

The Victor Jar Co. and THE VICTOR

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The story – almost a soap opera – began when Ernst Meyer and George Burkhart applied for patents for almost identical jar closures only three months apart. Although Meyer applied first, Burkhart received his patent 13 month earlier in 1899. Meanwhile, along with Frank Mathauer, the two had formed the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. in mid-1897, leasing the Fort Wayne Glass Co. to make their fruit jars.

The firm broke apart a year later – probably in a feud over the patent rights. Burkhart fled to Canada to pursue his patent, while Meyer and Mathauer formed the Myer-Mathauer Glass Co. in 1899 to market the jars, now made by the Safe Glass Co. The final firm in the triumvirate was the Victor Glass Co., now selling Victor Jars, possibly as late as 1923.

Histories

Fort Wayne Glass Co., Upland, Illinois (1896-1898)

Warren B. Phillips, Joseph H. Rhodes, and Louis A. Centlivre incorporated the Fort Wayne Glass Co. on December 15, 1894, with a capital of \$60,000 to operate the Upland Glass Works. It is unclear whether the firm built the factory or took over an existing plant. By January 9, 1895, the fledgling company was already in the hands of receiver J.H. Clifton, who leased the factory to Watson & Smith by December 11, 1896, making bottles and fruit jars. The pair ran the plant as a non-union operation (*Indianapolis Journal* 12/11/1896; Roller 1998).

On January 9, 1897, however, the *Journal* amended that report to say that Frederick Seitz had obtained the lease, adding that the plant had “been idle for over a year, and, in fact, most of the time since it was founded several years ago.” *Commoner and Glassworker* reported on June 19, 1897, that the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. was operating the Fort Wayne plant (Roller 1998). This may have been the production center for the Meyer Fruit Jar for the next year or so.

On October 28, 1898, William Butler purchased the factory at a public sale for \$5,195.71. The *Elkhart Weekly Review* (10/29/1898) claimed that “the sale was ordered on a redemption execution, and is the first sale under such conditions in this county for twenty years.” Although the meaning of the term “redemption execution is unclear, it apparently indicates that Butler purchased the property *after* the lending institution had foreclosed. A Ball History Memorandum, dated March 10, 1915, at the Minnetrista Cultural Center Archives noted that Butler Deeded the plant to the Ball Bros. Glass Mfg. Co. in June of 1898. However, this date cannot be reconciled with the October 28, 1898, purchase date when Butler obtained the property according to the November 3, 1898, issue of *China, Glass & Lamps*.

Meyer Fruit Jar Co., Detroit, Michigan (1897-1898)

On June 12, 1897, The Meyer Fruit Jar Co. filed its articles of association to make fruit jars under the Meyer 1898 patent (still pending at the time of filing). The president of the corporation was George W. Burkhart, with Frank P. Mathauer as vice president, and Ernst R. Meyer at secretary. The firm had a capital stock of \$10,000, with \$7,500 already subscribed by the three principals. The company was last listed in the 1898 Detroit City Directory (Roller 1997). As noted above, the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. operated the former (bankrupt) Fort Wayne Glass Co. plant at Upland, Indiana, by June 1897, probably for about a year, but Meyer thus lost its production venue in mid-1898.

Roller (1983:201; 2011:306) discussed Ernst R Meyer, secretary for the company, who applied for a patent for his closure design (No. 643,908) on February 16, 1898. The president, George W. Burkhart, applied for a patent on a very similar closure (No. 616,890), slightly later, on April 13, 1898. Even though he applied later than Meyer, Burkhart’s patent was granted on January 3, 1899, while the Meyer patent was approved just over a year later, on February 20, 1900. Roller suspected that there were infringement problems involved (also see the patent section and Discussion and Conclusions).

Burkhart went to Canada, where he was the manager and a member the Board of Directors of the Ontario Glass Co., Ltd., following the incorporation of the company on November 29, 1899. The company had trouble with its Monarch jar, apparently using the Burkhart patent, and ceased production of the jar on August 6, 1901 (King 1987:97-98).

