Keystone Mason Jars, Part II
Mason Fruit Jar Co. and Keystone Users

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In his lifetime, John Landis Mason received or was assigned 40 patents, including the most famous fruit jar patent of all time – for what came to be called the Mason Jar – on November 30, 1858. Roller (2011:638) admitted that Mason’s “history is not well known or recorded,” so our information on his life and dealings is limited. The Mason Mfg. Co. produced a number of jars, some with the word “KEYSTONE” or a keystone symbol embossed on the sides, but other jars – not directly connected with Mason – were also embossed with either the symbol or the word. This study attempts to unravel at least some of the identities involved. Part II addresses the firms that were not directly connected with John L. Mason.

Histories

This study primarily focuses on two glass houses, both called the Mason Fruit Jar Co. The earlier one was at Philadelphia, while the latter plant was in Coffeyville, Kansas. The two factories were apparently unrelated.

Mason Fruit Jar Co., Philadelphia (1855-ca. 1905)

As we noted in the section on A.R. Samuel, his factory was called the Keystone Glass Works, and his sons continued to operate the plant after his death until at least 1878. By 1883, a firm called Grange & Co. ran the Keystone Glass Works at Frankfort Ave. near Melrose at Philadelphia – a different location from the Samuel plant but still in the same city. The Philadelphia city directory reported both Grange & Co. and the Mason Fruit Jar Co. at the Frankfort location in 1885, so it is almost certain that the Mason Fruit Jar Co. arose from the Grange & Co. firm (Roller 1998). Thus, the Mason Fruit Jar Co. probably grew out of the A.R. Samuel firm, explaining the keystone logos on many of its jars. Toulouse (1971:344) recognized that the firm began in 1885, just as the 13-year extension to the early Mason patents expired (see the section on the Mason Mfg. Co. in Part I).
The November 3, 1888, issue of Commoner & Glassworker noted that Charles, William, and John Grange were the principals of the Mason Fruit Jar Co. and that they made “a specialty of fruit jars. They make all of the trimmings and turn the jars out complete. They also make oil cans and fit them out with their jackets ready for the market.” By the following year, the plant used two five-pot furnaces to make “Mason Porcelain-Lined and Mason Improved Fruit Jars and Fruit Jar Trimmings; also the new Home Oil Can,” and the firm was in the process of expanding its product line to include all kinds of green and amber bottles (Roller 1998).

The company had incorporated by 1890, with William Grange as the president, John W. Grange as vice president, and Charles E. Grange as secretary and treasurer. By 1892, the plant had added a third furnace with a two-pot capacity. By November of 1897, however, Commoner & Glassworker reported that the plant had “not made a jar or lid this last three years, and there is no sign of a start” (Roller 1998). This may have been a result of the 1894 Act that allowed foreign glass to be imported into the U.S. at a reduced tariff. The glass industry was hard hit.

The downturn was apparently not permanent. The firm purchased a lot in January 1900 with the intention of expanding the operation. The last listing that Roller found, however, was in 1901 (Roller 1998). John Grange died in 1905, and first of the Thomas Registers listed the plant that year (Thomas Publishing Co. 1905:1046). Parker (n.d.) claimed that the “company closed in 1907 and another ‘Mason Fruit Jar Co.’ was set up in Coffeyville Kansas,” implying a relationship between the two that probably did not exist.

Containers and Marks

Flat-topped Keystone Logos

We have discovered three major variations of jars with the flat-topped, uncircled keystone logos. These were notably different from the keystone logos with rounded tops that we discussed in Part I. See Part I for a discussion of the those jars.

{keystone} / MASON / FRUIT JAR

Roller (1983:213;2011:323) illustrated a jar similar to the one discussed just above, only embossed “{keystone} / MASON / FRUIT JAR” on the face. He also suggested the Mason Fruit
Jar Co. as the probable manufacturer and ca. 1890s as the date. Creswick (1987a:118) illustrated the jar, agreeing on the manufacturer, but dated it 1880-1900 (Figure 1).

This may have been the earliest jar made by the Mason Fruit Jar Co., using the Mason shoulder seal patented in 1858. The use of the term “Mason Fruit Jar” may have been an attempt to avoid any possible patent infringement issues with the Consolidated Fruit Jar Co. Although the original patents expired in 1884, the new firm may still have been nervous.

