

The Mysterious Letter S

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Various glass houses used logos containing the letter S throughout the latter half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. While we have addressed many of these in the various “S” sections of this Encyclopedia, they also need to be assessed as a group. These include the letter S alone, S in a circle, S in a diamond, S in a star, S in a shield and S in a Hexagon. Although this study will not generally address the letter at the beginning of multiple initials, we have included the “SGCo” marks because they, too, tend to be confusing.

The Lone Letter S

The literature addresses at least seven glass houses that used the solo letter S as a logo on glass bottles or fruit jars. In addition, the Thatcher Glass Co. also embossed the letter on milk bottle bases to identify its Streator plant. Since Thatcher often placed its actual logo on the heels of its bottles, the ones from Streator have the potential to be misleading – so it becomes an eighth. We begin the list with two fruit jar manufacturers, both of which embossed the letter S on Mason jars. In addition, we have assigned validity scores to the use of each logo by a given glass house (certain, probable, unlikely, etc.).

Hero Fruit Jar Co. – certain (1884-1890) Mason fruit jars

Although the Hero Glass Works was open from 1869 to 1883, the second firm, the Hero Fruit Jar Co. embossed the letter “S” between “MASON’S” and “PATENT” on the front of some jars (MASON’S / S / PATENT / 1858) as well as its known logo, the Hero cross with no letters, sometime between 1884 and 1890. According to Toulouse (1969:266-267; 1971:440, 158), there were two different Mason fruit jars marked with an “S,” one with serifs and another in sans serif form. One serif “S” was much thinner than the other, and that was accompanied by an “unlettered Hero cross,” a mark only used after 1883 by the Hero Fruit Jar Co., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. See the section on the Hero firms for more information. The second serif “S” mark was found on “Mason jars machine-made pre-1915 style.” Both marks and the sans serif “S” were found on jars marked “MASON’S / PATENT / 1858.”

Toulouse (1969:266-267) also discussed the significance of the placement and crudity of the “S” – noting that the Hero variation had the “S” between “MASON’S” and “PATENT” as well as an identical jar with no Hero cross. On a third variation, the “S” had migrated above “MASON’S” and was “very crudely formed.” His final variation was identical with the third, “except that the ‘S’ is well formed and all lettering is doubly outlined.”

We could not find these examples in Roller (1983). Creswick (1987a:143), however, illustrated two jars with “S” below the “MASON’S” but showed the “S” as normal rather than with serifs. One variation had an unlettered Hero cross above “MASON’S”; the other had a large plus sign (+) in that position. In her second volume, Creswick (1987b:93) illustrated a single example with a serif “S” above “MASON’S / PATENT / 1858.” She noted that the jar had a shoulder seal (placing its manufacture prior to ca. 1915) and had either a “smooth or ground lip” (i.e., both mouth-blown and machine made variations). She did not attempt to identify the maker (Figure 1).

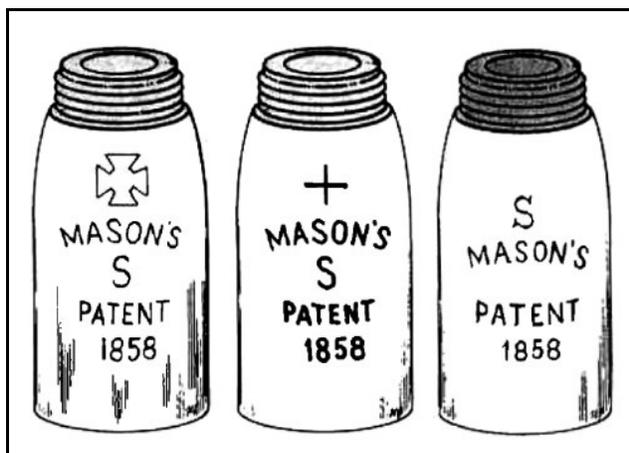


Figure 1 – S Mason’s jars (Creswick 1987a:143; 1987b-93)

Aside from the jars with the L&W logo (see next entry), all of the S-marked jars were *probably* made by the Hero Fruit Jar Co. (possibly the earlier Hero Glass Works) – although only the jar with the Hero Cross is certain. The big question – which remains unanswered – centers around the letter “S.” For both glass houses, there is no intuitive explanation for the use of the letter – although it could stand for “Salmon” – the given name of Salmon B. Rowley. In the case of Lorenz & Wightman (below), the letter was obviously intentional (over a ghosted word), so it must have had *some* meaning.

