Swayzee Glass Co.

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The Swayzee Glass Co. had a short but distinctive history, opening in 1895 and specializing in fruit jars until the Ball Brothers purchased the factory in 1906. The plant marked its fruit jars with the Swayzee name. The use of the SGCo monogram by Swayzee, however, is subject to debate.

History

Swayzee Glass Co., Swayzee, Indiana (1895-1906)

The new firm announced plans for the erection of a 20-pot glass factory in Swayzee, Indiana, on West Marks St. (just west of 3rd St.) in April 1894. The company was known as the the Swayzee Glass Co., and it was originally intended to manufacture prescription ware. The company was incorporated on September 3, 1895, with a capital of \$50,000. The directors for the corporation were Leander C. Cole, Robert J. Main, and John M. Main – and the plant probably began production at about that time (*Commoner and Glassworker* 1909; Roller 1994; 1997).¹

Despite the intention to make prescription bottles, initial production almost certainly included fruit jars. The plant began making glass oil cans and fruit jars by at least August of 1896. Main at that time indicated his intention to withdraw from the consortium of fruit jar manufacturers that had temporarily dominated the trade – an announcement that would be

While Roller (1994) placed the date of incorporation at September 3, 1895, Indiana Secretary of State William Owen (1897:120), noted that the articles of incorporation were not filed until December 14, 1895. When production began is currently uncertain. When the factory closed for the season in June 1896, the workers were treated to a banquet by manager Robert Main (*National Glass Budget* 1896a). This is unusual enough to suggest that it marked the close of a very successful season, and probably of the factory's first fire. If so, and if the blast was of the standard length, production would have begun in the fall of 1895.

meaningless unless the company had been making such ware during the previous fire (*National Glass Budget* 1896b). On April 24, the *Indianapolis Journal* published a long article about the arrival in town of Dennis A. Hayes, the president of green glass blowers union and his attempt to persuade Main to unionize the plant. Main was unmoved. Although it failed to provide background information, the *Kalamzoo Gazette* reported on August 18 that "Walter Westlake, editor of the Swayzee News at Marion, Ind., was taken from his bed, horribly beaten and egged out of town by non-union workers in R.J. Main & Co.'s fruit jar factory."

In 1897, Swayzee apparently stepped up production, manufacturing ten railroad car loads of jars per day from its two continuous tanks, including shipment of several car loads to the Marion Fruit Jar Co. to fill orders that Marion could not supply from its own factory. In October, Swayze rebuilt and expanded its tanks to increase capacity to 32 rings and staff from 225 to 325 hands "turn[ing] out daily 450 gross Mason fruit jars," and it continued with the same number of pots rings the following year (*National Glass Budget* 1897a; 1897b; 1897c; 1897d; 1897e; 1898a).

The late 1890s were marked by a significant transition in fruit jar production, caused by the successful introduction of machines by the Atlas Glass Works in 1896 and Ball Brothers in 1898. The country's two largest fruit jar factories were soon cranking out arguably better jars at prices with which the hand factories could not compete. In the spring of 1898, Swayzee was running full. While orders were reported fair, however, more stock was being produced than could find a market and "the sides of the ware sheds are said to be beginning to bulge out." It was an ill omen, but the situation did not improve. Main decided to suspend operations by the end of the year (*National Glass Budget* 1898b; 1898c).

The situation at Swayzee is illuminated by an extended newspaper interview with Main himself:

Mr. Main said when he first started the factory last fall [1898] he paid his men 42 cents for pints, 48 for quarts and 60 for half gallon jars. At this scale the men were making on an average of \$25 to \$30 a week, and many of them more than this. Mr. Main showed his books to the reporter, and seemed to be honest in his explanations. At the same time Ball Bros., at Muncie, the firm's hottest competitor, were manufacturing their jars with machines, and it was costing them

31 cents for pints, 36 cents for quarts and 44 1-10 cents for half gallons. The prices above named, it must be understood, were by the gross. At the price paid by Ball Bros., the jars were completed, while the Swayzee people, besides being forced to pay the above prices for blowing the jars, were at a big expense at grinding and finishing them (*National Glass Budget* 1899e).

At those rates, Swayzee could not compete. Main suggested a rate reduction as the only means to keep the factory open, but this was refused, and the men struck, and the managment locked the doors. In January, the works were still closed "with snow on the factory floors and hoar frost in the idle ring holes" (McCormack & Schmid 1901:19-20; *National Glass Budget* 1899b).

