A Tour Through Time in Vaseline Jars

Bill Lockhart

In the pursuit of the unusual, both archaeologists and collectors tend to ignore the most common bottles and jars. Although the basic history of Robert Chesebrough and Vaseline Petroleum Jelly is well known, little has been published about jars used to package the product. Based on jar shape and embossing, there were seven major changes in the glass jars from their first use ca. 1888 to the end of glass containers in 1965 – as well as numerous variations. This study examines the variations in the jars and the probable dates when they were used.

History

At the age of 22, Robert Augustus Chesebrough was already an established chemist, experienced in the study of petroleum. In observing an oil operation in 1859, Chesebrough noticed that workmen were applying “rod wax” – a viscous, sticky, black substance that adhered the drilling rods – to cuts and bruises because it made the wounds heal faster. He took samples of the rod wax back to Brooklyn for study and eventually created a clean product that he called “petroleum jelly” (Demand Media 2010; Fike 1987:56; Weisinger 1953:128-129).

According to online sources (e.g., Demand Media 2010), Chesebrough originally filled all the containers in his home with his new petroleum jelly, then began using his wife’s vases to hold the overrun. On a whim, he combined the word “vase” with the medical suffix “line” to form the new name for his product: Vaseline. Weisinger (1953:130) offered an alternative explanation: “The brand name ‘Vaseline’ stems from the German word for water wasser (pronounced vahser), and the Greek word for oil, elaion.” Regardless of the origin, the name soon became a common household word. After refining the material, Chesebrough made it available in the 1860s on a limited basis, promoting the balm as “effective for man or beast” (Fike 1987:56).
Weisinger (1953:130-131) told the story of Chesebrough’s early rise to success:

Chesebrough embarked on what was probably the first giveaway campaign in history. Obtaining a mare and a wagon, he loaded up with thousands of one-ounce sample bottles and set out for upper New York, doling out a bottle to every person on the route, stopping at country farms to supply the woman of the house. The last link in each area was, of course, the local druggist, who would inevitably fill the demand created by the samples.

These bottles must have been generic with paper labels. I have discovered no embossed examples in the one-ounce size.

Chesebrough received Trademark No. 6,041 for the word “Vaseline” on May 14, 1878, and re-registered the logo as Trademark No. 8,359 on June 14, 1881 (McGuire 1991; Spude 2006:261). Chesebrough received Trademark No. 21,727 for the “Blue Seal” brand on August 12, 1892, claiming a first use on October 10, 1888, although Fike (1987:56) claimed that Blue Seal, along with regular Vaseline, was available nationwide by 1879.

Fike also noted that Chesebrough established the Chesebrough Mfg. Co., Consolidated, in 1880, although this may be a year early. An article on Chesebrough-Pond’s in the October 4, 1965, Jefferson City Tribune note that Chesebrough became a subsidiary of Standard Oil in 1881 and remained part of the huge firm until the Supreme Court broke up the combine in 1911. During that period, the firm moved from Brooklyn to Perth Amboy, New Jersey. The name “Consolidated” and its various initials, however, continued in advertisements until at least 1951.

In addition to its regular form, Vaseline could be obtained in perfumed, carbolated, or camphorated forms by 1895, with prices ranging from ten cents for the original formula to a quarter for the supplemented types (Penland 1963:25), although ads for the various types were printed in newspapers by 1890. Carbolated was or became the Blue Seal Vaseline.

Chesebrough expanded and began production at a Canadian plant at Montreal in 1910, although a British branch had been established earlier (Fike 1987:56). According to Weisinger
(1953:3131-132), Chesbrough ate a “daily dose” of Vaseline and attributed his longevity to the product. He died at the age of 96 in 1933. The expansion continued with a second U.S. factory at McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania, and plants in Canada, England, South America, and Australia. In addition, the firm developed new products (e.g., Vaseline Hair Tonic) until Jerome A. Starka became president of Chesebrough on May 5, 1955, and merged the company with Pond’s Extract Co. on June 30 of that year – forming Chesebrough-Pond’s, Inc. The firm became part of Unilever of Canada in 1987. The product remains available in 2015 (Fike 1987:56; Jefferson City Tribune 10/4/1965; Wikipedia 2011).

Imitators

As with most successful products, Vaseline had its imitators, especially since the formula was not patented. Although the trade mark offered protection for the word “Vaseline,” the term “petroleum jelly” was descriptive. Descriptive terms were exempt from trademark protection. Thus, other firms began to market petroleum jelly.

One fairly successful imitator was the St. Joseph’s Laboratories, with plants at New York and Memphis. The product was called St. Joseph’s Moroline Petroleum Jelly. The early colorless jars were unusual in shape, half-round with five vertical panels on the other half. An eBay seller also noted that there was also an octagonal jar (Figure 1). Later jars were similar in shape to continuous-thread Vaseline containers, some of which were made by Owens-Illinois (Figure 2).
Wilson and Wilson (1971:110) stated: “It is believed that [Robert Chesebrough] began selling in cans and first in bottles for the retail trade about 1887.” Unfortunately, the Wilsons did not state who believed this statement or where they obtained the information. A search of newspaper advertisements shows that the Wilsons were essentially correct – if not in detail. Ads placed prior to March 15, 1890, used the word “box” in connection with Vaseline. A typical ad (e.g., *Warren Weekly*, February 8, 1889, Warren, Indiana) listed “One Box of Pure Vaseline, 10 cents.” Vaseline cold cream and camphor ice were also offered in boxes. Round and square tin (or other metal) containers, especially those with replaceable lids held on by friction, were commonly called “boxes.” These were probably the “cans” noted by the Wilsons. Occasional vintage Vaseline tins are offered online (Figure 3).