Lorenz & Wightman – certain (1863-1873) Mason fruit jars

Creswick (1987a:147) illustrated one jar embossed with “MASON’S / S / PATENT / NOV 30TH / 1858” on the front and “L&W” (Lorenz & Wightman) on the base. A similar jar

was identical except that it had a ghosted “MASONS” (no apostrophe) below “MASON’S” and no initials on the base (Figure 2). These were almost certainly both made by Lorenz & Wightman. The use of the letter “S” is even less intuitive for Lorenz & Wightman than for the Hero firms (see above).

Salem Glass Works – probable (1860s, possibly later) peppersauce

Toulouse (1969:267) noted that “the use of “S” has also been attributed to the Salem Glass Works, Salem, N.J., 1895-1938, but I do not agree,” and he cited his prior

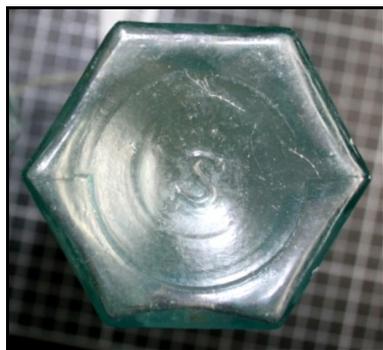


Figure 3 – S peppersauce (Ellen Gerth)

identification of Hero. The

Hero variation was, of

course, made by the Hero Glass Works, but the other S marks

could mean anything. Gerth (2006:64-65; personal

communication 1/25/2007) found a similar serif “S” on Gothic

Peppersauce bottles in the wreckage of SS Republic, sunk in

1865, and the only glass house beginning with the letter “S” that

we could find during the correct period was the Salem Glass Co.

(Figure 3). See the section on the Salem Glass Works for a more

complete discussion.

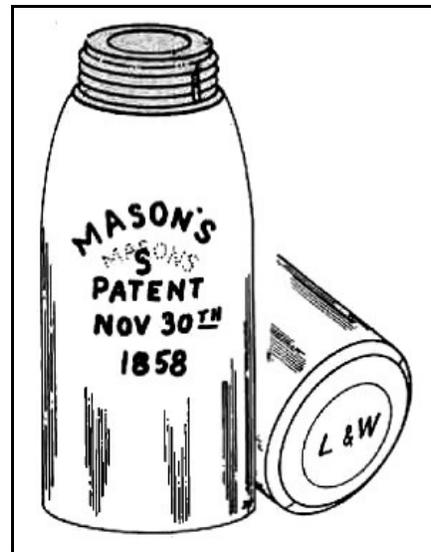


Figure 2 – S Mason’s L&W (Creswick 1987a:138, 147)

Streator Bottle & Glass Co. – (highly unlikely)

Peters (1996:9) claimed that “S” was a mark used by the Streator Bottle & Glass Co. Unfortunately, he did not state his reasons for the assertion, and it was not supported by any other source.

American Bottle Co. – certain (1906-1914) soda bottles

During the 1906-1914 period, the American Bottle Co. used a date and factory code system embossed on the heels of soda bottles. The heelcodes followed a pattern of 6-S, 7-S, etc.,

where S equaled the Streator, Illinois, plant and B indicated the former Adolphus Busch factory (Figure 4). The single- or double-digit date code followed the letter after a dash. See the American Bottle Co. section for more information.



Figure 4 – 6-S (Fort Stanton Collection)

Owens Bottle Co. – certain (1917-1919) mostly prescription bottles, some others

Our study of the Owens Bottle Co. disclosed that from 1917 to 1919, the firm marked its bottles with the first initial of each factory, surrounded by an arc of dots plus one or two numerals at the 12:00 and 6:00 o’clock positions. The top number was a two digit date code (17, 18, or 19), the bottom one a mold code. Each dot indicated the month of manufacture (one dot = January; two dots = February, etc.). The twelfth dot for December completed the circle. The letter “S” was a code for the Streator factory (Figure 5). See the Owens Bottle Co. section for more information.



Figure 5 – Owens S (Nate Briggs)

Southern Glass Co. – certain (ca. 1924-ca. 1926) Coca-Cola & milk

For the very brief period from ca. 1924 to ca. 1926, the Southern Glass Co. of Vernon, California, embossed the single letter “S” on some milk bottles and all Coca-Cola bottles made by the factory (Figure 6). Typically, however, the plant used more complex marks, such as the Circle-S, SGCo, or Star-S logos. For more information, see the section on Southern Glass.



