

THE KING OF NOVELTY BRANDING COLLECTIBLES

By Don Thornton

This is the story of Harry Lockwood Vaughan, super salesman, prolific inventor, marketing genius, clever designer, king of pocket-size novelties and eventually a very wealthy man. And a lucky man. He was in the right place at the right time. When he launched The Crown Throat & Opener Company in Chicago in 1910, the bottling – beer and soda – industry was taking off.

Vaughan formed the company at the age of 39 after working in tobacco tin and soda fountain sales and bouncing around the bottle cap industry for several years as a very successful and popular salesman. The company's first product was based on one of Vaughan's inventions – the “NEVER-CHIP” wall mounted bottle opener. It was a small beginning for what would become a steamroller of a manufacturing concern for more than five decades.

Patent No. 943,759 dated December 21, 1909 was awarded to Vaughan for what became the “NEVER-CHIP,” which was designed to prevent chipping of the bottle, a major problem for bottlers, all of whom reused their bottles.



The 2 1/2-inch device is attached to the wall with two screws. The branding on one was: **ENJOY YOUR GLUEK'S “THE BEER FOR THE MAN WHO KNOWS.”** At the curve it is marked: **VAUGHAN CHICAGO NEVER CHIP PAT'D MADE IN U.S.A.** The box says in part: **IT'S THE ONLY STATIONARY BOTTLE OPENER MADE WHICH WILL REMOVED “THE CAP” WITHOUT CHIPPING THE BOTTLE. IT'S FLEXIBLE.**

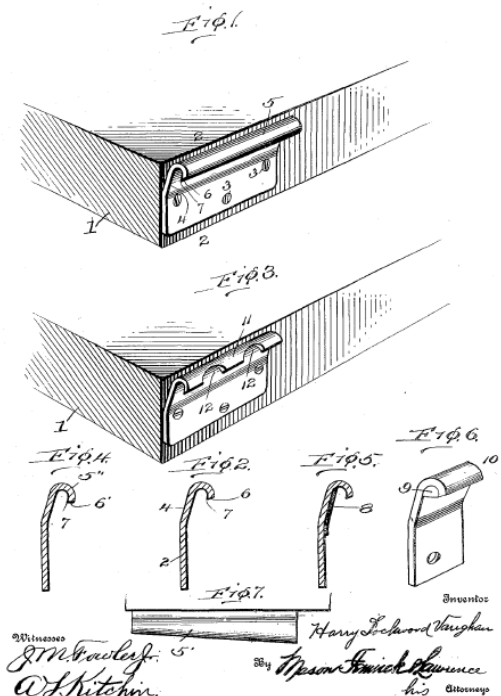


Vaughan began his brand naming with the **Never-Chip**. The company sold the Never Clip directly to retailers, such as hardware stores, but most of its revenue in sales came from deals with other companies, mainly bottlers, in which Vaughan customized the product with its clients' names emblazoned on the metal.

In an ad in a 1910 edition of *The American Bottler*, the Crown Throat & Opener Company emphasized the benefits of branding the Never Chip.

“Many brewers and bottlers are sending these openers into private homes; being stationary, they last for years, and will eventually save thousands of dollars in the giving away of hand openers – not mentioning millions saved in the chipping of bottles,” the ad said.

H. L. VAUGHAN.
BOTTLE OPENER.
APPLICATION FILED APR. 24, 1909.
Patented Dec. 21, 1909.
943,759.



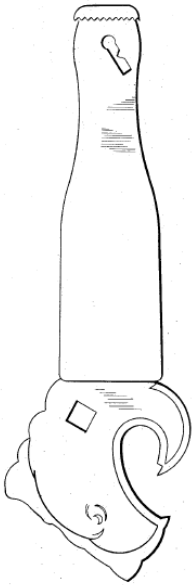
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DESIGN.
H. L. VAUGHAN.
POCKET BOTTLE OPENER.
APPLICATION FILED SEPT. 6, 1911.

42,445.

Patented Apr. 30, 1912.



Vaughan also was behind the very successful branding of handheld bottle openers, led by the "King" of novelty openers. In a 1911 edition of *The American Bottler*, the company touted its novelty King, or "lion head" flat opener saying: "With your name in quantity of 10,000." The opener was based on Vaughan's Design Patent No. 42,445 dated April 30, 1912 for a "pocket bottle opener."



Branding of the just under 3-inch opener includes: **ALWAYS DRINK BOZEMAN BEER.**

In addition to the Lion, Vaughan was granted three other design patents for figural openers with bottlers purchasing millions of them with their brand names.

