

Cape May Glass Co., Star Glass Works, and John S. Alston

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When John S. Alston patented his first invention in 1900, he set in motion a mystery that has yet to be entirely explained. Alston patented two improvements to his original bottle closure and opened a plant at Pleasantville, New Jersey, to manufacture his caps. His plans, along with a proposed glass house, soon went awry, leaving researchers with a few bottles and jars and the question of who made them. Although one researcher made a tentative suggestion that the Cape May Glass Co. made the containers, our investigation suggests otherwise.

The Alston Patents

John S. Alston received a total of three patents, one for his original bottle closure, the other two for improvements.

Alston's 1900 Patent

On July 14, 1899, John S. Alston of Atlantic City, New Jersey, applied for a patent for a "Bottle-Stopper." He received Patent No. 646,653 almost eight months later, on April 3, 1900. His closure was intended as a stopper "adapted especially for beer bottles." The seal worked with a thick wire fastened into a hole in each of two bosses,¹ one on either side of the bottle neck. The top of the wire slid up a ramp on the apparently metal cap with a rubber washer to affect the seal (Figure 1). We have found no evidence that Alston made any lids to this original patent.

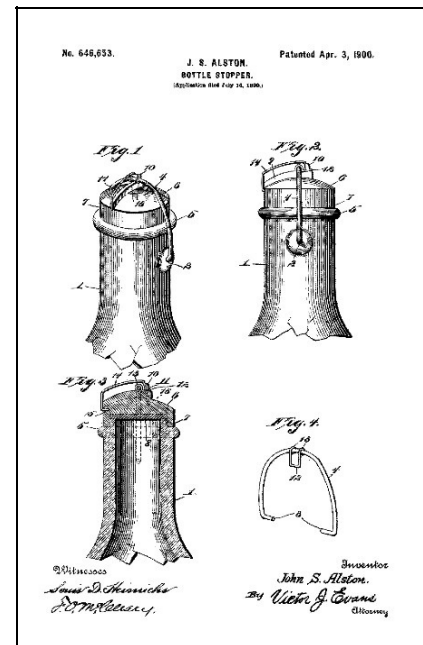


Figure 1 – Alston's 1900 patent

¹ A "boss" is a protuberant part or body or a raised ornamentation. The term was often used in jar patents and literature to indicate a raised segment on a jar finish.

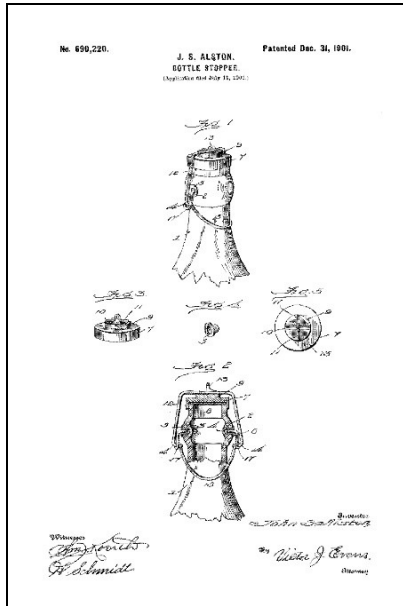


Figure 2 – Alston’s 1901 patent

Alston’s 1901 Patent

On July 11, 1901, Alston applied for another patent and received Patent No. 690,220 for another “Bottle-Stopper” on December 31, 1901. This patent implemented a more typical wire-bail arrangement, still using the bosses to anchor the wire (Figure 2). The cap had a wire loop, reminiscent of the Baltimore Loop Seal, although

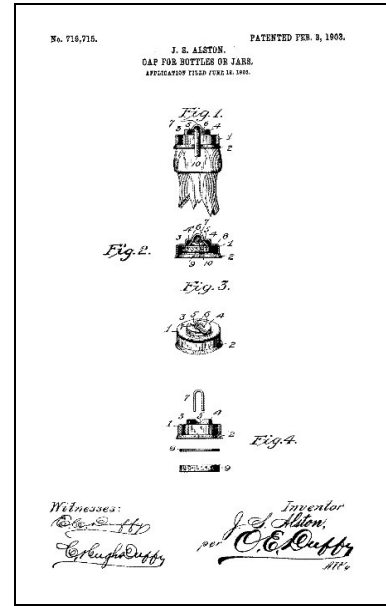


Figure 3 – Alston’s 1903 patent

this one seated atop the finish rather than inside (the method used by the Baltimore Loop).

Alston’s 1903 Patent

By the time Alston applied for his third patent on June 18, 1902, he realized that his invention needed a wider appeal, so he called it a “Cap for Bottles or Jars.” He received Patent No. 719,715 on February 3, 1903. This was only a slight refinement of the cap, itself, including a metal disc to hold the cork washer in place and a staple holding the bail to the cap (Figure 3).

The Alston Factory

J.S. Alston Mfg. Co., Pleasantville and Atlantic City, New Jersey (ca. 1903-ca. 1914)

The J.S. Alston Mfg. Co. probably opened ca. 1903. The 1904 Atlantic City directory listed the firm as “bottle stoppers” at Room 10 of the Union Bank Bldg. The Atlantic City location, however, was a sales office. The actual factory making the closures was at nearby Pleasantville (only about three miles west of Atlantic City). At some point during 1904, the plant suffered a fire that caused \$25,000 worth of damage (Garrison 1904:474). Despite the loss, Alston intended to expand in November 1905:

The works of the J.S. Alston Mfg. Company at Pleasantville are being enlarged so as to provide accommodations for the establishment of a glass bottle manufacturing plant to be operated in connection with the company's present business of manufacturing beer and drug bottle stoppers. It is expected that the new line of work will furnish employment for 500 men (State of New Jersey 1906:455).

Despite the cheery tone, all was apparently not well. On February 9, 1906, the *Trenton Times* reported that the J.S. Alston Mfg. Co. was a corporation "in default" – i.e., one that had failed to pay corporate taxes. However, the status was reinstated on March 22, 1907 (Voorhees 1907:104).