Figure 6 – Southern S (California Park Service; Zang Wood)

Thatcher Mfg. Co. – certain (ca. late 1920s-1930s) milk bottles

From the late 1920s to the 1940s (possibly as late as 1951), the Thatcher Mfg. Co. embossed the letter “S” on the bases of

bottles made by Thatcher's Streator factory. In the 1920s and early 1930s, the "S" was in the ejection scar, but it migrated to other locations on the base after that (Figure 7). Thatcher used variations of the TMC logo on the heels of the bottles. For more information, see the section on the Thatcher Mfg. Co.



Figure 7 – Thatcher S

Unknown Examples

Toulouse (1971:455) noted in a different context that a simple "S" mark was found on bottles, but the maker could not be identified. Creswick (1987a:187) illustrated a grooved-ring wax-sealer fruit jar with a sans serif "S" embossed in the center of the base (Figure 8). She described another with a "S" on the front of the jar. These, of course, could have been made by virtually any company with "S" in the name. Also see "S" on liquor bottles in the Salem Glass Works section.

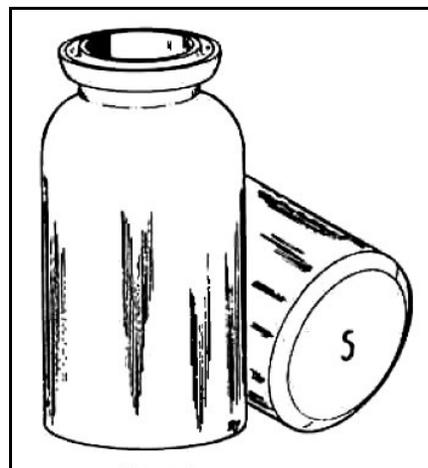


Figure 8 – S jar (Creswick 1987a:187)

Circle-S

We have recorded the Circle-S logo on four classes of bottles: sodas, liquor flasks, toiletry bottles, and kitchen ware (spice jars, coffee jars, etc.). In addition, David Whitten has a very light aqua bottle that was mouth blown with a "blob" top. Although it has the shape of a champagne beer bottle, the sides and base appear to be too thin to withstand carbonation. It may have been made for grape juice or another still beverage.

Three of these four classes can each safely be ascribed to a different glass house with some plausible doubt in the case of the fourth – as well as the grape juice bottle. The bottles are discussed below under the headings of each of the four glass houses suggested to have used the

Circle-S mark. A 1939 Owens Newsletter (from the Owens-Illinois Glass Co.) included a chart of logos used by glass houses of the period. Below a drawing of a Circle-S mark was the word “Swisher” – possibly a Swisher Glass Co. or Swisher Glass Works. We have been unable to locate any information about the firm, and the reference probably meant Swindell – a known user of that logo.

Southern Glass Co. – certain (1919-ca. 1920) – soda bottles

The Southern Glass Co. operated at Vernon, California, from 1919 to 1930, almost exclusively producing soda and milk bottles. See that section for more information. We have only seen examples of the Circle-S mark on soda bottles – mostly used by Arizona bottlers (Figure 9). These were mouth-blown bottles. Southern had not yet adopted semiautomatic machines.



Figure 9 – Circle-S Southern
(Mike Miller)

Swindell Bros. – certain 1940s (prob ca. 1920-1959)

According to Toulouse (1971:452-454), Swindell Brothers, Baltimore, Maryland, used the Circle-S mark from ca. 1920 to 1959. Toulouse found no record of any other mark. Griffenhagen and Bogard (1999:127-128) followed Toulouse in both identity and dates for the mark. Scholes (1941:129) showed this mark as being used by Swindell in the early 1940s. The S-in-a-Circle logo was shown as belonging to Swindell on a table of glass trademarks compiled by Owens-Illinois in 1964, but the mark was no longer listed in 1971 or 1982 (Berge 1980:83; Emhart 1982:74-75; Hanlon 1971:6-17).

