

UTICA, N. Y.
STRAP-SIDED WHISKEY FLASKS
By Jon Landers

American glass houses have been making whiskey flasks since the early 1820's. Early whiskey flasks were very fancy. Many were made with pictures and slogans embossed on them. It was hoped that these elegant bottles would help sell the product. Bottle collectors refer to these flasks as historical flasks. They were made up until the late 1870's when at this time glass houses started embossing the whiskey retailers and store owners names on the flasks instead of decorative motives and slogans. This was good advertisement for the dealers. Bottles were expensive and the customer could bring their flasks back to the store for a refill and would not have to pay for the price of a new bottle. Because the 1/2-pint and pint size bottles could easily slip into a coat pocket or the back pocket of a man's trousers, they became known as pocket flasks. Another name for these bottles is strap-sided flasks because they have thick strips down both sides that look like straps.

Around 1875, glass houses started using a new method for manufacturing whiskey flasks. Instead of having a costly special mold made for each retailer, a plain master mold with a round hole in the front was used. Round interchangeable slug plates were made that fit into the round holes of the master molds. These round slug plates would have a whiskey dealer's name and town cut into it. Of course it was much cheaper to make a slug plate for each new customer instead of a whole private mold. This made the cost of the bottles much more affordable and many small establishments were now able to purchase bottles that had their names embossed on them.

These old flasks made by glassblowers usually have whittle marks and bubbles in the glass which is desirable to glass collectors. The lips were made with a hand tool, which sometimes caused imperfections or made the necks a little crooked. All of the flasks from this period used corks as closures. Some of these flasks are made of colorless glass but most are found in different shades of aqua, amber, green and amethyst. The green colored flasks are the most rare, and the aqua the most common. The last few years that these flasks were made, they were made by an automatic bottling machine, which for the most part eliminated the imperfections.

These strap-sided whiskey flasks with embossed slug plates were used up until the 1920's. After this period, glass houses started making plain generic bottles that had no embossing on them. This made the cost of the bottles even cheaper. A whiskey retailer would have paper labels made to use on the plain bottles. It must have been easy to get into the retail liquor business during those times. Most grocers and drug stores also sold liquor.

Liquor retailers are still using non-embossed whiskey flasks with paper labels. 1/2 pint and pint containers are sold with labels, but the labels carry a brand name and the distiller's name rather than the retailer's name. The containers also have plastic screw caps.

Today, these old strap-sided whiskey flasks from the 1870's - 1920's with embossed round slug-plates are highly collectable. It is a fun category to collect and they are still affordable.