{keystone} / MASON / FRUIT JAR / PATENT / NOV 30\textsuperscript{TH} / 1858

Toulouse (1969:200-201) illustrated a mouth-blown, shoulder-seal Mason jar embossed “{keystone} / MASON / FRUIT JAR / PATENT / NOV 30\textsuperscript{TH} / 1858 (all horizontal)” on the side (Figure 2). He noted the Mason Fruit Jar Co. as the producer and dated the jar ca. 1885-1900, citing a variation with “the maker’s name repeated on the bottom of the jar.” Roller (1983:213; 2011:323) noted the same jar but inserted the word “probably” in his identification of the Mason Fruit Jar Co. as the maker and ca. 1890s as the date. Creswick (1987a:118) illustrated the jar, agreeing on the manufacturer, but dated it 1880-1900 (see Figure 1). This may have been the second jar made by the firm, adding the patent date to the older molds with the term “Fruit Jar.”

MASON’S / {keystone} / PATENT / NOV 30\textsuperscript{TH} / 1858

Toulouse (1969:207, 212) illustrated and discussed a mouth-blown, shoulder-seal jar embossed “MASON’S (slight arch) / {circled keystone}/ PATENT / NOV 30\textsuperscript{TH} / 1858 (all horizontal)” on one side (Figure 3). He dated the jar ca. 1885-1900 and identified the Mason Fruit Jar Co. as the manufacturer. He also showed a “moldmaker’s error” that lacked the apostrophe “S” – making the first word “MASON.” Roller (1983:233-234) agreed with the Mason Fruit Jar Co. identification and illustrated a drawing of the jar from a March 14, 1889, ad.
He added three lids used on the jars and illustrated the center parts of two of them (see Figure 4):

1. TRADEMARK
   BOYD’S PORCELAIN
   LINED PATD JULY
   18.71. MAR 30.69
   REISSUED OCT. 25.81 around MFJCO monogram in center stamped into top (see Figure 4)

2. MASON FRUIT JAR CO (arch) / PHILAD’A PA (inverted arch) around a keystone figure surrounded by sunburst stamped into top (Figure 5)

3. MASON FRUIT JAR CO (arch) / PHILAD’A (inverted arch) stamped into top (see Figure 5)

4. North American Glass photographed a fourth variation: MASON FRUIT JAR CO. / PHILADA. PA. (inverted arch) around a keystone figure with no sunburst (see Figure 5)

Creswick (1987a:133, 144) illustrated several of the jars and identified the Mason Fruit Jar Co. as the maker, 1885-1900 (Figure 6). She also included the jars with the circled keystone. The actual keystone symbols varied considerably in their actual shapes, especially width. This almost certainly reflected the skills of each engraver. Except for the keystone, this was now an exact copy of the earlier Consolidated Fruit Jar Co. containers.
The Roller update (2011:345) listed this variation.

Roller (1983:164; 2011:278) discussed a jar embossed only with a keystone symbol above “IMPROVED” on one side (Figure 7). He noted that the maker was unknown but was possibly the Mason Fruit Jar Co., ca. 1880s-1890s. Creswick (1987a:89) illustrated the jar and agreed with the Mason Fruit Jar Co. as the maker ca. 1885-1890. On the same page, Creswick illustrated two other jars only embossed “IMPROVED” with the word in a position that similar to the one with the keystone logo (Figure 8). She noted only that these jars had been found both in the U.S. and Canada, but she had no clue as to the manufacturer. Could these also have been made by the Mason Fruit Jar Co.?
These jars could have been made as early as 1887 but likely not before. Prior to 1995, the term of a patent extended for 20 years from first application or 17 years from date of issue, whichever is longest. Thus, Mason’s 1870 patent would have expired ca. 1887, and that was about the time that the Consolidated Fruit Jar Co. ceased the production of Mason jars. This jar with the simpler embossing may have been the Mason Fruit Jar Company’s earlier Improved jar.

**MASON’S / {keystone} / IMPROVED**

Roller (1983:222; 2011:338) listed a jar embossed “MASON’S / {keystone} / IMPROVED” along with a glass lid embossed “MASON FRUIT JAR CO. PHILADA.” around a keystone. The editors suggested the Mason Fruit Jar Co., ca. 1885-1900 (Figures 9 & 10).

