

Travis Glass Co.

Bill Lockhart, Beau Schriever, Bill Lindsey, Bob Brown, and Carol Serr

Originally associated with Hervey Thatcher, H.E. Travis left Thatcher to form a rival glass firm in 1908. Travis was quite successful, until Thatcher acquired the business in January of 1920. Surprisingly, the firm's logo – T in an inverted triangle – remained unidentified by collectors and archaeologists as late as the 1980s.

Histories

Travis Glass Co., Clarksburg, West Virginia (1908-1920)

Travis Glass Co., Weston, West Virginia (ca. 1916-1920)

Travis Glass Co., Cedar Grove, West Virginia (ca. 1917-1920)

According to Scoville (1948:104-105), H.E. Travis teamed up with Francis E. Baldwin to form the Baldwin-Travis Glass Co., the first company to secure an exclusive contract to use the Owens Automatic Bottle Machine. He described Travis as “a practical glass manufacturer who had been superintendent at the Fidelity Glass Company in 1903 and who later established his own plant and made milk bottles by hand process.” In 1904, Baldwin-Travis merged into the Thatcher Mfg. Co. At some point, Travis left the company. For more information about this period, see the section on the Thatcher companies.

H.E. Travis, R.A. Travis, L.M. Travis, C.E. Lamberd, and W.B. Cornwell incorporated the Travis Glass Co. at Clarksburg, West Virginia, with a capital of \$50,000 in April of 1908 (*Commoner and Glassworker* 1908:1). The *Daily Telegram* announced on October 13 of that year that the plant had started its fires the Wednesday before and would begin production at 6:00 the following morning. The plant intended to make “milk, catsup, mustard, vaseline and other bottles.” The edition for November 28 added that the factory operated five machines at its ten-ring continuous tank, four during the day shift and all five at night. The text accompanying a photo of the machine used by Travis Glass (Library of Congress) noted that Travis employed “no lungblowers” – men who blew glass my mouth in 1908 (Figure 1).

By March 27, 1909, Travis advertised “New Ideal” nursing bottles. The firm allowed Walter D. Morrison to test his new fully automatic bottle machine at their factory in 1911 – although Travis made no promise to purchase one or more of them – and apparently did not (Figure 2). The factory had exactly doubled its capacity, with two tanks and 20 rings by 1912 (*Daily Telegram* 3/27/1909; 3/8/1911; Roller 1997).

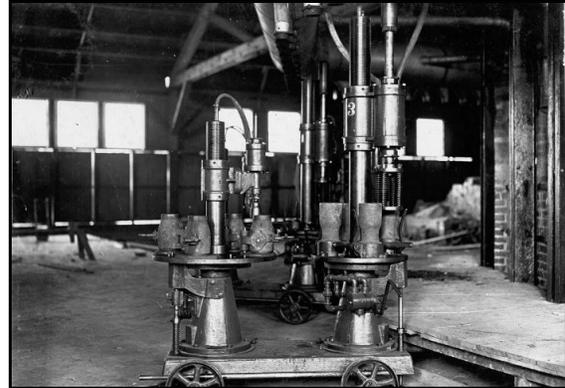


Figure 1 – Travis machine (Library of Congress)

By September 23, 1913, the *Bridgeton Evening News* had announced that Travis had “taken over the old Bastow plant at Weston [West Virginia].” The newspaper added on November 17 that the plant had “installed another of their own machines, which is a three-man machine run by electricity. This is the second machine they have in operation, one on quart milks and the other on pints, and both are said to be giving satisfactory results.” By March 17 the following year, the Weston unit was using “three O’Neill machines . . . making quart milks” at a single tank. The combined plants now operated a total of three continuous tanks with 28 rings (*Bridgeton Evening News* 3/17/1914; Roller 1996).

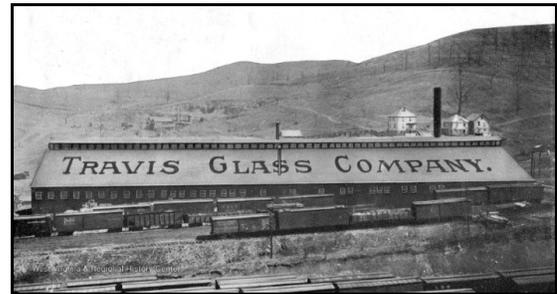


Figure 2 – Travis plant (West Virginia University)

The firm placed a final factory in operation at Cedar Grove by 1917, using two continuous tanks, bringing the company total to five continuous tanks with 40 rings (*Glass Worker* 1918:12; Roller 1997; Six 1993:22). In October 1918, the Clarksburg plant installed a “Hartford” (actually Hartford-Empire) machine that was producing quart bottles at the No. 1 tank, a complement to the five semiautomatic machines already in place at the No. 2 furnace. Weston operated a single Hartford machine, and the Cedar Grove plant had one furnace, but no further description was offered (*Glass Worker* 1918:12).

