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Not everything is what it seems

by Jim Hagenbuch

I remember in 1971 finding my first pontiled bottle. It was embossed "Dr. D. Jayne's Alterative Philada." I had seen the exact bottle before, only with a smooth base.

In those days a number of general reference books were available, mostly published in the middle to late 1960s, showing various lip finishes, forms and bottle-dating methods.

The general consensus among most of these early writers was that the pontil period ended around 1850-55, give or take a few years, and that the smooth base period started immediately afterward.

A few years later, as I advanced in my collecting, I acquired a smooth-base quart Corn For The World flask, (GVI-4 in "American Glass"), in a nice yellow-olive color. It was my first historical flask of note and I was proud as punch over it. While paying for it I mentioned how I really liked the bottle and the fact that it wasn't pontiled didn't bother me. The dealer told me the flask must have, "been blown at the end of the pontil period," and I accepted that. After all, I had seen a number of aqua examples, smooth base and pontiled, all blown in the same mold.

As years went by, so did the number of Corn For the World flasks I owned, sold, traded for, sold and owned again. Some

pontiled, some smooth-base, many in aqua with considerably less being in other colors.

As collectors of flasks know, the quart size (GVI-4) Corn For The World was one of a number of flasks blown at a Baltimore glasshouse spanning a period of about 50 years, and can be found in a wide range of colors, some being fairly exotic.

Besides the quart, I had seen a number of identically embossed Corn For The

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World flasks in the pint (GVI-6) and half-pint (GVI-7) size, all being pontiled, in fact, to this day I have never seen a smooth-base example in either size.

The more of these flasks I handled, the more I began thinking that something about the dealer's statement, "been blown



Norman C. Heckler & Company, Auction #34, Bill Pollard Collection, lot 58.

at the end of the pontil period," wasn't quite right

For some reason, the smooth-base, quart-size Corn For The World could be found in colors that no pontil period Corn For The World occurred in. Unusual and exotic shades of blues, yellow olives, purple amethysts and topazs.

Did the glasshouse change its colors right at the end of the pontil period?

In "American Bottles & Flasks and Their Ancestry" by McKearin/Wilson a paragraph reads: "In the 1840s the ear of corn and inscription 'Corn For The World' reflected national aspirations – a particu-





larly appropriate symbol and slogan for Baltimore flasks, for vast quantities of corn and cornmeal were shipped from Fells Point to foreign markets."

In 1815, England passed into law the English Corn Laws to curtail imports of American agricultural products. Highly unpopular in America, this law had an adverse effect on agricultural exports from America, especially from the Port of Baltimore.

In May of 1846, to the great satisfaction of American farmers, the English Parliament repealed the Corn Law. Could this single event have inspired Baltimore to produce the Corn For The World flasks?

Whatever the reason, the pontiled Corn For The World flasks were blown in the 1840s. But what about the smooth-base examples? Remember, only the quart-size

Corn For The World flask is found with both pontil scarred and smooth bases.

In time, I was able to visit a number of museums having displays of early flasks. Corning, New York, Dearborn, Mich., and the Philadelphia Museum of art, to name a few. All had examples of the Corn for the World flask in colors other than aqua.

Several of the museum displays had grouping of flasks from various glasshouses. This way, one could see flasks blown at a specific glasshouse spanning a period of over 50 years.

It was in these museums displays of Baltimore glasshouse flasks that a possible explanation for the exotic color quart Corn for the World flasks could be seen.

Several displays contained examples of Spring Garden Glassworks, Resurgam and Baltimore Glassworks embossed flasks, in the exact same colors as the smooth base Corn For The World quart.

These flasks were blown in the 1860-1870s, roughly 20 years after the pontiled quart Corn For The World.

So what's all this mean? Was my first quart Corn For The World flask bought way back in the early 1970s really blown, as the dealer told me, "at the end of the pontil period"? Or was it blown 20 years later?

I find it hard to believe that a glasshouse would continue to produce the quart size flask, while discontending the popular pint and half-pint sizes in the same mold.



Norman C. Heckler & Company, Auction #34, Bill Pollard Collection, lots 101 & 95

In all likelihood, production of the quart-size flask ceased at the same time the pint and half-pint sizes did, probably in the late 1840s. Then, sometime in the 1860s, the mold was reintroduced with more flasks being made. This time in the more exotic colors found in the smooth base examples.

Whatever the reason for its reintroduction, the later smooth-base Corn For The World flasks are highly desirable and make a very impressive display when seen in the full array of colors they were made in.

