

Great Western Glass Works

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Like so many other glass firms, the Great Western Glass Works was initially very successful – for more than a decade after its opening at St. Louis, Missouri, in 1874. When the plant began to have labor problems – and possibly other issues – it closed its doors in 1886. The board of directors elected to move the business to Paola, Kansas, reorganizing as the Paola Glass Co. It was a bad decision. The firm moved, contracted with the Paola Gas Co., and built its new factory. The gas concern refused to supply the amount of fuel needed to power the plant, and the glass house closed after a very short run.

Histories

The Great Western Glass Works at St. Louis was one of at least four glass-making operations to use “Great Western” in its name. As noted in the introduction, the firm reorganized as the Paola Glass Co. after moving to Paola, Kansas, and closed its doors permanently in 1888. Another, probably unrelated, Great Western Glass Co. was opened in 1904 at Bartlesville, Indian Territory (Oklahoma). To put these places in perspective, Paola is about 150 miles due west of St. Louis (or about 35 miles southeast of Kansas City). Bartlesville is about 140 miles southwest of Paola.

Just to complicate things for future researchers, there was also a Great Western Glass Co. at Ottawa, Illinois. Its output was plate glass, and the firm was incorporated in early 1902, with a capital of \$1,000,000 (*New York Financier* 1902:415). In addition, a Great Western Glass Co. operated at London, England, in the 1890s, although it was apparently not an actual glass factory (*London Standard* 5/12/1892). Neither of these was involved with the firms in Missouri, Kansas, or Oklahoma, so we have removed them from further consideration.

Great Western Glass Works, St. Louis, Missouri (1874-1889)

The Great Western Glass Works organized as a Missouri corporation in 1874.¹ Lossos (2000) showed the factory at the intersection of Barton and Jackson Streets (Jackson later became Third St.) on the 1875 Bird's Eye View Map of St. Louis and identified the vice president and manager as Phineas B. Leach (Figure 1). Charles H. Burch (possibly Barch) was the president by at least 1876 (City Directory 1876; Roller 1997).



Figure 1 – 1875 Bird's Eye View Map of St. Louis

The firm reorganized on October 22, 1878, with Leach as president and William F. de Cordova as secretary. *Crockery and Glass Journal* (1880:12) noted that the plant sold “largely to city dealers and druggists, but they have also a heavy trade in all the Western and some of the Southern States. They turn out immense quantities of bottles, flasks and lamp chimneys of all kinds.” On July 29, 1880, the firm received a permit to build a \$3,000 addition to the factory. The city issued a second permit to the plant for \$2,500 worth of brick repair for the third floor (Journal of the Board of Public Improvements 1877). The *St. Louis Globe-Democrat* (2/24/1881) reported that a fire caused \$10,000 worth of damage on February 23, 1881. Between the flames and the water, the conflagration caused severe damage to the packing room, shipping room, mold department, second-floor hay loft, and a storage department on the first floor. At that time, Leach remained as president, George M. Edgar was vice president, and de Cordova still filled the secretary and treasurer positions. In 1882, the plant made “druggist’s flint prescription bottles, and flasks,” and its capacity had “more than doubled since 1878” (*Year Book* 1882:107).

In 1885, the State of Missouri (1885:105) reported that Great Western was capitalized at \$50,000 (almost certainly from the 1878 reorganization) and employed 100 men and 50 boys. On April 26, 1886, 45 boys went on strike for higher wages, but they returned to work the next

¹ Various primary sources referred to the business as “Works” or “Company.” More sources used the term “Works” – including a patent assignment – so we have selected that word for this study. This may be another case where the operating firm was called the Great Western Glass Co., and the factory was the Great Western Glass Works.

day (Whitten 2015). However, the glass house continued to have labor issues, and the board of directors was obviously dissatisfied with conditions. On July 1, 1886, the *Alton Telegraph* (Alton, Illinois) reported that the Great Western Glass Works had “offered to remove to this city in consideration for a bonus of \$8,000 cash, several acres of land, and free water for five years.” The city of Alton apparently declined. Regardless, the management discharged the employees on November 26, 1886, claiming that the workers had been drinking so much that they were unreliable. The workers claimed that they had been threatening to strike because apprentices were being expected to do the work of journeymen (*Daily Inter Ocean* [Chicago] 11/27/1886). Regardless of who was correct, the glass works may have closed permanently at this point.

