

## **Butler Bottle Co.**

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The Butler Bottle Co. of Butler, Ohio, primarily produced milk bottles during the 1907-ca. 1916 period. The plant apparently only used one logo (24B) and a “B” in the Massachusetts Seal. Although the firm intended to move to a location with better access to natural gas, it apparently disbanded instead. As sometimes happens, there was another Butler Bottle Co., this one at Butler, Pennsylvania. Although the Pennsylvania plant also made bottles, it was open decades earlier, and there is no evidence that it used any type of logo.

### **History**

#### **Butler Bottle Co., Butler, Ohio (1908-1915)**

Local recollections suggest that the A.M. Stewart Co. made milk bottles at Butler, Ohio, from 1903 to 1914. As is common with oral histories, the basic facts are present, but they have been distorted through time and with retelling. The firm was initially incorporated as the Butler Bottle Co. on October 26, 1907, with a capital of \$30,000. It is unclear if Stewart was involved with the company at this time, but it is unlikely that he was the president or owner. J.M. Ikes was the president by 1908, and the plant had one continuous tank with six rings (Cain & Gardiner 1907:209; Dairy Antique 2013; Roller 1992).

Although incorporated in 1907, the plant was not ready for production until 1908. According to the *American Bottler* (1908:56), the “Butler Bottle Company, the plant of which at Butler, O., was built by J.M. Ikes and other Columbus men. A number of contracts have been secured by the company.” In 1908, the *Commoner and Glassworker* (1908:2) announced that the Butler Bottle Co. at Butler, Pennsylvania, had just built a new plant. This is almost certainly a confusion by the journal with the Butler Glass Co. at Butler, Ohio, that had just completed its new plant. The Pennsylvania firm had moved to Anderson, Pennsylvania two decades earlier.

By 1909, D.M. Brumback was the president, with S.M. Rinehart as secretary. Confirming local tradition, A.M. Stewart was listed as treasurer, and L.E. Tigner was the

manager. Tigner was later involved with the Essex Glass Co., Parkersburg, West Virginia (Dairy Antique 2013; Roller 1992). Also by 1909, the Butler plant operated five milk bottle machines (*Commoner & Glassworker* 1909:1; Hayes 1909:13). The firm was not listed in the 1904 glass factory directory, and, although it was included in the Thomas Registers from 1912 to 1916, it was not in subsequent editions or the 1909 issue (Thomas Publishing Co. 1912:480; 1916:660). Unfortunately, the products made by the factory were not enumerated. Butler exhibited bottles (presumably milk) at the February 1909 Michigan Dairyman's Association convention (Dairy Antique 2013).

On January 8, 1912, J.Q. Emery, Dairy and Food Commissioner for the State of Wisconsin, returned the Butler Bottle Co. bond that had allowed Butler to sell milk bottles within the state. He noted that "Section 1666a, of the statutes as found in chapter 566 of the laws of 1911" provided in part:

The designating number shall be furnished by the state superintendent of weights and measures upon application by the manufacturer, and upon filing by the manufacturer of a bond in the sum of one thousand dollars, with sureties to be approved by the Attorney General conditioned upon their conformance with the requirements of this section (State of Wisconsin 1914:1014).

Emery stated that Butler had only posted bond for a single year – which was "not a compliance with the section [Emery] had quoted, nor was Butler's bonding company approved by the state" (State of Wisconsin 1914:1014). In 1913, however, the factory still used one continuous tank with six rings to make "milk, packers' and preservers'" bottles by both semiautomatic machine and hand methods (*Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913:953).

The Dairy Antique site (2013) noted that Butler Bottle was thinking about relocation as early as 1910 because of a natural gas shortage at Butler. By 1915, the firm was considering West Virginia or Toledo, Ohio. But there the vision becomes murkey. The *Mansfield News-Journal* for February 1, 1917, noted that the Butler Bottle Co. was delinquent in both its 1915 and 1916 taxes, as well as facing penalties for 1915. This pretty clearly indicates that the business closed at some point during 1915, since those taxes would have been due in early 1916.