By 1909, the plant was listed at Atlantic City with "glass specialties [and] rubberless jar tops" as products. However, in 1915, the listing returned to Pleasantville, where the factory employed five people to make closures (Garrison 1909:363; Low 1915:431). Roller (2011:23) added that Alston wrote the Ball Bros. Glass Mfg. Co. on May 13, 1912, informing the larger firm that the McDonnell July 14, 1908, patent – used by the Balls – was an infringement on the Alston patents (Figure 4). Anthony F. McDonnell applied for a patent for a "Bottle and Cap Closure" on March 31, 1908. He received Patent No. 893,008 on July 14, 1908. The patent used bosses with the wire coiled inside them rather than the Alston system, where the wire was inserted into a smaller hole in the glass. We have not discovered the outcome of the dispute, but the Ball Brothers continued to manufacture jars with the McDonnell patent.

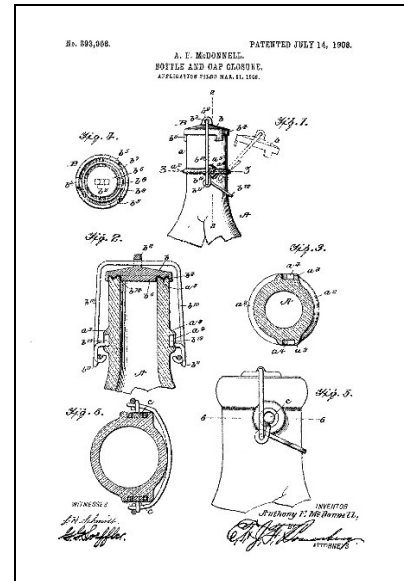


Figure 4 – McDonnell's 1908 patent

Alston offered the Pleasantville plant for rent in October 1914, and we have found no further references to the business (Roller 2011:23). The timing is interesting. The Ball Brothers had a long history of buying out the competition or burying rivals in litigation. It is very likely that Alston's letter to the Ball Brothers resulted in the ultimate demise of his corporation.

Alston Patent Containers

Alston apparently commissioned three fruit jars, although the manufacturer remains in contention. In addition, he ordered a single production run of salesman's sample beer/soda bottles. The Alston closure was never popular, with only two currently-known bottle users. These containers are presented below in the probably order of manufacture.

The "Star" Jars and Bottles



Figure 6 – Alston stoppered bottle (New Jersey Bottle Forum)

Roller (1983:10; 2011:24) described a single aqua jar that was unembossed on the sides but had a 1/8" tall, five-pointed star embossed on the shoulder seam. The quart jar was mouth blown and was embossed "PATENTED APRIL 3RD 1900 DEC 31ST 1901" on the base. This may have been introduced as a salesman's sample. Creswick (1987:3) described the same jar, but she did not note the star, and she claimed the container was machine made (Figure 5). This may be a variation. Leybourne (2008:9) listed two of these jars, one machine made and one mouth blown – again with no mention of the star. According to McCann (2014:100), however, only a single mouth-blown jar of this kind has been reported.

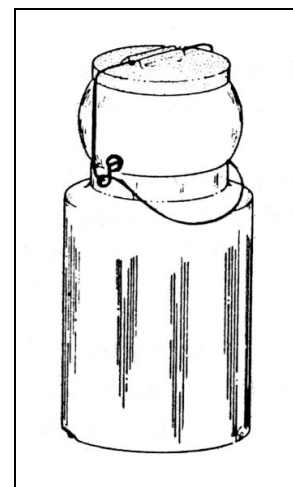


Figure 5 – Early Alston jar (Creswick 1987:3)

A member of the New Jersey Bottle Forum (2013a) described a champagne-style beer or soda bottle and included three photos. The front of the bottle was embossed "J.S. ALSTON (arch) / PATENT / BOTTLE & STOPPER (both horizontal) / PLEASANTVILLE, N.J. (inverted arch)" in a round plate on the front (Figure 6). The word "REGISTERED" appeared at the front heel, and a five pointed star was embossed on the side seam at the neck/shoulder area (Figure 7). The dimple on the finish in the photograph appears to be metal lined, a characteristic Creswick noted on the third jar variation. The base was



Figure 7 – Side seam star
(New Jersey Bottle Forum)

embossed “PATENTED APRIL 3RD 1900 DEC 31ST 1901 (both horizontal)” (Figure 8). This was almost certainly a salesman’s sample bottle.

These two containers were almost certainly made during the early years of Alston’s firm, probably 1903 or 1904, and the star on the shoulder

makes it obvious that the same glass house made both of these “salesman’s sample” containers. Roller (1983:10; 2011:23) noted that “the trademark of the Cape May Glass Company was a five point star.” Although we have found no documentary evidence for this claim, Roller later explained his reasoning.



Figure 8 – Alston bottle base
(New Jersey Bottle Forum)

Roller (1976:22) noted:

After reading the Alston Jar article in the July column (p. 35), Glenn W. Dye, of Wildwood, N.J. took note of the small (1/8") 5-point star that was embossed on the side seam line of the jar described. Glenn has done research on the glasshouses of Cape May County (N.J.), and suggests that the Alston jar with the embossed star might well have been made there, since most Cape May Court House glass seems to be identified with a 5-point star.

While we have found no direct supporting reference to this identification of the star as a logo for the Cape May Glass Co., it was certainly a symbol associated with the town. For example, three local newspapers had “star” in their names: Star of the Cape, Cape May Star & Wave, and the Cape May Daily Star. In addition, a local church was the Star of the Sea Church, and an important hotel was the Star Villa. It is obvious that a star logo would have been a good choice for *any* local business.

While Cape May was never listed under a “jar” category in any factory list that we have found, the firm was listed under “Glass Bottles and Other Containers for Fruit Juices, Catsup, Etc.” in Grace Gray’s *Every Step in Canning* (1920:250). Since Gray was an associate professor at Iowa State College, it is likely that she had some basis for including Cape May Glass in her list. However, neither Cape May nor its predecessor, the Taylor-Stites Glass Co., was listed as making beer or soda bottles.

Other Soda or Beer Bottles

According to von Mechow (2014), there were only two beer bottles with the Alston closure (aside from the salesman’s sample bottle). One of these was colorless and was embossed “COLUMBIA (arch) / {drawing of a woman (Columbia) holding an American flag} / CAMDEN (inverted arch)” in a circular plate on the front (Figure 9). The base had embossing that was identical with the salesman’s sample base: “PATENTED APRIL 3RD 1900 DEC 31ST 1901 (both horizontal).” Camden was only ca. 50 miles northeast of Pleasantville.

