

Universal Glass Products Co.

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Beginning briefly as the Brown Tumbler Co. at Parkersburg, West Virginia, in 1919, the firm changed its name to the Universal Glass Products Co. the same year. Initially, the two Parkersburg factories made a variety of containers, but they soon settled in to milk bottles as the primary product – then the only one. The National Bottle Corp. bought the company in 1960 but continued it under the Universal name and finally closed ca. 1979 – possibly later.

Histories

Brown Tumbler Co., Parkersburg, West Virginia (1919)

Universal Glass Products Co., Parkersburg, West Virginia (1919-1979)

On March 16, 1919, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* reported that the Brown Tumbler Co. was building “a glass working plant at Parkersburg and will install machinery at a cost of \$18,000.” The firm changed its name to the Universal Glass Products Co. when it incorporated on February 20, 1919. F.W. Milligan was the president, with F.J. Glass as vice president, Robert S. Davis as treasurer, and C.J. O’Connor as secretary (*Bizstanding* 2018; *Glass Industry* 1921:51; *Pottery, Glass & Brass Salesman* 1921:29; Roller 1997). The firm apparently had two plants in Parkersburg.

By 1927, the plant produced “milk jars only” (*American Glass Review* 1927:146). On June 28, 1928, the *National Labor Tribune* announced that Universal Glass “manufacturer of machine-made bottles, etc.,” had approved plans for a \$160,000 addition. A 1929 ad in *The Milk Dealer* showed that the plant made cottage cheese jars as well as milk bottles of all sizes, showing a picture of an ejection mark on a bottle base, a confirmation of machine production. The company added “and private mould work” in 1929 and three continuous tanks by 1932 – down to two in 1937. The listing remained the same until 1943; however, in 1944, the company noted that the two tanks had five rings (*American Glass Review* 1927:146; 1929:105; 1937:92; 1944:108; Toulouse 1971:515).

By 1930, Davis had ascended to the presidential position with Glass as secretary, later moving to vice president, but Alice Davis Oates (probably a daughter of R.S. Davis) was vice president in 1937, advancing to the presidency in 1952, probably upon the death of R.S. Davis. She held that position until the sale of the company. During the late 1950s, the firm began increasing its product line, beginning with liquor bottles (Mackey's Antiques & Clock Repair 2013; Toulouse 1971:515).

National Bottle Corp. acquired the company in 1960 but apparently operated it under the Universal name, with Bernard L. Sachs as president. National Bottle Corp. also operated Gayner Glass Co. and Star City Glass Co. (Toulouse 1971:515). See the section on Gayner for more information. Under the ownership of National Bottle, Universal purchased the American Can Co. at Joliet, Illinois, and had apparently either opened or purchased a factory in New Jersey by 1961. The West Virginia plants were open until at least 1979 (*Chicago Daily News* 3/30/1961; Six 1993:23) – possibly until 1986 (see below). Toulouse (1971:515) claimed that National Bottle opened a second Universal plant in Joliet, Illinois, in 1962, closing the Parkersburg factory, but the closure was not substantiated by any other source. He must not have realized that the Joliet factory produced cans.

Containers and Marks

Giarde (1980:127) noted that “Universal did not adopt the system of regularly embossing the manufacturing year on its milk bottles” and that “the company mark is often located at the lowest possible point on the heel of the bottle. Many of the company marks are difficult to find and/or read because the mark was poorly embossed.” We, too, have been unable to find any identifiable date codes on milk bottles with any of the marks noted below. At some point, probably during the mid-1930s, Universal adopted a color labeling process similar to the one used by the Thatcher Mfg. Company's Pyroglazing – as did other glass houses. According to Dairy Antiques (2016), Universal called its process Fire-Fused Color Lettering or Hi-Fired Color Lettering.

UGP in an elongated diamond (1921-ca. 1930)

Dairy Antiques (2016) noted that the logo “was pictured in their early ads with periods although on actual milk bottles the punctuation is not seen.” A 1929 ad showed U.G.P. in an

elongated diamond embossed on the heel of the bottle (Figure 1). The ad noted that the bottles were “made in all standard shapes and sizes” (*Milk Dealer* 1929). This mark was not mentioned in any other sources, and we have not seen an



Figure 1 – Diamond-UGP (*Milk Dealer* 1929:116)



Figure 2 – Diamond-UGP (eBay)

example in conjunction with the Massachusetts Seal. This was almost certainly the first logo used by Universal from 1921 until ca. 1930 (Figure 2). The firm probably phased these out during the mid-1920s, once the plant began using the Mass Seal but continued using the molds until they wore out.