A January 11, 1919, article noted that Travis was the “exclusive makers [a glass factory was always referred to in the plural at that time] of bottles used by the Borden Milk Co.” The company was planning an extensive addition to its “plant at Glasgow, near Cedar Grove.” The

factory was installing “automatic flow machines [i.e., fully automatic machines]” to replace “the old-style gathering machines which required skilled workers” (*Glass Worker* 1919:1). The *Glass Worker* carried ads for Travis until at least September 27, 1919, but there was no ad in the same space by January 17, 1920.

On September 2, 1919, the Thatcher Mfg. Co. announced the acquisition of the Travis Glass Co. and three other milk bottle manufacturers. Thatcher had begun acquiring as much of the competition as possible. At least part of the motivation for the takeovers was the acquisition of contracts for the Hartford feeders. See the section on the Thatcher companies for more details (Giarde 1980:115; Roller 1987; Toulouse 1971:498).

Containers and Marks

Along with regular milk bottles in at least pint and quart sizes, Travis made two-ounce creamers. At least one sample creamer was embossed “TRAVIS (downward arch) / CLARKSBURG / W.VA. (both horizontal) / GLASS CO. (upward arch)” in a circular plate. The author dated the bottle at 1913, although he failed to reveal the specific configuration of the date code (Bindscheattle 1999:6).

Travis also advertised in England during its final year in business. Ads ran from January 1919 to January 1920, naming I.O. Pedersen as the Travis “Direct Factory Representative” in London (*The Milk Route* 1998:1). Currently, we have not discovered whether the company sold bottles in other countries.

Inverted-Triangle-T (1908-1919)

Giarde (1980:122) identified the Inverted-Triangle-T mark on milk bottles, although he called the identity of the maker “a mystery yet to be solved.” He noted that the Inverted Triangle T was often accompanied by what appears to be a date code. His examples were “T-19-13, T-19-16 or T-19-17.” We have observed codes ranging from T-19-12 to T-19-19 in large digits in an inverted arch below the centered logo (Figure 3). Part of the mark was often obliterated by the ejection (valve) scar.

The “T” obviously indicated the company, and the 19 was the consistent company number. The numbering system was originally devised by the state of New York, although many other states soon adopted the arrangement. The final number was a two-digit date code, ranging from 1912 to 1919. Schadlich ([ca. 1990]) dated the use of both the mark and the date codes 1913-1920. The date codes suggest that Travis began using date codes in late 1912.¹ We have never seen a “20” date code. Since Thatcher purchased Travis in January 1920, and negotiations had been public during 1919, it is unlikely that Travis produced any milk bottles in 1920.



Figure 3 – Inverted triangle T (Al Morin)

All known milk bottles with the Inverted-Triangle-T mark were made by automatic machines. As noted above, Travis used both semiautomatic and fully automatic machines in milk bottle production. Some of the bottles show no signs of the date codes. These were probably made by the initial plant at Clarksburg prior to the adoption of the code system. Those were likely made during the ca. 1908-1912 period.

The company advertised “Travis Extra Strong” milk bottles by at least October 26, 1917, and noted that “every bottle is the strongest, the most accurate and most beautiful in design that skill and the finest machinery can produce” (*The Milk Dealer* 1917:26). A 1919 ad claimed that the firm was “backed by nearly 30 years of *exclusive* bottle making experience and the finest manufacturing facilities” (*The Milk Dealer* 1919:47). The accompanying illustration showed the triangle embossing and date code on the base of the milk bottle (Figure 4). Since the factory was founded in 1908, the “30 years” of experience probably referred to one (or more) of the owners. The use of the mark by Travis is further confirmed by a 1917 article in *The Glass Worker* that discussed the Travis “Extra Strong” baseball team. Made up entirely of workers



Figure 4 – Travis ad (*The Milk Dealer* 1917:26)

¹ We suggest that the date codes and company number began *late* in 1912, because bottles with that date code appear to be quite scarce. Neither Giarde nor Schadlich mentioned the “12” code, and we have only seen a single example.

from the Travis plant, the team is shown in a photo – all wearing shirts emblazoned with the inverted-triangle-T logo.