The second bottle was embossed “GEORGE RINGELE (arch) / GR monogram / REGISTERED (inverted arch)” in a circular plate on the front. Von Mechow placed the location as Philadelphia, and, again, the basemarking was identical. Ringele also used a Hutchinson-stoppered bottle. Because of the identical basal embossing, both of these were probably made during the same general time period as the salesman’s sample – and likely by the same factory. All three bottles were mouth blown.

The Alston

Toulouse (1969:18) gave a brief description of “The Alston,” dating the jar ca. 1901, but he had no idea who made it. Roller (1983:9) illustrated and discussed the same jar, embossed “The / Alston” in upwardly slanted cursive on the front. The jars were machine-made with tinned-steel lids – lined with paraffin-soaked wood-pulp – held in place by a wire bail fitted into



Figure 9 – Columbia bottle (New Jersey Bottle Forum)

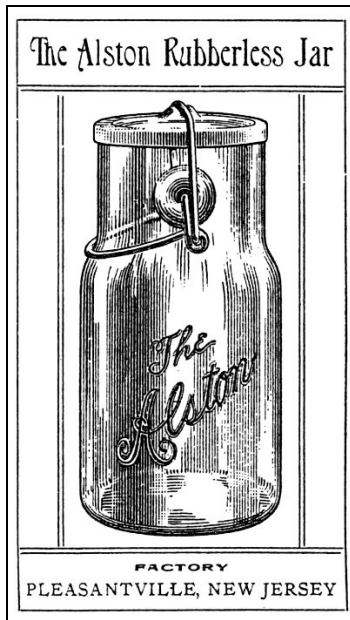


Figure 10 – Alston ca. 1912 pamphlet (Roller 1983:9)

round bosses on the sides of the jar neck. Roller (1983:9-10; 2011 23-24) illustrated “The Alston Rubberless Jar” and the cap from a ca. 1912 J.S. Alston Mfg. Co. pamphlet. (Figure 10). The jar base was embossed “PATD APRIL 1900 DEC 1901” – clearly made to Alston’s 1901 patent (Figure 11). Even though Roller suggested that the “star” jar (see above) was made by the Cape May Glass Co., he claimed that the manufacturer of this one was unknown – although the jar was made *for* the Alston Mfg. Co. of Pleasantville, New Jersey. According to Roller (1983:10), the cap on the second Alston jar had an “hourglass-shaped depression with tapered sides to allow for adjusting the pressure on the sealing gasket.”



Figure 11 – Alston base (North American Glass)

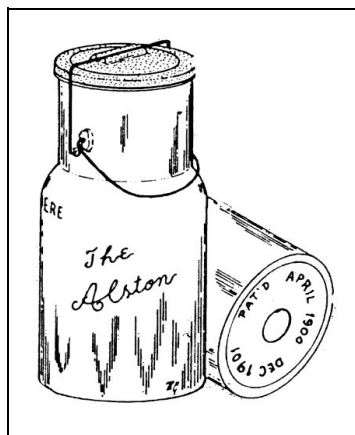


Figure 12 – Alston jar (Creswick 1987:3)

Creswick (1987:3) discussed and illustrated what was apparently the same jar (Figure 12). However, she noted that “BAIL HERE” was embossed on the shoulder to the left and slightly above “The / Alston.”² She also claimed that the jar had a smooth lip (i.e., machine made). The Roller revision (2011:23) used the same description as the earlier book but noted that the jar was machine made. Jars shown on the North American Glass site all had the “BAIL

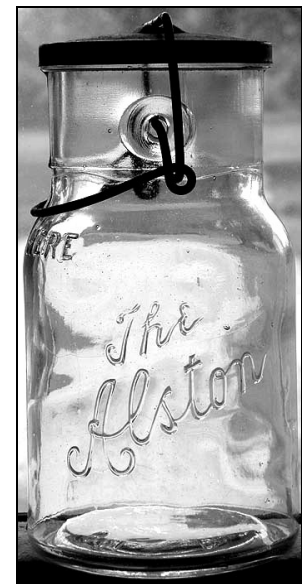


Figure 13 – Alston jar (North American Glass)

HERE” embossing (Figure 13) and were obviously machine made (Figure 14). The lids were made to Alston’s 1901 patent (Figure 15).

² Note that “BAIL HERE” crossed the side seam – just like the star on the earlier jar and bottle.



Figure 14 – Alston finish (North American Glass)

These jars had one very unusual feature – a horizontal “ghost” seam at the parting line where the neck ring joined the body mold. Vertical ghost seams are fairly common on early bottles made by the Owens machines, although they were unusual on bottles or jars made on other machines. We have not encountered a horizontal ghost

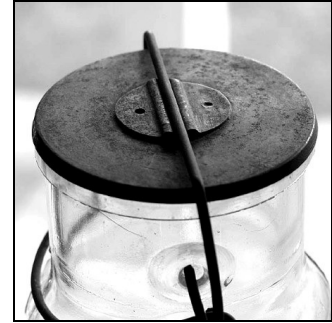


Figure 15 – Alston lid (North American Glass)

seam before these examples. A ghost seam can only be created during the initial “parison” or blank stage of the two-stage machine process.

The Owens machine vertical ghost seams occurred when the parison mold was made in two halves, crating a vertical seam, then the parison was transferred to the blow mold – also two piece – and the two seams did not align perfectly – creating the often distorted and frequently incomplete ghost seam beside the regular one. On the Alston jars, the ghost seam appeared below the parting line

(horizontal neck-ring seam) and was also distorted (Figure 16).

This could only have been created by a machine that used two separate neck-ring molds, one in the parison stage, the other in the blow mold stage.

Most machines only used a single neck-ring mold that

remained attached to the jar or bottle through *both* stages. We should eventually be able to track down this machine, using patent records. Each of the six jar photographs from North American Glass site also included a small finial at the top and bottom of the neck-ring vertical seam.

These are the result of mold wear and may indicate that all of these jars were formed from a single mold (see Figure 16).