Beginning on March 15, 1890, ads began to use the term “bottle” in connection with Vaseline. A typical ad (e.g., *Daily Independent*, November 29, 1890, Monroe, Wisconsin) listed “One two ounce bottle of Pure Vaseline, 10 cts.” Vaseline Pomade, White Vaseline, and Blue-Seal Vaseline were also offered in bottles, while Vaseline Cold Cream was packaged in a “jar.” The term “bottle” as used in the ads almost certainly referred to the first style of glass container listed below – the pomade bottle. It is highly likely that cold cream jars were the short, wide containers made from white “milk” glass that were popular for creams and cosmetics during that period.¹

The date of this change in the newspapers is probably misleading. Major companies (and even some local firms) purchased newspaper ads one or two years in advance. Even if there was

¹ Fike (1987:13) noted that “milk glass was used for medicines, cosmetics, toiletry, food, and specialty items from the 1890s to the 1960s.” Jones and Sullivan (1989:14) called it “opaque white glass (popularly known as milk glass)” and noted that it was “redeveloped by the Venetians in the early-16th century . . . and has continued in production since that time.” However, “it became more widely used for tablewares, containers, and lighting devices” in the late 19th century.
a change in name, packaging, or style of the product, the ads continued to run until they expired. It is thus possible that Chesebrough began packaging Vaseline in glass, pomade-style bottles as early as 1887 – the date noted by the Wilsons.

Vaseline jars (or bottles) essentially fall into two manufacturing dichotomies: color and finish style. Colorless jars were apparently only used for “Pure Vaseline” – the original formula developed by Chesebrough in the 1860s. Wilson & Wilson (1971:28) claimed that “‘Carbolated’ was put up in amber glass.” Auctions on eBay support the Wilson hypothesis. Caps identify “Blue Seal” Vaseline as “Carbolated” – and these were usually on amber jars. According to Kardatzke (2002:142), “amber jars were first introduced around 1896.”

The second major division is in finish types. The earlier bottles all had one-part rounded (or squared) finishes (essentially an embossed ring around the lip or rim of the finish), made to be sealed with a cork. These are actually wide-mouth “pomade” bottles with fairly long necks. These are the first variation dealt with below. Later containers were real jars – with short necks – and had continuous-thread finishes for metal screw caps.

**Identified Manufacturers**

Virtually all glass houses that made a general line of bottles produced pomade jars, so there is no way to discern who made the mouth-blown Vaseline jars. The story of the first machine-made Vaseline jars, however, goes back to July 11, 1881, when Philip Arbogast received Patent No. 260,819 for a glass-blowing machine. Although the machine was ineffective, Daniel C. Ripley purchased the patent and designed his own machines. Based on the Arbogast design, Ripley patented two

![Figure 4 – Ripley 1891 patent](image-url)
machines in 1891. The second patent, No. 461,489, received on October 20, illustrated a pomade (Vaseline) jar as his example (Bernas 2012; Lockhart & Bernas 2014:2-6) (Figure 4).

Ripley’s factory had joined the U.S. Glass Co. conglomerate on July 1, 1891, so the machines fell under the umbrella of U.S. Glass. The firm soon began licensing other glass houses to use the machines. On November 22, 1892, Ripley sold a one-year license to the West Virginia Flint Bottle Co. at Central City, West Virginia, and West Virginia Flint became the first glass house to make Vaseline jars by machine for Cheesbrough. The jars were substandard and the factory apparently did not renew the license at the end of the year (Bernas 2012; Lockhart & Bernas 2014:6). It is virtually certain that Chesebrough continued to purchase mouth-blown bottles during this period and the following year.

C.L. Flaccus filled in the gap by obtaining the U.S. Glass Co. license to make Vaseline jars at his Enterprise Glass Co. in 1893 – again probably only for a year, although the timing is less certain, and Flaccus may have continued either machine or hand production of the Vaseline jars – or both – for a few more years. As with the West Virginia glass house, these bottles were also apparently substandard. Flaccus also may have used a machine designed by Jesse R. Johnston to make jars (possibly Vaseline jars) as late as 1898 (Lockhart & Bernas 2016:7).