U.G.P.CO51 (ca. mid-1920s-1960)

Giarde (1980:127) noted “UGPCO” as a mark used by Universal from 1930 to 1960. Several eBay auctions offered embossed milk bottles with heelmarks of U.G.P.CO51. The “51” was an integral part of the mark, similar to the L52 used by Lamb Glass Co. Dairy Antiques also listed U.G.P.CO. without “51” but gave no indication as to whether the logo was common or not. Although we have never discovered an example, Al Morin stated that they were common in conjunction with Massachusetts Seals. In absence of date codes, we can only date this mark concurrent with the UGP51 logo.

UGP51 (ca. mid-1920s-1960)

Toulouse (1971:515) and Giarde (1980:127) both dated the UGP mark 1930 to 1960, using the acquisition by National Glass Corp. as an end date. However, a 1964 Owens-Illinois glass marks chart showed a UGP mark for Universal (Berge 1980:83), but a 1971 table no longer carried the logo (Hanlon 1971:6-17). Giarde (1980:127) noted that “the UGP mark together with the numeral ‘51’ are found on many milk bottles.” The only examples we have personally examined (California State Park collection, Sacramento) were marked UGP51 on the heel (Figure 3). None of the bottles had decipherable date codes,



Figure 3 – UGP51 (Joanne Booth)

but they were made both with and without punctuation. One bottle base included a four-digit number that may have been a catalog code.

UGP S

Some eBay auctions have offered square milk bottles embossed “UGP S” at the heels. One of these was also embossed “58 X,” a possible date code. The square bottles first appeared ca. 1944 and became the norm by at least 1950. It is probable that United Glass Products dropped the “51” at the end of the seal system in 1947. We do not currently have a large enough sample to determine whether the “S” had become an integral part of the mark by the 1950s. The “S” may really be a “5” with a very faint “1” – although the “1” may have been ignored by the sellers. We do not have any photos of this combination.



Figure 4 – United Glass Products (eBay)

UNITED GLASS PRODUCTS CO. (poss. 1950s-1960s)

An eBay auction included a photo of a milk bottle with “UNITED GLASS PRODUCTS CO.” on its side in Red ACL (Figure 4). The square gallon bottle had the look of a sample of promotional container.

U-51 (poss. 1940s)

Examples of bottles with both Massachusetts Seal and Maine Seal (see below) were embossed “REGISTERED / U-51” on the front heel (Figure 5). We have not found this mark in any of the typical sources – although our examples are embossed low on the heel roll and could be easily overlooked. Al Morin noted that he had not seen the mark in conjunction with any Massachusetts milk bottles, although both the U.G.P.51 and U.G.P.CO.51 marks were common (personal communication 8/16/2009). The U-51 logo may have been used toward the end of the seal sequence during the 1940s.



Figure 5 – U51

UG monogram (1960-ca. 1979)

Toulouse (1971:515) illustrated a UG monogram but was uncertain when it was used. Giarde (1980:127) showed the same mark with the same uncertainty, almost certainly following Toulouse. The only example we have seen was on a liquor bottle base sent to us by Cory A. Jones. The base was embossed “FEDERAL LAW FORBIDS THE SALE OR RE-USE OF THIS BOTTLE” in a circle around “U-2581318 / 0-9 2 / 144 UG monogram 67” (Figure 6). The embossing followed the federal guidelines established in 1934 and required until 1964 – although many firms continued to use the old molds until they wore out, changing the date codes as needed. Since Universal did not introduce liquor bottles until ca. 1959, the logo probably did not begin use until the plant sold to the National Bottle Co. in 1960 – and likely remained in use until ca. 1979 – possibly 1986.



Figure 6 – UG monogram (Cory A. Jones)

UG in the Massachusetts Seal (ca. 1922-1947)

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: “MASS (arch) / {factory designator} / “SEAL (inverted arch).” These often appeared in a small plate (Figure 7). Universal Glass Products used the “UG” mark in the seal from some point – probably the mid-1920s until 1947 when the state dropped the requirement (Blodget 2006:8; Schadlich [ca. 1990]).