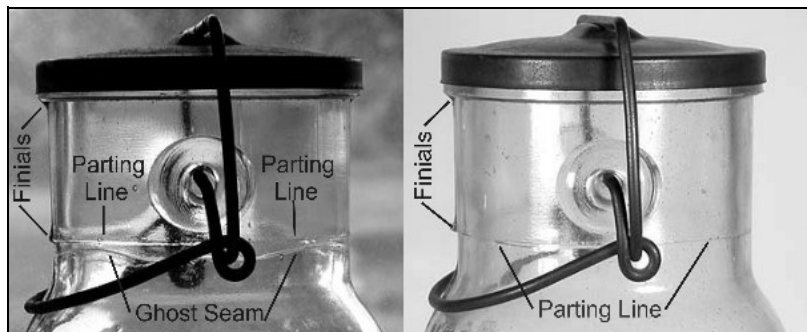


Figure 16 – Ghost parting line (North American Glass)

The 1903 Lid

Roller (1983:10) described a lid that was stamped “J.S. ALSTON MFG. CO. PLEASANTVILLE N.J. *** PAT. FEB. 3. 1903 ***” on an example of the “star” jar. Roller (1983:10) also featured a drawing of the 1903 lid from a 1912 J.S. Alston pamphlet (Figure 17). Creswick (1987:3) identified the jar as being machine made, unembossed, and having a bulbous neck (see Figure 5). She noted that the dimples on the bulbous finish were metal lined and that the metal lid was “permanently attached to the bail by means of a wire staple.” Creswick added that William Brantley of the Ball Corp. had shown her an old ad for the “Alston Rubberless Jar” sold by the John S. Alston Mfg. Co., Chelsea St., Atlantic City, New Jersey – probably the one noted by Roller in the section above. The Roller revision (2011:23-24, 406) noted the jar as mouth blown.

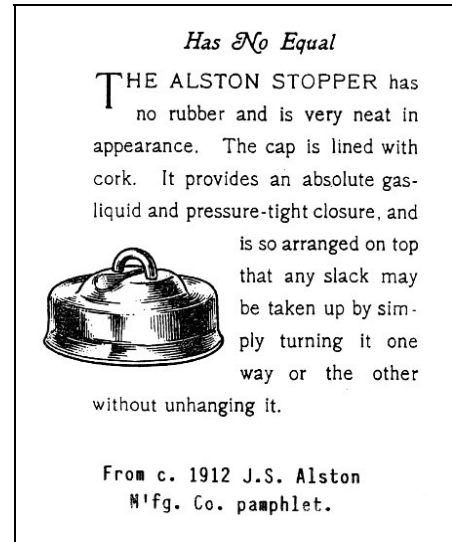


Figure 17 – Alston 1903 lid (Roller 1983:10)

Histories

As noted in the discussion above, Roller suggested that the Cape May Glass Co. could have been the manufacturer of the “star” jar. Because of information that will be presented in the Discussion and Conclusions section, we have also included the earlier glass house at Cape May Court House as well as the subsidiary to Cape May, the Hereford Glass Co. Again, for reasons that will be clear in the discussion, we have presented the history of the Star Glass Works at Medford, New Jersey, and the two plants at Minotola.

Taylor-Stites Glass Co., Cape May Court House, New Jersey (1901-1908)

Leander G. Taylor and Harry Stites incorporated the Taylor-Stites Glass Co. at Cape May Court House, New Jersey, on November 2, 1901, with Taylor as president and Stites as secretary and treasurer. They began with a capital of \$125,000, \$10,050 of which was subscribed. Taylor was the original agent of the corporation. Located at the junction of School House Lane and the

Reading Railroad, the plant lit its fires in late November 1901 and made its first bottles on December 5 of that year (New Jersey State eLibrary n.d.:678; Pepper 1971:273; Roller 1998).

The plant had a single continuous tank with five rings, although the tank had burst by March 1905. It was repaired, and the plant used two tanks with 16 rings by 1907. The 1907 Thomas Register listed the plant as making prescription, preservers' and packers' ware. The register did not list Cape May under the jar section (Roller 1998; Thomas Publishing Co. 1907:159).

The April 3, 1908 issue of *Paint, Oil and Drug Review* (1913:24) explained that

Several buildings of the Cape May Glass Company at Cape May, N.J., were destroyed by fire recently entailing a loss of \$15,000, nearly covered by insurance. The blaze started from unknown cause in factory G, quickly spreading to the nearby shops. Boys from a nearby factory saved the mould house preventing the destruction of \$40,000 worth of crated ware in the ward, the packing house, and the main building.

Taylor sold his half of the corporation to George Jonas, president of the Minotola Glass Co., paving the way for a new incarnation of the firm in 1908 (Pepper 1971:274).³ Taylor became manager of the Hereford Glass Co., also located at Cape May Court House and called the Lower Plant (the Taylor-Stites or Cape May Glass Co. was the Upper plant).

Cape May Glass Co., Cape May Court House, New Jersey (1908-1924)

As noted above, Leander Taylor sold his interest in the Taylor-Stites Glass Co. to George Jonas. Jonas was also involved with Moore, Jonas & Moore (1882-1895) at Bridgeton, New Jersey. Jonas had sold his share of the firm to William Allen and Martin Mulford on March 20, 1895, and the company became the Moore-Jonas Glass Co. (1895-1920) – an interesting choice of name considering the defection of George Jonas. Jonas, meanwhile, opened the George Jonas Glass Co. at Minotola, New Jersey (see below).

³ Pepper claimed that the stockholders voted unanimously to liquidate on October 22, 1909. This does not agree with New Jersey corporate records that place the date in 1908.

This reorganization of the corporate structure resulted in a name change to the Cape May Glass Co. on April 25, 1908 – with Stites as president, J. Douglas as secretary, and Jonas as treasurer. In 1909, Cape May Glass – the “Upper Plant” – engulfed the “Lower Plant” (Hereford Glass Co.), which continued to operate under its own name, even though it was now a subsidiary of Cape May Glass (Figure 18). The Thomas Register continued to list the same products (prescription, preservers’ and packers’ ware) as it had for the Taylor-Stites firm. Again, there was no listing for the new firm under the fruit jar heading (New Jersey 1909:39; Roller 1998; Thomas Publishing Co. 1912:499).



Figure 18 – Cape May Glass Co. ca. 1909 (West Jersey History Project)



Figure 19 – Cape May Glass Co. 1910 (West Jersey History Project)

Pepper (1971:274-275) had a much longer product list. She included soda, beer, whiskey, cologne, perfume, bitters, vanilla extract, Bromo-Seltzer, citrate of magnesia, catsup, and prescription bottles. She specifically noted the Cape May Light House bitters bottle (Seaworth Bitters) and Coca-Cola bottles. In an interview, one of the former blowers at the plant told her that “everything made at Cape May Court House was hand blown,” and Harry Stites was the mold maker for the firm. The plant used sand from Millville, Williamstown, and Vineland to make high-quality colorless glass as well as containers in aqua, amber, green, cobalt, and sapphire.

