

## **The Sterling and Sneath Glass Companies**

Bill Lockhart, Beau Schriever, Bill Lindsey, and Carol Serr

Although there were probably other glass houses that bore the Sterling name, we have only found two with any evidence of logo use on glass products. One of those used the “£” logo on insulators, and another embossed a Circle-S mark on its products. Three other glass houses used the Circle-S logo: the Southern Glass Co., the Swindell Brothers, and the Sneath Glass Co. The first two companies have their own sections, but Sneath Glass is dealt with in this study.

### **Histories**

#### **Sterling Glass Co., Elmer, New Jersey (1902-1903)**

The Sterling Glass Co. – with Ellison Elmer, Newton Elmer, and Frank Bigson as principals – incorporated in April of 1902 to make insulators at the former Elmer Glass Co. The firm began production of pressed ware on May 31 – one of three corporations making glass at the old Elmer Glass Works: Sterling Glass Co., New Jersey Metal Co. (Mason jar lids), and the Gilchrest Improved Jar Co. (Gilchrest jar lids). By October, however, Sterling was forced to shut down its furnace due to lack of coal. The Harloe Insulator Co. took over Sterling’s business in August of 1903. There is no record that Sterling manufactured any containers (Klingensmith 1990:124-125; NIA.org n.d.; Roller 1998). Also see the section on the Perfection Glass Co. for a discussion a *different* Sterling Glass Co., making tableware.

#### **Containers and Marks**

##### **STERLING £**

The Sterling Glass Co., Elmer, New Jersey, used the “£” mark on three types of insulators from May to October of 1902 (Klingensmith 1990:124-125). Some insulators were only marked with the “£” symbol, while others carried both th “£” and the word “STERLING” (Figures 1 & 2). We have found no evidence that the plant made bottles or other containers.

The Libbey Glass Co. used a cursive “L” logo that was very similar to the “£” symbol on tumblers of various kinds (Figure 3). Although Peterson (1968:49) noted that the Circle-L logo was used on tableware and glass kitchenware beginning



Figure 2 – Sterling (Etsy)

in 1955, and Toulouse (1971:327) illustrated the Libbey L as being used in a circle, all examples we have seen had the cursive “L” embossed in the center of the base of tumblers with no circle. Whitten (2019) also noted the lack of the circle. The logo was used until at least the early 1970s. See the Other L section for more on Libbey and the firm’s glass marks.



Figure 1 – £ (Etsy & Pinterest)

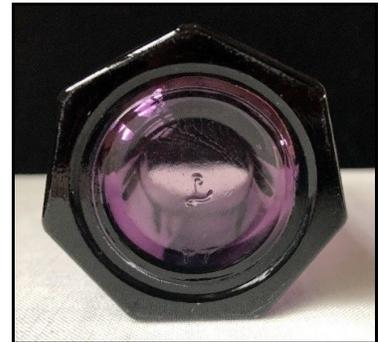


Figure 3 – Libbey L (eBay)

### **Sterling Glass Company, Lapel, Indiana (1914-1950)**

Arthur Woodward, Wade Busby, D.E. Conrad, T.J. Stephenson, George Lennes, Marion Simmermon, Charles A. Bird, Charles Wachstetter, Oliver P. Wise, Willard Conrad, Charles Whetsel, John A. Fisher, and A.J. Shetterly incorporated the Sterling Glass Co., Lapel, Indiana, in November 1914. The plant initially made bottles by hand at a single tank. By 1915, Busby was president with Woodward as secretary and manager. In 1918, the company initiated “a line of prescription ware, namely the card ovals” and adopted a semiautomatic machine to make its bottles (*Glassworker* 1918:12; Roller 1994:55; Toulouse 1971:451).

The Thompson-Taylor Co., Chicago, bought the plant in November 1922 but continued to operate it under the old name. John D. Warfield was president with George E. Hurd as vice president, Thomas W. Algeo as secretary and treasurer, and Arthur Woodward as plant manager. The group revamped the factory and equipped it with Lynch LA machines and Miller feeders to make extract bottles, castor oil flasks, sauce, vinegar, and medicine bottles, polish bottles, and similar narrow-neck ware in 1923 (Roller 1994:55).