Main meanwhile was reported "on the look out for machines." He found a likely candidate in the form of the Power press-and-blow machine just put on the market by the Simonds Glass Co. (*National Glass Budget* 1899a). The non-union glass workers had now been on strike for 18 months – since December 22, 1898. The glass blowers in particular were not impressed with the new approach. By June, the situation had turned nasty. The *Indiana Journal* had been covering the strike from its beginning and reported that Jack Knee and George Shepp, two of the striking blowers, attacked Henry Berger on May 21 and that "the town was almost in a state of riot. Non-union workmen paraded the streets, revolvers were flashed and a serious riot was threatened." The police arrested Knee and Shepp, calming the situation.

The first machine was installed in February of 1899 but was barely in place before Swayzee was compelled to serve as a co-defendant in a suit by Atlas Glass against Simonds for patent infringement. Although initially ordered to return the machine to Pittsburgh, Swayzee was instead allowed to post a \$3,000 bond pending the outcome of the trial. Main promptly ordered additional machines. Six were in successful operation by May, each turning out 200 to 300 dozen jars per day, with more machines on the way. In January 1900, the circuit court held in favor of Simonds, and this was affirmed by the appeals court in June (*National Glass Budget* 1899a; 1899c; 1899d; 1899e; 1899f; 1899g; 1900a 1900b; Roller 1997).

With his use of machines secure, Main continued to use them for fruit jar production, while making flasks and bottles by hand. The *Indiana Journal* headlined the news on July 4, 1899, that the Swayzee Glass Co. was finally unionized two days earlier after more than four

years of strife between the workers and management. But all was not well for long. The *Journal* reported on July 15 that the plant had reverted to its non-union status because "the union men refused to obey the rules of the company." Main stated that Swayzee Glass would pay union scale, but both union and non-union employees were welcome to work.

The plant added a third continuous tank in 1900, but only two seem to have been in use at any one time. In 1902 the company was reportedly operating "one tank on machine made fruit jars and the other on hand and machine made bottles. Nine machines are now being worked and there are eight or ten hand bottle shops." Since the Power machine produced only wide-mouth ware, the "machine made bottles" presumably included the Vaseline jars and general packers ware noted in 1902 and 1904 (*National Glass Budget* 1901; 1902; Roller 1994; 1997).

In 1904, Main patented his own press-and-blow machine (Patent 779,089), which shared many features with the Power machines he had been using. Presumably the factory was then converted to these machines. It should be noted, in any case, that we have found no indication of hand production of fruit jars after the initial introduction of machines at the beginning of 1899.

On February 8, 1906,² the Ball Brothers purchased the Swayzee plant for \$71,428 and bought the inventory for an additional \$62,914.80. The plant closed in late March. Despite a report that the factory would reopen in October, workers dismantled the building in March 1907 (Roller 1994; 1997).

Containers and Marks

Since production began in 1896, Swayzee glassware should be dated from that year rather than 1895, when the corporation first began. Machine production began in 1899, providing an early date for all machine-made Swayzee jars. We have found no evidence for the use of any marks on bottles or other products beside fruit jars.

² The Midwest Antique Fruit Jar & Bottle Club (2005) and other recent webpages placed the closing date at April 21, 1906.

SGCo Monogram (1896-1906)

Toulouse (1969:283; 1971:473), Roller (1983:236), Creswick (1987a:144), and Kath (1996:52) each illustrated and described an intricate monogram found on the sides of fruit jars embossed "MASON'S / {SGCo monogram} / PATENT / NOV 30TH / 1858." The monogram appeared on pint, quart, and half gallon jars (Figures 1 & 2). Creswick noted that the jar had a "ground lip," indicating that these were mouth blown.

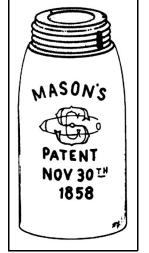


Figure 2 – SGCo mono (Creswick 1987a:144)

Toulouse attributed the monogram to the Safe Glass Co. and placed its use between 1880 and 1900 on handmade yellow-green and aqua jars.