**“MASON’S”**

Toulouse (1969:198-199; 202-203) discussed a jar embossed “THE / ‘MASON’S’ (slight arch, quotation marks) / IMPROVED (slight inverted arch)” and the Mason Disk Protector Cap, claiming they were made by the Mason Fruit Jar Co. ca. 1885-1900. Roller (1983:217), however, presented evidence connecting the Mason’s Disk Immerser to the Bellaire Stamping Co., the Missouri Glass Co., and the Hazel-Atlas Glass Co. This evidence suggests that the jars and Mason Disk Immerers were probably not provided by the Mason Fruit Jar Co. We discussed the Bellaire Stamping Co. briefly in the Other B section, and the Hazel-Atlas Glass Co. in its own section. See the section on the Missouri Glass Co. for more on the Mason Disk Immerser.

**Mason Fruit Jar Co., Coffeyville, Kansas (1907-1909)**

Although construction began in 1906, the Mason Fruit Jar Co. opened at Coffeyville, Kansas, in 1907, probably about April. The April 7, 1907, issue of the *Coffeyville Daily Journal* noted that the firm was “known throughout the length of this country, having been in business for many years in Indiana before coming to Coffeyville.” M.A.E. Patten was the president of the
firm with A.S. Knisely as vise president, George N. Upham as secretary, E.S. Rea as treasurer, and Charles W. Henderson as manager. The corporation had a capital of $100,000 (Coffeyville Daily Journal 4/7/1907; Martin 1910:209).

Both Henderson and George Doyle, the factory superintendent, had been long-term employees of the Marion Fruit Jar & Bottle Co., Marion, Indiana, before coming to Coffeyville to start the new plant, and the Coffeyville factory was apparently a branch the Marion firm. The plant had a capacity for 1,700 gross of fruit jars per day, made on six machines – although the sources failed to address the type of machinery. The target market was west of the Mississippi. The Ball Brothers purchased the factory in 1909 and closed it in 1912 (Coffeyville Daily Journal 4/7/1907; Martin 1910:209; Roller 1983:212)

Containers and Marks

THE Mason

Toulouse (1969:197) illustrated and discussed a shoulder-seal jar embossed “THE Mason” on the front – “Mason” in cursive underlined by a “tail” extending back from the letter “n” to a point below the letter “a” and “THE” in a fancy curl at the front of the “M” (Figures 11 & 12). He dated the jar ca. 1910 and added that the maker was unknown “but believed to be a company bought by Ball Bros. Co. about that time, as the same jar appears with “ball” added above.” Roller (1983:212; 2011:321) discussed the jar, dating it ca. 1906-1909, and adding that it was sold by Parott & Co. at Los Angeles in 1907 and by Ben Schloss Crockery at San Francisco in 1909. He illustrated a letterhead from the Mason Fruit Jar Co., Coffeyville, (ca. 1909) with a drawing of THE Mason jar. Creswick (1987a:116) dated the jar 1907-1909 and agreed with the manufacturer (Figure 13).
Related Ball Jars

Toulouse (1969:32) discussed a shoulder-seal jar embossed “Ball” above “THE Mason” on the side. He dated the jar ca. 1900-1910 and, of course, noted the Ball Brothers as the manufacturer. He suggested that “there is some indication that the word ‘Ball’ was added by another workman, perhaps Ball Brothers acquired this mold from a company that they had purchased, and relettered it.” Roller (1983:42; 2011:72) discussed the jar, adding that Ball added its name after the purchase of the Coffeyville plant in 1909. Creswick (1987b:22) illustrated the jar but added not new information (Figure 14).

Creswick (1987a:11) illustrated a jar embossed “Ball (cursive) / MASON’S (slight arch) / ⟨keystone in a circle⟩ / PATENT / NOV 30TH / 1858 (all horizontal)” on the front – as well as listing a similar jar lacking the circle (Figure 15). She noted that the jar was “unusual inasmuch as the keystone trademark is usually associated with the Mason Fruit Jar Company of Philadelphia. Possibly made from a reworked mold acquired by the Ball Company.” In the only two eBay photos we have found for this jar (with uncircled keystones), the keystones were very indistinct. A photo from North American Glass, however, showed the Mason Patent embossing on the front and “Ball” in cursive on the reverse (Figure 16).
Keystone Jars Made by Other Glass Houses

Other glass houses used the keystone symbol or the word “KEYSTONE” on jars and bottles. For example, many of the Heinz products were embossed with the keystone or had it imprinted on paper labels (see the H.J. Heinz section for more on that firm and its bottles). Another much later example was the Knox Glass Bottle Co., a major firm with numerous factories, mostly scattered across the Midwest and East Coast states. Each Knox glass product was embossed with a keystone logo on the base enclosing a letter (e.g., K, M, S) that identified the producing factory. For more information, see the section on the Knox plants and products.

