

Western Bottle Manufacturing Co.

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Despite the term “Manufacturing” in its name, the Western Bottle Mfg. Co. was almost certainly a jobber, serving the Foster glass houses. Incorporated on December 11, 1900, the firm may not have sold bottles until the following year. Before the company closed ca. 1931, it used a variety of manufacturer’s marks to identify its products.

History

Western Bottle Manufacturing Co., Chicago (1900-at least 1931)

The Western Bottle Mfg. Co. incorporated at Chicago on December 11, 1900, with a capital of \$20,000. John B. Kelter was president of the company with Owen Roberts as vice president, Louis Hochschild as secretary and treasurer, and B.F. Hochschild as another director. The firm had offices recorded at 2 Randolph St. and at 171 Randolph St. in 1901 – 171-173 Randolph St. and 232 E. Randolph St. the following year, and 208-221 E. Randolph St. from 1903 to 1910 (Bethman 1991:78; Rose 1902:113 State of Illinois 1902:256; State of Illinois 1911:388).

Apparently a jobber rather than a manufacturer, the firm sold a variety of prescription bottles, a nurser brand, and brushes, including toothbrushes – and the Justrite Nurser pulled the firm into a legal dispute. In 1911, William M. Decker, owner of the Hygeia Nursing Bottle Co. sued Western Bottle for infringement of his June 19, 1894, patent (No. 521,773), the basis for his Hygeia Nurser. When the court found in favor of Decker, Western Bottle filed an appeal, but the court again returned a verdict of infringement. While we have not discovered the final outcome, it is virtually certain that Western Bottle withdrew its Justrite Nurser – although the brand was still advertised in 1912 (Caselaw 2020a; 2020b). Since the case was not finalized until December 28, 1911, some ads remaining into 1912 are unsurprising.

In 1912, the firm moved to its final location, 402 W. Randolph (West end of Randolph St. Bridge). From at least 1911 to 1923, the officers of the firm were John M. Levis and Albert

C. Levis. The Thomas Registers listed the firm under the Bottles heading from 1905 to at least 1921, the latest issue we possess. The Western Bottle Mfg. Co. remained in business until at least 1931, probably closing around that time, another victim of the Great Depression (Bethman 1991:78; Federal Reporter 1912; Gray 1920; Thomas Publishing Co. 1905:103; 1921:780). A 1931 article in the *Saturday Evening Post* confirmed that the company remained in business until at least that date. Whitten (2020) dated the firm from 1901 to the 1930s.

Containers and Marks

BREED (1901-ca. 1908)

Bethman (1991:74) described this type of bottle as “basically square with beveled corners.” He noted that the wording “probably stands for the man who may have created this style of bottle, R.E. Breed. He was associated with the Marion Flint Glass Company, and later with the Western Bottle Manufacturing Company.” This bottle style is similar to the “Paris” bottle sold by Dean, Foster & Co., so the style may not be unique to Western Bottle.

If R. Edwards Breed created the bottle style, he apparently did not patent it. The only Breed we have discovered connected with bottles in the patent records during the early years of the 20th century was DeWitt C. Breed, and his bottle was not even remotely similar in design to the one with “BREED” embossed on the base. R.E. Breed was



Figure 2 – Breed base (Cole Llewellyn)

involved with the Board of Directors for the Marion Flint Glass Co. from at least 1890 to at least 1912, much of that time as president (Roller 1994:62). If Breed had also been involved in Western Bottle, it would have been in addition to his position at Marion Flint or after ca. 1912 and thereby long after the Breed bottles had entered the market.



Figure 1 – Breed bottle (eBay)

Bethman (1991:537, 716, 732, 738) illustrated four Washington prescription bottles, each embossed on the base with “BREED / W.B.M.CO.” (Figures 1 & 2). All were identical in style. The date range for the bottles was 1903-1905. Preble (2002:470, 660, 719) illustrated three examples of the same logo with a combined date range of 1901-1908. Preble (2002:473) also showed a single bottle marked “BREED / M” on the base. This one was also dated 1901-1908.