Figure 1 – SGCo monogram (eBay)

In his 1969 book, he also noted that at least one embossing error was present along with the typical Mason's jar described by Kath. The error jar was missing the "'s" on the word "MASON'S." Creswick noted that the jars were made by the Swayzee Glass Co. from ca. 1894 to the early 1900s (her version of the production dates). Kath followed Creswick's identification and dates, as did Whitten (2019). Roller, however, was not certain of the manufacturer's identification.

Roller (2011:356) suggested that the monogram

"may have been made circa 1894-1906 by the Swayzee Glass Company" based on wooden shipping boxes for Swayzee jars with a "similar" monogram. Some eBay sellers have offered Swayzee wooden cases for auction. Stamped drawings on the cases showed jars marked "MASON'S / PATENT" with an SGCo monogram in between. The monogram was not exactly like the one on the jars, but it was similar



Figure 3 – Swayzee crate (eBay)

(Figure 3). See the discussion and conclusions section for a debate about the manufacturer of these jars.

To add to the confusion, a 1902 Swayzee letterhead shows a case of jars with a fruit jar on either side. The fruit jars, while indistinct, show four lines of embossing. The company name is not apparent in the drawing,



Figure 4 – 1902 letterhead (North American Glass)

and it has the appearance of a generic sketch rather than a depiction of an actual case and jars (Figure 4). Further, by 1902, the company would have been producing machine-made jars embossed "SWAYZEE MASON" for three years totally invalidating the jar design shown on the letterhead.

SWAYZEE (1896-1906)

Toulouse (1969:283-284) illustrated and discussed several variations of fruit jars that showed the Swayzee name. These included the "SWAYZEE MASON," "SWAYZEE'S MASON," "SWAYZEE'S IMPROVED MASON," AND "SWAYZEE'S FRUIT JAR." The "FRUIT JAR" had two variations with "FRUIT JAR" on one line or two lines. Toulouse dated all the jars to the full tenure of the Swayzee Glass Co. Roller (1983:350) only addressed the "SWAYZEE'S IMPROVED MASON" but noted a variation with what he called a "crown figure" – more like the top half of a fleur-de-lis – between "SWAYZEE'S" and "IMPROVED" (Figure 5). The Roller update



Figure 5 – Swayzee's Improved - Fleur-delis on right (eBay)

(2011:500) added a misspelling of "IMPROVED" as "IMPPOVED" (Figure 6). If eBay auctions are anything to judge by, the improved was the most common of the Swayzee jars and the most recent – possibly both.

Creswick (1987a:206-207) noted that the "SWAYZEE MASON" and both variations of the "SWAYZEE FRUIT JAR" each had a "ground lip" – i.e., all mouth-blown (Figure 7). Creswick (1987b:162, 274) showed four variations of the SWAYZEE'S IMPROVED MASON jars, including the mislabeled IMPPOVED. Two had what Creswick called a "fleur-de-lis" design between "SWAYZEE'S" and "IMPROVED." An error jar of the "fleur-de-lis" variation had



Figure 6 – IMPPOVED (eBay)

"IMRROVED" below the design. She noted that each of the "IMPROVED" jars had a "smooth lip" (i.e., were machine made).

Discussion and Conclusions

Both of the possible identifying marks for Swayzee Glass require some discussion. We address the "SWAYZEE" logo first, because the conclusions may have some bearing on the second discourse about the SGCo monogram.

SWAYZEE

SHAYZEE'S

FRUIT JAR

FRUIT

JAR

MASON

JAR

Figure 7 – Swayzee jars (Creswick 1987a:206-207)

It appears strange that the Roller volumes (1983; 2011) only discussed the

Swayzee Improved Masons but none of the earlier jars. Yet, it seems logical that, if there were an *Improved* Mason, there must have been an earlier Mason to have been improved upon. In addition, all sources (and our eBay searches) agree that all Improved Masons were machine made. Therefore, Swayzee *must* have made some sort of Mason jar prior to the machine period. Creswick noted that the Swayzee Mason and the Swayzee Fruit Jars had "ground lips" – i.e., they were mouth blown with the rim ground even.

Dating, then, becomes relatively simple. From 1895 until Swayzee locked out its workers in December of 1898, all bottles were made by hand methods and had ground rims. Thus, the

Swayzee Fruit Jars and Swayzee Mason jars *should* all be dated to the 1895-1898 period. The problem is that we cannot find *any* examples of these earlier jars.

