

A GLIMPSE INTO THE PAST: A HISTORY OF THE ENNIS BROTHERS BOTTLING WORKS

By Fred Capozzella

There are probably as many reasons to collect bottles as there are bottle collectors. My personal obsession is bottles as an historical artifact, a remembrance of a specific business and, perhaps more importantly, a glimpse of the workings of an industry that has changed dramatically as national brands have taken over the market. The history of the Ennis Brothers Bottling Works is a perfect illustration of the above.

The first mention of Ennis and bottling in Utica Directories was in 1877, when Albert G. Ennis appears as a manufacturer of birch beer, at 131 Bleecker St. William Ennis, no occupation listed, resided at the same address. I'm sure you have seen the quart bottles embossed "Established 1877." Albert is not mentioned again until 1880, as a manufacturer of birch beer, is missing in 1881 but in 1882, reappears as a root beer manufacturer, living on Second Ave. That listing continued through 1885. In 1884, William R. Ennis is listed for the first time, but as a bottler only, residing next door to Albert. It seems likely that the Wm. Ennis Hutchinson and quart bottles date from this year.

It is interesting that the only birch beer manufacturers listed in the business section of those directories were G. B. Tillson, in 1877, at 19 Eagle St. and Chas. W. Sharp, also at 19 Eagle St., in 1878. Ennis was not listed.

By 1886, Albert has moved the bottling operation to 111 Bleecker St. and was now listed in the business section as a "bottler." That same year, another Ennis, George W., in addition to William, is listed as a bottler, with both of them living in the same house, still next door to Albert.

The following year, Albert has become a soda beer manufacturer, with the business listed at 10 Hickory (note that Noyes ran west from Genesee to Chenango Ave., while Hickory ran from Chenango Ave. west to York St.). Also involved in that plant were George W. and William. The facility was moved, because by 1888, Ennis Bottlers occupied 26 Hickory and apparently lived there, too. Again, the business included Albert, George W. and William. There was no significant change the next year, although the homes and plant all seemed to be located at either 23 Hickory and/or 26 Hickory and the firm was first listed as the Ennis Bottling Company.

A considerable change occurred in 1890, and continued through 1891, when the firm included A. G. Ennis, E. H. Ennis, Geo. W. Ennis, and Wm. Ennis. It was still located at 26 Hickory.

From 1892 through 1894, the facility seems to have moved to Cleveland Ave., which was parallel to and about two blocks north of Hickory, running from Stark to Hicks. In '94, the Hickory site was home to Oneita Spring Co., James Mann, president (and also president of the Utica and Mohawk Railroad). The following year, and through 1897, Ennis Bottling moved back to Hickory, occupying 28 through 32 and listing itself as "Sole Agents for Oneita Water." By the way, the Oneita Spring Company was in business, either as a separate company or as part of Ennis Brothers, from 1886 through 1902. The company name was Oneita Spring Co. through 1896. It was not listed in 1897, but after that, it was known as Oneita Mineral Springs Co. It seemed to be located first at 10 Hickory, through 1887 and then at 26 Hickory, until it disappeared. In 1892, offices were in the Mann Building with springs at 26 Hickory. I haven't been able to determine whether or not the actual springs were on Hickory or if water was brought in from some other place and bottled at the Ennis plant. If there were a spring at 10 Hickory, it would now be under the Arterial, at the Noyes intersection. Also, by 1907, Ennis advertised itself as selling "Palatable Distilled Water."

Another interesting development took place, in 1898, when the company began producing extracts, at the same address and under the Ennis Brothers name. There were no ads in the directory indicating what kinds of extracts were made – for example, were they for cooking or for soda manufacturing?

Everything remained essentially the same through 1912, although by 1900, only George W. and Edward H. are listed as proprietors. And in 1905, the firm was listed as Ennis Brothers and seemed to have ceased production of extracts. In 1907, one of their ads specified that they sold brewed ginger ale. It seems likely that this had been standard, though, probably from about 1890 or so, and was almost certainly the ginger beer, of stoneware bottle fame.

In 1913, the entire firm was managed by Edward H. and was a manufacturer of carbonated beverages. The only change in the next few years involved address, to 1010-1012 Hickory in 1916 and to 1010-1012 Noyes in 1923. Obviously, the renumbering occurred first, followed by the elimination of Hickory and de facto extension of Noyes. That location, by the way, is west of Spilka's Hotel, between Lenox and Schuyler, across from the Bossert site. It is now just a vacant lot.

Another alteration in management took place in 1931, when Edward was listed as President and Howard W. was secretary-treasurer. This arrangement continued through 1940, when only Howard W. was listed.

The final entry was in 1941. In 1942, the site on Noyes was home of Roberts Beverages. Roberts bottled under that name until 1946. Beginning in 1947, it was known as the Orange-Crush Bottling Co. It apparently ceased operation in or about 1951. In 1952, the Noyes site was occupied by Central Dairy Equipment.

After I prepared the above account of the firm, I was contacted by Jerry Hanagan, a member of MVABC and a former employee of Ennis Brothers! He remembers that the territory extended as far north as Poland and Cold Brook and he made many runs delivering soda to stores there. He also recalls that the mixing of the soda took place on the second floor of the plant, after which the mixture was piped down to the bottling room. He states that Howard was the major force, at least in the late '30s, when he worked for them. He also says that they made the standard variety of sodas, including ginger ale (a big seller), orange and root beer.



Wm. Ennis Aqua Hutchinson Bottle