The Hazel Glass Co. also received a U.S. Glass Co. license during the 1892-1893 period and apparently began production of Vaseline jars concurrently with the West Virginia firm and/or C.L. Flaccus. But Hazel Glass went one step beyond. Charles N. Brady and Charles H. Tallman had opened the Hazel Glass Co. at Wellsburg, West Virginia, in 1885 and moved the business to Washington, Pennsylvania, the next year. In 1893, Brady became involved with Charles E. Blue and convinced Blue to design a jar machine. Blue received a patent for a mold in 1894 and patented his first complete machine two years later in 1896. Along with R.J. Beatty, George Beatty, and J.W. Paxton, Brady incorporated the Atlas Glass Co. – also at Washington, Pennsylvania – on April 8, 1896, specifically to use the Blue machines (Bernas 2012; Lockhart & Bernas 2016:8-13).
Blue received Patent No. 531,609 for his unique mold on December 25, 1894 (Figure 5). Unlike most mold designs, the parison mold slid in or out of the final (blow) mold, forming the finish with the top of the blow mold (see Lockhart & Bernas [2016:17-20] for more complete discussion of Blue machines). This mold and the subsequent machines (e.g., Patent No. 567,071, September 1, 1896) left a unique V-shaped scar encircling the jar at or just below the neck/shoulder junction. This was the dominant manufacturing characteristic of most subsequent Vaseline jars (Lockhart & Bernas 2016:17-20). When the Hazel Glass Co. merged with the Atlas Glass Co. in 1902 to form the Hazel-Atlas Glass Co., the new firm became the major producer of Vaseline jars.

When the Brockway Machine Bottle Co. began production on October 14, 1907, Vaseline jars were the factory’s initial product (Brockway [1961]; Toulouse 1971:59-60). The Thomas Registers did not pick up the firm until 1912, then listed it as making ink, mucilage, and Vaseline bottles. The same listing continued until at least 1921 (Thomas Publishing Co. 1912:481; 1921:872). The *Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* (1913:953) confirmed Brockway’s use of semiautomatic machines to make Vaseline jars in 1913.

The early Brockway firm did not use a manufacturer’s mark prior to 1925, and this may explain the lack of Brockway logos on jar bases. However, virtually all jars that I can date to the 1907-1925 period either had Blue machine characteristics or Owens scars. To my knowledge, Brockway never had access to either of those types of machines. The Brockway information simply does not fit with the observed jar characteristics I have noted. See the Discussion and Conclusions section below.

King 1987:140-141; 153-154) noted that the Consumers Glass Co. of Vlle. St. Pierre (Montreal), Quebec, Canada, made Vaseline jars for Cheesbrough by 1921 and at least as late as 1928. As with the Brockway jars described above, however, this does not fit with the evidence derived from the jars.

Griffinhagen & Bogard (1999:122) listed the letter “C” as “used by Chesebrough Mfg. Co.” in the 1920s. They cited no source, and I have not yet seen such a basemark. This may have been a recording error.
Container Variations

In discussing the container variations, it is important to note that various types of Vaseline (Blue Seal, White, Pomade) were already being produced before the first glass bottles were made. All of these were probably packed in colorless glass initially. At some point (during the use-life of the first container style), Chesebrough began using amber glass for the Blue Seal and possibly for some other types of Vaseline. The discussions below, however, include both glass colors in each category (except the last two).

Although the vast majority of identified Vaseline jars had the Chesebrough name embossed on one side, some were generic jars with paper labels. Wilson (1980:57) illustrated two pomade jars excavated at Fort Laramie (1870-1890). One had the typical “CHESEBROUGH MFG Co (arch) / VASELINE (horizontal)” logo described and discussed below, but the other was unembossed with remnants of a paper label, showing the letters “lin” (Vaseline) and “Chese” (Chesebrough). It is likely that the generic bottles were used first, but the two types may have been used simultaneously.

I have devised a classification scheme for Vaseline jars that covers all variations I have discovered. The classification begins with jar shape and is very simple. Type I jars were pomade style, each with a fairly long neck and a single-ring finish. Type II jars had shorter necks and continuous-thread finish (with one exception that had broken threads). The next level – Style – centered around the embossed wording on the jars. The final level was based on manufacturing techniques, especially differences in the neck and/or shoulder areas, although basal scars became important in later jars (Table 1).

Type I – Pomade-Style Jars

Chesebrough used two labeling styles, each with variations in manufacturing characteristics – not including the generic containers noted by Wilson (above). Although the earliest jars were mouth blown, this category includes the first containers manufactured by U.S. machines. Vaseline was so successful that the firm became an important innovator in the glass industry, adopting the latest developments.
### Table 1 – Major Variations in Vaseline Bottles and Jars

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Side</th>
<th>Base</th>
<th>Tech</th>
<th>Finish</th>
<th>Color</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1887-ca. 1900</td>
<td>CHESEBROUGH MFG Co / VASELINE</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>Emb. Ring</td>
<td>C, A, P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892-1894*</td>
<td>CHESEBROUGH MFG Co / VASELINE</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Squ. Ring</td>
<td>C, A, P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893-ca. 1908</td>
<td>CHESEBROUGH MFG Co / VASELINE</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Squ. Ring</td>
<td>C, A, P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 1904-ca. 1908</td>
<td>CHESEBROUGH / VASELINE / MANUFACTG CO</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Emb. or Sq. Ring</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 1906-ca. 1909</td>
<td>“VASELINE” / CHESEBROUGH / NEW - YORK</td>
<td>None [Note: stepped shoulders]</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 1909-ca. 1915</td>
<td>same</td>
<td>Number or None</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>C, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 1918-ca. 1938</td>
<td>TRADE MARK / VASELINE / CHESEBROUGH / NEW - YORK</td>
<td>Numbers</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>C, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 1938-ca. 1945</td>
<td>CHESEBROUGH / MANFG. CO. CD. / NEW - YORK</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>C, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ca. 1945-ca. 1955</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>CHESEBROUGH / MFG. / CO. CD. / NEW YORK</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>C, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1955-ca. 1960</td>
<td>None [old-style jar]</td>
<td>Chesebrough-Pond’s, Inc.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>C, A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960-ca. 1965</td>
<td>None [new straight-side jar]</td>
<td>Chesebrough-Pond’s, Inc.</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>CT</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-1987</td>
<td>None – Plastic</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>??</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* These were made by C.L. Flaccus at the Enterprise Glass Co. Each bottle has a squared ring finish – unlike the rounded rings on the other pomade jars. Later machine-made jars had rounded rings.
**Style A** – CHESEBROUGH MFG Co (arch) / VASELINE (horizontal) on the front face.