Although we have not discovered the details, the plant obviously continued to be plagued by financial difficulties, possibly connected with the abrupt closing. The Bank of Commerce won a judgement against the Great Western Glass Works on June 12, 1888, forcing a sheriff’s sale of the property. The sheriff took control of the land on June 18 and auctioned the property in late July. The Bank of Commerce purchased the land for \$17,000, even though it had originally cost \$40,000 (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 7/25/1888).

On behalf of a Baltimore syndicate (unnamed), Charity E. Warner of Covington, Kentucky, bought the property in late December 1888. The group intended to revive the Great Western plant – although that does not seem to have happened (*St. Louis Post-Dispatch* 12/28/1888). The Anheuser-Busch Brewing Assn. apparently acquired the plant and demolished it in late 1890 to build a new factory. The new plant, part of the Adolphus Busch Glass Mfg. Co. (see that section), was completed at the end of December (*Iron & Machinery World* 1890:12). See the section on Adolphus Busch for more information on Busch firms.

Paola Glass Co., Paola, Kansas (1887)

The *Barton County Democrat* of Great Bend, Kansas, reported on October 20, 1887, that the Great Western Glass Co. had moved its buildings and workers to Paola, Kansas – renaming itself the Paola Glass Co. – a few months earlier to take advantage of gas wells in the town. The move did not go well. The new Paola Glass Co. contracted with the Paola Gas Co. on May 21, 1887, to furnish sufficient gas for the firm to operate a 12-pot furnace, along with lights and other power needs. Leach and de Cordova, respectively the president and secretary of the new

firm, built the new factory, importing workers from St. Louis. The gas company delivered gas beginning October 5, 1887, and the factory produced its first glass on October 11, but the gas flow was insufficient to continue operating the plant, causing a shutdown by December 15. The gas company claimed that it refused to supply the full quantity of gas because it made more money by selling to the nearby city. With no source of income, the firm could not continue. To make matters worse, the investors were unwilling to supply more money to convert the factory to another fuel source – if, indeed, one could be found (*Hutchinson Daily News* 10/15/1887; West Publishing Co. 1896:621-624; Whitten 2015).

The glass company sued the Paola Gas Co. for failure to supply the promised gas to operate the plant. Although the glass house won in district court, the Supreme Court overturned the verdict on April 11, 1896 (West Publishing Co. 1896-621-626; Whitten 2015). The *Wichita Daily Eagle* reported on January 11, 1888, that the Paola Glass Co. had reorganized and made changes to its furnace. However, we have found no evidence that the plant resumed production nor have we found information about the final disposition of the property.

Great Western Glass Co., Bartlesville, Oklahoma (1904-ca. 1910)

The Great Western Glass Co. incorporated in December 1903, with a capital of \$75,000. W.F. Lytle was the president, with D.A. Lytle as secretary; J.J. Campbell as vice president, and William Jarskouw – an experienced glass man – as superintendent and general manager. The firm broke ground for its factory at W. Third Street on December 9. The main buildings were the blow house, finishing shop, and a warehouse. President Lytle predicted that the plant would be open in February 1904. The factory made lamp chimneys, lantern globes, and novelties (*Delphi Carroll County Citizen Times* 12/12/1903; Withers 1967:93).

The company reorganized in 1906 and either built a new plant or renovated the old one (the sources are unclear), reopening in September. On November 25, 1907, the workers refused to take cashiers' checks for their pay, and the plant shut down. However, the factory was back in operation by December 5, only to be placed in the hands of the receiver later that month and closed (*Evening Star* [Independence, Kansas] 11/29/1907; *Stilwell Standard* [Stilwell, Oklahoma] 12/5/1907; Withers 1967:93).

Henry V. Foster joined J.W. Lynch, George Crawford, R.D. Cleary, and others to incorporate the Bartlesville Bottle & Glass Co., on August 17, 1910, with a capital of \$10,000. Lynch was president; the firm manufactured containers and produced the first bottle made in Oklahoma on September 1, 1910. The Thomas Register listed the company at least as late as 1921, but it was not included in our next glass factory directory in 1927 (Corporation Commission 1911:593; Oklahoma Secretary of State 2013; Thomas Publishing Co. 1921:781; Withers 1967:94).