In 1924, the factory made “flint prescription, patent and proprietary ware, beverage and soft drink bottles” by machine at one continuous tank, and Woodward sold his shares to George Terwilliger in 1928 – then Terwilliger assumed the role of plant manager. On January 1, 1929, the firm reorganized as the Sterling Glass Division of the Warfield Co. Until 1940, however, the company was listed in directories under either name (Roller 1994:55).

The product list was amended to include “flint fruit jars, packers and preservers’ ware, private mold work” in 1933 (Figure 4). Terwilliger died in 1935, and W.H. Avery became the general manager with J.J. Matthews as plant manager. The firm invested \$75,000 in plant improvements in 1938. By 1940, John D. Warfield was chairman and treasurer with John D. Warfield, Jr., as president, William H. Avery as vice president, and William J. Matthews as factory superintendent. In 1943, the listing noted that the plant used four machines (*American Glass Review* 1930:96; 1933:71; 1943:107; Roller 1994:55; Toulouse 1971:451). The *Milwaukee Sentinel* announced on June 1, 1950, that the Brockway Glass Co. had purchased the idle Sterling factory.

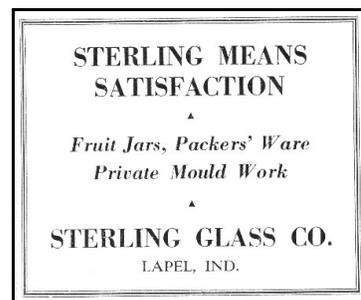


Figure 4 – Sterling ad (*American Glass Review* 1934:107)

## Containers and Marks

### S in a Circle

Scholes (1941:129) showed this mark as being used by both the Swindell Brothers and the Sterling Glass Co. in 1940. Unfortunately, he assumed everyone would know *which* Sterling he intended. The Circle-S mark was also used briefly by the Southern Glass Co., Vernon, California, but only on mouth-blown soda bottles. See that section for more information.

Toulouse (1971:450-451, 452-454) noted the Circle S trademark as being used by the Sterling Glass Co. at Lapel from 1914 to 1951 and by the Swindell Brothers, Baltimore, Maryland, from ca. 1920 to 1959. The lists of items we have found included fruit jars, packers’ and preservers’ ware, prescription and medicinal bottles, soda bottles, and household bottles. Most of these were typically generic items that would only have been identified by the manufacturer’s mark on the bases – although Sterling certainly also made private mold items that were either marked with the name of the customer or had special designs.

Many of these types of product jars and household items have rarely been collected by anyone and have thus been unlikely to appear in any of the sources where we typically to find examples. Any generic jar or bottle marked with a Circle-S logo could have made by Sterling Glass between 1914 and 1951, either machine made or mouth blown. A small, generic oil bottle was embossed with the Circle-S basemark and a sideways “5” (Figure 5). Unfortunately, this could have been made by either Sterling Glass or the Swindell Brothers. Also see the Letter S section for a discussion and comparison of all the Circle-S logos.



Figure 5 – Circle-S

### **Sneath Glass Co., Tiffin, Ohio (1892-1894)**

In 1889, the Tiffin Glass Co. built a factory at Tiffin, Ohio. The Sneath Glass Co. – with Samuel B. Sneath, Ralph D. Sneath, and John. W. Geige at the helm – purchased the plant on January 22, 1892, beginning the production of lantern globes and tumblers in February. The plant had a single furnace with twelve pots, located in a two-story brick building. A fire destroyed the factory on March 15, 1894, and the newspaper estimated the loss at \$50,000, only about half of which was covered by insurance. Rather than rebuilding at Tiffin, the firm relocated to Hartford City, Indiana (*Saginaw News* 3/15/1894; Wikipedia 2019).