**Variation 1** – Mouth blown, one-part, rounded finish, some colorless bottles solarized amethyst (ca. 1887-ca. 1900)

As noted above, Chesebrough probably first packaged Vaseline in glass bottles ca. 1887. These pomade-style, mouth-blown, wide-mouth bottles would have been the initial containers (Figure 6). The one-part finishes were made for corks (Figure 7). At some point, a label identifying the product was pasted onto the top of the cork (Figure 8). Wilson & Wilson (1971:28) noted that “there were probably 30 or more variants of the vaseline pots made between 1887 and the turn of the century. . . . The stopper tops were made in automatic bottle machines after the [turn of the century] for a number of years before screw tops were made.”

The Wilsons illustrated five variations including differences in length of neck, exact shape of the rounded finish, additional rings on the neck, and neck flaring or lack thereof. Kardatzke (2002:142) noted three Vaseline bottles, all solarized amethyst found in the excavations of the town of Skagway, Alaska (first platted in 1897) and one amber jar; he noted that “amber jars were first introduced around 1896” but did not state the source for that information. If this is correct, pomade-style jars must have continued to be made by hand production until ca. 1900 or even later.

These bottles varied greatly according to size of font, spacing between letters, diameter, and height (Figure 9). The “o” in “Co” was usually lower case, but there were exceptions with a
capital “O.” Height, especially length of neck, always varies in mouth-blown bottles because the finish is created with a tool and was not part of the mold. The distance between the end of the side seam and the finish also varies greatly. On some of the pomade-style bottles, the seam terminated just above the shoulder; on others, it was just a few millimeters below the finish. Bases were indented, concave, or almost flat (Figures 10). Most bases had no embossing, but some were embossed with letters or one- to two-digit numbers, usually in the centers.

The 1899 Illinois Glass Co. catalog called these bottles pomades. Royal pomade bottles had the embossed ring around the lower part of the neck and a “footed” base, while round pomade bottles were simpler in style. Sizes varied from ½ ounce to four ounces. The catalog also included “Round Pomades–Screw Top.” A similar section appeared in the 1903 catalog (Haynes 1899:752; Illinois Glass Co. 1903). All were mouth blown.

A very similar section on pomades also appeared in the 1906 Illinois Glass Co. catalog (Illinois Glass Co. 1906:37). Pomades also appeared in the “Machine Made Bottles” section, along with Model No. 229M, a two-ounce “Extra Wide Mouth Vaseline, Screw Top” (Illinois Glass Co. 1906:282). The 1908 catalog had an identical section, and the one from 1911 was similar – although the Vaseline jar was called a “Common Sense Pomade” – but there were no pomades or Vaseline jars advertised in the 1920 catalog (Illinois Glass Co. 1908; 1920; Putnam 1965:44-45). Pomade bottles, of course, were very common and were made by many glass houses.

Earlier pomades were totally different in style. The 1880 Whitall Tatum & Co. catalog (1971:25) illustrated pots or jars that it called “Pomades and Glass Boxes.” These pomades were round, squat jars with glass lids held on by friction. The style of bottle later called “pomades” were available much earlier, however. The 1876 Whitall Tatum catalog (1876:13)
illustrated the same type of bottle but called it “Plain Round-Shouldered Prescription Vials, Wide Mouth.” No wonder later manufacturers sought a shorter name!

Although all dates aside from the initial use of glass should be considered approximate, I can hypothesize that colorless Vaseline bottles, mouth-blown into a two-leaf mold with a cup bottom, and tooled, one-part finishes were made and used between ca. 1887 and ca. 1900 (also see discussion of machine-made bottles below). Amber bottles of the same type were probably made between ca. 1896 and ca. 1900. The “30 or more variants” noted by the Wilsons appear to have been mostly variations due to the hand processes and probably cannot be identified by either manufacturer or dates.

**Variation 2** – Machine-made, one-part finish, rounded on top, sharp on bottom; distinct seam at base of shoulder (1892-ca. 1894?)

This style is only known from a photo in Wilson & Wilson (1971:28) (Figure 11). The one-part finish was rounded on top but had a sharp bottom. The finish seam was on the bottom edge, and it looks sharp enough to cut. There was a possible seam at shoulder-neck joint, but the distinct seam at base of the shoulder was the dominant characteristic of the variation. There was a lower-case “o” in “Co” – and a period after “Co.” The example from the Wilsons appeared to be colorless. The seam at the base of the shoulder was a probable characteristic of the Ripley machine, owned by U.S. Glass Co.