TR in the Massachusetts Seal (1917-1919)

From late 1909 to 1947, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts required that all glass factories selling bottles to dairies within the state mark their containers with a Massachusetts seal (Schadlich & Schadlich 1984:3-4). At some point, factories embossed the seal on the shoulder of each milk bottle, usually in a circular form embossed “MASS (arch) / {factory designator} / “SEAL (inverted arch).” These often appeared in a small circular plate. (Blodget 2006:8; Schadlich [ca. 1990]). Since the Thatcher Mfg. Co. bought Travis in early 1920, the firm could not have used the TR mark beyond 1919.

The Travis Glass Co. was listed in the 1918 Bulletin and almost certainly joined the Massachusetts system early. Schadlich (ca. 1990) stated that Travis used the “TR” in the Massachusetts seal embossed on the shoulders of milk bottles “since 1917,” although our empirical evidence indicates that Travis began using the shoulder seal by at least 1914 (Giarde 1980:115; *Commoner & Glassworker* 1908:1; Toulouse 1971:498). Since Travis used date codes from 1912 to 1919, that is also the probable range for the use of the Massachusetts seal.²

The TR seal is found in at least four locations on milk bottles and in four configurations as summarized in Table 1. Probably the earliest configurations are two that were added to existing plates. One of these had the “seal” built around a large letter “A” (probably meaning “Grade A”) in the center of the plate. “MASS” was embossed along the left upper slope of the “A” with “SEAL” descending down the other side. Between the legs of the “A” was “T-R” – the



Figure 5 – Mass. seal (Al Morin)

² Evidence suggests that Thatcher, for example, adopted date codes in late 1909 – when it joined the Massachusetts system. The code system used by Travis was likely an adaptation to the seal and numerical code laws legislated by various states in the early to late teens.

only example we have seen of the use of a hyphen with the “TR” seal (Figure 5). On one example, there was also a weak mirror image of a “TR” below the “T-R” mark. The dairy name and city were embossed at the top and bottom of the plate.

Another “TR” seal was added to a “STORE / BOTTLE” plate. These were used on bottles that were sold in stores during the period when home delivery of milk was the norm. On this seal, the logo “MASS SEAL / TR” was embossed at the bottom of the plate below the word “BOTTLE.” A third had “MASS SEAL / TR” added below “THE SHEPARD / COMPANY” in a round front plate (Figure 6). It is possible that other variations added to the plates will be discovered.

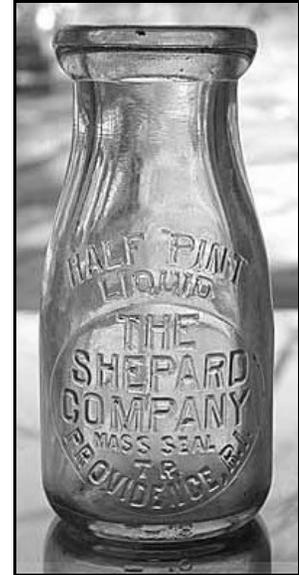


Figure 6 – Mass. seal (eBay)

Table 1 – Seals Used by the Travis Glass Co.

Description	Date Range
“MASS” and “SEAL” along opposite slopes of large letter “A” with “T-R” below – on plate	ca. 1909-1912*
“MASS SEAL / TR” at bottom of plate	ca. 1909-1912*
“MASS SEAL / TR” at lower body/heel	ca. 1909-1917
“MASS SEAL (arch) / TR (horizontal)” in circular format	ca. 1914-1916
“MASS (arch) / TR (horizontal) / SEAL (inverted arch)”	ca. 1916-1919

* A single bottle with a date code of 1917 has both of these seals plus the typical circular seal mandated in 1918. It is almost certain that this reflects a reuse of two old plates for this specific dairy (see discussion in text).

The plate seal additions were probably followed by “MASS SEAL / TR” embossed on the lower-body/heel area on the reverse side (Figure 7). These and those described above were probably used during the ca. 1912-1917 period (one heelmarked bottle has a 1917 date code), after the company began using date codes. This is difficult to track because Travis date codes and the distinctive Inverted-Triangle-T manufacturer’s mark are often very faint on the bases of the bottles. It is easy, for example to assume there is no date code because it is almost invisible.

Another configuration had the seal in a circular form on the shoulder with “MASS SEAL (arch) / TR (horizontal).” This would probably have been used during the ca. 1914-1918 period, and the date range is supported by the example in the Morin collection with a 1916 date code (T-19-16) embossed on the base. The final format was the “MASS / TR / SEAL” embossed on the shoulder. Although mandated by law in 1918, at least one Travis bottle with this configuration had a 1917 date code (T-19-17).