GEM OVAL (ca. 1904-ca. 1906)

Bethman (1991:75) noted that this style was also made by Western Bottle. Bethman (1991:414) illustrated a single example of this mark and dated it 1905-1906. The bottle was marked “GEM OVAL / W.B.M.CO.” on the base (Figure 3). Miller (2008:235) illustrated a similar bottle dated 1904-1906.



Figure 3 – Gem Oval

Justrite (at least 1911)

At a hearing on April 18, 1911, William M. Decker, owner of the Hygeia Nursing Bottle Co., sued Western Bottle over the use of a cap with a “simulation of a mother’s breast and a nipple” similar to the one patented by Decker (Patent No. 521,773, June 19, 1894). The hearing was inconclusive. Decker again pressed the suit on December 28, and, this time, won an injunction against Western Bottle (Federal Reporter 1912:414-418). Although at least one ad continued to appear in 1912, the nurser was almost certainly discontinued in that year. The N.A.R.D. ad showed a nurser virtually identical to Decker’s Hygeia bottle (Figure 4).

WESTERN BOTTLE MFG. CO. CHICAGO

The *Justrite* NATURAL NURSER

Indorsed by the medical profession, accepted as standard in hospital nurseries and day nurseries

PATENTED JUNE 22-1894

Non-Lollapsible Natural Shape
Nipple Dipped Not Moulded
Nipple One Piece

Nipple Pliable Will Not Make Gums Sore
Jar Blown of First Grade Flint Glass

WESTERN BOTTLE MFG. CO. CHICAGO U.S.A.

BLACK OR MAROON NIPPLES

PRICE COMPLETE

1/2 Doz. complete	.....	\$21.00 per gross
1/2 - Nipples only, Black or Maroon	.....	15.00 "
1/2 - Jar only	.....	7.20 "
1 Doz. complete	.....	2.00 per doz.
1 - Nipples only, Black or Maroon	.....	1.25 "
1 - Jar only	.....	.75 "
5 gross lots, see shipment list, 10 per cent.	.....	F. O. B. CHICAGO

When writing advertisers, just say: "Saw it in our Journal of the N. A. R. D." 1913

Figure 4 – Justrite ad (N.A.R.D. 1913)

WB monogram

Whitten (2020) discussed a logo he described as “W superimposed over B (or could be B superimposed over W)” on the bases of “handblown, tooled-lip clear or sun-colored amethyst prescription bottles (probably dating c. 1900-1915), found in Hawaii.” He speculated that

Western Bottle could have been the user of the monogram but added, “no proof of this.” Also see another WB logo in Other W section.

W.B.M.CO. (1901-ca. 1931)

Toulouse (1971:535) never figured out this mark. He speculated that “several companies could fill these initials, translated ‘— Bottle Manufacturing Co.’ . . . but there is not an iota of evidence that any companies actually used these initials. . . . Without proof the initials must be considered unknown.” He dated the mark 1880 to 1910 based on the manufacturing techniques.

This “W.B.M.Co.” logo was used by the Western Bottle Mfg. Co. apparently as long as the firm sold mouth-blown bottles (Figure 5). Bethman illustrated numerous examples of this mark with a total date range of 1901 to 1913. Miller (1999:76, 84, 101-102; 2008:199, 212, 235-236) showed the mark on bottles dated 1902-1906. None of the bottles had letters or numbers accompanying the logos. Colcleaser (1965:70) illustrated the mark on a pharmaceutical bottle but did not include dates. Preble (2002:655, 678) illustrated six examples of the mark. His combined date ranges extended from 1901 to 1915. It should be noted that most of these books did not include bottles later than ca. 1920. However, since these marks are found on embossed drug store bottles, they almost certainly reflect containers mouth blown into two-piece molds. These were phased out by no later than ca. 1924 and were mostly discontinued by 1920. At this point, we have not found the mark on generic, machine-made bottles.