In 1913, the plant used two continuous tanks with 21 rings to make prescription, beer and soda water bottles, along with vials and flasks (Figures 19 & 20). Despite the recollection of the old blower, the glass house was listed as using both machine and hand methods – although the machines were probably for wide-mouth ware. The Hereford factory used a single tank with nine rings to make the same products (*Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913:952).

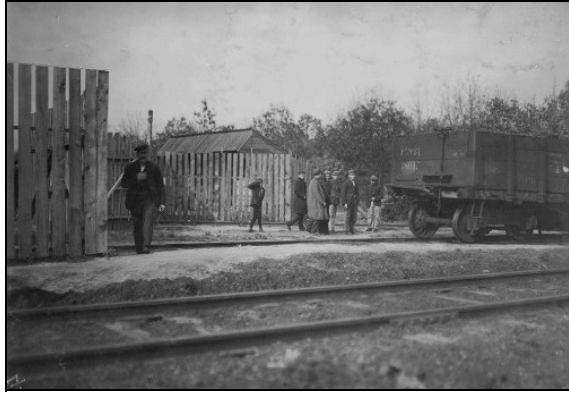


Figure 20 – Cape May Glass Co. at noon (Library of Congress)

By 1918, the address of the factory was 208 Broadway, although that may have been an office. At some point, the firm made at least one type of sample bottle, embossed

“MADE BY / CAPE MAY GLASS CO. / CAPE MAY C.H., N.J.”

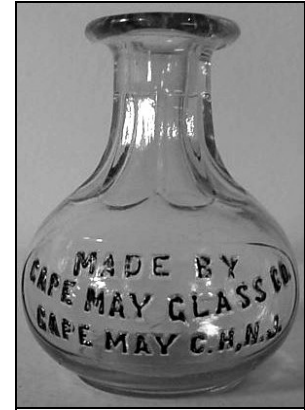


Figure 21 – Cape May sample bottle (Cape May Collectors)

(Figure 21). The glass house apparently ceased production in December 1924. In May 1925, *Glass Industry* reported that the Bridgeton National Bank (Bridgeton, New Jersey) had asked for a receiver to be appointed for the Cape May Glass Co. The bank claimed that the company was insolvent and that the greater part of the plant had been dismantled. It set the liabilities at \$35,000 (Roller 1998; White, Orr & Co. 1918:47).

Despite the announcement, the firm was still enumerated in glass house directories from 1927 to 1930 – a common fault of these publications. Stites remained as president in the listing, with Jonas still as treasurer. The plant was listed making prescriptions, vials, beers, minerals, patent and proprietary wares, liquors, and flasks at a single continuous tank with eight rings (*American Glass Review* 1927:127,129; Roller 1998).

Cape May Bottles

It is virtually certain that none of the Stites, Taylor, or Jonas factories ever consistently marked any of their glass products. Ring (1980:425) listed and illustrated a bitters bottle made in the shape of a lighthouse (Figure 22). The bottle was embossed “SEAWORTH (arch) / BITTERS / CO. / CAPE MAY / NEW JERSEY / U.S.A. (all



Figure 22 – Seaworth Bitters bottle (Ring 1980:425)

horizontal).” The bottles were made of aqua, amber, and light green glass in two sizes – 11½" or 6½" tall (Figure 23). Pepper (1971:274-275) stated that the bottle was a replica of the Cape May Light House and was made by the Cape May Glass Co. A photo of the Cape May Light House clearly shows the resemblance. Note that the neck and shoulder are added to the roof of the light house (Figure24).

Hereford Glass Co., Cape May Court House, New Jersey (1908-1912)



Figure 24 – Cape May Light House (New Jersey webpage)

On June 8, 1908, L.G. Taylor and several others incorporated the Hereford Glass Co. one mile south of the Cape May Glass Co. on the west side of the Reading Railroad. The firm began with \$350,000 in capital stock with Dr. Julius Way as president and Luther T. Garretson as treasurer. By 1909, the plant operated a single continuous tank with nine rings and was still listed that way in 1913. Way remained president, Charles Vanaman was secretary and treasurer, and L.G. Taylor was manager (*Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913:952; Roller 1998). Even

though the factory continued to operate under its own name until at least 1912, the Cape May Glass Co. controlled the plant from 1909 on.

Star Glass Works, Ltd., Medford, New Jersey (1897-1924)

In 1894, with two partners, John Mingin purchased the Medford Glass Co. (1840-1899) at Medford, New Jersey, and renamed it the Star Glass Works (McDonald 2012:58; Rossi). By



Figure 23 – Seaworth Bitters bottle (Ed & Kathy Gray)



Figure 25 – Star Glass Works front (New Jersey Bottle Forum)

1897, the Star Glass Co., Ltd., had a single day tank (Figure 25). On April 6, 1901, the *Commoner & Glassworker* announced that the Star Glass Works was making an “improved widemouth jar for tomatoes.” The jar was “fastened with a patented closure of the Whiteley Co.” of Bridgeton, New Jersey

(Figure 26).⁴ By this time, the plant had two day tanks with 18 rings (Roller 1997).

Both primary and secondary sources refer to this glass house as both Star Glass Works and Star Glass Co. This is probably a case where the operating company was the Star Glass Co., Ltd., and the factory was named the Star Glass Works (Figure 27). This was very common

from at least the mid-1800s to the early 20th century. It is also possible that one of those names was in common usage rather than an official title.



Figure 27 – Star Glass Works back (Pepper 1971:175)

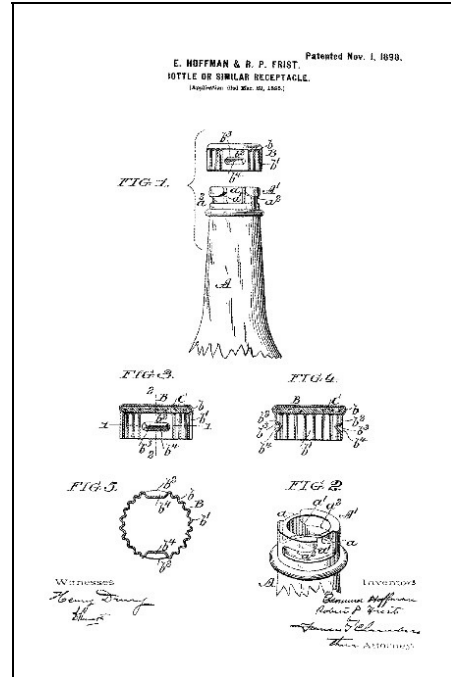


Figure 26 – Hoffman & Frist 1898 patent

⁴ This was most likely Patent No. 613,371, granted to Edmund Hoffman and Robert P. Frist on November 1, 1898. The pair assigned the patent to Charles E. E. Whiteley, of Bridgeton, Henry Whiteley, of Philadelphia, and William G. Whiteley, of Wilmington, Delaware. Hoffman also patented improvements on the lid in 1901 (No. 666,673) and 1902 (No. 714,303). Frist was the founder of the California Glass Co., California, Pennsylvania, and used these patents with that firm (see California Glass Co. section for more information).