As noted above, the West Virginia Flint Bottle Co. at Central City, West Virginia, licensed the Ripley machine to make Vaseline jars during 1892. Scoville (1948:323-324) noted that “C.L. Flaccus, after securing a machine license from the United States Glass Company in 1893, began to produce vaseline jars in his nonunion Enterprise Glass Company at Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania” (Scoville 1948:324).

Scoville (1948:324) further noted that “the president of the Chesebrough Manufacturing Company, that produced petroleum jellies, testified in 1898 that the Flaccus vaseline jars had been of inferior quality. . . . Flaccus jars at the outset had rough, sharp edges along their mouth
and lip.” Although I have not physically examined one of these jars, succeeding jars (see below) had edges sharp enough to cut fingers at the mouth of the jar and the base of the finish.

**Variation 3** – Machine-made; V-shape horizontal groove at or just below neck/shoulder joint (ca. 1895-ca. 1904)

These are by far the most common form of the pomade-style Vaseline jars. The most notable feature of each jar is a horizontal, V-shaped groove encircling the jar at or just below the neck/shoulder joint (Figure 12). This groove was created by the unusual nature of the machines invented by Charles E. Blue. The process used a drop-down parison insert within the blow mold. In the parison stage, the insert was in place, and a plunger forced a gob of glass into the mold, creating the finish and a rough shape. Then, the parison insert dropped down, revealing the final or blow mold. A puff of air blew the jar into its final shape. When the insert dropped, it apparently pulled the glass down slightly, creating the V-shaped groove. These grooves are deep enough that you can insert a thumb nail and run it around the circumference of each jar.

A second, less important characteristic is a sharp edge at the throat of the jar and a similar sharpness at the lower edge of the finish. These are actually rough seams. At the throat, the plunger made contact with the neck ring at a right angle (45°). The base of the neck ring – at the widest part of a rounded finish and the lowest part of a squared finish – also created a sharp angle. These are sharp enough to cut a finger that is rubbed against them (Figures 13 & 14). In all of these jars, the “o” in “Co” could be capitalized or lower case, and I have seen examples in amber and colorless glass.
As discussed above, Blue invented his first mold in 1894 and patented the machine to go with it by 1896. The machine may have begun making Vaseline jars as early as 1895, and it was certain up and running the following year. Determining an end date is more tricky. The next reasonably clear date is for the sealing bead on jars with continuous-thread finishes (discussed below) ca. 1908. This leaves a 13-year period when this variation and the next style were used. Since both variations of Style B are less common than this variation (Variation 3) of Style A, it is likely that Variation 3 was used from 1895 to ca. 1904 – although this is only an estimate.

Variation 3 also had three subvariations – all based on finish shape. Subvariation (a) had a rounded single-ring finish (Figure 15). The horizontal seam created by the top plate was around the center of the finish. I have only seen one example of this variation; it was probably the earliest one – a copy of the finishes from the mouth-blown bottles – and was likely discontinued very early. This was probably only made in 1895, possibly into 1896.

Subvariation (b) was the most common and was probably used during the bulk of the period, perhaps 1895-ca. 1900. The finish was squared on these jars, with the top plate seam at the bottom edge of the square (Figure 16). As noted earlier, the seam was quite sharp. Subvariation (c) was less common but not unusual. It had a squared finish, but the top edge was slightly rounded, and vertical side was slightly tapered upward toward the jar (see Figure 15). These were more sophisticated and were likely produced during the later part of the period, ca. 1900-ca. 1904.

Variation 4 – machine-made; smaller squared finish; offset side seams (ca. late 1890s, poss. early 1900s)

I have only found two examples of this style, one of that I could examine closely (Figure 17). The body was embossed exactly as the one described above: CHESEBROUGH MFG Co
(arch) / Vaseline (horizontal). The finish, however, was smaller. Although square in configuration, the finish only extended slightly beyond the neck – unlike the notable extension on all the other styles (Figure 18). Again unlike any other variation, the bottle had the letter “A” embossed on the neck below the finish.

The mold lines, however, set this variation apart. The jar had a cup-bottom base – a horizontal seam encircling the heel. Two side seams extended from the heel seam almost to the finish, fading out just before reaching the bottom of the finish. An offset pair of seams – ca. ¼ of the circumference of the neck to the right of each side seam – extended down from the finish (Figure 19). The squared, single-ring finish had a seam encircling its base that was sharp enough to cut an exploring finger. The cup bottom base had a sunken center (Figure 20). These “ghost” seams are fairly common on blow-and-blow machines, but it is unusual to have the parison seam offset this much. A quarter inch or less is much more common.

This is a most interesting bottle from a manufacturing viewpoint. It was made in a press-and-blow or blow-and-blow machine, but the base did not have a valve or ejection scar (as made by a typical press-and-blow machine) or a machine scar (as from a typical blow-and-blow machine). A normal machine scar was created by the junction of the sides of the parison mold and the baseplate. It is probable that the parison was formed upside down, eliminating the baseplate. Thus, a typical machine scar would not have formed. The parison mold was made in two pieces (creating the two vertical seams that extended down from the finish) as was the blow or final mold (creating the two vertical seams from the
base almost to the finish). When the parison was moved to the blow mold, it was rotated slightly, creating the offset between the seams.