Containers and Marks

GW (ca. 1878-1889)

Herskovitz (1978:8) found a single beer bottle base embossed with a “GW” mark. The base had no accompanying letters or numbers and was found at the second Fort Bowie, occupied from 1868 to 1894. He did not attempt to assign a date or company to the mark. When the Bottle Research Group examined the Fort Bowie collection at the National Park Service Western Archaeological and Conservation Center (NPSWACC) in 2007, we discovered a colorless base with a “GW” mark that was approximately beer-bottle-base size (Figure 2). This was probably the base misidentified by Herskowitz. As far as we can tell, no glass firm with “GW” initials made beer bottles.



Figure 2 – GW base
(NPSWACC)

Aside from the Herskovitz base (see description above), this mark is found in a wide variety of contexts, many reported by collectors in the St. Louis area. For example, David Whitten has an oval ginger or bluing type bottle, and a mustard jar with the mark, both from the vicinity of St. Louis. The mark is embossed horizontally across the center of each bottle base. Preble (2002:662, 699) illustrated four examples of the mark on Colorado drug store bottles. The combined date range was 1879-1886. We recorded two “GW” marks on colorless drug store bottles in the Tucson Urban Renewal collection (Tucson, Arizona). One was from the Elite Pharmacy, Deming, New Mexico.

All of these examples were made of colorless glass, and all were medicinal or household bottles or flasks the typical type of containers produced by the Great Western Glass Works of St. Louis – although the plant also produced some cobalt blue containers (Figure 3). Added to the match with the initials and the prevalence of bases with the logo in the St. Louis area, there is virtually no doubt that the Great Western Glass Works was the user of the mark. The only other two U.S. firms with the right initials made other products and/or were a bit late to have produced bottles with the GW logos. The Ottawa plant made plate glass in one case, and both began in the early 20th century. There is no evidence that the British Great Western exported any containers to the U.S.

In addition, we found several complete colorless medicine bottles and flasks in the Fort Riley hospital collection (Lockhart et al. 2012). The marks on these are worth some discussion. We included a study of the “G” in “BGCo” in the Belleville Glass Co. section, and part of that is worth repeating here. The important finding was that one of the “G” formats was datable. The capital “G” as embossed on glass bottle bases typically was engraved in several styles, all based on the serif: 1) serif extending right; 2) serif extending left; 3) serif extending to both sides; 4) an upright post with no serif; and 5) serif or “tail” in the shape of a hook or reversed comma, extending downward. The first of these – serif extending to the right – was fairly common during the ca. 1876-1880 period but was infrequently used later – and very rare after ca. 1878.



Figure 4 – Serif & post G
(Tucson Urban Renewal collection)

The most common format in the “GW” logos had the serif extending to the left, occasionally with a post extending downward (Figures 4 & 5). It was not unusual for serifs to extend both directions. A single example from Fort Riley, however, had the serif extending to the right – suggesting a manufacture prior to 1880 (Figure 6).



Figure 5 – Left-serif G (David Whitten



Figure 3 – Cobalt blue
(Brandon Smith)

Admittedly, our sample is small – 21 examples – but the distribution suggests that the mark was used predominantly after the reorganization of 1878. It seems likely that the firm adopted the logo as part of that restructuring.

A second important characteristic of the “GW” logo was the shape of the “G.” A typical “G” found embossed on glass – regardless of the serif format – was narrow or oval in configuration. The “G” in “GW” – however – was rounded or circular in shape. The letter is thus quite diagnostic.

Charles H. Warner Patent

A member of Antique Bottles.net reported a colorless flask embossed on the base with “G / JAN 16 1883 / W.” Charles H. Warner received Design Patent No. 13,526 for a “Design for a Glass Flask” on January 16, 1883 (Figure 7). He assigned the patent to the Great Western Glass Works. Warner was probably not related to Charity E. Warner, who purchased the Great Western property in 1888 (see above).

Gottlieb Wurster & Co.

Gottlieb Wurster & Co. was in the bottling business at Chicago, Illinois, from 1869 to 1880. Wurster used amber and aqua porter bottles embossed with his company name on the side and “GW&Co” in a circle on the base. He also used similar amber porter bottles embossed with “G.W.” on the bases (Farnsworth & Walther 2011:457-459). Some of these bottles could be confused with ones made by the Great Western Glass Works, although there is no evidence that Great Western made anything but colorless and cobalt blue glass. In addition, the “G” on the base was tall and thin or oval with a downwardly curved serif – in contrast to the round “G” and bar serifs of the Great Western logo (Figures 8-11).