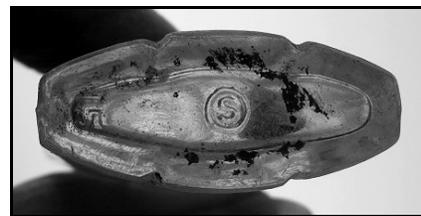


Figure 10 – Circle-S Swindell

A Dr. A.C. Daniels disinfectant bottle with a Circle-S logo on the base also had a design patent number of “D 114,208” issued to John L. Dunnock on April 11, 1939 and assigned to the Swindell Bros. This removed all doubt as to the connection between Swindell and Circle-S mark. A liquor bottle also carried the Circle-S logo along with a plant code of “31,” a number apparently assigned to the Swindells. The glass house also used the mark on barbers’ bottles and at least one straight-sided Coca-Cola bottle (Figure 10).

Sneath Glass Co. – certain (ca. 1908-ca. 1940) – glass kitchen ware

The Circle-S logo was also used by the Sneath Glass Co. during the period between ca. 1908 and ca. 1940 – although the company was in business from 1894 to 1952. Sneath primarily made kitchen ware during the period when it used the Circle-S mark, but some of the glass canisters and



Figure 12 – Hoosier Cabinet (Wikipedia)

spice jars could easily be mistaken in excavations for product or fruit jars (Figure 11).



Figure 11 – Circle-S Sneath (Mary Wienstein)

Sneath Glass made spice jars and other glass containers to fit into Hoosier Cabinets. Hoosier Cabinets were made during the period between ca. 1908-ca. 1940 – an era when builders typically did not include built-in cabinets as part of a kitchen – by the Hoosier Mfg. Co. Sneath Glass Co. made jars that specifically fit into the space and were sold along with the cabinets by Hoosier (Figure 12).

Sterling Glass Co., Lapel, Indiana – probable (poss. 1914-1951) – household, prescription, soda, packers

The Sterling Glass Co. was open between 1914 and 1951, and Scholes (1941:129) showed this mark as being used by the Sterling in 1941. Toulouse (1971:450) jumped the dates to include the entire tenure of the firm – 1914-1951). The factory may mostly have produced generic bottles and jars, so almost any with no markings may have been made by Sterling between 1914 and 1951 – either machine made or mouth blown (Figure 13). However, Sterling certainly made some private mold bottles – i.e., embossed with a company name or using a special design.



Figure 13 – Circle-S Sterling

Summary

We may safely ascribe certain types of bottles to specific glass houses as shown below. However, many of the generic bottle types could have been made by either the Sterling Glass Co. or the Swindell Brothers. We have indicated below the probability that location could play in some cases and marked specific bottle types as certain, probable, or possible. Be aware that the possible categories could have been made by either Sterling or Swindell.

Southern Glass Co., Vernon, California (1919-ca. 1920)

Certain – mouth-blown soda bottles used in western contexts

Sneath Glass Co., Hartford City, Indiana (ca. 1914-ca. 1940)

Certain – Hoosier Cabinet bottles, kitchen ware

Sterling Glass Co., Lapel, Indiana (ca. 1908-ca. 1940)

Probable – generic product jars and bottles with Circle-S

Possible – other generic Circle-S bottles

Swindell Brothers, Baltimore, Maryland (ca. 1905-1959)

Certain – Liquor flasks, toiletry bottles

Probable – bottles with Circle-S used in the South or Maryland Area; Coca-Cola bottles

Possible – other generic Circle-S bottles

Diamond-S

In our initial study of the Diamond-S logo, we explored four variables: 1) diamond shape; 2) bottle type; 3) color; and 4) date ranges.

The study concluded that the shape of the diamond (Figure 14) had little importance and

mostly depended on the whim or understanding of the mold maker. Color was only relevant in a single instance (a lone amber flask), but bottle type and date ranges were important considerations.

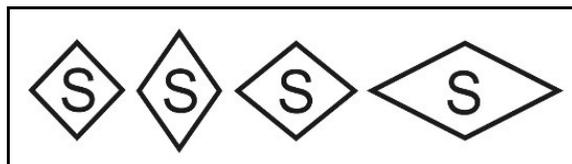


Figure 14 – Diamond S variations

Types and Date Ranges

The bottles in our sample divided into six major categories:

1. T.A. Snider catsup bottles
2. Liquor flasks with continuous-thread finishes
 - A. Late 1880s-1890s
 - B. 1930s
3. Liquor flasks and bottles with one- or two-part finishes
4. Medicinal bottles
5. Soda, milk, and “other” bottles
6. More recent Scotch bottles

It is possible that other bottle types were made with these logos; however, these were the only types in our sample. Aside from the 1920-1925 period for soda and milk bottles with the Diamond-S mark, the 1930s liquor flasks, and the more recent scotch bottles, the other containers in our sample were made between ca. 1880 and ca. 1895.