All of this shows that this jar was made on an early machine, still very crude. However, the jar was not made on one of the common Blue machines nor was it produced on an early Ripley (U.S. Glass Co.) machine. At least one of the early Blue machines could have produced ghost seams, and I know nothing about the characteristics of the Johnston machines used ca. 1898 by C.L. Flaccus. Thus, I have been unable to determine which of the early machines made the jar. It was likely produced during the late 1890s or the first few years of the 20th century.

**Style B** – CHESEBROUGH (slight arch) / VASELINE (horizontal) / MANUFACTG CO (slight inverted arch) on the front face.

This style was only made in two variations, one of which is scarce or rare. These were probably only made for a few years. As noted above, the most common machine-made Vaseline bottles probably phased out ca. 1904, to be replaced by Style B jars. These, in turn, likely transitioned to the new continuous-thread jars during the ca. 1906-1908 period.

**Variation 1** – machine-made; significant horizontal seam at base of shoulder (ca. 1904-1908)

This style is only known from a photo from Taylor (2006:13). The significant feature on this jar was a horizontal seam encircling the base of the shoulder (Figure 21). There may have been a seam at the shoulder/neck joint, but that was unclear in the photo. The finish was rounded, with a horizontal seam in the center. There was no detectable apostrophe in “MANUFACTG” in the photo. This variation may have been made on one of the later Blue machines.
**Variation 2** – machine-made; V-shape horizontal groove at or just below neck/shoulder joint (ca. 1904-ca. 1908)

Although this is the Style 2 embossing, these were the typical Blue machine jars, with the V-shaped groove at or just below the neck/shoulder joint (Figure 22). Unlike Variation 1, these jars had a distinct apostrophe in the word “MANUFACT’G” and a capital “O” in “CO.” The finish on each jar was squared with sharp edges, and there was no marking on the base.

**Type II – Continuous-Thread Finishes**

This marks a distinct transition away from the earlier style jars to a more modern sealing method, and these jars defined Vaseline for half a century. Although continuous-thread finishes and screw caps had been used earlier on wide-mouth containers, jars made to John L. Mason’s 1858 patent were some of the first to have the threads actually molded into the glass. However, there was a notable improvement in the continuous-thread jars developed by the Hazel-Atlas Glass Co. that first appeared in the firm’s 1908 catalog. To understand the significance of this innovation requires a look at sealing methods.

A connection of glass on glass or metal on glass failed to provide a good seal for perishable products, so almost all jars used some form of gasket (using a variety of different names) to affect a tight seal. This was accomplished in one of four ways:

1. **Shoulder Seal** – This was the original 1858 Mason jar seal. The base of the lid sealed on a gasket at the shoulder of the jar

2. **Bead Seal** – Ca. 1908, Hazel-Atlas added a “bead” of glass (i.e., a ring of glass molded into the jar) around the neck just below the continuous threads. The base of the lid sealed on a gasket that rested on the bead.
3. Top Seal – This was used by at least the 1890s, possibly earlier, on catsup bottles and liquor flasks. A pad of cork or other material was inserted into the top of the lid and sealed on the rim of the jar. Prior to the advent of machine production, this type of seal was often unreliable due to the imprecision of hand manufacture.

4. Thread Seal – This seal was never very popular. It was used on some fruit jars with glass lids. An insert made of rubber or similar material was placed between the threads on the finish and the threads on the lid to form a seal.

Although my sample is small, some of the early Vaseline continuous-thread jar lids appear to have sealed on the sealing bead, but most screw caps were too short to reach the rings. These sealed at the top of the jar, although the high viscosity of Vaseline eliminated the need for a perfect seal.

Only the earliest of the Vaseline jars with continuous-thread finishes lacked the sealing bead. The beads were prominent on all the others, although all lids I have examined actually used a top seal. Since all of these jars were machine made, the fit between the lid and the rim of the finish was good.

Fike (1987:56) confirmed this observation, citing a personal communication with Joseph C. Coen of Chesebrough-Pond’s, he noted that Chesebrough began using jars with continuous-thread finishes in 1908. However, the 1906 Illinois Glass Co. catalog offered the two-ounce “Extra Wide Mouth Vaseline, Screw Top” in the “Machine Made Bottles” section that was noted above, although the jar had no bead seal. This suggests that the screw-top jars were available at least two years earlier (1906). The Vaseline jar did not appear in the 1903 Illinois Glass Co. catalog.

Style A – “VASELINE” (slight arch) / CHESEBROUGH (horizontal / NEW YORK (slight inverted arch) on the front face

Variation 1 – no sealing bead; elongated neck; footed base; very sloppy seam just above shoulder (ca. 1906)
This was probably the first attempt at making the continuous-thread finish on a Vaseline jar (Figure 23). The most notable features aside from the change in embossing and entire jar shape were the lack of a sealing bead (present on most continuous-thread jars) and the sloppy seam just above the shoulder (Figures 24 & 25). I have only discovered a single example of this variation. It was probably a pilot model once Hazel-Atlas had agreed to make the changes to the continuous-thread jars. The sloppy seam may have been caused by a new process added to the Blue machine that did not work well. The jar also had a small rectangular scar on the finish that was probably a repair of the mold (see Figure 24). The seam is in the same location as the typical V-shaped groove. These were likely only made ca. 1906.