Vaughan offered two versions the 1914 patented lady opener, clothed or unclothed. The just under 3-inch nude version is marked **C.T. & O. CO. PATD CHICAGO** on the opener hook and **ALLIANCE BREWING CO. ALLIANCE, OHIO.** on the back.



The Crown Throat & Opener Company also offered several other pocket size openers, including a figural eagle, elk and horse.

Witnesses
M. P. Moller
L. C. Boring

Inventor
H. L. Vaughan
By A. J. Hedderburn, Jr.
Attorney

DESIGN.
H. L. VAUGHAN.
BOTTLE OPENER.
APPLICATION FILED APR. 7, 1913
44,226. Patented June 17, 1913.



Witnesses:
S. M. Ryan
Inventor:
Harry L. Vaughan
By A. J. Hedderburn, Jr.
Attorney

DESIGN.
H. L. VAUGHAN.
BOTTLE OPENER.
APPLICATION FILED OCT. 8, 1913
44,945. Patented Nov. 25, 1913.



Witnesses:
S. M. Ryan
Inventor:
Harry L. Vaughan
By A. J. Hedderburn, Jr.
Attorney

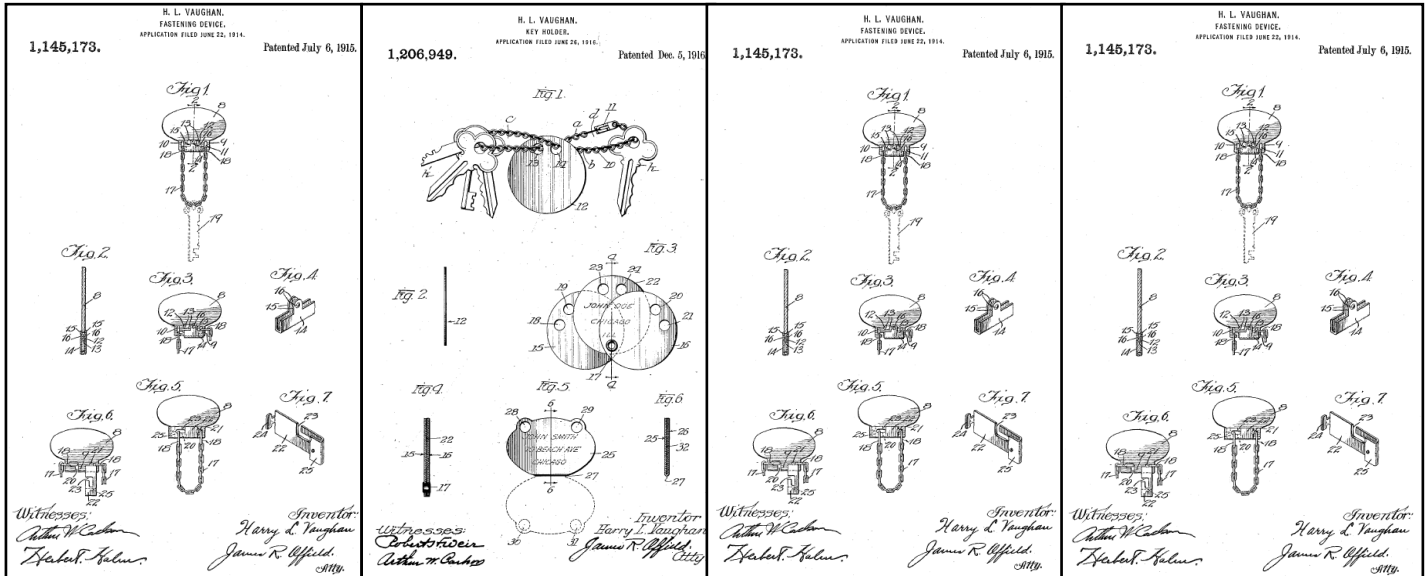
DESIGN.
H. L. VAUGHAN.
BOTTLE OPENER.
APPLICATION FILED SEPT. 24, 1914
46,762. Patented Dec 8, 1914



Witnesses:
Robert H. Weir
Arthur W. Carlson
Inventor:
Harry L. Vaughan
By James R. Offield
Attorney

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In 1915 Vaughan changed the name of the firm to the Vaughan Novelty Manufacturing Company as its line of products grew substantially. Those products over the years included, among other things, key chains, a combo bottle opener/corkscrew, milk bottle carriers and cap lifters, a bottle capper, orange peelers, ice picks, lemon squeezers and corn forks.