Meyer-Mathauer Glass Co, Detroit, Michigan (1899-ca. 1900)

In 1899, the Meyer-Mathauer Glass Co. was listed in the Detroit City Directory with a notation that the firm manufactured or sold fruit jar fasteners (Roller 1997). Earlier, Roller (1983:371-372) noted that the company was apparently established by Ernst R. Meyer and Frank P. Mathauer to make jars for the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. and its successor, the Victor Jar Co. The timing makes it much more likely that the firm was another sales agent, following Burkhart's defection to Canada. The Victor Jar Co. was the successor to Meyer-Mathauer.

Victor Jar Co., Detroit, Michigan (1900-1923)

The Victor Jar Co. incorporated on July 12, 1900, with Richard E. Meyer as president, Victor Johnson as vice president, and Frank P. Mathauer as secretary. The company made fruit and pickle jars. By at least September 26, 1900, the firm was advertising the Victor Jar. Victor Johnson, likely the namesake for both the company and the jar – and probably the money behind the corporation – became president by 1902 (Roller 1997; State of Michigan 1911:296).

Along with the Victor Jar, the firm advertised the Meyer Patent Fastener by 1904, but none of the former principals – Johnson, Meyer, or Mathauer – were listed as officers. Robert F. Hartenstein became president in 1905, with J. Charles Eichhorn as vice president, and the firm included packers' ware in its product list. A 1906 communication from the Hazel Factory No. 2 asked the Victor Jar Co. to order molds, suggesting that Victor Jar was a jobber rather than a producer, although the firm was always listed as a manufacturer (including in the Thomas Registers – see Containers and Marks). The last listing for the company in glass directories was in 1923 (Roller 1997). However, the *Hendricks Commercial Register* continued to include the firm until 1925 – although such lists were not always accurate. The list placed the company at 1321-1323 Monroe.

Patents

Although we are never likely to discover it, there must be quite a story behind the *very* similar patents received by George W. Burkhart in 1899 and Ernst R. Meyer in 1900. As noted above and discussed below, the timing of these two patents suggests that something odd was

going on. Burkhart was the president of the Meyer Fruit Jar Co., with Meyer as secretary. Meyer was apparently the actual inventor, so why did Burkart also apply for what is essentially the same jar closure? By mid-1898, the probable differences between Burkhart and Meyer created an irreparable rent in the firm, Burkhart fleeing to Canada, while Meyer began with a new company.

George W. Burkhart (1899)

George W. Burkhart filed for a patent for a “Jar Closure” on April 13, 1898, and received Patent No. 616,890 on January 3, 1899 (Figure 1). The patent was primarily for “the construction of a clamping band adapted to be contracted upon the cover of the jar.” This may have been the basis for the first Victor Jar and was almost certainly the patent under which the Monarch Jar was made by the Ontario Glass Co.

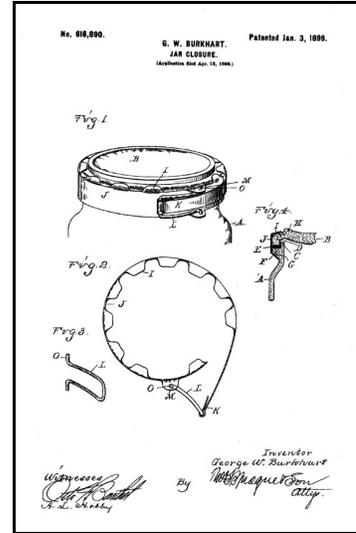


Figure 1 – Burkhart 1899 patent

Ernst R. Meyer (1900)

Ernst R. Meyer filed for a patent for a “Jar Closure” on February 16, 1898, and received Patent No. 643,908 on February 20, 1900 (Figure 2). Like Burkhart, Meyer’s patent was based around a “contractile clamping ring formed of a sheet-metal band having overlapping ends linked together by a clamping lever.”