The firm made Swayzee Mason's Improved, all machine manufactured, between 1899 and 1906, the machine era that lasted until the Ball Brothers acquired the firm and closed the factory. We have discovered no way to provide finer dating for any of the variations. Although some hand production continued steadily until at least 1904, the limited references to this indicate that it was used for other types of ware.

SGCo Monogram

As noted in the text above, the SGCo monogram found on MASON PATENT NOV. 18TH 1858 fruit jars has been attributed to both the Safe Glass Co. and the Swayzee Glass Co. The majority of sources considered Swayzee as the likely user based on the similarity of the monogram on the jars and on wooden shipping cases clearly identified as the Swayzee Glass Co. A comparison and contrast of the two monograms may prove useful.

Superficially, the monogram on the actual Mason jars and the stampings on the Swayzee boxes are similar, with the same horizontally elongated shape and the same initials – S, G, and Co. But, there the similarity ends. The letter "S" on the jar has five significant embellishments that are missing on the box letter, although the box "S" has serifs at both ends. The "G" is the second smallest letter on the jar – with serifs at both terminations – while the letter shares equal dominance with the "S" on the box – and has one embellishment and one serif. On the jar, the "Co" is significantly elongated, extending beyond the "S" on both sides. The "C" has a single serif and an embellishment at the curve. On the box, however, the "o" in "Co" is surrounded by the "C" – and both inhabit a minor place at the center of the monogram (Figure 8). It is pretty obvious that the designer of the box had never seen one of the jars, or vice versa. While the designs still could have been used by the same glass house, the *only* similarity is in very superficial shape and the same initials.

Toulouse (1969:283; 1971:473) included no reason for his choice of the Safe Glass Co. as the user of the monogram, although he attributed his information in the later book to the Upton Bank, his earlier 1969 book, and J.S. Giles. Aside from the reference to Giles, the only evidence

we can discover rests on the similarity of the embossing between the SGCo monogram and a similar GCCo monogram consisting of an upright "C" with a serif at the



Figure 8 – Comparison of the three monograms

top termination, a horizontally elongated "G" with terminal serifs and an embellishment at the curve, and a small "Co" in the center (see Figure 8). As with the comparison and contrast above, there are slight similarities, but the bulk of the characteristics are notably different. Both monograms, however, appeared on the same jars – MASON'S PATENT NOV. 30TH 1858.

In a capsule history of this glass house, the firm began as the Safe Glass Co., Bowling Green, Ohio, with John S. Giles as the owner in 1889. Giles took on Henry H. Glough as a partner in 1893, renaming the company as the Giles-Clough Glass Co. (and moving to Redkey, Indiana) – the firm that adopted the GCCo monogram. In 1897, the partners split, with Clough retaining the Redkey location (as the Redkey Glass Co.) and Giles beginning anew at Upland, Indiana, the following year – again with the Safe Glass Co. name. We have assumed in the past that the second Safe Glass Co. would have been the user of the SGCo monogram – *if* the user were Safe Glass rather than Swayzee (see Table 1 and the section on the Giles-Clough Glass Co. for more information)

Table 1 – Chronology of Safe Glass Reorganizations

Firm	Dates	Principals
Safe Glass Co.	1889-1892	John S. Giles
Giles-Clough Glass Co.	1893-1897	John S. Giles, Henry H. Clough, and Frank Robinson
Safe Glass Co.	1898-1905	John S. Giles, Carl C. Giles, Charles Ardruser, and Ed O'Neill
Redkey Glass Co.	1897-1902	William Butler, O.H. Clough, and Henry H. Clough

The main evidentiary point in favor of a Safe Glass selection is the continuity of monogram use on the same types of fruit jars from Giles-Clough to Safe Glass. The only dissuading factor is that Toulouse – the only source supporting Safe Glass – was known for

assigning marks *solely* based on the matching of initials – in other words, just making a guess. However, his citation of J.S. Giles – the owner of the Safe Glass Co. – as one of his sources lends pretty strong credence to the use of the logo by Safe Glass.

The evidence for Swayzee was only based on the similarity of the monogram to the ones stamped on wooden crates. Glass houses were well known in the 19th century (almost certainly extending into the early 20th) for using generic drawings and artistic renditions of jars that did not exist as parts of their advertising. It would not be too great a stretch to assign Swayzee's monogram drawing – a monogram that certainly never was used on glass – to the same artistic license. The only point against assigning the logo o Swayzee was the use of the "SWAYZEE" name on its machine-made products. However, as discussed in the "SWAYZEE" section above, the mouth-blown jars referenced by Toulouse and Creswick seem to have been fictitious – based on repeated online searches that failed to find a single example.