**Variation 2** – no sealing bead; stepped shoulder; footed base; V-shape horizontal groove at or just below neck/shoulder joint (ca. 1906-ca. 1909)

This variation is unique because of its stepped shoulder (Figures 26). It, too, lacked the sealing bead and had in its place two flat steps between the shoulder and finish (Figure 27). This also heralded a return to the ubiquitous V-shaped groove just above the shoulder joint – indicating the Blue machine. These were probably made during the ca. 1906-ca. 1909 period.
Variation 3 – sealing bead; footed base; V-shape horizontal groove at or just below neck/shoulder joint (ca. 1909-ca. 1918)

In Variation 3, the steps disappeared, and the sealing ring appeared in their place – apparently developing as a bulge from the steps – marking this jar as being made after the 1908 Hazel-Atlas innovation (Figure 28). The Blue machine V-shaped groove remained in place, but the jars were otherwise virtually flawless in appearance (Figure 29).

Fike (1987:184) illustrated one of these jars, although he failed to include the quotation marks surrounding “VASELINE.” The quotation marks are visible on all the examples – both colorless and amber – that I have seen, although they can be faint. Buchner et al. (2007:240) noted this variation (including the quotation marks) in three amber examples in the two-ounce size, and a single colorless jar in the four-ounce size excavated from Lamar Terrace – Memphis, Tennessee. Amber bases were embossed “44” or “64.” The area excavated was occupied between the 1870s and 1939. Jars of this type made up 4 of 72 Vaseline jars found at the site (Buchner et al. 2007:1-5, 227, 240).

These jars are much less common than the jars (see below) embossed with “TRADE MARK” above and bracketing “VASELINE” (with no quotation marks on the actual jars), so they were probably used for a relatively short period of time. I acquired one of these jars from a local collector who dug the container at the Elephant Butte Dam construction site. The dam was built between 1903 and 1916. Those dates fit well with the soloarization of the jars into amethyst or violet hues. For most of the glass industry, the transition from using manganese dioxide as a decolorant (solarizing to an amethyst color) to selenium was complete by the very early 1920s. Since the next style also displayed amethyst jars, Style A, Variation 3 was probably made between ca. 1909 and ca. 1918.
**Style B** – TRADE (slight upward slant; just above “V”) VASELINE (slight arch) MARK (slight downward slant; just above” E”) / CHESEBROUGH (horizontal) / NEW - YORK (slight inverted arch)

**Variation 1** – sealing bead; footed base; V-shape horizontal groove at or just below neck/shoulder joint (ca. 1918-ca. 1938)

This style had only one variation (Figure 30). The only change between Style A, Variation 3 and Style B was in the embossing, although the sealing ring was a bit more pronounced. I have found these jars in colorless, amber, and amethyst hues. As noted above, manganese dioxide was phased out by the early 1920s, but these jars probably continued to be made much later. As noted above, these were the most common style of the continuous-thread jars, so they were probably used for a significant period. I set a range from ca. 1918 until ca. 1938. Many of these jars exhibit round circles on the bases that resemble valve scars created by press-and-blow machines; however, they all have the typical V-shaped groove that marked the Blue machines (Figure 31). It is possible that later Blue machine molds were made in such a way as to create the mark. The circle may have even been machined into the baseplate and thus transferred to the jar.

Buchner et al. (2007:227, 240-241) noted that jars of this type made up the bulk of the 72 Vaseline jars excavated at his site. All the jars of this style were colorless, and the vast majority were in the smaller (two-ounce) sizes. Most of the bases were embossed with various numbers, ranging from 1 to 48 plus 85 and 2217. As noted above, the site was not older than 1939, so these jars were almost certainly used during the 1930s.

**Variation 2** – sealing bead; footed base; Owens machine scar on base (ca. 1918-ca. 1929)
These jars were identical to Variation 1, except for atypical Owens machine scars on the bases. Each scar was an almost perfect circle, slightly off center, with side seams extending to the scar and a two-digit number in the center (Figure 32). Most of these had very indistinct feathering, although the feathering was more apparent on some jars. The jars were made in colorless and amber glass.

One example had solarized to a light amethyst. It had a classical Owens scar (distinct feathering) and was embossed “262” in an elongated diamond (Figure 33). This was a mark used by the Illinois Glass Co. from ca. 1900 to 1929. Illinois Glass also made some bottles with Owens scars that had no logos, so all of these jars were likely made by the firm (Lockhart et al. 2005).

**Style C** – CHESEBROUGH (slight arch) / MANFG. CO. CD. (horizontal) / NEW - YORK (slight inverted arch)

**Variation 1** – sealing bead; footed base; V-shape horizontal groove at or just below neck/shoulder joint (ca. 1938-ca. 1945)

As with Style B, Style C only had a single variation (Figure 34). Again, the shape of the container had not changed, and it still exhibited the V-shaped, Blue machine groove. The only significant difference was change in embossing, and I have only found these jars in colorless formats. Some of the bases have the small circles on them that I discussed in Style B, Variation 1 above.

The use of “MANFG.” as an abbreviation for “Manufacturing” is a bit unusual, although jars with this embossing are fairly common. Also unusual was the abbreviation “CD.” This almost certainly
indicated “Consolidated” – although that term dates back to 1880. It seem strange that Chesebrough waited so long to add the abbreviation to the embossing. Chesebrough likely used these jars from ca. 1938 to ca. 1945.

