

Opener Advertiques

By Bill Gaylord in the Western Collector October 1969

This the tenth of a continuing series by Bill Gaylord on Advertiques (defined as advertising novelties or trinkets over forty years old which were used to promote a product or company, given as premiums or souvenirs and having a useful purpose in addition to that of advertising). Part I on Mirrors appeared in March, 1968; Part II on Glasses in May, 1968; Part III on Beer Trays in July, 1968; Part IV on Trade Tokens in September, 1968; Part V on Tobacco Tins in November, 1968; Part VI on Trivia in January, 1969; Part VII on Showcases in April, 1969; Part VIII on Ceramics and Pressed Glass in June, 1969; Part IX on Stationery Items in August, 1969.

Figure 1



Figure 2



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IN THIS FLIP-TOP, snap-cap, twist-lid age when we find ourselves searching for anything reminiscent of the past, it seems appropriate to study some of the very implements which our modern methods have eliminated ... namely, openers of bottles and other containers, specifically those of interest to collectors of advertiques.

Most habitual collectors begin with something inexpensive and easily obtainable such as rocks or match folders or pennies and stamps. Starting with these things a fairly large number of items may be accumulated before the fact emerges that some of them are rarer than others. Pennies may be gotten for one cent each until the collector needs to fill the blank spots in his album by purchasing from another collector or a coin dealer. Then he finds that a rare penny may command as much as ten thousand cents. Rocks are free for the picking until crystals or gold nuggets or diamonds or moon rocks are picked. The factor which causes the price to rise is the demand created by a large number of people competing for the same item.

Openers are suggested here as a new field of collecting that has promise. Presently inexpensive, the supply is plentiful, even though the items are going out of style, but no-one knows yet, which examples are rarest.

Openers are interesting, have a romantic history and a variety of inscriptions, even on identically designed models. They have the added appeal of being related to one of the most popular collecting hobbies of all, bottles. Like the saloons of the early days, with which there is some connection, the field is wide open.

Rapidly headed for total extinction are bottle openers designed for crown caps, as these are superseded by other, more convenient caps for which an extra implement is not necessary.

On the way out are conventional corkscrews with spiral "worms". One of several current substitutes is a gas injection system which forces compressed air into the bottle through a hollow needle. The increased air pressure inside pushes the cork out of the bottle. Another approach is to use cork lined threaded caps instead of corks. Before long, the only bottles needing an opener will be the vintage wines which were put away before the cork was pulled completely from the market.

Can openers, too, are under attack. Tab-top cans, a logical progression from sardine packing methods, are eliminating the need for can openers, not only in the liquid market, but also in some of the frozen and solid food lines. For this reason, punch openers of the type used for beer and soft drinks for the past two decades will soon depart from the scene.

Now that they are disappearing, has anybody ever noticed them, or have they just been taken for granted. Like so many things that are no longer available? Are they unnoticed until they are gone, like the buggy whip or the 5c cigar ?

The accompanying photographs illustrate some of the features which may make openers attractive to the collector. *Figure 1* shows an array of bottle openers designed to remove crown caps, those crimped-edge metal closures which have been in use since the late 1880's. All nine are shown with the business end upward, even though some were meant to be read the other way.

Upper left in the photo is the only color lithographed opener we have ever seen. It was issued by Wieland's Extra Pale Lager Beer, and was produced (patented 1911) by the H. D. Beach Co., of Coshocton, Ohio, makers of many lithographed trays and mirrors mentioned in previous Advertique articles. The beer bottle is printed in amber on a green background. The lettering is black, while the ornamental striping is red. The opener is stamped from light gauge steel, strengthened by curving the outer edges upward.

Next is a plain metal hook-type opener for Ruhstaller's Lager. Stephens Mfg. Co., Waltham, Mass. made this opener (patented 1901) which has the familiar key shaped handle which may be related to the nickname for bottle openers: "church keys". Also notable on this model is the square hole near the hook which was used for turning the acetylene valve on carbide lamps found on contemporary automobiles.

The next four openers are also pictured in another photo, where the shapes may be seen more clearly. They are the two Buffalo Brewing Co., Calvert Gin, and White Rock Mineral Water.

The final three openers in the first picture are of somewhat later manufacture, and are typical of openers available today. Buffalo Beer, opener made by Vaughan, Chicago. Ruhstaller's Gilt Edge Lager, and Canada Dry, marked Made in U. S. A.

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Figure 2 shows three typical corkscrews used to advertise as well as serve the products named. Large, medium or small, they all have that sharp-pointed, spiral wire worm which penetrates the cork as the user turns the handle, eventually working its way deep enough to make it possible to remove the cork by pulling the handle of the opener.

Clermont Whiskey used an opener with a hollow handle which doubled as a wooden case for the corkscrew when not in use. Anheuser-Busch issued a type of corkscrew popular with brewers before the turn of the century when corks were still used to close beer bottles. The metal ring acts as a brace as the worm turns, and the cork rises easily from the bottle. Listerine issued a tiny corkscrew for the tiny stoppers used in the narrow-necked Listerine bottles. Not much force was necessary to remove them, so the little one did the job well.