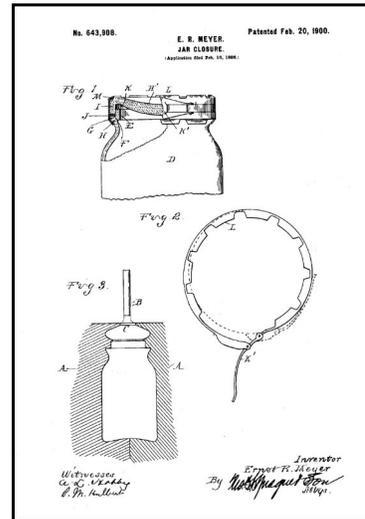


Figure 2 – Meyer 1900 patent

The drawings for these two patents were very similar and the filing of both in Detroit is suspicious. Meyer applied for his patent first (February 1898), with Burkhart following 14 months later (April 1899), yet the Burkhart patent was issued in January 1899, and Meyer’s patent was not issued until February 1900, a full two years after the application was filed. The Meyer patent included a much more detailed description of the manufacturing process for the jar as well as the closure. Roller (1983:201) suspected that there were infringement problems involved, and the replacement of the 1899 patent on the first Victor Jar with the 1900 patent on the second one supports that suspicion.

Jacob C. Eichhorn (1914)

Jacob C. Eichhorn filed for a patent for a “Closure of Vessels” on July 17, 1912, and received Patent No. 1,088,133 on February 24, 1914 (Figure 3). Eichhorn assigned the patent to the Victor Jar Co. Neither the patent drawing nor the text give a very clear picture of this closure, which may account for the year and nine month delay in the award. His text, however, calls the main idea a “clamping strip,” and such a device was actually used on square jars bearing this patent date.

Eichhorn also had design patents for “cookie jar” type of containers in 1912 and 1913 (No. 43,137 and No. 43,566) and at least two other patents that were not container related. Eichhorn’s final patent for a “Storage Cell Battery” was filed on June 3, 1918, and he received Patent No. 1,339,442 on May 11, 1920.

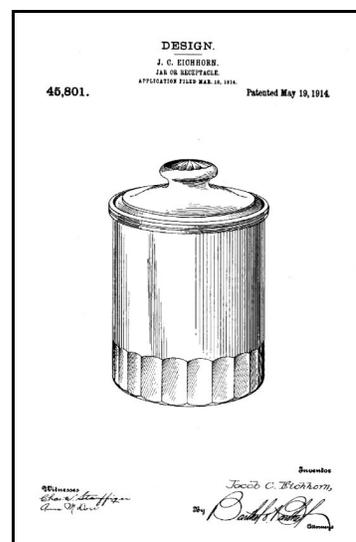


Figure 3 – Eichhorn 1914 patent

Richard E. Meyer

Richard E. Meyer may have actually originated the idea for the clamps that were used on the Eichhorn closure (see above). Meyer filed for a patent for a “Jar Closure” on December 11, 1911, and received Patent No. 1,054,231 on February 25, 1913 (Figure 4). While these clamps were not exactly like the ones used on the Victor Jar Co. butter jars describe below, they certainly encompassed the *idea* behind the clamps used in the Eichhorn patent.

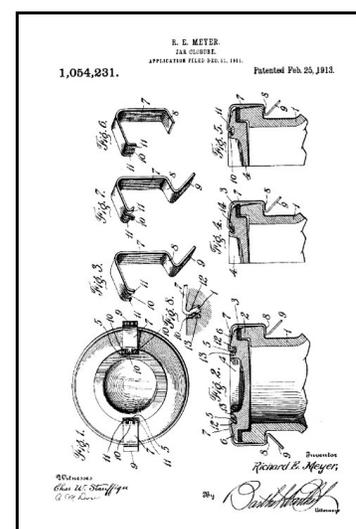


Figure 4 – Meyer 1914 patent

Meyer had patented a complex jar closure on October 14, 1902 (Patent No. 711,452) and an apparatus to apply that seal to jars on June 6, 1911 (Patent No. 994,179). Meyer actually *applied* for the sealing apparatus patent on January 2, 1903, just a year after his application for the closure on January 8, 1902. The sealing apparatus patent was delayed so long that he re-applied on August 7, 1909. Meyer later developed a capping tool to apply crown closures to bottles (Patent No. 1,545,567 on July 14, 1925).

Containers and Marks

The Victor Jar Co. was listed as a jar manufacturer in the Thomas Registers from 1905 to 1918. During the 1905-1912 period, the firm was only listed as making glass jars; however, from 1914 to 1918, it was listed in the fruit jar section (Thomas Publishing Co. 1905:577; 1914:3010; 1918:4429).