Eventually, we were able to sort the bottle types into the glass houses that used them along with the probability for each.



Figure 15 – Diamond-S Southern (Mike Miller)

Southern Glass Co. – certain (ca. 1920-1925) soda [elongated horizontal diamond]

The Southern Glass Co., located at Vernon (Los Angeles), California, used the Elongated Diamond-S logo on machine-made soda and milk bottles during the 1920-1925 period (Figure 15). See the section on the Southern Glass Co. for more information).

Chicago Glass Mfg. Co. – certain (1883-1891) prescription bottles [see CGMCo file]

The 1888 letter from the Chicago Glass Mfg. Co. to Charles Yockel described and illustrated the revolved square diamond variation and described the medicinal bottles upon which

it was to be used (Figure 16). The Bottle Research Group found these exact bottles (albeit in horizontal diamond variation) in our examination of the Tucson Urban Renewal Project collection.



Figure 16 – Diamond-S Chicago (TUR; Wintherthur Library)

The Chicago Glass Mfg. Co. plant was in operation *only* during the correct time period, and it was noted for its colorless prescription glass ware. We have hypothesized that the “S” in the logo indicated Thomas Sheldon, the manager until 1888, but, even if that is incorrect, the bottles were still made by the Chicago Glass Mfg. Co. during the 1888-1892 period. For more information, see the Chicago Glass Mfg. Co.

Swindell Bros. – almost certain (1885-1889) prescription bottles

Bethman (1991:76) attributed the Diamond-S mark to the Swindell Brothers, noting that “the ‘diamond S’ marking would appear to date from 1885 to 1889.” Other evidence, however, suggests that the mark was used by the Chicago Glass Mfg. Co. See that section for details as well as our discussion above.

Several flasks with the Diamond-S basemark have appeared in ca. 1885-1895 Western contexts, some with the early continuous-thread finishes, others with one- or two-part finishes (Figure 17). We have found no documentation for the manufacture of liquor products by Chicago Glass, but the Swindell Brothers of Baltimore made flasks at least as early as 1887 – and identical flasks appeared in the 1902 catalog. The Swindells also made flasks – again with the Diamond-S basemarks – during the early 1930s. In addition to the logo and dated codes, these also had a “31” plant code number, apparently the one for the Swindells.

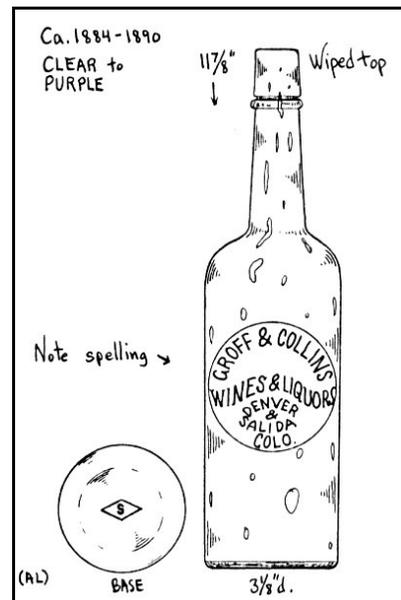


Figure 17 – Diamond-S Swindell (Clint 1976:123)

Toulouse (1971:449-450) assumed that T.A. Snider & Co. used the Diamond-S logo on their Snider's Catsup bottles but that hypothesis did not hold up under testing (Figure 18). We could not find the mark on most Snider bottles, nor have we discovered an example of a Diamond-S logo on Snider paper labels. The Swindells made a general variety of bottles, while Chicago Glass specialized in medicinal containers; therefore, Swindell is the more likely choice.

It is virtually certain that the Chicago Glass Mfg. Co. used the Diamond-S logo on medicinal and prescription bottles from 1883-ca. 1891, but it is possible that the Swindell Bros. adopted the mark after the Chicago firm ceased operations. It is unclear when the Swindells began the use of a Circle-S logo, although that was in place by at least the 1920s. (see above).