In our initial study of the Safe Glass Co. (see the section on Giles-Clough), we made the assumption that the original Safe Glass factory at Bowling Green, Ohio, used no logos on its fruit jars and other products. The plant was in production from 1889 to 1892 with fruit jars as its primary output, although it also made druggists' ware and beer bottles.

In this study, however, we are taking a slightly different approach. Because all of the jars with the SGCo monogram were mouth blown, they could only have been produced during the hand production period of either the Swayzee or Safe Glass Co. Since these jars appear to be quite common on the collectors' market, quite a few of them must have been made at some point. If the Swayzee Glass Co. used the logo, it must have been during the 1895-1898 period, before the total switch to machine production.

Safe Glass, however, brings a different dynamic into the picture, since it was open at two different periods, 1889-1892 at Bowling Green, Ohio, and 1898-1905 at Upland, Indiana. As noted above, we had made the assumption that the jars with the SGCo monograms were made by the latter firm in our earlier study (see the section on the Giles-Clough Glass Co.). However, the latter Safe Glass may have discontinued the production of fruit jars when it obtained presses to make tumblers and various types of packers' ware. In December 1898, *Commoner & Glassworker* noted that Giles had "entirely abandoned the manufacture of fruit jars, claiming there is nothing in them anymore." However, *China, Glass & Lamps* reported that the

management had "locked all the union men out of their fruit jar and packers' bottle factory, and will try to start with non-union men operating the machines" – although the term "fruit jar" was not necessarily definitive in this statement. It is clear that fruit jars were discontinued or at least became a minor item at the plant.

Therefore, if the Safe Glass Co. used the logo – and the jars remain fairly common – they must have been produced in quantity at some period. That leaves only the initial firm, making mouth-blown jars as the primary product from 1889 to 1892 – although a few *could* have been revived during the 1898-1905 period. We have found no evidence that Safe Glass adopted machines for fruit jar production. Although possible, however, it is unlikely that the latter Safe Glass could have competed in the market with mouth-blown fruit jars around the turn of the century.

In conclusion, the strongest contender for the use of the SGCo monogram is the initial Safe Glass Co., Bowling Green, Ohio. Our reasons for selecting this firm are based on several points:

- 1. The initial Safe Glass factory specialized in fruit jars, operating during a period when hand production was the norm.
- 2. No other logo is known for the company during that period.
- 3. There is continuity of monogram use between Safe Glass and its descendant, the Giles-Clough Glass Co. Giles-Clough used a similar monogram on the identical type of fruit jar MASON'S PATENT NOV. 30TH 1858.
- 4. During his interview to obtain information for his second book, Toulouse would almost certainly have asked John S. Giles what logo he used.

Evidence for the logo's use by Swayzee Glass, however, rests solely on the similarity between the SGCo monogram on glass jars and similar monograms stamped on wooden boxes along with the Swayzee name and the equally otherwise undefined period when it produced mouth-blown jars. In this case, however, continuity is lacking. The mouth-blown jars claimed to have been used by Swayzee were embossed "SWAYZEE / MASON" – different from both the same configuration used on the boxes and on the jars – although, as noted above, no actual jars seem to exist. It is therefore *much* more likely that the monogram on the Swayzee boxes was a device rather than an attempt to depict an actual logo found on the jars themselves.

A final caution about this identification creates a new dilemma. With the exception of monograms in question, we have no other contenders for the mouth-blown jars made by *either* glass house. Only one of these firms could have used the SGCo monogram; therefore, the other used jars with one of the more generic Mason label configurations. However, this does not sway our earlier conclusion that the body of current evidence – strongly based on the Toulouse interview with John S. Giles – supports a use of the SGCo monogram by the Safe Glass Co.

Acknowledgments

We wish to thank Doug Leybourne for allowing us to reproduce the drawings from the Alice Creswick books and Greg Spurgeon for letting us use the photos from North American Glass. Gratitude also to Bob Brown for help in searching and to Wanda Wakkinen for proofreading.

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Last updated 6/5/2019