Figure 28 – Star Glass Works office (Pepper 1971:177)

By 1904, John B. Mingin was the president and manager, with Frank Reilly as secretary and treasurer (Figure 28). The factory made prescription bottles, liquor containers, and druggists' ware at two day tanks but only had 17 rings. In 1909, "the only large industry of Medford [was] the Star Glass Company bottle manufacture employing 135 men" (*American Glass Review* 1934; Garrison 1909:261). Pepper (1971:174) added that the plant employed ca. 250 people, using

ten shops, each with five men, although she gave no date (Figure 29).

By 1913, the plant made druggists' supplies, liquor bottles and flasks, all by machine. The Factory closed in 1923, although the old brick chimney remained erect, until it "toppled over with a huge crash" in 1940. The company persisted in glass plant lists until 1925, with the same officers as in 1904. The plant made Flint prescription bottles, vials, beer and mineral bottles, liquor bottles, and flasks (*Journal of Industrial and Engineering Chemistry* 1913:952; McDonald 2012:60; Roller 1997).

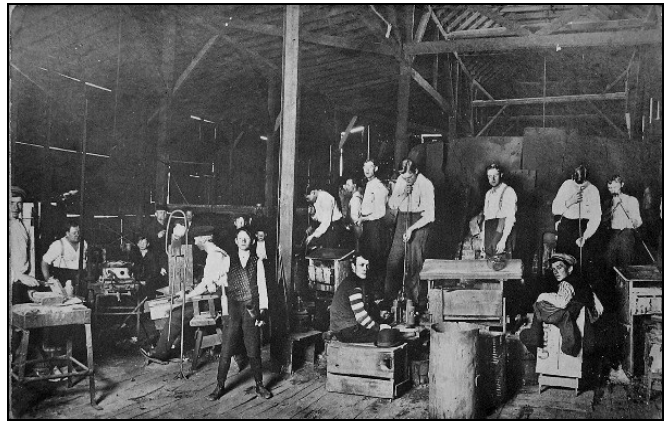


Figure 29 – Inside Star Glass Works (Old South Jersey)

Star Logo

Toulouse (1971:486-487) noted that "the star is a common design on glass pieces. It may be used simply as an ornament, as the name of a company, or as a 'surround' for a letter in the form of a trademark or an unofficial mark." He suggested six possible companies as users of a star logo:

Star Glass Co., New Albany, Indiana (1860s-1900s)
Star Glass Co., Star City, West Virginia (1908-1926)
Star City Glass Co., Star City, West Virginia (1949-1966); Coventry, Rhode Island (since 1966)
Star Glass Works, Medford, New Jersey (1899-1925)
Star Glass Works, Newark, Ohio (1883-1904) [actually Newark Star Glass Works]
Star Glass Co., Morgantown, West Virginia (1906-1921)

Of these, the only one close to Pleasantville, New Jersey, was Medford – ca. 52 miles northeast of Alston’s closure factory.

Pepper (1971:174) noted that the “Star Glass Works had a bottle plant making varieties quite similar to those mold-blown at the Cape May Court House factories, and in sizes from 1/4 ounce to 32 ounces.” She listed “flat paneled bottles for vanilla, conical ones for Gouttman’s drops, blob-top sodas and minerals, and miniature champagnes and cordials” as products of the plant – all mouth blown. She further stated that “Star Glass had its own brand-marked liquor flasks in several sizes, flat bottles impressed with a star and word WARRANTED (star) FLASK / 7 OUNCES / UNION MADE.” Photos show that “WARRANTED” was arched in a scroll, “FLASK” was horizontal, and smaller flasks included the line “8 OUNCES” below “FLASK.” “UNION MADE” was embossed on the heel (Figure 30).



Figure 30 – Star Warranted Flask (eBay)

Of special interest here, the plant made soda bottles and at least one “wide-mouth jar for tomatoes.” Thus, it had the capacity to make both jars and soda bottles. In addition, assuming Pepper was correct, the factory embossed a five-pointed star on at least some of its containers.

George Jonas Glass Co., Minotola, New Jersey (ca. 1894-1911)

Pepper (1971:270) began her chapter on the George Jonas Glass Co. and Minotola Glass Co. by saying, “The life of the Minotola Glass Company [including the George Jonas firm] was one long labor dispute producing the bitterest strife in the entire history of the glass bottle blowers union of New Jersey.”

George Jonas of Bridgeton, New Jersey, purchased land near the junction of the Central Railroad of New Jersey and the Newfield & Atlantic branch of the New Jersey Seashore Railroad (Pennsylvania Reading Seashore Line) in what was later Minotola ca. 1893, and began building a glass factory. The plant was operating by at least 1896 (Pepper 1971:270-273; Roller 1995).⁵ As often happened, the factory was called the Minotola Glass Works, and the operating firm was the George Jonas Glass Co. The Jonas company was a non-union shop.

On April 10, 1899, 500 glassblowers and 1,000 apprentices walked off the job at glass houses in Bridgeton and Minotola – including the Moore-Jonas plant at Bridgeton and the George Jonas Glass Co. at Minotola. In May, Moore-Jonas joined other glass houses in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York to form a consolidation to control the glass market in that area of the country. Both Moore and Jonas served on the Board of Directors. After violence broke out, glass houses began unionizing in July. Only Moore-Jonas and Minotola remained non-union (Farrinccino 2014a).