A.R. Samuel, Keystone Glass Works, Philadelphia (1863-ca. 1878)

As noted above, Adam R. Samuel built the Keystone Glass Works in 1862, and operations began on February 2, 1863. The factory remained open until at least 1878. The plant made a MASON’S IMPROVED jar embossed MANUFACTURED BY A.R. SAMUEL KEYSTONE GLASS WORKS PHILAD. P A, and we presented evidence in the A.R. Samuel section (which see) that the factory was probably an early manufacturer for John Mason. This was almost certainly the same Keystone Glass Works (albeit at a different location operated by the Mason Fruit Jar Co. from ca. 1885 to 1900.

Adams, Macklin & Co., Pittsburgh (1851-1861)

The firm of Adams, Macklin & Co., Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, made jars embossed with the keystone symbol that used two lugs on the neck for a seal ca. 1860 (Roller 1983:180). Adams, Macklin & Co. also made at least one jar simply marked with KEYSTONE in a slight arch. The firm was in business from 1851 to 1861. (Creswick 1987a:94). See the Other A section for a brief discussion of Adams, Macklin & Co. (under Adams & Co.).
Elk Flint Bottle Co., St. Mary’s (1903-1904) and Shinglehouse, PA (1904-ca. 1914)

The Elk Flint Bottle Co. produced a machine-made jar with a Lightning closure embossed “TRADE MARK (slight arch) / KEYSTONE / REGISTERED (both horizontal)” on the front during the 1903-1914 period (Figure 17). Roller (1983:357-358; 2011:515) dated the jar ca. 1910-1912 and illustrated a July 10, 1910, ad from Elk Flint showing the jar — a rock-solid identification. See the Other E section for a more complete discussion of both the firm and the jar. Creswick (1987b:77) illustrated the jar but added no new information (Figure 18).

Keystone Jars from Unknown/Uncertain Glass Houses

Circled Keystones

We have discovered Three distinct configurations of the embossing connected to the circled keystones, all initially illustrated by Toulouse (1969:197, 208) and later noted by others.

{circled keystone} / MASON

Toulouse (1969:197) discovered a jar embossed with a circled keystone symbol above the word “MASON” and dated it ca. 1880-1900, noting that the manufacturer “may be” the Mason Fruit Jar Co. (Figure 19). Roller (1983:212, 236) discussed this variation but noted that “the Mason Fruit Jar Co., of Philadelphia, [used] a keystone figure on their jars c. 1890s, but not a circled one.” Creswick (1987a:118) illustrated the jar with a circled keystone but no patent data (Figure 20). She claimed the Mason Fruit Jar Co. as the maker between 1880 and 1900.
Toulouse (1969:208) illustrated and discussed a mouth-blown, shoulder-seal Mason jar with “{circled keystone} / MASON’S / PATENT / NOV 30TH / 1858 (all horizontal)” embossed on one face and noted that the circled keystone was “quite small” (Figure 21). He did not know the maker but dated the jar ca. 1890-1900. The word “PATENT” was offset to the right rather than being centered like the other words. Roller (1983:231) suggested that the Mason Fruit Jar Co. could be the maker and dated the jar ca. 1885-1900. Creswick (1987a:143-144) illustrated three of the jars – including one with “PATENT” offset to the left – and identified the Mason Fruit Jar Co. as the maker, 1885-1900 (Figure 22). The Roller revision (2011:349) included three slight variations. One had the word “PATENT” back in line (Figure 23).

Toulouse (1969:208) noted a final example embossed “MASON’S (slight arch) / {circled keystone} / PATENT / NOV 30TH / 1858 (all horizontal)” on a shoulder-sealed, mouth-blown Mason jar (Figure 24). This circle was much larger, and he dated the jar ca. 1870-1890. He stated that the producer was “sometimes attributed to the Consolidated Fruit Jar Co., but specific proof is entirely lacking.” Roller (1983:231) suggested the Mason Fruit Jar Co. as the probable
producer. Creswick (1987:144) illustrated the jar, but she attributed them to the Mason Fruit Jar Co., 1885-1900 (Figure 25).

These circles appear to be intentionally embossed rather than the accidental result of round plates. Creswick (1987:145) illustrated a Mason jar with a similar plate mold that had no embossing, but it was probably unrelated.

