurer with George W. Henrich as vice president and Jerome F. Shepley as secretary (Kane 1978:84-85; Roller 1997; Thomas Publishing Co. 1909:201; 1920:827). The plant made beer bottles exclusively on twelve O’Neil semiautomatic machines at one continuous tank with six rings in 1913 (*Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913:953).

By 1918, the plant was operating “its green tank with three one-man machines and three hand blow shops” making “beers and sodas.” Because the amber tank was being repaired, the article gave no information about that aspect of production (Bristow 1918:3). Von Mechow (2018) noted that Rhodes “was purported to have closed about 1919” almost certainly because of impending Prohibition. However, the June 12, 1920, issue of the *Glass Worker* carried an ad for a “night worker familiar with the operation of O’Neill machines” – suggesting that the plant may have remained in operation through the 1920 season. Like some breweries, Rhodes may have initially tried to ride out Prohibition by making bottles for cereal beverages (near-beers). However, by 1923, that market had completely dried up. The factory was certainly closed before November 27, 1923, when the *Repository* discussed the intention of the city of Massillon to obtain the plant. The paper noted that the city had “been investigating this prospect for some time.” In 1924, the Ohio Glass Product Co. reopened the old plant (*Repository* 1/15/1924; Roller 1997). For more information on the Ohio Glass Products Co., see the Other O file.

Containers and Marks

R.G.&B.CO. (1901-ca. 1920)

Jones (1966:18) showed the “R.G.&B.CO.” mark but made no attempt to identify the maker. Rydquist (2002:5) noted that the mark was found on “blown crown top beers.” Toulouse (1971:438) listed the mark as “RB&GCo” (note the reversing of the central two letters in both cases) and stated, “If ‘B&G’ stand for ‘Bottle & Glass’ it would mean that the company using it was probably founded in the 1880s and later, since this was a popular phrase in names.” However, he had nothing else to say about the mark or the containers upon which it was used. We have found no bottles with the letters “B&G” instead of “G&B.” We believe this mark was listed in error and referred to the “R.G.&B.CO.” logo.

The ampersand format was made in at least four variations. In our sample, the first two variations were mouth blown, while the second two were machine made. Variations 2 and 3 were by far the most common in our sample:



Figure 1 – RB&GCO arch (eBay)

1. Arch at the top of the base above a two-digit number (Figure 1)
2. Horizontally across the center of the base, either alone, with a line below it, or above a two-digit number (Figure 2)
3. Slight arch near the top of the base above a two- or three-digit number (Figure 3)
4. Horizontally at the heel (Figure 4)



Figure 3 – Slight arch logo (eBay)



Figure 4 – Heelmark (eBay)

The arched variation (1) had the least representation in our sample, so it was likely the earliest one, soon replaced by the horizontal variation (2). At least one example of the arched variation had a double stamp, a technique typically used between ca. 1895 to ca. 1914. Both of the machine-made logos (slight arch on the base; heelmark), however, were probably used concurrently. The “G” in the logo (in all discernable cases) had the downwardly extended and sharpened “tail” or serif. Typically, all of the “R.G.&B.CO” logos had punctuation and a capital “O” in “CO.” and were followed by a one- to two-digit number – almost certainly a mold code.



Figure 2 – Horizontal logo (eBay)

RGBCO or R.G.B.CO. (ca. 1913-ca. 1920)

Toulouse (1971:440) listed the “RGBCo” mark and noted that “the words ‘Glass Bottle’ were in common use in the early 1900s.” Wedel and Walker (1992:173-174) illustrated and described the mark as “RGBCO / 303-1” on a crown-topped beer bottle, and we found the same

bottle (identical base numbers) at the University of Wyoming (Figures 5 & 6). The mark was almost certainly used by the Rhodes Glass & Bottle Co., Massillon, Ohio. All marks in our sample – whether basemarks or heelmarks had a capital “O” in “CO.” and were followed by a three-digit number, a dash, and a single-digit number, almost certainly mold codes.



Figure 6 – Basemark (University of Wyoming)

Whitten (2016) noted that “RGBCo” was “presumably a variation” of the RB&GCo mark. We have seen both forms, but one with the ampersand present is by far the more common. We have seen only two variations of the “RGBCo” mark:

1. Horizontally across the base with a three-digit number followed by a dash then a single-digit number, without periods in our small sample (see Figures 5 & 6)
2. Horizontally across the heel, always with punctuation (Figure 7)

The four bottles were all machine made, suggesting that the lack of the ampersand was limited to the period of time after 1913. The illustration by Wedel and Walker (1992:174) showed the basal indentation but no seams of any sort. In other cases, the use of the dash to separate numbers was found exclusively on machine-made bottles from the American Glass Works, Richmond, Virginia, and D.O. Cunningham, Pittsburgh. We have not found this xxx-x configuration on any mouth-blown bottles. We therefore suggest a date range of ca. 1913 to ca. 1920 for the “RGBCo” logo.

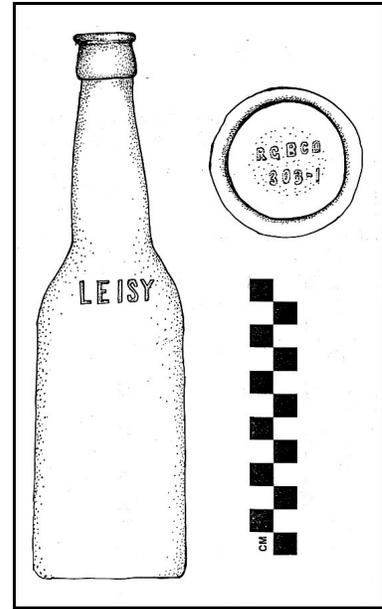


Figure 5 – RGBCO (Wedel and Walker 1992:174)



Figure 7 – Heelmark

We questioned why a manufacturer with only one plant would use two logos. A possible answer is that each style of mark represents a different furnace. The ampersand style was the original logo, but, with the adoption of O’Neill machines, the firm apparently divided the

furnaces, using the older ampersand mark for Furnace No. 2. This also suggests that Furnace No. 2 was the one described in 1918 as having three machines plus the hand operation.

Furnace No. 1 then housed the remaining nine O’Neill machines with no hand units and used the logo without the ampersand. This hypothesis is supported by numbering system on the bases. We mentioned above that all four non-ampersand marks in our sample were numbered in the xxx-x format. In all four cases, the final digit is a “1” – possibly an indicator of Factory No. 1 (see Figures 5 & 6). It is also logical that the main tank (with the number “1”) would be the primary one.

Discussion and Conclusion

Despite the reference to exclusive machine manufacture in 1913, hand production continued at the factory until at least 1918 and likely until the plant closed in 1920. Many (possibly most) of the machine-made bottles may have been unmarked, a common occurrence during the early 20th century (e.g., see Lockhart et al. 2007). Machine-made bottles with “RG&BCo” logos may have only been for firms with large orders. Unfortunately, we did not record whether the machine-made bottles had side embossing denoting specific breweries. The vast majority of bottles had no side embossing.

It appears likely that the “R.G.&B.CO.” marks were used first and may have only peripherally been added to machine-made bottles. The “RGBCo” logo (no ampersand), however, may have been used exclusively on bottles made by machine. We are currently unable to assign date ranges to any of the variations within each of the two configurations, although machine-made bottles were probably not manufactured prior to ca. 1912.

Acknowledgments

Our gratitude to Wanda Wakkinen for proofreading this work.

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Last updated 12/18/2018