D.A. Hayes, president of the Glass Bottle Blowers Assn. reported on the labor situation at Minotola in October 1901 (*American Federationist* 1901:496):

[The George Jonas Glass Co.] concluded that intelligence and organization was increasing too rapidly in the towns and cities so it built a little empire of its own at Minotola, New Jersey. The store, church, dwelling houses, and every foot of ground belong to this firm. There is not a building nor even a vacant lot where organized labor could hold a meeting, and should any of the workmen be found talking to our members, they are not only instantly discharged, but their food supply at the company store is cut off also, and there being no other store allowed in the town, you can realize that the non union men there are lying in a hard bed, but one of their own making.

The union was not the only one complaining. Cooper (1903:226) quoted the *Philadelphia Evening Telegraph* as saying that

⁵ According to Rossi (1998:18), the plant began in 1889.

Men with families are employed as bottle blowers at boys' wages in the George Jonas Glass company [*sic*] at the little hamlet of Minotola, N.J. They live in houses owned by the company, to whom they pay rent: and they are compelled to trade at the company store on the cash book system; they are compelled to contribute toward the support of the preacher; they are prohibited under pain of discharge from meeting together to plan means for throwing off the shackles that bind them in the bitterest kind of slavery.

Children much below the legal age of 12 years are employed; and unless a man has two boys whom he will place at work in the factory he cannot secure employment; and if he is fortunate enough to have two little children whom he is willing to turn over to his employer he will be permitted to go to work at apprentice wage.

Hayes further noted in 1901 that “the factories at Minotola are operated almost exclusively on bottles for the Whittemore Bros. Company, Boston, Mass., manufacturers of shoe and leather dressing” and bemoaned the fact that the union could not get Whittemore Bros. to pressure Jonas (*American Federationist* 1901:496). Farrinccino (2014b) added that the union campaign eventually broke the resistant of the Whittemore Bros., and they canceled their contract with Minotola Glass.

Pepper (1971:241) was very specific about products made at the plant, probably during the very early 1900s. Furnace No. 1 made “handblown flint ware” including wine, whiskey, olive, cherry, and continuous-thread-finished catsup bottles – all mouth blown. Furnace No. 2 was “producing machine-made bottles” – although she failed to discuss either the type of machine or the products. This early, the machine likely made wide-mouth bottles or jars. Furnace No. 3 “a smaller one known as the dinky, was used alternately for blue glass in making Stafford inks and Bromo-Seltzer bottles and for amber glass required in snuff and other jars and tonic bottles.”

The workers struck at some point during 1902, and Jonas took two of them to court for threatening potential replacements on September 17, 1902. The workers were restrained, but we have not discovered the outcome of the strike (Dickinson 1903:644). The firm was incorporated

by at least 1904 (probably earlier). George Jonas was president and treasurer, with D.C. Applegate as secretary and general manager. The plant made flint, amber, and green liquors, fruit jars, and bottles at three continuous tanks (*American Glass Review* 1934:157; New Jersey Bottle Forum 2013b; Pepper 1971:271; Roller 1995).

The *Culver-Citizen* (Culver, Indiana – 4/26/1906) reported that the factory was destroyed by fire of unknown origin in April 1906. The paper noted that three hundred men and boys are rendered idle.” Although we have not found historic confirmation, the firm obviously rebuilt the structures. The firm was listed in the Thomas Registers as Geo. Jonas Glass Co. and made beer, soda, wine, and brandy bottles, as well as preservers and packers’ ware from 1907 to 1912 (Thomas Publishing Co. 1907:159; 1912:480), although Pepper (1971:272-273) claimed that “the Shoemakers who owned the Cumberland Glass Company of Bridgeton” bought the plant and unionized in 1908.

Minotola Glass Co., Minotola, New Jersey (1911-at least 1920)

On July 20, 1911, the George Jonas Glass Co. changed its name to the Minotola Glass Co. The agent of record was Isaac L. Stetser (New Jersey State eLibrary n.d.), although Pepper (1971:272) claimed that Jonas sold the plant “to the Shoemakers who owned the Cumberland Glass Company of Bridgeton” rather than yielding to the union demands. The Minotola Glass Co. made beer, soda, preservers’, and packers’ bottles as well as fruit jars from 1914 to 1917 and continued to be listed until at least 1920 (Thomas Publishing Co. (1914:531; 1920:827, 4615).

During late December 1916, workers struck at Minotola for an increase in wages. By January 6, 1917, the *National Glass Budget* (1917a:6) reported that “those who were receiving \$1.50 and had demanded \$2 per day were conceded \$1.75 those who were getting \$1.75 and asked for \$2.25 got \$2.” Management announced that employees who had not struck would receive substantial increases in wages or bonuses.

A later issue (*National Glass Budget* 1917b:5) noted that there had been three strikes in 1917 and the latest one – begun the first week of April – included gatherers and take-out boys. On April 28, the *National Glass Budget* (1917c:4) reported that Furnace No. 2 was back in operation, and the other two would begin next week. The strike was over, and the union won.

With “the capitulation of the Minotola factory, every plant in South Jersey, excepting one with a total equipment of Owens automatic machines, has been brought under union jurisdiction.” Despite the strikes, the firm increased its capital from \$100,000 to \$500,000 “for expansion” (*Metallurgical and Chemical Engineering* 1917:149).

A 1917 glass factory list noted that Minotola made flint liquors and flasks, flint and green fruit jars, packers and preservers by both hand and machine methods at three continuous tanks with 37 rings in 1917. By that time, M.B. Mulford was the president, with J.F. Perry as secretary and treasurer, while James Gillespie was the plant superintendent (Roller 1995).

The Illinois Glass Co. had purchased the Minotola Glass Co. along with the Cumberland Glass Mfg. Co. at Bridgeton by January 1920. Illinois Glass operated the plant until the merger between it and the Owens Bottle Co. that created the Owens-Illinois Glass Co. in 1929. Owens-Illinois closed the plant in 1933 (*Iron Age* 1920:308; *Purchasing Agent* 1920:68).

Discussion and Conclusions

We have only discovered a total of six different containers that can be traced to the J.S. Alston Mfg. Co. Three of these were champagne-style beer bottles that were clearly marked with the Alston name. The other three were fruit or product jars. One was embossed “The Alston”; another had two Alston patent dates embossed on the base, and the final jar had a lid stamped with the Alston company name. It is clear, however, that Alston made the closures – *not* the glass containers.

