

STRAP-SIDED WHISKEY FLASKS

by Jon Landers



American glass houses have been making whiskey flasks since the early 1820's. Early whiskey flasks (historical flasks) had pictures with slogans embossed on them. It was hoped that the bottles would help sell the product. Historical flasks 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. The 1/2 pint and pint sizes could easily slip into a coat pocket or the back pocket of a gentlemen's trousers and these bottles became known as pocket flasks.

A cheaper method of manufacturing was used for these bottles. Instead of having a special mold for each bottle, a round hole was made in the master mold and a round interchangeable slug-plate was used. The slug plate had the whiskey dealers name and town cut in it. All of the flasks from this period used corks as closures.

These strap-sided whiskey flasks were used up until the 1920's when labels were used on the bottles instead of the embossed slug-plates. Glass houses made universal generic bottles which the customer could slap their labels on. It must have been easy to get into the retail liquor business during those times. Most grocers and drug stores sold liquor.

The flasks from the 1870's to about 1910 were blown in a mold by a glassblower. These bottles have whittle marks and bubbles in the glass which is desirable to glass collectors. The lips were made with a hand tool which sometimes have imperfections or made the necks a little crooked. The last few years these flasks were made they were made by an automatic bottling machine which for the most part eliminated the imperfections.

Whiskey flasks are still made in the 1/2 pint and pint sizes with labels, but the labels have a brand name on the product and the distiller's name rather than the retailers name. The containers also have plastic screw caps.

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