From 1915 to 1919, Vaughan was awarded four patents for key rings/chains.

His first key ring patent was probably the most popular. The 1 1/2-inch tab is marked on the top in tiny lettering: **E. Z. SYLDE**. On the opposite side there are three lines of tiny type. The first line can not be deciphered. The next two say: **CHICAGO** and **PAT. APL'D FOR**. The tab is branded: **G. HEILEMAN BREWING CO. LA CROSSE, WIS.**



Vaughan took out newspaper advertisements, including one in the *Chicago Tribune* on November 4, 1915, making this pitch: "Very inexpensive; can be mailed in your letters without extra charge. For all kinds of business."

Also very popular was Patent No. 1,206,949. Although the patent drawing shows round tags, the two holes were the crux of the design. The holes "act as a barrier" for the key chain "whereby the selection of keys is facilitated."

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They pull business. Useful novelties with your advertisement or trademark actually carried by their receivers.

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For example, the round tag was replaced by a small, 2-inch metal vintage car for an auto repair shop in one case and a 2-inch shoe for a shoe store in another. The car is marked: **COLUMBIA SIX / MCFARLAND MOTOR CO. 1701 GRAND AV. K. C. MO.** The shoe is marked: **COMMON SENSE SHOE STORE EDUCATOR SHOES ATLANTIC CITY, N. J.** Both are marked in tiny type at the top of the holes: **PAT'D 12-5-16.**

Probably the coolest of all was Patent No. 1,296718 – and it was only for the chain lock, not the tag. But the tag by a Chicago hatter takes the cake. It is about 2-inche across the bottom and shaped like a hat. It is marked on one side: **CHICAGO'S LARGEST HATTER EST'D, 50 YEARS ELEWEYER GUARENTEED HATS.** The other side is marked: **25C REWARD PAID BY OWNER 122782 D. LELEWER & SON OR DROP IN ANY MAILBOX.**

DESIGN.
H. L. VAUGHAN.
COLLAR & SHOE BUTTONER.
APPLICATION FILED MAR. 6, 1916
49,166. Patented June 6, 1916.



H. L. Vaughan
Inventor

Vaughan was awarded Design Patent No. 49,166 on June 6, 1916 for a “collar and shoe buttoner,” which proved a very successful branding item.



This 3-inch model is marked: **DAISY PAT. 6-6-16 BROWNING KING & CO. SEATTLE.**

Vaughan returned to bottle openers in 1924, this one designed to hook the crown on the back allowing an “over the top” push down motion to remove it. Patent No. 1,490,149 said the “inexpensive utensil” allowed the removal of caps “with ease, certainty and little effort on the part of the user.”

The 3 1/2-inch opener is marked on the side **OVER THE TOP TRADE MARK MADE IN U.S.A.** and on the inside around the key chain hole **VAUGHAN CHICAGO.** Branding was on the top, this one is marked:

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FINK BREWING CO. HARRISBURG, PA.

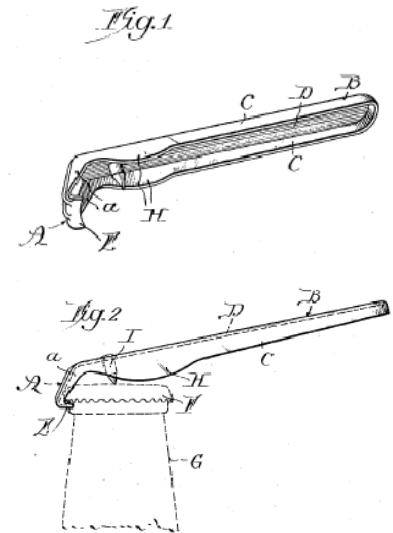


**HARRY L. VAUGHAN.
BOTTLE OPENER.**

FILED DEC. 1, 1921

1,490,149

Patented April 15, 1924.



Inventor
Harry L. Vaughan,
By official, Louis H. ...

In 1916, Vaughan was granted a patent for his piece de resistance, an item that proved to be the company's greatest seller, estimated in the tens of millions. Patent No. 1,207,100 dated December 5 of that year was for a "crown cap remover and cork screw" that became the "Nifty."

The 3-inch device with folding corkscrew and a round hole on the end for a key chain, retailing for 25 cents, became an instant and long lasting best seller. A Vaughan catalogue published in 1939 said 38 million had been sold.

Some are marked **NIFTY** but the vast majority that survive today have the brand names of bottlers, wine makers, hotels, taverns, markets and even a casket maker.