Figure 7 – Mass. seal (Al Morin)

A slight variation had the circular “MASS. / TR. / SEAL” (with periods after MASS and TR) on the reverse shoulder and the words “MASS SEAL” added to the front body plate (Figure 8). However, the plate had no reference to “TR” or Travis, only the local dairy. The base had the Travis T-in-an-inverted-triangle mark with no discernable date code. See Lockhart et al. (2017) for more information about Massachusetts seals.



Figure 8 – Mass. seal

A single bottle in the Morin collection had *three* of these seals embossed in different places! The bottle had the typical post-1918 shoulder seal with *two* seals in plates (front and reverse). The plate seals were in the configurations described above, with the company identification on the front body and the “STORE BOTTLE” plate on the reverse body.

This bottle requires some speculation. As discussed in the early part of this study, plates were probably used until they wore out. Thus, some of them likely continued to be used into the era of succeeding seal configurations. A short look at plates is also in order. The purpose of plates was to: a) allow customers (dairies, in this case) to purchase a cheaper way to personalize their bottles (a plate cost much less than an embossed bottle);³ and b) to allow the glass houses to make generic bottles that could be used for virtually any dairy (or other customer) with the insertion of a plate. The only hitch in the plan was that dairies (and other bottle users) were fickle. They switched providers according to sales, prices, shipping, and just the whim of the

³ Prior to the use of plates, customers had to buy the entire mold to have the company name embossed on the bottle.

individual dairy owner. After making a plate, a specific glass factory might not get a reorder from the same dairy for years.

Applying this knowledge to the three-seal bottle, we have a bottle that was made with the final, mandated seal embossed on the shoulder and two plate seals. Although this is pure speculation, the S. Aranoff dairy may have ordered bottles from Travis in, say, 1913. After a single order (with bottles where Travis embossed the Massachusetts seal on the front plate), Aranoff found a better deal from Thatcher or some other glass plant, so the plate sat on the shelf. Meanwhile, Travis made a generic plate for store bottles, but that, too, did not sell well. Four years later, in late 1917, Aranoff decided to take advantage of a Travis sale and ordered “store” bottles. Now, Travis had a generic bottle with the earliest of the mandated seals – but had old plates for Aranoff on the shelf, along with a store bottle plate that was also relatively unused. Travis now had a solution, and we have had a mystery to unravel.

Maine T19 Seal

Maine enacted its first seal law in 1913, requiring manufacturers to emboss each bottle with an identifying number and their logo or initials. Because the wording was a bit vague, the earliest Maine seals were embossed on bottles in many configurations. A 1915 amendment required the words “MAINE SEAL” to be used and the seal to be embossed on the upper half of the bottle (i.e., the shoulder). The law remained in existence until 1947 (Public Laws of Maine 1913:78-79; 1915:28; 1947:295-296).

The only example we have seen was embossed “MAINE / T19 / SEAL” in a circular format (plate) with “T” in an inverted triangle in the center of the base and “T-19-15” in an inverted arch at the bottom of the base (Figure 9). The “15” is a date code for 1915 and shows that the circular format was in place by at least that date. It is likely that Travis made bottles for Maine dairies until it ceased production at the end of 1919, although the apparent scarcity of bottles with the T19 seal suggests that the Travis was not popular with Maine dairies. See Lockhart et al. (2017) for more information on Maine Seals.



Figure 9 – Maine T19 seal

Other State Seals

Rhode Island extended the T.19 Seal to Travis by at least 1916, and the seal was formed in a circular format. Michigan granted Travis the T-19 Seal during the same year, and Wisconsin also issued the 19 Seal to Travis in 1916 (Figure 10). We have not discovered a Travis seal in any additional states. See Lockhart et al. (2017) for more information.



Figure 10 – Wisconsin seal

Discussion and Conclusions

In 1980, the user of the Inverted-Triangle-T mark was still unknown. Giarde (1980:123-125) discussed four possible contenders that had been proposed by collectors as the manufacturer using of the mark: Atlantic Bottle Co., Thatcher Mfg. Co., Turner Brothers, and Tygart Valley Glass Co.).

Current data indicate that the Inverted-Triangle-T mark was used exclusively by the Travis Glass Co. on milk bottles from late 1912 to 1919, although the Turner Glass Co. (or Turner Brothers) also used the mark on packers (i.e., food and general bottles – see the section on Turner Brothers for a discussion of that company’s use of the mark). The mark used by Travis is only known on milk bottles made with press-and-blow machines that left distinct ejection scars on the bases. Date codes range from 1912 to 1919, although the 1912 codes are very scarce.

