

Wormser Glass Companies

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

Ephraim Wormser partnered with Jacob Burgraff and William Frank in 1854 as Wormser, Burgraff & Co. to build the Pittsburgh Green Glass Works. Burgraff left the partnership in 1857, and the firm became E. Wormser & Co. Wormser traded his share to Frank in 1866, and William Frank & Son operated the factory until it closed in the late 1870s. In late 1882, Wormser reentered the glass business, building a plant at E. Wormser & Co., Ltd.

Around 1884, he reorganized as the Wormser Glass Co. The plant made a variety of bottles but seems to have specialized in beer bottles during the first and second decades of the 20th century. The advent of Prohibition in 1920 may have adversely affected the firm, forcing its closure for several years. By 1927, the firm again was listed, this time as the Wormser Co., Inc., producing a variety of bottles. The sources debated the final closure of the plant, although it was ca. 1928. The early firm marked a few flasks with the company's full name, and a single soda bottle bore the logo "EW&Co." The later firm probably used the "W.G.CO." mark on a variety of bottles.

Histories

Wormser, Burgraff & Co., Pittsburgh (1854-1857)

Ephraim Wormser built the Pittsburgh Green Glass Works in 1854, with some financial backing from his brother-in-law, William Frank.¹ The plant was operated by Wormser, Burgraff & Co., with Frank (in the dry good business at that time) apparently not formally associated with the group. Jacob Burgraff withdrew in 1857 or 1858 (Hawkins 2009:532; McKearin & Wilson 1978:158). Also see the section of William Frank & Co.

¹ Hawkins (2009:532) noted that Thurston (1857:142) claimed Wormser made glass at the old Chambers, Agnew & Co. plant. The information came from a table claiming that the plant's location, 122 Market St., was originally the Chambers & Agnew plant in 1847.

E. Wormser & Co., Pittsburgh (ca. 1857-1866)²

When Burgraff left the company ca. 1857, William Frank entered the business, and the name was changed to E. Wormser & Co. The plant made green and amber liquor and druggists' bottles at one furnace with seven pots. When Wormser and Frank built the Franktown Glass Works in 1858, Wormser may have closed the older glass works.³ The new plant was also known as E. Wormser & Co., until Wormser deeded his share to Frank in exchange for Frank's share of Wormser, Meyers & Co., an oil concern, on March 24, 1866. At that point, Wormser apparently dropped out of the glass business for a period of years (Hawkins 2009:532-533). For details about the Franktown operation, see the section on William Frank & Son.

E. Wormser & Co., Ltd, Pittsburgh (ca. 1882-ca. 1885)

Wormser reentered the glass business as E. Wormser & Co., Ltd., in May 1882, building a plant on a hill overlooking the Laughlin station of the B&O Railroad. The factory made green glass containers. Wormser may have reorganized the firm at least in part because of a lost lawsuit in 1883:

An execution of \$7,000 was issued against Wormser & Co., bottle and fruit-jar manufacturers, on August 1st, at the suit of Weiler Bros., all of this city [i.e., Pittsburgh]. Mr. Wormser was in the glass business here twelve or thirteen years ago, but about a year and a half since he, in conjunction with a Mr. Frank, put up a six-pot gas furnace under a patent held by the latter. They continued to work on bottles and jars, although at irregular intervals, and were shut down lately. It is said that the execution was issued in satisfaction for some old claims newly brought forward (*Crockery and Glass Journal* 1883:12).

² McKearin and Wilson (1978:159) disagreed on the names used by Wormser, but we have elected to use the Hawkins chronology. Hawkins' research is more recent and centered in Pittsburgh.

³ Hawkins (2009:533) noted that it was possible that the materials from the older factory were used to build the Franktown works.

Wormser Glass Co., Pittsburgh (ca. 1884-ca. 1918)

By 1884, the name of the firm had become the Wormser Glass Co. The Hero Fruit Jar co. sued Wormser and won. As a result, Wormser announced that the company had “engaged in the flint glass business, and will hereafter make bottles and flasks” (*American Glass Worker* 1885:2; Roller 1997). The plant had one furnace with eight pots in 1886, but the factory burned to the ground on April 10, 1888. A new plant was in production by the end of the year, and the firm announced a new furnace for the manufacture of fruit jars (Hawkins 2009:534; Roller 1997).

The *Pittsburgh Dispatch* reported on May 4, 1890, that the Wormser Glass Co., “a small chimney manufactory,” was destroyed by fire at a loss of \$3,000. This was the “second time the place has been burned out in the past six months and it is supposed it was set on fire.” It was a rough year for the Wormsers. On September 9, the *Dispatch* added that Joseph and Ephraim Wormser “were arrested yesterday afternoon . . . and held under \$1,200 bail” for employing child labor. Isaac Wormser, “the third and last member of this firm has not been arrested yet. It is said that he is out west.”

The plant remained in operation until ca. 1891, when it apparently entered a period of idleness for several years, resuming production in 1897. In 1899, the plant had one furnace with 12 pots and a 1½-ton day tank, both producing flint glass. By at least 1901, the plant made flint, amber, and green bottles, including prescription ware, flasks, brandies, and fruit jars – all at one five-ton day tank. The same products were made until at least 1909 (Thomas Publishing Co. 1905:104, 578; 1909:202, 1101; Roller 1997).