In 1922, the Victor Jar Co. advertised its products for use as cigar jars, claiming that sealed glass humidors were vastly superior to their tin counterparts. The ad noted that “among the important distinguishing features of these jars are two patented steel closures known as the Victor band and the Bull Dog. These are used with both round and square cigar jars” (*Glass Container* 1922:16).

MEYER FRUIT JAR CO. (1897-1898)

Roller (1983:201; 2011:306) noted a jar embossed “MADE BY THE MEYER FRUIT JAR CO. DETROIT, MICH.” on its side. The jar was produced by the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. at the former plant of the Ft. Wayne Glass Co., rented by Meyer from June 1897 to ca. June 1898 (possibly a few months later). Creswick (1987a:112) told the same story and included the same dates as she illustrated the jar (Figure 5). This jar is also listed in our Other M section. The jars were probably only made during the one-year period during 1897-1898, when Meyer rented the Fort Wayne Glass Co. plant. This is at least partly confirmed by 2001 prices of \$1,000 and up, suggesting the scarcity of pint jars (Leybourne 2014:253).



Figure 5 – Meyer Fruit Jar (Creswick 1987a:112)

THE VICTOR (1900-1906)

Toulouse (1969:317) described two variations of The Victor. Each had a glass lid “held by a compression band circling the finish.” The first variation was machine made and was embossed “THE VICTOR (arch) / {elaborate ‘M’ in a diamond surrounded by a circle

(horizontal)} / PATENTED 1899 (inverted arch)” (Figures 6 & 7). Two different eBay photos showed a Roman Numeral III embossed on the base, partly surrounded by the valve scar (Figure 8). King (1987:98) noted that the “capital ‘M’ in the circle” signified Ernst R. Meyer, the inventor of the jar’s closure.



Figure 7 – Finish (North American Glass)



Figure 9 – Victor 1900 (North American Glass)

Roller (1983:371; 2011:533) only listed the machine-made jar. The second variation was also machine made and was embossed “THE VICTOR (arch) / {elaborate ‘M’ in a diamond surrounded by a circle (horizontal)} / PAT. FEB. 20-1900 (inverted arch)” (Figure 9).

Although he correctly identified the Meyer patent for the second jar, he had no idea about a maker.

Roller (1983:371) claimed that the Meyer-Mathauer Glass Co., Detroit, Michigan, made the first variation between ca. 1900 and 1904. He stated that this variation was also made by the Safe Glass Co. from ca. 1899 to 1902 for the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. and the Victor Jar Co., both of Detroit. The final variation was made by the Safe Glass Co. from 1900 to 1902 and by the Illinois Glass Co. from 1904 to 1906, in both cases for the Victor Jar Co. (Roller 1983:372).

Unfortunately, Roller failed to state *how* he knew to identify these manufacturers. It is virtually certain that none of the Meyer firms – Meyer Fruit Jar Co., Meyer-Mathauer, and Victor Jar Co. – manufactured the Victor Jar. All were probably makers of the closures but purchased the jars from actual glass houses. The Roller update (2011:533) added variations of the 1900-patent jar with customer



Figure 6 – Victor 1899 (North American Glass)



Figure 8 – Base (eBay)

information embossed on the base, including “THE G.H. HAMMOND CO. CHICAGO, ILL.”; “JOHNSON & JOHNSON NEW YORK”; and “NELSON MORRIS & CO. CHICAGO, ILL.”

Creswick (1987b:134) illustrated the two jars but did *not* note the handmade sub-variation of the first jar that was claimed by Toulouse (Figure 10). The Victor Jar Co.



Figure 10 – Victor (Creswick 1987:134)



Figure 11 – Victor (*Bay City Tribune* 9/29/1900)

received Trade Mark No. 96,555

for the word “VICTOR” on April 21, 1914. The firm claimed that the first use of the term was on February 20, 1899, shortly after George Burkhart received his patent for the closure used on the Victor Jar. Creswick followed Roller in the identification of the manufacturers of the jars. The Victor Jar Co. and some of its vendors advertised in the newspapers – e.g., *Bay City Tribune*, September 29, 1900 (Figure 11).