Figure 5 – WBMCO

Burggraaf and Southard (1998) showed 12 examples of the bottles, although they did not illustrate bases. Date ranges for local Iowa druggists conclusively show that the W.B.M.Co. mark was used during the first decade of the 20th century (by at least 1904, if not sooner). However, two of the date ranges offered by Burggraaf and Southard (1998:468, 536) are earlier than the date ranges for the company given by Bethman. One range (1892-1900) is probably just a case where the druggist was in business a year or two longer than shown by the local records.

Such cases are common. In the second case, however, the range of 1875 to 1891 is too early. The closing date is ten years earlier than the opening date for Western Bottle. We currently cannot explain the discrepancy, although it is possible that Burggraaf and Southard were in error.

W.B. / M.CO.

Buchner et al. (2007:236) recorded a white, milk-glass cosmetic jar or ointment pot embossed on the base with “W.B. / M.CO.” This is the only report we have found for this configuration of the initials as well as the only mark on a milk glass container.

WESTERN BOTTLE / MFG. CO. / CHICAGO U.S.A. (ca. 1910-1920 or later)

Preble (2002:354, 701, 715) illustrated three examples of prescription bottles embossed on the base with “WESTERN BOTTLE (downward arch) / MFG. CO. / CHICAGO U.S.A. (both horizontal).” His combined date ranges were 1905 to 1915 with two in the 1911-1915 range.



Figure 7 – Nurser (eBay)

An advertisement for the Institute Natural Nurser in 1909 revealed a nursing bottle marked “WESTERN BOTTLE MFG. CO. / CHICAGO U.S.A.” all horizontally placed on the front of the bottle (N.A.R.D. 1909). Western Bottle may have continued

These were almost certainly made later than the “WBM” marks noted above. We recorded a single generic bottle with this mark that may have a crude machine scar – marked the same but with “M.F.G. CO.” (Figure 6). Unfortunately, we no longer have access to the bottle to check for other machine characteristics. If these were machine made, these generic bottles, embossed with the full company name, may have been sold during the last decade that the company was in business.



Figure 6 – Western Bottle Mfg Co.



Figure 8 – Nurser base (eBay)

selling this brand after the lawsuit of 1911 ended the vending of the Justrite bottle described above. However, that style of bottle was often embossed “W.B.M.CO.” (Figures 7 & 8). A cobalt blue eye bath was also embossed “WESTERN BOTTLE MFG. CO.” around the base – without the city designation (Figure 9).

Discussion and Conclusions

Although nothing appears in print, it seems as though most bottle collectors and researchers have assumed that the Western Glass Mfg. Co. produced its own glass – a logical conclusion based on the inclusion of “Manufacturing” in the name. However, several hints strongly suggest that the firm was a jobber – which explains the lack of mention of the firm in the Roller files.



Figure 9 – Eye Bath
(Eye Bath Collector)

One of the prescription bottle names was “BREED” – and R. Edwards Breed was the vice president and later president of the Marion Flint Glass Co. If Western Bottle were a sales outlet for Marion Flint Glass, then a bottle embossed with Breed’s name would make sense. Another connection centers around John M. Levis. Not only was Levis one of the principals of Western Bottle, he was also the president of the Sheldon-Foster Glass Co. in 1911. Sheldon-Foster and Marion Flint Glass were both related through the Foster family. See the sections of Sheldon-Foster and Marion Flint Glass for more information.

A final bit of evidence was the migration of Western Bottle’s address along E. Randolph St. from 1901 to 1912. While it is not difficult to move a sales office and/or warehouse to various addresses, even a small glass factory would have remained stationary. Like the earlier jobbers that served the Foster family – e.g., Dean, Foster & Co. or A.M. Foster & Co. – the Western Glass Mfg. Co. was a wholesaler for the glass houses. The firm followed the tradition of the earlier jobbers in having its logos embossed on its products. For more information about the earlier jobbers, see the sections Dean, Foster & Co. and A.M. Foster & Co.

Acknowledgments

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