By 1909, however, Wormser was noted as “running their new three-ring continuous tank on amber glass, making a general line of beer bottles and six shops are employed” (*Commoner & Glass Worker* 1909:13). The following year, the number of rings was up to six (*Commoner and Glassworker* 1910:1). By 1913, Wormser used two continuous tanks with 12 rings to make a “general line of bottles and jars” in 1913, although he was last listed as making jars in the 1912 Thomas Register (*Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913:954).

Wormser was enumerated as a beer bottle maker in 1916 and 1917 (Thomas Publishing Co. 1916:662; 1917:731). In 1917, Bristow (1917:9) added that “the firm has one tank in blast and is working eight hand blow shops on amber beers,” and “there are two Teeple 1-man machines on the ground which will be put in commission in the near future.” The listing for the Wormser Glass Co. continued in 1918, but the firm was not listed in 1920 or 1921. Unfortunately, we have no glass factory lists for the years between 1922 and 1926, so we do not know exactly when Wormser reappeared.

However, we can speculate. Although National Prohibition did not go into effect until 1920, many individual states terminated alcohol sales earlier. In addition, breweries were hard hit by restrictions in World War I, effectively ending or severely limiting beer sales in some (possibly many) locations (e.g., see Lockhart 2004:15). Since the Wormser operation had evolved into a strong reliance on beer bottle production, the firm may have closed the plant for a few years.

Wormser Co., Inc., Pittsburgh (at least 1927-1928)

By 1927, the company was listed as Wormser Co., Inc. The plant made “prescriptions, vials, flint, green and amber beers and minerals, patent, proprietary, liquors, flasks, fruit jars, packers and preservers” by both hand and machine production at two continuous tanks with 12 rings and one day tank with 3 rings. The listing remained the same until 1930, but the final enumeration in 1931 was greatly reduced to little more than the name (*American Glass Review* 1927:147; 1931:91). The glass factory lists used by Roller (1997), however, show the factory as idle between 1929 and 1933.

The closing of the company is in some contention. Hawkins (2009:534) noted that the final listing for the plant in the Pittsburgh city directories was in 1925. McKearin & Wilson (1978:159) dated the closing of the factory at 1927. Toulouse (1971:187-189) placed the end at 1929. The *American Glass Review* dates would seem to support the Toulouse date, but all the lists were lax about discovering closings. We have selected 1928 as the probable date, but it is possible that production effectively ceased early in Prohibition.

Containers and Marks

E. WORMSER & Co. (ca. 1857-1866)

McKearin & Wilson (1978:159, 649) and Hawkins (2009:535) noted two flasks marked “E. WORMSER & Co. / PITTSBURGH / PA.” in a fancy outline (Figures 1 & 2). On one, the engraver miscalculated and did not leave sufficient room for the “o” in “Co,” so placed the letter outside the outline. This mark was almost certainly



Figure 2 – E Wormser & Co. (Jay Hawkins)

made by the earlier company (ca. 1857-1866). Hawkins also noted an “E. WORMSER & Co.” mark without the city/state designation but did not mention the type of bottle or jar.

Hawkins (2009:533, 535) stated that the plant used both “E. WORMSER & Co.” and “E. WORMSER & Co. PITTSBURGH PA.” He illustrated the mark from the side of a historical flask, and the Norman C. Heckler auctions featured similar ones (Figure 3). Toulouse (1971:189) noted (incorrectly) that the full



Figure 3 – E Wormser & Co. (Norman C. Heckler)

Hawkins (2009:533, 535) stated that the plant used both “E. WORMSER & Co.” and “E. WORMSER & Co. PITTSBURGH PA.” He illustrated the mark from the side of a historical flask, and the Norman C. Heckler auctions featured similar ones (Figure 3). Toulouse (1971:189) noted (incorrectly) that the full name was only used on the one flask.

E.W.&Co (ca. 1857-1866)

McKearin & Wilson (1978:158) discussed (but did not illustrate) “E.W.&Co” embossed above the heel of a blob-top soda bottle.” Because of the bottle type, this mark was likely used by the earlier company. Hawkins (2009:535) also included the logo.

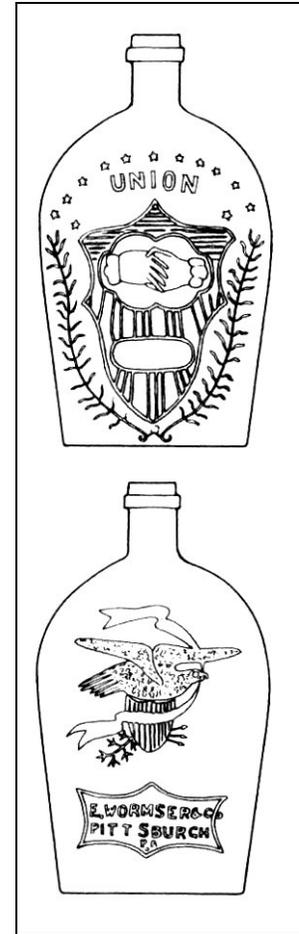


Figure 1 – E Wormser & Co. (McKearin & Wilson 1978:649)

According to Toulouse (1971:187), this mark was used by E. Wormser & Co., ca. 1857 to 1875. He noted that the company also used the full name, E. WORMSER & CO. on some bottles during the same period. Oddly, Toulouse reported that “Ephraim Wormser would be overlooked if not for one flask, known in at least two colors . . . with the full name of the company below the eagle.” Although he never mentioned the EW&Co mark in his text, he listed it as existing.