VICTOR JAR Co. (1914-1923)

An eBay auction offered a square jar (with rounded corners) with a lid embossed “SEAL PAT. FEB. 24, 1914 (arch) / VICTOR JAR CO. (horiz.) / DETROIT, MICH. (inverted arch)” (Figures 12



Figure 13 – Butter Jar (eBay)

& 13). Creswick (1987b:134) illustrated the jar and noted that the lid was made of glass and was held in place by four metal clips (Figure 14). Creswick dated the jar ca. 1914, based on the patent. The patent was issued to Jacob C. Eichhorn and was assigned to the Victor Jar Co.



Figure 12 – Butter Jar (eBay)

Creswick (1987b:134) also illustrated and described a variation of the square jar with a glass lid embossed “SEAL PAT. FEB. 24, 1914 (arch) / VICTOR BUTTER (horiz.) / PROTECTION JAR (inverted arch).” This lid was held in place by two larger metal clips placed on opposite sides. This, too, of course, used the Eichhorn patent. Creswick noted that both jars had a “smooth lip” – i.e., they were machine made.

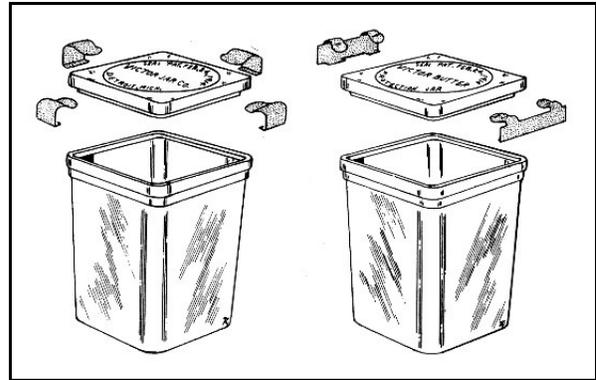


Figure 14 – Butter Jars (Creswick 1987:134)

Discussion and Conclusions

It is clear that the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. opened in 1897 to sell fruit jars sealed with a band apparently invented by Ernst R. Meyer. Meyer applied for a patent February 16, 1898. Meanwhile, the president, George W. Burkhart, applied for a patent on what appears to be the same closure two months later, on April 13, 1898. The name of the company and the claim under the articles of association suggest that everyone thought Meyer was the actual inventor. Since the original jar had the generic date “PATENTED 1899,” it may have actually gone into production in 1898 – in anticipation that the Meyer patent would be received early that year.

For some reason, Burkhart received his patent first, on January 3, 1899. This apparently precipitated a falling out between the three principals and the defection of Burkhart to Canada, where he became involved with Ontario Glass Co., Ltd., by November. Meanwhile, Meyer and the former vice president of the Meyer Fruit Jar Co., Frank P. Mathauer, formed the Meyer-Mathauer Glass Co., almost certainly to manufacture the lid invented by Meyer and market it, along with a jar made elsewhere. Meyer received his patent on February 20, 1900.

Ontario Glass, meanwhile, had made and marketed the Monarch Jar, using the closure patented by Burkhart. The rest is conjecture, but the timing suggests that Meyer and Mathauer sued Burkhart and won (or threatened and convinced Burkhart that he would lose. The Monarch was discontinued in 1901.

Mathauer and Meyer may have also had a falling out; the company was only listed for a single year. Alternatively, Ernst R. Meyer may have died in 1899. The Meyer-Mathauer Glass Co. operated from 347-351 Monroe Ave. In 1900, the Victor Jar Co., with Richard E. Meyer (possibly a relative – a son?) as the president and Mathauer as secretary, occupied the same address. The company claimed to manufacture fruit and pickle jars. A reorganization in 1905 apparently dethroned Mathauer and brought in an new inventor, Jacob Charles Eichhorn. The firm began producing or selling packers' ware in addition to fruit jars.