Figure 18 – Snider (eBay)

Salt Lake City Glass Co. – highly unlikely (1885-1889)

Because we discussed the Salt Lake City Glass Works (1885-ca. 1889) in other contexts (see e.g., the Chicago Glass Mfg. Co.), we address it here briefly. There is virtually no question that the liquor flasks we assumed *could* have been made by the Salt Lake City firm were actually produced by the Swindell Bros. (see above). The Salt Lake City factory probably made beer bottles exclusively.

British Bottles – probable (ca. 1970s-2000s?)

We have also discovered an eBay seller offering a Diamond-S logo with a vertical diamond (curved sides) on a Cutty Sark Scotch bottle that also had parentheses stippling on the resting point – a sure sign of a post 1970 manufacture (Figure 19). A California excavation also uncovered an identical logo on a similar green base. The bottle bases were embossed with the name of Berry Bros. & Rudd, Ltd., wine



Figure 19 – Diamond-S English (eBay)

merchants since 1698. The bottles were almost certainly made by a British or Scottish firm, but we have not discovered which one.

Star-S

Of all the “S” logos, this is the easiest to research. Only one glass house, the Southern Glass Co., used the Star-S to mark its soda and milk bottles from 1926 until the plant closed in 1930. Although the stars could appear on either the heels or bases of bottles, the firm added two-digit date codes in 1928 (Figure 20). The Illinois-Pacific Glass Co. took charge of the Southern Glass liquidation in 1931 and continued to use the Star-S mark during that year, adding a two-digit date code to the reinforcing ring of the finish.

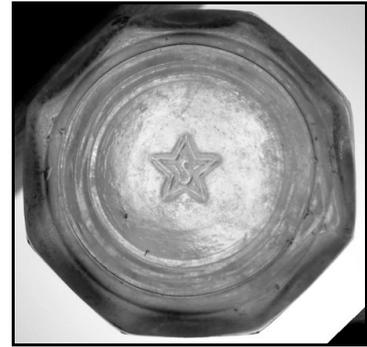


Figure 20 – Star-S

Shield-S (poss. ca. 1890-1919)

Eastin (1965:56) illustrated an Edison battery bottle with a Shield-S embossed on the base (Figure 21). The bottle was machine made, and the shield had a flat top. The number “1” was embossed to the left and “11” to the right.



Figure 22 – Shield-S (eBay)

Auctions on eBay offered two bottles embossed with Shield-S on the bases. These differed from the Eastin shield in that the shields on both had pointed tops, and neither mark was accompanied by numbers. One of these, an aqua export beer bottle, was embossed

“FOSS-SCHNEIDER / BREWING CO. / CINCINNATI, O.” at the shoulder, with a one-part, tooled finish (Figure 22). Foss-Schneider operated from 1884 to 1919 (Van Wieren 1995:270). The other was a colorless picnic flask with no markings except the Shield-S on the base. The flask was mouth blown, and, like the beer

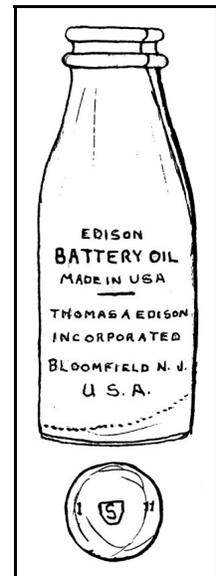


Figure 21 – Shield-S (Eastin 1965:56)

bottle, had a tooled finish. At Fort Laramie, we found still a different flask – a shoo-fly flask – embossed with the same sans-serif S in a broad shield on the base.

Although the Edison bottle was made later, the other three were probably produced during the ca. 1900-1915 period. The differences in shields suggests that a different glass house manufactured the Edison bottle, but we have not discovered a good candidate for either.

Von Mechow (2019) also discussed the Shield-S logo on beer bottles that he dated ca. 1897-ca. 1903, although he, too, could not identify a manufacturer. He noted that “it is believed that this mark is for the Streeter Glass Company that was located in Greenfield and then Terre Haute.” There is interesting collaborating information, but there is not any conclusive evidence at this point. This firm primarily made fruit jars, but was known to make bottles. The evidence is quite ephemeral, but Harry Streeter certainly may have used the mark under his name from ca. 1897 to 1899 or by his later firm, the Terre Haute Glass Mfg. Co., from 1900 and ca. 1903.