**Style D** – base embossing: CHESEBROUGH (arch) / {number} / MFG. / CO. CD. / {number or letter} (all horizontal) / NEW YORK (inverted arch)

This was the beginning of a new trend. The only embossing was now on the base (Figure 35). On occasional jars, the numbers may be missing. The product was almost entirely identified by the paper label.

**Variation 1** – non-continuous-thread finish; sealing bead; footed base; V-shape horizontal groove at or just below neck/shoulder joint (ca. 1945-ca. 1950)

These still exhibited the V-shaped groove, created by the Blue machines (Figure 36). My only examples were amber. The jars are uncommon in typical collector venues (notably eBay), probably because of the lack of side embossing. These were likely produced between ca. 1945 and ca. 1950.

**Variation 2** – continuous-thread finish; sealing bead; footed base; machine scar on base (ca. 1950-1955)

The only difference between Variation 2 and Variation 1 is the presence of a machine scar, almost certainly indicating the use of an Individual Section Machine (see Figure 35). By this time, the IS machines were the industry standard. These were likely made between ca. 1950 and the merger that created Chesebrough-Pond’s in 1955. My only example is amber in color.
Style E – CHESEBROUGH - POND’S, INC. (arch – almost full circle) / {number} in a circle (horizontal)

As with Style D, it is difficult to find examples of Style E jars because they hold no value for collectors. My only examples are colorless. Aside from the migration of the company information to the base, the notable differences are stippling at the resting point of the base, a shorter pedestal base, and a shorter neck/finish.

Variation 1 – CT finish; sealing bead; footed base; machine scar on base (1955-ca. 1960)

This variation had a machine scar on the base. As noted above, it probably indicates a manufacture by an Individual Section machine. The addition of the name “Pond’s” places the jars at 1955, probably until ca. 1960 (Figure 37). An amber eBay example was embossed “CHESEBROUGH-POND’S INC. 0 5” in a circle. It is possible that “5” was a date code for 1955, making this jar the first style produced after the merger (Figure 38).

Variation 2 – CT finish; no sealing bead; no footed base; straight sides (ca. 1960-1965)

This style marks a distinct change in configuration. The jar had straight sides, a tiny indent to form a shoulder below the sealing ring, and a very short continuous-thread finish (Figure 39). The cap, thus, extended beyond the circumference of the glass jar (unlike all previous styles, where the circumference of the cap was much smaller than that of the jar). The base pedestal was entirely missing.

The only example I have recorded was colorless (with lid) on eBay. Below “CHESEBROUGH-POND’S INC.” on the base was a “4” and an “A” nestled inside the legs of an “H” – the logo of the
Hazel-Atlas Glass Co. (Figure 40). The “4” could be a date code for 1964. These were likely introduced ca. 1960. Chesebrough-Ponds adopted a “new plastic jar” for Petroleum Jelly in 1965 (e.g., Van Nuys Valley News May 13, 1965), and that date forms a fitting close for glass use. The initial jars were essentially replicas of the glass containers, with screw-top lids (Figure 41). At some point, however – by at least 1987 – the jars became rectangular in shape (with rounded corners) with press-on lids (Figure 42).

**Discussion and Conclusions**

A few mysteries still surround Vaseline jar production. Historical evidence suggests that the Brockway Glass Co. was a major producer of Vaseline jars from 1907 to ca. 1921, but those records do not match physical evidence from the jars, themselves. The V-shaped groove at or just above the shoulder joint of the vast majority of machine-made Vaseline jars was a tell-tale signal that the jars were made by the machines developed by Charles E. Blue for the Hazel Glass Co. (later Hazel-Atlas Glass Co.). Blue machine characteristics suggest that Hazel-Atlas was the exclusive manufacturer of Vaseline jars into the 1950s. It is possible that all of the jars made by Brockway were generic – *without* any embossing of the Vaseline or Chesebrough name. I currently have no way to test this hypothesis.

The term “Consolidated” and its variations remains unexplained. The word was initially connected with the consolidation of Chesebrough with Standard Oil in 1881, but that relationship was broken up by the Supreme Court in 1911. However, Chesebrough used “Consolidated” and several different abbreviations in advertisements until at least 1951 – and
likely until the merger with Pond’s in 1955. The reason for the long continuation is unclear and the reason for delaying the additions of “CD” on the embossing until the 1930s is completely baffling.

This study makes it clear that Chesebrough and Chesebrough-Pond’s Vaseline containers went through several datable changes between the inception of glass jars ca. 1887 and the transition to plastic containers in 1965. Only a few of these variations had characteristics that led to precise dating – and those few were almost immediately followed by variations with much more nebulous temporal spans (see Table 1). In many cases, my dates are “best guesses” based on apparent popularity of the style. Often, I found several variations between datable contexts and had to arbitrarily assign ranges that best seemed to fit the situation.

Future research should seek new ways for discovering a chronology for the currently arbitrary date ranges. Advertisements have been useful for dating some of variations, but ads rarely showed the embossed jars – generally only the paper labels, if any container at all. Possibly, a larger sample of the jars will be of future help. In the words of Cheryl Martin, history is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle with most of the pieces missing – and dating these jars certainly fits that description.

Acknowledgments

My gratitude to Wanda Wakkinen for proofreading and finding interesting errors.

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Last updated 7/30/2015