We noted in the A.R. Samuel section that the origin of the keystones encircled by a ring was in debate. The sources variously attributed their manufacture to the Marion Fruit Jar & Bottle Co., the Mason Fruit Jar Co., and the Consolidated Fruit Jar Co. The consensus, however, was that the jars were made during the ca. 1880-1900 period. Toulouse (1969:346) noted that at one time there were “forty or fifty factories . . . making ‘Mason’ jars,” so this mystery may never be solved.

Discussion and Conclusions

The histories of both Mason Fruit Jar firms are reasonably complete, but our presentation of the jars requires some explanation. One of the difficulties we face in approaching bottle research from a company perspective is that the glass house products have rarely been researched in this manner previously. The major sources – Toulouse (1969), Roller (1983; 2011), and Creswick (1987), researched the jars in a context separate from the glass houses that produced them. We have attempted to merge the two contexts to create a more complete picture of the processes and motivations involved along with a more comprehensive dating scheme.
In this case, that means looking at why the jars were made and creating possible sequences for their production. The reason for the formation of the earlier Mason Fruit Jar firm is obvious – to take advantage of the lucrative market for Mason jars that had just opened up with the expiration of the renewed 1858 patents. The choice of both very popular jar styles – shoulder seal and improved top seal – is equally obvious.

The reason for the embossing is less certain. As noted above, the use of the keystone probably referenced the Keystone Glass Co., originally owned by A.R. Samuel along with the obvious connection to Pennsylvania, the Keystone State. The use of the specific embossed terms, especially Mason Fruit Jar, are less obvious. Again, as mentioned above, the Mason Fruit Jar Co. may initially have been hesitant to copy the exact name – Mason Patent Nov 30th 1858 – as it was used during the patent-protected period. Assuming that this hypothesis is correct, we can posit a logical progression for the embossed labels on the shoulder-seal jars:

{keystone} / MASON / FRUIT JAR
{keystone} / MASON / FRUIT JAR / PATENT / NOV 30TH / 1858
MASON / {keystone} / PATENT / NOV 30TH / 1858

This may express an increasing confidence that the terminology as well as the patented jars were now fair game for competitive manufacture. Using the same logic, {keystone} / IMPROVED would have been used prior to MASON’S / {keystone} / IMPROVED.

It also seems logical that the Marion Fruit Jar Co. adopted the Mason Fruit Jar Co. name for its Coffeyville factory to take advantage of the then-available name of its successful – but now defunct – competitor. We have no explanation for the new embossing with “THE” in the curl of the “M” on “Mason.” However, the use of the old molds by the Ball Brothers when they purchased the plant was in keeping with Ball’s policy of taking advantage of still useable molds when it acquired other plants.

The Ball embossing on jars with both keystone and circled keystone jars is less obvious, but the explanation is probably simple. The Ball Brothers likely purchased the molds when the older Mason Fruit Jar Co. ceased operations. There seems to be no other logical path. Again, this would fit the Ball modus operandi.
The final detail to wrap up concerns the circled keystone logos. All currently known keystones attached to the Mason Fruit Jar Co. name were used without circles. If the circled logos belonged to this firm, the obvious question would be – Why would they add the circles to some jars and not others? An easier question is – Why would a competitor use the circled keystone? The answer to that is to take advantage of a successful logo.

The big question, of course, revolves around which firm would have used such a copycat strategy. And why have past researchers failed to find advertisements? Unfortunately, this line of inquiry breeds more questions than it does answers. After the lifting of the patents in 1885, many firms added Mason jars to their inventories while adding their own names and logos. Since the jars with circled keystones appear to be pretty common, we also need to seek a glass house that was successful.

Both the {keystone}/ MASON and {keystone}/ MASON / PATENT / NOV 30\textsuperscript{31}/ 1858 jars have the logo placed high on the curvature leading to the shoulder – as if the circled keystone had been added to the molds. Following this idea further, these two jars, made from altered molds, would logically have come before the jars with the circled keystones between the words “MASON’S” and “PATENT.” However, these meanderings do not seem to lead to any testable hypotheses, so we must leave the questions and speculations to future researchers.

**Acknowledgments**

We wish to thank Greg Spurgeon for allowing us to use the photos from North American Glass and Doug Leybourne for letting us reproduce the Alice Creswick drawings. As always, gratitude to Wanda Wakkinen for proofreading.

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Last updated 10/10/2017