### **Sneath Glass Co., Hartford City, Indiana (1894-1952)**

Hartford City, Indiana, enticed the Sneaths to rebuild there with a free location and natural gas in 1894. Although the firm had been privately owned previously, it incorporated on December 24, 1894, with a capital of \$30,000. The plant began making glass in September with Ralph D. Sneath as president, John. W. Geiger as treasurer, Alvie C. Crimmel as secretary, and Henry Crimmel as plant manager. While Sneath and Geiger were businessmen, the Crimmels had the glassmaking experience – 25 years in Henry’s case. The plant initially made kerosene lantern globes and fonts in green, blue, and ruby colors (*Indianapolis Journal* 12/25/1894; Wikipedia 2019).

Even though the plant was nonunion, 50 mold boys went on strike in February of 1900. Since there was a “scarcity of boy helpers” in the flint trade, the boys could not be easily replaced. The firm reached a settlement, and the boys returned to work on March 2. Inspired by the success of the boys, 30 blowers struck on March 12. The workers refused a compromise offered by the management, and many of them left for other employment. Sneath hired new help by at least October 1901 (*Indianapolis Journal* 2/13/1900; 3/12/1900; 3/21/1900; 5/22/1900; 10/29/1901; *Marshall County Independent* 3/2/1900). In an odd aside, Clyde Crimmel was arrested for gas waste on November 20, 1901. He agreed to cap the burning well. Sneath Glass had its own gas field. Waste complaints continued into January of 1902 (*Indianapolis Journal* 11/22/1901; 1/1/1902).

Sneath Glass moved to the Jones factory of the the American Window Glass Co. in 1905, renovating the plant and abandoning its former location. When incandescent light bulbs began to replace oil lamps during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the railroads – major customers for ruby lantern globes – virtually stopped expanding, Sneath began diversifying its product line to include fruit jars and kitchenware by 1908 (Wikipedia 2019). On September 7, 1908, the *Bridgeton Evening News* announced that Sneath was “installing a blowing machine for the manufacture of lantern globes” – apparently the plant’s first semiautomatic machine.

One line of jars was made specifically to fit into Hoosier Cabinets (installed in kitchens), made by the Hoosier Mfg. Co. These spice jars, coffee and tea jars, and salt and sugar bins had continuous-thread finishes and embossed vertical ribs to provide secure grips. At that point in history, construction firms rarely installed cabinets in homes, so homeowners often purchased the prefabricated Hoosier Cabinets as an aftermarket addition (Wikipedia 2019). At some point, probably early 1911, Sneath increased its capital fro \$100,000 to \$200,000 (*Bridgeton Evening News* 3/13/1911).

In 1916, Henry Crimmel had a stroke, dying the following year, preceded in death by two other founders a year earlier. Henry’s son, Alva Clyde Crimmel (known as Alvie or Clyde) – formerly the firm’s secretary – became vice president and treasurer by 1920. Henry H. Crimmel, Clyde’s eldest son, joined the management team in 1918. During World War I, the firm produced red, green, and white masthead lights for the U.S. Navy. An unusual product, introduced in 1921, was a glass mailbox, enabling the householder to see if he or she had mail without opening the box (Wikipedia 2019).

Ralph D. Sneath was president in 1930, with Alvie Clyde Crimmel as vice president, Henry H. Crimmel as treasurer and general manager, Harry C. Hill as secretary and sales manager, and Ray Pruden as factory manager. The firm added refrigeration products, with several new patents between 1933 and 1941, gradually reducing its dependency on cabinet ware. During the early 1930s, architects began designing houses with built-in kitchen cabinets, so the jars made to fit the Hoosier and other specialized cabinets lost popularity. Ralph Sneath – the last of the founders – died in 1940 (Wikipedia 2019).

During World War II, the firm again made military items – this time water-tight search light globes – plus additional civilian goods, such as irons, skillets, and kitchen sinks made of glass. Refrigeration items, however, still made up the bulk of the products. The development of the plastics industry heralded the demise of Sneath Glass. The company lost market value for two reasons. First, it failed to adopt plastics, maintaining only a line of glass products. Second, since the firm made goods for other companies – and no longer marked its products – it had no brand recognition with the American public. When the union workers struck for higher wages in 1952 – the only strike in the history of the company – Sneath was unable to meet their demands. The firm was already operating at a loss, so A.C. Crimmel and the other officers closed the plant permanently. The Indiana Glass Co. (Dunkirk, Indiana) purchased the factory a year later (Wikipedia 2019).

