

Fidelity Glass Co.

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with contributions from Jay Hawkins

Although the products of the company were more diverse, Fidelity Glass Co. specialized in milk bottles for most of its existence. Opening in 1895, the firm served its customers until it ran into financial difficulties in 1916. One of its main customers, the Atlantic Bottle Co., purchased the company in 1917, thereafter producing its own milk bottles. See the section on the Atlantic Bottle Co. for more information.

History

Fidelity Glass Co., Tarentum, Pennsylvania (1895-1916)

According to the November 14, 1894, edition of *China, Glass & Lamps*, the Fidelity Glass Co. of Tarentum, Pennsylvania, had “\$50,000 capital stock secured by subscription” and had “secured” the former Challinor & Taylor factory. The firm expected to begin production on January 1, 1895 (Roller n.d.). Challinor, McCombs & Co. (David Challinor and Morris McCombs) opened a tableware plant in Pittsburgh ca. 1870, although the firm of Chalcinor, Hogan & Co. (David Challinor and Edward Hogan) succeeded the earlier company later in 1870. In 1883, Challinor dissolved the partnership to move the plant to Tarentum. David Taylor bought in by February 1884, creating a new firm of Challicinor, Taylor & Co. The plant became Factory C of the United States Glass Co. on June 29, 1881, but the facility burned to the ground on March 19, 1893, and was not rebuilt (Hawkins 2009:116-121).¹ Since all these firms specialized in tableware, a more precise history is beyond the scope of this work. See Roller (2009) for more information.

¹ There is an inconsistency here. The first sentence seems to indicate that Fidelity had purchased a factory that no longer existed. Hawkins (2009:212) resolved this conundrum by stating that the Fidelity factory was built on the site of the Challinor and Taylor plant; therefore, the term “secured” indicated controlling the land.

According to Hawkins (2009:211-212), the company was started by striking glass blowers from the C.L. Flaccus Glass Co. who were unhappy with mechanization. Henry S. Brackenridge was the president, with J.G. Vogeley as vice president, J. Frank Peffer as secretary, and J.F. Humes as treasurer. Other board members included John Grant, H.S. Humes, Thomas O'Malley, and William Goss. *China, Glass & Lamps* (5/15/1895) reported that H.E. Travis was the superintendent of the plant, and Charles Gass was the manager (cited in Roller n.d.).²

Secondary sources (e.g., Toulouse 1971:29) have noted that the plant was at Brackenridge, Pennsylvania, and Hawkins (2009:211) agreed that the Brackenridge location “was listed by some contemporary sources.” However, the actual factory was situated at nearby Tarentum, about a mile southwest of Brackenridge. Both are roughly 10 miles northeast of Pittsburgh, along the Allegheny River. Some of the confusion may have arisen because the initial president of Fidelity was Henry S. Brackenridge. It is also possible that an office was located at Brackenridge.

The plant originally had a 16-pot furnace and was still making “flint bottles” in “sixteen pots” in 1897. By 1898, the plant had two furnaces with 28 pots, but the number decreased to 16 pots in 1900 (probably indicating that only one furnace was working at the time the report was written) and was back up to 28 in 1901 and 1902 (Hawkins 2009:211; *National Glass Budget* 1897a:7; 1897b:5; 1898a:7; 1898b:3; 1900:11; 1901:11; 1902:11). In 1904, the plant made “prescription and packers’ ware, milk jars (*American Glass Review* 1934:167).

A listing of factories using semiautomatic machines in 1905 noted a plant in Tarentum with “six bottle machines making milk jars, pints and quarts, salt and pepper shakers” (*National Glass Budget* 1912a:1). At least some of those machines (especially making milk jars) almost certainly belonged to Fidelity Glass, although the C.L. Flaccus Glass Co. also had a plant in

² Travis later formed the Travis Glass Co. (1908). See the section on Travis Glass for more information. Vogeley Peffer were a local businessmen, involved with several Tarentum firms – hardly glass men. We found nothing about Brackenridge at Tarentum – aside from the Fidelity connection. Charles Gass, on the other hand, was connected with the union by at least 1903 – a solid glass connection. This all questions the idea that Fidelity was begun by dissatisfied Flaccus blowers. We can find no Flaccus connection with either Travis or Gass, and the others were certainly financiers. It also seems strange that blowers would develop a machine firm.

Tarentum and used semiautomatic machines. The Thomas Register (1907-1908:161, 799; 1917:731) listed the plant as making prescription, packer, and preserver bottles from 1907 to 1917. By 1912, the operation had switched to two continuous tanks with 19 rings, and the factory used two continuous tanks with 19 rings to make a general line of bottles by both semiautomatic machine and hand production the following year (Hawkins 2009:211; *Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913:953).

Toulouse (1971:29) stated that Fidelity experienced financial difficulties in 1916, and the Atlantic Bottle Co., always before a jobber rather than a manufacturer, bought the factory and began making its own milk bottles.³ Even though Atlantic Glass operated the plant under its own name, the factory was listed locally under its former name (Fidelity) until 1930, when the Owens-Illinois Glass Co. purchased Atlantic (Hawkins 2008). The *American Glass Review* (1934:167) also claimed (incorrectly) that the “Anchor Bottle Co.” took over the plant in 1917.