Two of these have connections that suggest a manufacture by the same factory. Both the salesman’s sample bottle and a mouth-blown jar embossed with Alston patent dates had a small (1/8" tall), five-point star embossed on one shoulder seam (to the left side of the front on the bottle; unknown on the jar). Embossing across the seam was unusual during that time period (although it became common on soda bottles during the late 1920s and 1930s). The presence of the small star makes it virtually certain that these two containers were made by the same glass house. Both containers were mouth blown. The glass house would therefore need to be relatively close to Pleasantville (Alston’s plant), in business during 1903 and 1904, and making both jars and bottles by hand methods.

The other two beer bottles were both mouth blown, but the star was not reported on either of them – and it is not visible in the only photo we have found. These may have been made by the same glass house as the first containers – or may not. Many of The Alston jars were machine made. Either the original glass house adopted wide-mouth machines, or these were made by another plant. Other mouth-blown jars also lacked the star or at least any report.

The first firm may have failed because it concentrated on beer bottles. When Alston first entered the arena of bottle stoppers in 1903-1904, the crown was still a relatively new contender. The old tried-and-true of the beer stoppers were the Lightning fastener and the cork. Anheuser-Busch, for example did not stop using corks until at least 1914 and probably only began offering crowns ca. 1910 or so. In addition, the Hutchinson stopper was used on both soft drink and beer bottles. It seems likely that the combination of Lightning, crown, cork, and Hutchinson closures was far too strong for Alston, and he gave up on beer bottles after his first firm failed in 1906.

At least one variation of The Alston jar was embossed on the shoulder with “BAIL HERE” – and this embossing also extended across the side seam in a comparable location. While not as strong a connection, this also suggests the same firm as the one that used the star – although these containers were machine made. If the volume of jars listed on the North American Glass webpages is any indication (six jars), this was by far the most common variation. If this, indeed, was connected with the two “star” containers, the glass house would have also had to have been in business during the 1907-1914 period – the probable time of greatest production for Alston – and have produced machine-made jars.

It is virtually certain that the “star jar” – i.e., a small star embossed on the shoulder of the jar – and the salesman’s sample bottle were *not* made by the Cape May Glass Co. Since Alton was in business by at least 1904 (probably late 1903), it is logical that a salesman’s sample would have been made during one of those early years, when Alston was attempting to market his new closure. In addition, both of the “star” jars only have the 1900 and 1901 patent dates on the bases. A later jar lid included the 1903 patent date. Since the Cape May Glass Co. was not formed until 1908, the glass house could therefore not have made the Alston jar with the star logo on the shoulder. The only tentative connection between Cape May and Alston *was* the star, so the Alston and the Cape May Glass Co. were probably not connected.

In addition, even though Glenn Dye (see Alston jar section) stated that “most Cape May Court House glass seems to be identified with a 5-point star,” neither of the identified Cape May bottles that we have found seem to have had any form of star motif. Although Dye likely had information that we lack, we have found no evidence for the use a star on the side of a bottle by Cape May (or any other identified glass house). Future research should concentrate on bottles from Cape May (and the other possible makers) and/or search for glass fragments at the sites of the factories.

Another possibility was the Taylor-Stites Glass Co. at Cape May Court House, open from 1901 to 1908. Once again, the star would have been a valid connection. The only problem with this identification is that the only product list we can find for the glass house was for prescription, preservers’ and packers’ ware. This does not entirely preclude the manufacture of soda/beer bottles and fruit jars, but it limits the likelihood. In addition, the only reason for looking in this direction was the very tenuous connection with the star.

Although the J.S. Alston Mfg. Co. intended to expand its Pleasantville stopper plant in 1905 to produce its own bottles, the firm had deteriorated the next year to the point where it could not pay its corporate taxes. Even though the business was reinstated in 1907, it was never listed as having more than five employees – a far cry from the 500 predicted in the 1905 proposed expansion. It is thus virtually certain that Alston did *not* make his own bottles and jars.

Pleasantville is ca. seven miles west of Atlantic City, with Cape May Court House ca. 37 miles to the south. Many other jar producers were within 50-60 miles, such as the Bodines at Williamstown, the Woodbury Glass Works at Woodbury, the Salem Glass Works at Salem, and both Cohansey and Cumberland at Bridgeton. The Star Glass Works at Medford – ca. 52 miles northwest of Pleasantville – falls neatly into this category. The glass house was reasonably close, made containers during the correct time period, and produced at least one type of wide-mouth jar and beer bottles. The factory was also known for embossing a single star on at least one type of bottle. This may be a good choice



Figure 31 – Thomas Potts house – Medford (Old House)

for the producer of the “star” jar and bottle. A possibly limiting factor, however, is that the only embossed star logo that is attributed to the Star Glass Works was composed of a central dot with triangles creating the five points (see Figure 30). A star on the Thomas Potts house, however – Medford’s only remaining structure of the glass house – is the solid, five-point variation (Old House 2011; Figure 31).

If distance were a consideration (and it may well have been), then the George Jonas Glass Co. (ca. 1894-1911) – later the Minotola Glass Co. (1911-ca. 1920) – operated by Stites’ partner, George Jonas, would be a good choice. Minotola was only ca. 20 miles from Pleasantville, and the plant was listed in 1904 as making fruit jars and later as producing beer bottles. By at least 1917, Minotola operated machines, and those may have been introduced much earlier. In addition, Jonas ran a non-union shop – probably offering lower prices – just the thing for an apparently struggling business like the one operated by Alston.

In summary, we have two probable time periods for manufacture, leading to two possible glass houses. First, from ca. 1904 to 1906, one plant produced mouth-blown salesman’s sample bottles and salesman’s sample jars – as well as the only two known bottles with Alston-patented finishes. Because of the time period, the Cape May Glass Co. is an unlikely choice, although its predecessor at Cape May, the Talor-Stites Glass Co., is a possibility. More probable – in our opinion – was the Star Glass Works at Medford, only slightly farther away than Cape May. Star Glass certainly used the star symbol and produced both beer bottles and wide-mouth ware.

The second period was after the reinstatement of 1907 until Alston closed in 1914. This is probably the time when Alton jars were machine made. Although any glass plant in New Jersey or eastern Pennsylvania *could* have made the jars, we consider the George Jonas Glass Co., followed by the Minotola Glass Co., as the most likely. Both made wide-mouth ware by machine, although we have not tracked down the year that machinery was first used. Both were very close – a little over 20 miles away from Pleasantville – and were non-union. This seems to be a perfect venue for these later jars.

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