Figure 7 – Mass UG Seal

Schadlich ([ca. 1990]) noted that the list in the Dept. of Standards Bulletin #11 (1918) did not include Universal, but the firm was in Bulletin #25 (1928). This is not surprising as the company was not in business until 1921. All examples that we have discovered had the seal in a circular plate on the shoulder. The initials may be embossed U.G. or UG (with or without punctuation). See Lockhart et al. (2017) for more information on the Massachusetts system.

51 in the Maine Seal (poss. 1920s-1947)

Maine had a similar system to that employed by Massachusetts (see above), except that its codes were usually numerical instead of alphabetical abbreviations. Although currently unconfirmed, it is almost certain that “51” in the Maine seal indicated the Universal Glass Products Co. Carlow (1987:86) provided an example that followed the typical pattern of “MAINE / 51 / SEAL.” The date range likely extended from the mid-1920s to 1947, when the seal system was revoked. For more information on the Maine system, see Lockhart et al. (2017). A similar mark – “SEALED / 51” – was probably used on Maine bottles in the 1920s (Figure 8).



Figure 8 – Sealed 51

10 in the Minnesota Triangle (1913-ca. 1950s)

Dairy Antiques (2016) noted that Universal used a 10 – instead of the more typical 51 – in the Minnesota Triangle (Figure 9). Minnesota’s answer to the seal system was to require a triangular logo with a number above the abbreviation “MINN” – placed on the shoulder until ca. 1941. A year earlier, the logo had migrated to the heel. Minnesota adopted its law on November 12, 1913 and continued to require the triangles into the 1950s. For more information on this system see Lockhart et al. (2017).



Figure 9 – 10 MINN (eBay)

Universal Glass Products Co., Vienna, West Virginia (1919-1986)

The Brown Tumbler Co. was built “in the late 1800s” – as its name implies making glass tumblers. Universal Glass Products purchased the plant in 1919. Bernard L. Sachs purchased the factory in 1959, and the National Bottle Mfg. Co. acquired the property in 1970. The Diamond Glass Co. acquired the plant in 1981, when National Bottle went bankrupt. Diamond Bathurst (as of 1983) closed the business in 1986 (Mackey’s Antiques & Clock Repair 2018). See the section on the Diamond Glass Co. for more information on that firm.

Containers and Marks

While the Vienna factory used the same logos as the primary Universal plant, once the factory came under the control of the Diamond Glass Co., the firm adopted a different logo.

V in a Diamond (1981-ca. 1986)

Whitten (2019) noted the Diamond-V logo as being used by the Diamond Glass Vienna, Inc., Vienna, West Virginia, from 1981 to ca. 1986 (Figure 9). The firm was a subsidiary of Diamond-Bathhurst. The Vienna plant also embossed “DIAMOND GLASS OF VIENNA” on some containers (Museum of American Glass 2015).



Figure 10 – Diamond-V (Dannie Richards)

Discussion and Conclusions

Despite our research, much of what we know about dating these marks is based on supposition. Since the marks used by United Glass had no identifiable date codes, there is no way to pinpoint anything about their dates of use. We have suggested the dates from the mid-1920s until it was purchased by the National Bottle Corp. (1960) as the range for the best-known manufacturer’s marks.

The three lesser-known marks are even more difficult to define. U.G.P. in an elongated diamond was an early logo, used until at least the advertisement in 1929. Although Toulouse and Giarde mentioned the UG monogram, it was apparently only used on liquor ware, probably just in the National Bottle Corp. era. The U-51 heelmark on the bottle we have personally examined, along with those we have seen on eBay, was probably used during the 1940s.

The shoulder seals, both the “U.G.” from Massachusetts and the “51” from Maine, could only have been used from a point shortly after the United Glass factory opened (ca. mid-1920s) to the end of the seal system (1947). However, it may have only been used in Maine for a short term during that period. Since the seal is pretty common in Massachusetts, it was certainly used there until the seal system ended, but we have no way to set a true beginning date. The Minnesota triangle likely had a similarly long life.

Acknowledgments

Our gratitude to Wanda Wakkinen for her tireless proofreading.

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Last updated 12/6/2019