It is possible that the Victor Jar Co. ceased production of the Victor Jar and the Meyer closure upon the reorganization in 1905 or shortly thereafter. The manufacturers listed by Roller stop at 1906 (see below). We have discovered no listing for the type of fruit jars made after 1905, but the firm certainly made or had made square butter jars by 1914, using a closure patented by Eichhorn. The company continued in operation until ca. 1923 (possibly as late as 1925).

The next question is: Who made the jars? Roller suggested that the Meyer-Mathauer Glass Co. made the first variation between ca. 1900 and 1904. This variation was also made by the Safe Glass Co. from ca. 1899 to 1902 for the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. and the Victor Jar Co. The final variation was made by the Safe Glass Co. from 1900 to 1902 and by the Illinois Glass Co. from 1904 to 1906, in both cases for the Victor Jar Co. Unfortunately, Roller failed to reveal his sources. At least part of this is a misunderstanding. There is no indication that Meyer-Mathauer lasted past 1900, and it is highly doubtful that the firm actually made jars – although it almost certainly produced the closures.

Both the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. and the Victor Jar Co. claimed to manufacture jars. The Meyer-Mathauer Glass Co., in contrast, only listed the Meyer fasteners. Most jobbers (wholesalers) were *not* listed under the headings for jar makers; however, the Victor Jar Co. was listed as a jar manufacturer in the Thomas Registers from 1905 to 1918. It seems likely that the Hazel Glass Co. made jars for Victor from 1906 (since Hazel wrote to Victor, asking about molds), and that suggests that Victor never made its own jars. Since the Victor plant was located at the same address as Meyer-Mathauer, it is unlikely that the firm actually made glass, although it very likely made its own closures.

The Safe Glass Co. certainly *could* have made the jars for Meyer-Mathauer and Victor. Safe was in business at Upland, Indiana, from 1898 to 1905. At least one type of machine-made jar, with a 1903 patent date, was certainly made by the Safe Glass Co. Those jars suggest that the Safe Glass Co. had the capacity to manufacture jars by machine during the 1900-1902 period. The Illinois Glass Co., of course, was in business long before and after the 1904-1906 period. Illinois Glass had semiautomatic machines by at least 1908, probably earlier.

The timing of the patents makes it highly unlikely that the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. ever actually sold any Victor jars; Meyer-Mathauer overtook the company shortly after the Burkhart patent became available in 1899. In addition, the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. made its own brand of jar – using the Meyer band on the closure – with no patent number on the jar. Conversely, the firm may have had the jars made in anticipation of the patent (hence the lack of a *specific* date embossed on the jar). These would then have been made in late 1898.

Yet another issue is the embossing on the jars. Two points create questions. First, does the fancy “M” equal Meyer? The answer to that is probably yes. There seems to be little question that Ernst Meyer was the actual inventor of the closure used on the Victor jars. The presence of the “M” could indicate that the company was honoring Meyer *despite* using the Burkhart patent in 1899. However, it could indicate that the jars were made in 1899 in anticipation of the award of the Meyer patent. It seems likely that Burkhart took his patent with him to Canada; it is doubtful that it was used by the company he left behind. This is supported by the fact that the second jar, with the 1900 patent, maintained the same design.

Second, why is the name “Victor” used? The only reference in any of the companies is the name Victor Johnson, vice president of the Victor Jar Co. Unless Johnson was involved silently in the earlier companies, why was there a reference to his name? A patent search revealed no patents to a Victor Johnson of Detroit. Assuming that this Victor *was* the namesake for the jars, it almost certainly sets the date of manufacture of even the jar with the 1899 patent mark to 1900. Of course Johnson could have been the man with the money. If he was the financier, then he could have demanded that the jar have his name, allowing the use of his first name as a consolation to the others. Of course, Victor has a more dramatic sound than Johnson.

Despite the unanswered questions, the dating of the jars seems relatively straight forward. The jars made by the Meyer Fruit Jar Co. were almost certainly only made in 1897 and 1898.

Roller's dates for the Patent 1899 jar at 1900-1904 makes sense, although his 1900-1906 for the second style (Patent 1900) seems a bit soon. Probably ca. 1902-1906 makes better sense. The square butter jars with the "VICTOR JAR CO." embossing could not have been made prior to 1914 and may have continued in production until the company ceased operations ca. 1923.

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