Containers and Marks

F (ca. 1910-1916)

Hawkins (2009:212) illustrated an “F” mark, accompanied by the word “FIDELITY,” embossed on the base of a single mouth-blown milk bottle used by a Pennsylvania dairy. He stated that the bottle was “attributed to the Fidelity Glass Co. (Figure 1). This suggests that an “F” on a milk bottle base *may* indicate a manufacture by Fidelity. Hawkins did not suggest any date range for the bottle, but it was almost certainly within the ca. 1910-1916 range.



Figure 1 – Fidelity and F (Jay Hawkins)

³ Toulouse (1971:396), however, told a second story about the same company, claiming that the Owens Bottle Co. bought 51% of the stock for the Fidelity Glass Co., Tarentum, Pennsylvania, in 1912. We have not been able to find any records of the factory as part of Owens, and other documentation supports the sale to Atlantic.

FID (ca. 1910-1916)

According to Giarde (1980:42), the FID mark “has been found on tin tops.” He attributed the mark to the Fidelity Glass Co., although he did not mention whether the bottles were mouth blown or machine made. A photo from Al Morin showed the mark on the upper reverse body of a milk bottle – accompanied by the Massachusetts seal (see below) – that was almost certainly machine made (Figure 2).



Figure 2 – FID on reverse
(Al Morin)

Brad Blodget (personal communication 2/23/2008) noted “FID. / 2” in large letters embossed horizontally on the reverse body of a milk bottle (probably from New York) with a numeral “2” on the front heel. The mark was located on either the front or reverse heel or on the center of the reverse body. It is unlikely that the firm used any logo prior to the Massachusetts requirements (see next entry). Although it is unclear when Fidelity began use of the Mass. Seal, it was not prior to 1910.

In addition, 1910 was the year when the State of New York initiated the number system for identifying milk bottle producers who wanted to sell containers to dairies within the state. The law required that manufacturers permanently mark each milk bottle sold in New York with the initials or logo of the glass house and a number assigned by the state. Other states soon initiated similar requirements, and the designated numbers became an integral part of the manufacturer’s marks. All or most states assigned the number “2” to the Fidelity Glass Co.

Jay Hawkins found an unusual variation. This one was embossed “FID. / 1” on the heel. This likely indicates that Fidelity was the first to apply for a number in one state, although the company certainly settled in at number “2.” This heelmark also could have been an engraver’s error or a typographical error on the part of the recorder.

“FID” in the Massachusetts Seal (ca. 1910-1916)

From 1910 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. From some point after 1910, factories embossed the seal on the shoulder of each milk bottle, usually in a circular form embossed “MASS (arch) / {factory designator} / “SEAL (inverted arch).” These often appeared in a small plate (Blodgett 2006:8; Schadlich [ca. 1990]).



Figure 3 – Mass Seal 1

Schadlich ([ca. 1990]) stated, “There were manufacturers applying the MASS SEAL to their milk bottles or jars for which no record of approval has been found.” One of these seals was embossed “FID” in the center, and the mark is attributed by Schadlich to the Fidelity Glass Co. He added that the Massachusetts seal was “above slug plate in arc. Front of bottle” and included the date range 1915-1916. We do not know how he derived the date range.



Figure 4 – Mass Seal 2

The FID seal appeared in at least three configurations. Possibly the oldest was embossed “MASS. SEAL FID.” in an arch on the reverse shoulder of a bottle (Figure 3). The second form was similar: “MASS. SEAL (arch) / FID.” – again on the reverse heel (Figure 4). The final format of the seal was placed on the reverse shoulder in a circular plate, embossed “MASS SEAL (arch) / FID. (inverted arch)” (Figure 5). This is a slightly different configuration from typical Massachusetts seals that had the company identification in the center of the seal. Al Morin’s photo (see Figure 2) showed the circular seal with “FID. / 2” below it, and at least one milk bottle with the arched seal was amber in color.



Figure 5 – Mass Seal 3 (eBay)

FIDELITY (ca. 1910-1916)

Hawkins (2009:212) noted that “FIDELITY” in an arch (along with a letter “F”) was embossed on the base of a Pennsylvania milk bottle (see Figure 1). He attributed the mark to the Fidelity Glass Co. The Dairy Antiques site (2015) also attributed the logo to Fidelity Glass.

MAINE F-2 SEAL (1913-1916)

Maine adopted a seal law in 1913 that required milk bottle manufacturers wishing to sell to dairies within the state to post a \$1,000 bond and emboss the glass house initials and assigned number on each bottle to guarantee the container was the correct size. In 1915, the law was modified to include the words “MAINE SEAL” and the number embossed on the upper half of the bottle (Public Laws of Maine 1913:78-79; 1915:28). In reality, the seal was placed on the shoulder/neck area, often in a round plate. The Dairy Antique site (2015) noted that Fidelity used the “MAINE F-2 SEAL” – although we have never found an example. Since the Atlantic Bottle Co. replaced Fidelity in 1917, the logo can only be dated 1913-1916.

Discussion and Conclusions

The Fidelity Glass Co. apparently only used three logos – F, FID, and FIDELITY – on milk bottles between ca. 1910 and 1916. The firm also applied the Mass FID seal during the same period and the Maine FID-2 seal from ca. 1913. Although the plant also made a few other bottle forms, we have never found one of these logos on any product except milk bottles.

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