Figure 3 illustrates the possibilities when bottle openers are combined with some other useful tool. Upper left is the familiar can/bottle opener, which may not be so familiar to our grandchildren. Center left is a paint-can/bottle opener, handy for refreshing tired painters. Bottom is a mixing-spoon/bottle opener combination, very practical. Upper right is a stopper/opener which would seem to require an empty bottle to start the cycle. (O.K. if you had lots of Moxie.)

After the bottle was opened, an ice pick was in order, and figure 4 shows one of many picks used by ice companies to advertise their product. Modern refrigeration methods have literally frozen out most ice companies, so the ice pick will join the illustrated porcelain cork-tops as another artifact no longer used in the promotion of a product or the enjoyment of life.

Figure 5 could be captioned, "The boilermaker's delight." That pioneer drinking combination of whiskey with a beer chaser is suggested by this "medicine" measure for Duffy's Malt Whiskey, and foam scraper from the Reno Brewing Co. Incidentally, foam or "suds" scrapers, used to tidy up the top of a schooner of beer, would make a challenging collection.

Other things are to be opened besides bottles, and figure 6 shows two unusual openers. The larger one was used to open wooden cigar boxes, the notch designed to pry up the nail which held the cover. The flat edge was sharpened to pry the lid, while the crooked end of the tool could serve as a tack hammer to replace the cover securely.

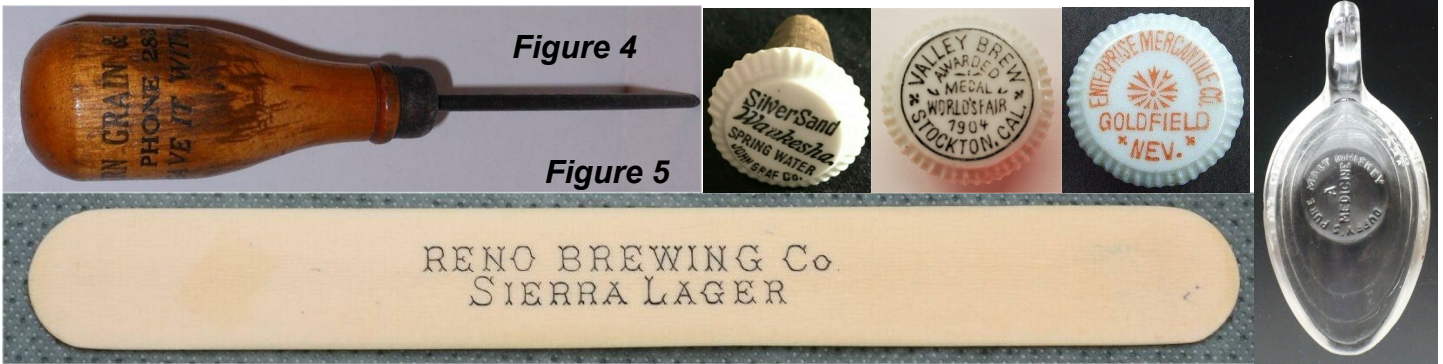
The pencil-like object is a spring-loaded perforator used for punching the end hole in a cigar. When cigars were sold without ready made holes in the end, the usual method of providing draft was to bite the end off or cut the tip with a small knife. The possessor of a perforator was a cut above everyone else who smoked stogies.

The last word in bottle openers appears in figure 7. The four "figural" openers are hard to beat for individual interest. At left is a "lady's leg" complete with button shoes and patterned hosiery. This design, on which the heel of the shoe is the hook opener, was issued by the Buffalo Brewing Co., of Sacramento, California, and was patented in 1912. Next to that is a baseball



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player making a pitch for the same Brewery about two years later. In this instance, the toe of the ball player is the cap lifter, the round hole where the ball should be is the hanger, while both Buffalo openers include the square lamp valve turner. Calvert Gin provided the "bottle" opener which reproduces their product on a more modern design. This opener was probably used more often for the mixers that go with gin, so here is a "go-with". The White Rock girl is a classic advertising illustration. Topless long before San Francisco's North Beach, she has been updated several times in her life since 1893. The White Rock Water & Ginger Ale opener shows an early version of the famous trademark.

While the openers considered here have been limited to types which carry advertising, there are certainly as many others which do not, and some fine collections are in existence. (*Western Collector*, October, 1968.)

The widespread collecting of openers is just beginning. Some other examples of commonplace items becoming popular collector objects are visible around us. Bottles, long considered trash by nearly everyone, have had a sparkling resurrection from the dump heaps of the country. Insulators, which were unnoticed for a century except by birds and pole climbers, are currently collected by thousands of people. Tin containers, discarded by all, nearly rusted away, but some colorful specimens now survive to accent the decor of many homes, and an intensified search is being conducted by the growing number of tin collectors.

What those things have in common with openers is obsolescence, interesting design, availability, variety, economy and a link with history. With a little help in the form of collector interest, the openers of the past will become artifacts to be treasured in collections, the conversation openers of the future.

Figure 7