The closing may have been caused by a dispute between the management. On September 11, 1915, the *Mansfield News-Journal* announced that the court of appeals had affirmed the decision of the lower court in W.H. Swetland et al vs. Butler Bottle Co. In discussing the semiautomatic bottle machines designed by Frank O'Neill, Paquette (2002:369) noted that a new factory was completed on December 1, 1916, for the recently formed Toledo Glass Co., a plant to use the new machinery to make bottles. The supervisor of the new plant was "W.H. Swetland, a former manager at the Butler (Ohio) Bottle Company." The Swetland suit may have been the final straw for Buttler Bottle. The former Butler Bottle plant was demolished in November 1916.

### **Butler Bottle Co., Butler, Pennsylvania (1882-1889)**

Dominick Ihmsen built an eight-pot factory to make bottles, flasks and prescription glass at Butler, Pennsylvania, and began production in late October 1882. The firm was capitalized at \$10,000. Although the plant had only been previously known by Ihmsen's full name, it became the Ihmsen Glass Mfg. Co. in April of the following year – over the objections of Ihmsen's family, who already owned the Ihmsen Glass Co. and resented the similarity of the names. By September, the firm experienced financial problems, and the plant was idle until the factory was sold at a sheriff's auction in on October 24 (Hawkins 2009:278).<sup>1</sup>

In late November 1883, however, a group of glass men formed the Butler Flint Bottle Co., Ltd., and continued to make vials and prescription bottles. Dominick Ihmsen was president, with W.J. McKee as secretary and treasurer. The remaining directors were Conrad and John Smith, John Farrel, James J. Hayes, John W. Vogel, and Alexander P. McKee. By December 8, the factory began blowing glass. At some point, Ihmsen retired, and he died in March of 1887. The firm continued and erected a second furnace, this one with 12 pots (Hawkins 2009:278; Roller 1997; Collins 2001).

The factory burned in June of 1888, with damages totaling \$25,000, although the plant was only insured for \$16,500. Alexander McKee moved the operation to Anderson, Indiana, as

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<sup>1</sup> The October date of the sale, and November for the formation of the Butler Flint Glass Co. does not make sense – unless one person purchased the factory, *then* created the corporation.

the Anderson Flint Bottle Co. McKee remained involved at the new location until at least 1904, and the plant closed ca. 1913 (Hawkins 2009:278; Roller 1997; 1998).

Meanwhile, another group organized the Butler Bottle Co., Ltd., with Charles Duffy as president and Thomas H. Gallagher, secretary. They purchased the property from the Butler Flint Glass Co. and erected a new building on the original site. Although the reason was not recorded, the firm only remained in business for a single year – when the Hamilton brothers purchased the business (Blanchard 1908:164; Collins 2001; Hawkins 2009:278; Roller 1997; 1998).

## Containers and Marks

### 24B (1911-1915)

The 24B mark was embossed on milk bottle heels by the Butler Bottle Co. (Figures 1-3). The mark is found in conjunction with “MASS B SEAL” (Massachusetts seal) embossed on milk bottles used by Massachusetts dairies in accordance with state laws (personal communication, Albert Morin, 2/17/2007). The state of New Jersey assigned the number “24” to a Butler Bros. Glass Co. at Butler, Ohio, in 1913, although this is almost certainly a mis-recording of the Butler Bottle Co. The mark may have been used in both “24B” and “B24” configurations (Dairy Antique 2013; Waldron 1913:17).



Figure 1 – Bergjan’s Bottle (eBay)



Figure 1 – 24 B and Mass Seal B (Al Morin collection)

The Butler Bottle Co. at Butler, Ohio, was registered to use the “24B” mark under the Wisconsin system, required for the sale of milk bottles within the state (*Stevens Point Journal* 1913:1). The reference cited in the history section (above) shows that Wisconsin began to use the numbering system in 1911, and that Butler Bottle was listed during that year. However, as noted in the history section, Butler was rejected by



Figure 1 – 24 B (eBay)

Wisconsin in 1912. Since Butler was again listed for Wisconsin in 1916, it is likely that the firm posted bond afresh and continued to use the mark between ca. 1913 and 1916 (*Stevens Point Journal* 1916). Butler may have been issued the same number in other states as well.