E.W.CO. WORKS (ca. 1857-1866)



Figure 5 – EW&Co (Jay Hawkins)

Hawkins (2009:535) listed the “E.W.CO. WORKS” mark but did not discuss the type of container or when it was used. Von Mechow (2020), however, noted the mark on a single soda bottle. The front of the bottle was embossed with a flying eagle above a shield and arrows. The eagle carried a streamer in its mouth, that flowed beneath it – embossed “E.W.Co.” An embossed line outlined “WORKS” at the front heel (Figure 4 & 5). This, too, was probably produced at the early E. Wormser & Co. factory.



Figure 4 – EW&Co (von Mechow 2020)

W.G.CO. (ca. 1884-ca. 1918)

We have found the “W.G.CO.” mark on beer bottles, a couple of Hutchinson soda bottles, three straight-sided Coca-Cola bottles, a few prescription bottles, milk bottles, and a single grooved-ring wax sealer. The milk bottles were certainly made by the Woodbury Glass Co. between ca. 1916 and 1920. The other “W.G.CO.” logos were all similar: same downward serif on the “G,” capital “O” in “CO,” and full punctuation, suggesting that the same glass house made all the bottles. We have never found an example of the wax sealer, so we have no data on that one.

As shown in our study of the “W.G.CO.” mark, these bottles apparently were made during the ca. 1900-1920 period. The study was not altogether conclusive, mostly eliminating all but the Williamstown Glass Co. and the Wormser Glass Co. as candidates for the user of the logo. Wormser was the stronger of the two finalists, so we have accepted Wormser as the manufacturer of the mark. See the W.G.CO. section for more information.

Discussion and Conclusions

There is no question that the marks with the full company name or the EW&Co initials were used by Wormser. However, it is also clear that Wormser rarely included any form of company logo on *any* of his early containers.

By the turn of the century, however, glass houses making beer bottles were increasingly adding some sort of logo – usually initials – to identify the manufacturing plant. Because of the manufacturing characteristics (e.g., tooled finish), initials (W.G.CO.), and the fact that Wormser made beer bottles, Wormser was the likely user of the mark on beer bottles.

Although there is no direct evidence that Wormser made soda or Coca-Cola bottles, the plant certainly had the capacity with its beer bottle production. As noted above, the Wormser Glass Co. was the most likely user of the “W.G.CO.” logo on all but milk bottles.

Sources

American Glass Review

1927 *Glass Factory Yearbook and Directory*. American Glass Review, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

1931 *Glass Factory Yearbook and Directory*. American Glass Review, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

American Glass Worker

1885 “Trade Notes.” *American Glass Worker* 1(11):2.

Bristow, A. E.

1917 "In Pittsburgh District." *Glassworker* 35(38):1, 8-9.

Commoner and Glassworker

1909 "Pittsburg Bottle News." *Commoner & Glass Worker* 28(4):13.

1910 "Pith of the Week's News: All the New of the Glass Trade Compiled in Condensed Form for Quick Reading." *Commoner and Glassworker* 28(49):1.

Crockery and Glass Journal

1883 "The Glass Factories: Pittsburgh." *Crockery and Glass Journal* 18(6):12, 14, 18.

Hawkins, Jay W.

2009 *Glasshouses & Glass Manufacturers of the Pittsburgh Region, 1795-1910*.
iUniverse, Inc., New York.

Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry

1913 "The Present Status of the Glass Bottle and Hollow Ware Industries in the United States." *Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 5(11):951-954.

Lockhart, Bill

2004 "Pure Beer Fresh from the Brewery: The El Paso Brewing Association." *American Breweriana* 129:11-15.

McKearin, Helen and Kenneth M. Wilson

1978 *American Bottles & Flasks and Their Ancestry*. Crown Publishers, New York.

Roller, Dick

1997 "Wormser History Notes." Dick Roller files.

Thomas Publishing Co.

1905-1906 *The Buyers' Guide: Thomas' Register of American Manufacturers and First Hands in all Lines*. Thomas Publishing Co., New York.

1909 *Thomas' Register of American Manufacturers and First Hands in All Lines: A Classified Reference Book for Buyer and Sellers.* Thomas Publishing, New York.

1916 *Thomas' Register of American Manufacturers and First Hands in All Lines: A Classified Reference Book for Buyer and Sellers.* Thomas Publishing, New York.

1917 *Thomas Register of American Manufacturers and First Hands in All Lines.* 9th ed. Thomas Publishing Co., New York.

Toulouse, Julian Harrison

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

Last updated 9/26/2020