Fowler (2019) also listed an interesting bottle in Hutchbook. Used by the Murphysboro Bottling Co., Murphysboro, Illinois, this Hutchinson soda bottle was embossed “S.B.&G.Co.” on the heel with an S-in-a-shield motif on the base. This was the only Hutchinson bottle used by the bottling company that was made by Streator and the only one with the S-in-a-shield mark, suggesting SB&GCO may have used the logo. There is no intuitive reason for Murphysboro to have used any logo with an “S” – but we have no other evidence that Streator used such a mark. Unfortunately, we have found little information about the bottling firm to ascertain whether the letter “S” would fit the name of an owner or some other connection with the bottler.

Hexagon-S

The Hexagon-S logo appeared on a machine-made, colorless base fragment embossed “FISHMAN” or “FISHMAN’S” above the symbol (Figure 23). Although our example appears to be too small (unless it was a miniature), there was a Fishman’s Fine Old Whiskey from Fishman’s Distillery. Unfortunately, all we can find online about the brand is a single label – with no Hexagon-S. Of course, there is no intuitive reason



Figure 23 – Hexagon-S

why an “S” label should appear with “Fishman’s” – so the logo probably represented a small, possibly remote bottle maker. We have found no other examples.

S.G.Co

Several glass houses used the “S.G.Co” logo, usually fairly briefly, often on different bottle styles and usually at different time periods. Below is a very brief description of each firm’s mark.



Figure 24 – S.G.CO Seattle

Seattle Glass Co. – almost certain (1903-1907)

The Seattle Glass Co., Renton, Washington, used the S.G.CO. basemark on beer bottles, local bitters bottles, medicinal ware, and probably other bottle types from 1903 to 1907 (Figure 24). All of these bottles were probably used in fairly local contexts.



Figure 25 – S.G.CO Severn (David Whitten)

Severn Glass Co.– almost certain (1898-1901)

From 1898 to 1901, the Severn Glass Co., Annapolis, Maryland, used an S.G.Co. or S.G.CO. logo on the heels of amber beer bottles and on the bases of aqua and amber Union Oval flasks (Figure 25). As with Seattle Glass, most of the Severn bottles were used in the Maryland area and surrounds.



Figure 26 – S.G.Co Southern, KY (David Whitten)

Southern Glass Co. – certain (1877-ca. 1879)

During its brief period of existence, the Southern Glass Co. of Louisville, Kentucky, produced wax-sealer fruit jars, flasks, and various types of bottles embossed “S.G.Co” on their bases (Figure 26). These were mostly used in the Louisville area.

Southern Glass Co. – certain (ca. 1923-1925)

The Southern Glass Co., Vernon, California, used a variety of logos (as noted above) throughout its existence, using an SGC_o mark in two different forms, each on a different bottle type. On milk bottles, the firm embossed “S.G.CO.” on the heels during this period, while it used S/G/Co in a segmented parallelogram on the bases of soda bottles (Figures 27). The firm replaced both marks with the Star-S logo in 1926. Unlike the other logos, *only* the Southern Glass Co. used S in a star.



Figure 27 – SGC_o Southern, CA (Mike Miller)

SGC_o Monogram

Because it was composed of the same letters, we include the SGC_o monogram in this section (Figure 28). Originally, Toulouse (1969:283; 1971:473) assigned the Safe Glass Co. as the user of the SGC_o monogram, basing his identification on an interview with J.S. Gilles, former owner of the firm. Subsequently, collectors



Figure 29 – Monogram comparisons (eBay)



Figure 28 – SGC_o monogram (eBay)

discovered shipping boxes from the Swayzee Glass Co. that were marked with drawings of an SGC_o monogram on a Mason fruit jar (Figure 29). Our analyses of the monograms, company histories, and sources suggests that Toulouse was probably correct about this one – the Safe Glass Co. was the likely user of the logo. However, the mark was probably embossed by the first Safe Glass Co. from 1889 to 1892. See the discussion in the Swayzee Glass Co. section for our most recent analysis.

Discussion and Conclusions

The above study places the various “S” logos in a perspective unavailable to our normal methods of dealing with logos specific to an individual factory or firm. This arrangement, grouping the logos together will allow an archaeologist or collector to compare the various users of a logo along with the types of containers used by each. As with all of our studies, we used the best information we could discover, preferring documented data but using the best logic and methods where documentation is lacking. Most of the marks have now been identified, although the Shield-S logos remain a mystery as of this writing. Because most of this is presented in summary form, most citations may be found in the sections about the individual glass houses.

Acknowledgments

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