## Containers and Marks

### Circle-S (ca. 1908-ca. 1940)

The Sneath Glass Co. Embossed the Circle-S logo on the Hoosier Cabinet items (spice jars, etc.), so the mark was almost certainly used between ca. 1908 and ca. 1940 (Figures 6-8). Also see the Letter S section for a discussion and comparison of all the Circle-S logos. Wikipedia (2019) explained the cancelling of the logo along with an unintended consequence:



Figure 6 – Hoosier Cabinet (Wikipedia 2019)

The “S” was eliminated to save mold-cleaning time. When the molds for the glassware became unclean, they would need to be scrubbed. In addition to the time spent scrubbing, the “S” on the mold would, in effect, eventually be polished off the mold—making replacement necessary. By not using the “S” mark, scrubbing time was eliminated, and molds would last longer. The problem with this cost-saving change was that it did not promote the Sneath brand. Sneath products lost their brand recognition, became difficult to identify, and competitors could make similar products that customers could not differentiate from Sneath’s.



Figure 7 – Hoosier Spice jar (Mary Wienstein)

## Discussion and Conclusions

Our overall look at the Circle-S logos – Southern Glass Co., Swindell Brothers, Letter S, and this section – provides the first serious study and comprehensive look at this family of manufacturer’s marks on glass products. See the Letter S section for an overview of all the Circle-S logos, the firms that used them, the types of containers, and the probable date ranges.



Figure 8 – Spice jar base (Mary Wienstein)

The trickiest identification is between some of the products made by Sterling Glass (Lapel, Indiana) and the Swindell Brothers. Although the Swindells certainly made the liquor and toiletry bottles and almost certainly produced the straight-sided Coca-Cola bottles, virtually all generic household, prescription, or other bottles and product jars could have been made by either glass house. However, the dating is similar in both cases: 1914-1952 for the Sterling Glass Co. and ca. 1900-1951 for the Swindell Brothers.

The other Sterling Glass Co. in this study, Sterling Glass at Elmer, New Jersey, only produced insulators for a short period of time – 1902-1903 – marked with the “£” symbol and/or the word “STERLING.” The “£” logo could easily be confused with the cursive “L” mark used by the Libbey Glass Co., although Libbey made tableware rather than insulators.

## Acknowledgments

We wish to thank Wanda Wakkinen for proofreading these works.

## Sources

### *American Glass Review*

1930 “Glass Factory Yearbook and Directory.” *American Glass Review*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

1933 “Glass Factory Yearbook and Directory.” *American Glass Review*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

1943 “Glass Factory Yearbook and Directory.” *American Glass Review*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

### *Glassworker*

1918 “Gas Producers and New Automatic Machinery.” *Glassworker* 37(2):1, 12-13.

1919 “Hamilton Bottle Factory will not be Rebuilt Now.” *Glassworker* 37(28):15.

### Klingensmith, Ray

1990 “Glass Factories of Elmer, New Jersey.” In *A History and Guide to North American Glass Pintype Insulators*. by John & Carol McDougald. Volume 1, pp. 120-125. The McDougalds, St. Charles, Ill.

### NIA.org

n.d. “Insulator Historical Timeline! 1900-1909.” <https://www.nia.org/timeline/1900.htm>

### Peterson, Arthur G.

1968 *400 Trademarks on Glass*. Washington College Press, Takoma, Maryland.

Roller, Dick

1994 *Indiana Glass Factories Notes*. Acorn Press, Paris, Illinois.

1998 “Elmer NJ History Notes.” Dick Roller files.

Scholes, Samuel R.

1941 *Handbook of the Glass Industry*. Ogden-Watney, New York.

Toulouse, Julian Harrison

1971 *Bottle Makers and Their Marks*. Thomas Nelson, New York.

Wikipedia

2019 “Sneath Glass Company.” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sneath\\_Glass\\_Company](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sneath_Glass_Company)

Whitten, David

2019 “Glass Manufacturers’ Marks on Bottles & Other Glassware.”

<http://www.glassbottlemarks.com/bottlemarks/>

Last updated 4/25/2019

