

X Marks

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We have discovered several “X” marks on bottle bases – mostly having no association with specific glass houses (with three exceptions). These reflect mainly two time periods, but we mostly were unable to reach definitive conclusions.

Containers and Marks

General Marks

Miller (1999:115-117) illustrated four olive oil bottles marked on their bases with an “X” and numbers – all used by Arizona firms. Two were marked 466 / X, one 75 / X, and the final bottle 394X. The reasons for the marks are currently unknown. Thomas (1998:unnumbered page) added five more marks, all presumably on bases and all from Washington or Oregon whiskey bottles (see table below).

From a sewer trench in San Diego, Carol Serr reported a mouth-blown “olive” type bottle with “331 X” embossed on a cup-bottom base. The X was a bit shorter than the digits. Other bases reported by Serr included “XFB / NCC// 5 ; XG // 4”); XH // 5; X A”; “XH // 4.” Digits separated by two slashes indicate a position on the heels of the bottles. Three mouth-blown bases were embossed “316 X” (round, colorless, probably a bowling-pin soda bottle); “462 X” (oval, amber, probably a small flask); and “331 X” (colorless, oval with two flat panels, probably a household bottle). None of these were datable (Figure 1).



Figure 1 – X marks

In addition, machine-made Certo bottles (amber with crown finishes and Owens scars) are marked on their bases with “X” codes. One example was marked “6 / MADE / IN U. S. A

(all horizontal) / S 16 1 (arch)” on the base (Figure 2). This base was on a bottle marked “CERTO / REG.U.S.PAT.OFF.” on the front shoulder and “FOR ½ BOTTLE/POUR TO HERE” – upside down with the bottle sitting on its base – with arrows pointing to a line – all in an inset panel. According to Digger O’Dell (2000), Certo was a product for making jelly and jam. Various recipes on the internet call Certo commercial pectin, liquid pectin, or even liquid fruit pectin.



Figure 2 – Certo base

A second, bottle was also amber, machine made, had a crown finish, and was similarly shaped, including the recessed panel. However, this bottle was not marked Certo. The recessed panel was marked “½ - CUP” with an arrow pointing to a half-way line. The identical marking appeared below the line. The base was marked “2 / X 7 2 (arch).” This initial “2” was oriented to be read by rotating the bottle 180 degrees (in other words, it was upside down in relation to the remaining three digits).

According to an eBay auction, a beer bottle with a Mitchell’s Brewing Co. label (El Paso) had a base marked “6X-2139, 17, 9, 61.” Presumably, the commas indicated line changes. The 61, however, cannot be a date code – Mitchell’s ceased operations and sold the plant to the Falstaff Brewing Co. in 1956.

A seriation (Table 1) of the known date ranges for companies using bottles with the “X” marks indicates that the most likely time the “X” bottle production was ca. 1908 to ca. 1913. This does *not* mean that the glass house was *only* in business during those years. But it does mean that a glass house was almost certainly open during that period. We can extend that idea to hypothesize that the glass house was *probably* not open much longer than that (at either end), but that is speculation – the data do not specifically indicate a limit to the range.

Table 1 – X Marks

Mark	Type	Company	Dates	Citation
75 / X	olive oil	Munger Bros.	1903-1907	Miller 1999:115
143 / X	amber pint Balt. Oval	Oregon Import Co.	1904-1915	Thomas 1998
144 / X	amber quart Balt. Oval	Oregon Import Co.	1904-1915	Thomas 1998
162 / X	colorless Balt Oval	Kline Bros.	1908-1914	Thomas 1998
201 / X	colorless cylinder fifths	Keystone Liquor	1902-1915	Thomas 1998
331 X	olive or pickle	??	??	Serr
394 X	olive oil	Munger Bros.	1903-1907	Miller 1999:115
466 / X	olive oil	Munger Bros.	1912-1916	Miller 1999:116-117
482 / X	colorless/amber Minn. Qts,	Remington Liq.	1908-1913	Thomas 1998
X 16 1	amber/crown finish	Certo	??	Lockhart
X 7 2	amber/crown finish	unknown	??	Lockhart
6X-2139, 17, 9, 61	amber, export beer, 12-oz	Mitchell's Brewery	1947-1953	eBay; Lockhart

Soda Bottles

Three machine-made soda bottle bases each were embossed with a large “X”: “ABC Co / X / 30N”; “RoXoT / 31”; and “{Diamond-R logo} X / C 82 8” (Figure 3). Respectively, those refer to the American Bottle Co., made in 1930 at the Newark, Ohio, plant; the Root Glass Co.,



Figure 3 – Soda bases

1931; and the Reed Glass Co. Although there was no date code on the Reed bottle, it was generic, made for a paper label – a bottle type generally used during the same ca. 1925-1934 period as the other two.

The “X” in this case obviously did *not* represent a glass house, although the reason for its use by three different firms is unclear. Most bottles of this type – regardless of glass house – did *not* have the “X.” These bottles were typically used by Clicquot Club and other beverage firms that used cylindrical bottles with rounded shoulders and very short necks (Figure 4).

Discussion and Conclusions

Although this brief study is far from conclusive, the use of the letter “X” on bottle bases seems to fall into two temporal and usage categories. The first was the 1908-1913 range, possibly five or more additional years on either or both ends. In most of these examples, the “X” was an integral part of a code that include a number, usually three digits in our sample – and the bases belonged to a variety of bottles in both amber and colorless hues (although a few had “X” and another letter). These have the appearance of mold codes or model numbers – little use to a researcher without a manufacturer’s mark to tie down the glass house that made them.

In the second group, we not only have the glass house logos on each of our three examples, the base included date codes on two of them, and the other was the same type of bottle – therefore, tied to the same period. The glass houses involved were the American Bottle Co. (date code for 1930), the Root Glass Co. (1931), and the Reed Glass Co. (no date code).



Figure 4 – Soda bottle

The containers were all 12-ounce generic soda bottles, all green in color, machine made, with crown finishes. In each case, the “X” was large but was placed differently – in between the logo and date code on the American bottle; in the center of the word “RoXoT” on the root bottle (also center of the bottle); and to the right of the logo on the Reed bottle across the center. These obviously had some shared meaning among the soda bottle manufacturers, but that meaning has been lost to us. Most of the generic soda bottles used between ca. 1925 and ca. 1934 had similar logos and codes but lacked the “X” marks.

Our contacts with the Owens-Illinois Glass Co. – Phill Perry and Russ Hoenig – told us that OI used an “X” to indicate experimental bottles. The ones discussed in this study, however, seem to have all been used to market typical liquids – not experimental in nature. There is little else we can say in the analysis of these letters. Using currently available methods, the needed information is simply not available. Without the unlikely discovery of some historical documents that discuss the reasons for the use of the initial, the mysterious letter “X” will remain mysterious.

Acknowledgments

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