Figure 6 – Right-serif G (Fort Stanton)

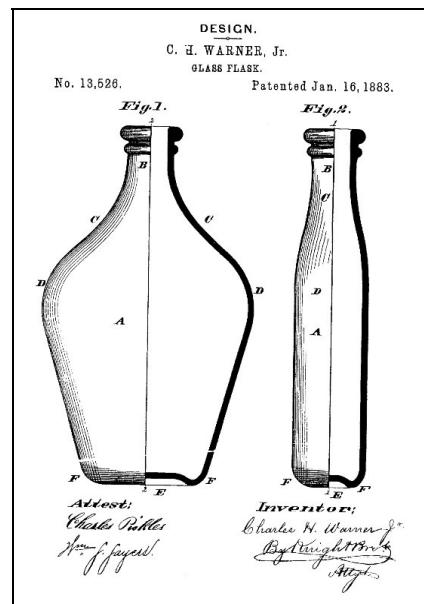


Figure 7 – Warner 1883 Patent

GWGCo (poss. 1874-1878)

An eBay auction showed a medicine-style bottle embossed GWGCo on the base. Those initials almost certainly stand for the Great Western Glass Co., and it was the right kind of bottle. Unfortunately, we did not capture the photo, and we have not found another example. This mark *may* have been used by the first corporation – 1874-1878.

Discussion and Conclusions



Figure 9 – Gottlieb Wurster bottle (Farnsworth & Walthall 2011:458)

Like so many other glass firm histories, this is a story of real promise ending in disaster. The Great Western Glass Works made colorless flasks and medicinal bottles that ended up at least as far away as Fort Union, New Mexico, and Fort Bowie, Arizona. For more than a decade, the business was truly successful. We know that the firm suffered serious fire damage in 1881 and had labor issues in 1886 – but many other glass houses survived similar problems. Also, in 1886, the firm offered to relocate to nearby Alton, Illinois, but Alton apparently refused to meet the firm's terms. The plant closed its doors that year and failed to meet its debts, resulting in a sheriff's sale of the property.



Figure 10 – Gottlieb Wurster base (Urban Remains)

Undeterred, the corporation moved the equipment to Paola, Kansas, reorganized as the Paola Glass Co., and built a new plant in 1887. When the local gas company reneged on its agreement and failed to supply sufficient gas, the factory closed



Figure 8 – Gottlieb Wurster base (Farnsworth & Walthall 2011:458)



Figure 11 – Gottlieb Wurster bottle (Urban Remains)

again, this time permanently. However, another glass house – the Great Western Glass Co. – opened a few years later (1904) at Bartlesville, Indian Territory. Where Paola was about 150 miles west of St. Louis, Bartlesville was a similar distance southwest of Paola. Although we have found no reason to assume any continuity, the coincidence of the name and location distance gives pause for thought.

Unfortunately, we are missing too many details. What made the labor dispute so desperate that the firm closed shop and left town? What was really behind the gas company's apparently indefensible action in forcing the Paola Glass Co. out of business? Was there a connection between Great Western Glass at St. Louis and Great Western at Bartlesville? It would also help to know more details about the early corporations of both firms.

One pretty certain factor is that the Great Western Glass Works used the "GW" logo on most if not all of its products. However, it would be helpful to know when the use of the mark began. We have speculated that it was first used by the second corporation in 1878, but that is based on logic and font characteristics. We rarely have much more than this to go on, but it would be nice. It seems likely that the medicine bottle embossed "WGCo" on its base was also made by the St. Louis Great Western. We have no evidence that the Bartlesville Great Western – the only other real contender – made containers.

Amber and aqua porter bottle bases used by Gottlieb Wurster & Co. of Chicago have the potential to mislead archaeologists. Some of the Wurster bottles were embossed "GW" on the bases – the same mark used by Great Western. Two characteristics should alleviate the confusion. First, there is no evidence or reason to speculate that Great Western ever made amber or aqua glass. Second, the "G" in "GW" on the Wurster bottle is thin or oval rather than the rounded "G" used by Great Western.

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