## **B with no number**

Al Morin described a mouth-blown milk bottle with a post-bottom base and cap-seat finish. The pint bottle was embossed “E.W. WOOLMAN’S MILK-4709 LANCASTER AVE” in a round plate and had “WASH AND RETURN” on the reverse body. A sans serif “B” – the same size as the plate lettering – was embossed in the center of the post-mold on the base. Such bottles were typically made during the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to ca. 1910. According to the January 1913 issue of *Creamery and Milk Plant Monthly* (1913:32), “EW Woolman is erecting a dairy plant at 4700 Lancaster avenue” at Philadelphia.

A search of our records only showed three other companies whose names began with the letter “B” were in business by that time and were known to have made milk bottles: the Belle Pre Bottle Co., Alexandria, Virginia, the Brookfield Glass Co., Brooklyn, New York, and the Buck Glass Co., Baltimore, Maryland. Belle Pre used a BP logo, so a lone “B” is less likely for that firm (see the section on Belle Pre). Brookfield certainly used a “B” mark on insulators (see Binghamton Glass Co. section), but we have found no evidence that the mark was used on bottles (McDougald & McDougald 1990:26; Woodward 1988:7).

Buck Glass certainly used a sans serif “B” logo – as did Butler Glass – although the lack of any of the typical Buck codes or the typical “24” for Butler makes a choice difficult. The Buck Glass location at Baltimore was much closer to Philadelphia than Butler’s Ohio placement, but either glass house could have made the bottle.

## **B in the Massachusetts Seal (1911-1915)**

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. The earliest list that we have found for Massachusetts seals (1910) did not list the Butler Bottle Co. The 1911 list, however, noted that the Butler Bottle Co. had received “Mass. Seal B.”

None of the listings from 1910 to 1912 included locations for the glass houses (Commonwealth of Massachusetts 1911:4; 1912:9).

The “B” seal for Butler Bottle Co. is somewhat unique among Massachusetts seals. The seal was inserted as an apparent afterthought into a plate on the front of the bottle that identified the dairy. The word “REGISTERED” was divided between the “S” and “T” with one half of the word to the left of a large square containing a large letter “A” (probably for Grade A milk) with the other half to the right. Below that was “MASS SEAL B” in a horizontal line set in a much smaller font (see Figure 1). The “24B” manufacturer’s mark was on the front heel of the bottle (Morin photo; Blodget 2006).

The 1918 Massachusetts Department of Standards Bulletin No. 11 listed the firm as the Butler Bottle Co., Butler, Pennsylvania (Schadlich ([ca. 1990])). The Pennsylvania plant was in business far too early and did not make milk bottles (see above). However, not only was the Ohio company known to have made milk bottles, it was clearly listed in Wisconsin as using the 24B mark that accompanies the Massachusetts “B” seals. It is therefore certain that the Butler Bottle Co., Butler, Ohio, actually used the Massachusetts “B” seal. Butler Bottle was out of business by 1918, but the Bulletin also listed several other milk bottle producers that were closed by that time.

Bottles with the Butler Massachusetts seal are scarce to rare, and the style of the seal was an early one. Since the accompanying “24B” mark was probably not used prior to 1913, the Massachusetts seal was likely in vogue for only a few years.

## **Discussion and Conclusions**

It is virtually certain that the Butler Bottle Co. listed in the Massachusetts Bulletins was located at Butler, Ohio, *not* Butler, Pennsylvania. The plant began operations in 1907 and remained in business until 1915 – although local tradition suggested a closure in 1914. Although the company appeared in the 1918 Massachusetts seal list, the list included several other plants that were no longer in business at that date.

Both the 24B heelmark and the “B” in the Massachusetts seal were registered to the Butler Bottle Co. Although the sans-serif “B” mark was certainly used by the Buck Glass Co. (see the Buck section for more information about the company and its marks), it was almost certainly not used in conjunction with “24.” Therefore, if the “B” heelmark is accompanied by a “24,” the mark belonged to the Butler Bottle Co. Future research may also disclose differences in manufacturing techniques between the two firms as well.

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