Some of the marks lack visible date codes, and many of the logos are very faint. In addition, the ejection or valve scar obliterated portions of some marks. At least some of the faintness and lack of codes may be explained by the early time period. Molds on both semi- and fully automatic bottle machines were lubricated to facilitate easy removal of the finished bottles. If the molds were not cleaned often enough, the lubricant built up, usually in the lowest areas of the mold – the cavities that created the basal embossing. During the post-1920s period, this was better understood, and the molds were cleaned more often and/or thoroughly. Bottles made by machines, especially semiautomatics) during the 1900-1920+ period, however, often displayed faintness, clogged (therefore, invisible or almost invisible) letters, or blank areas in the embossing.

The first documentary evidence we have found for machine use by Thatcher was 1913. The earliest dated codes we have found were from 1912 (on machine-made bottles), and these are very scarce. It is probable that Travis operated machines earlier, likely from the start of the company in 1908 and that the marks with no date codes were used from the beginning of the company. The logos on bottles with no date codes were embossed in the centers of the bases, while the marks that accompanied date codes were placed slightly above center. Since Travis began business in competition with the Thatcher Mfg. Co. – the sole licensee of the Owens Automatic Bottle Machine for the manufacture of milk bottles, it is almost impossible that Travis would have considered entering the field without at least a semiautomatic machine. Mouth-blown milk bottles simply could not compete with the Owens machine.

Currently, we do not know exactly when Travis began production. Therefore, the first bottles may have not been produced until 1909. The final date code we have seen (or found recorded) was 1919. Since Thatcher purchased the company in January 1920, and the negotiations had preceded that date, it is highly unlikely that Travis made any bottles in 1920.

Acknowledgments

Our gratitude – as always – to Wanda Wakkinen for proofreading.

Sources

Bindscheattle, Lloyd

1999 “Creamer Corner.” *The Milk Route* 217:6.

Blodget, Bradford

2009 *Milk Bottles from the Heart of the Commonwealth: A Collector’s Guide to the Milk Bottles of the City of Worcester, Massachusetts, 1890-2004*. Privately printed. [revision of the 2005 edition]

Commoner and Glassworker

1908 “Pith of the Week’s News: All the New of the Glass Trade Compiled in Condensed Form for Quick Reading.” *Commoner and Glassworker* 26(30):1.

Giarde, Jeffery L.

1980 *Glass Milk Bottles: Their Makers and Marks*. Time Travelers Press, Bryn Mawr, California.

Glass Worker

1918 “Gas Producers and New Automatic Machinery.” *Glass Worker* 37(2):1, 12-13.

1919 “Travis Glass Co. has Addition Under Way.” *Glass Worker* 37(15):1.

Lockhart, Bill, Pete Schulz, and Al Morin

2017 *Milk Bottle Seals: The Other Manufacturer’s Marks*. Historic Glass Bottle Identification & Information Website: References. <https://sha.org/bottle/References.htm>

The Milk Dealer

1917 Advertisement: “Travis Extra Strong.” *Milk Dealer* 6(10):26.

1919 “Travis Extra Strong.” *The Milk Dealer* 8(1):47.

The Milk Route

1998 “Travis Glass Company: Dairyman • 1919.” *The Milk Route* 217:1.

Public Laws of Maine

1913 Public Laws of Maine, Chapter 81.

1915 Public Laws of Maine, Chapter 44.

1947 Public Laws of Maine, Chapter 268.

Roller, Dick

1996 “Weston, WV History Notes.” Dick Roller files.

1997 “Clarksburg, WV History Notes.” Dick Roller files.

Schadlich, Louis

[ca. 1990] "Milk Bottles Marked by Manufacturers and Jobbers." Unpublished manuscript.

Schadlich, Louis and Nancy Schadlich

1984 "The 'MASS. SEAL' on Milk Bottles and Jars." Unpublished manuscript, Sturbridge, Massachusetts.

Scoville, Warren C.

1948 *Revolution in Glassmaking: Entrepreneurship and Technological Change in the American Industry, 1880-1920*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Six, Dean

1993 *The Index to Dean Six's Encyclopedia of West Virginia Glass*. West Virginia Museum of American Glass, Ltd., Weston, West Virginia.

Toulouse, Julian Harrison

1971 *Bottle Makers and Their Marks*. Thomas Nelson, New York.

Last updated 10/16/2019