Vaughan also offered the Nifty with a folding screwdriver and button hook replacing the worm. An example of the screwdriver model

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is marked: **DIXIE TAILOR CO.** on one side and **MADE TO MEASURE SUITS** on the other. An example of the button hook model is marked **NIFTY**, with the hook folding out from the end of the opener instead of the middle.

Business for Vaughan Novelty decreased during World War I, but remained steady. Then in 1935 it exploded, propelled by the introduction of canned beer. Until then glass bottled beer ruled, but cans were easier to stack, transport and carry, weighed less, didn't shatter and didn't need to be returned for a deposit.

Dewitt F. Sampson of Elmhurst, Illinois and John M. Hothersall of Brooklyn, New York, played the very crucial role of getting the beer out of the sealed can. They were awarded Patent No. 1,996,550 on April 2, 1935 for a non-mechanical, handheld "container opener," the very first of what became known as a "church key."

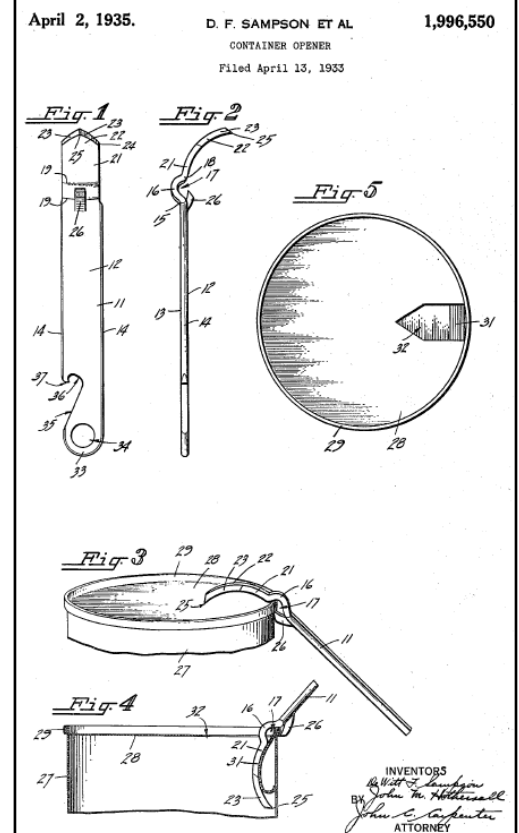
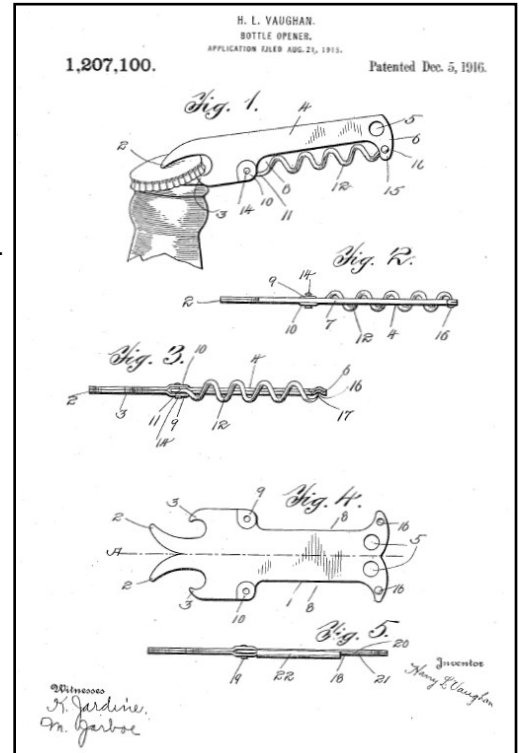
The two inventors assigned the patent to the American Can Company, which produced the first flat top beer can. American licensed the patent to Vaughan to make the opener and Vaughan soon started calling itself the "World's Largest Manufacturer of Can and Bottle Openers."



A vintage example (but not the first) of the 1935 church key is just under 5-inches in length and marked on the top: **ENJOY KRUEGER'S ON DRAUGHT. WHERE NOT AVAILABLE DRINK IT FROM KEGLINED CANS.** The other side is marked: **FOR BEER IN CANS MARKED CANCO PATENT 1,996,550 KEGLINED TRADE MARK AM.CAN CO.**



Vaughan produced the same opener but marked it: **"QUICK and EASY" CAN & BOTTLE OPENER** with some also marked: **VAUGHAN U.S.A. PAT. 1,996,550** on the back. Wide open branding followed with, among others, Sterling, Ballantine Ale, Coors, Lucky Lager, Pearl, Burgermeister, Schmidt's, Hamm's, Pabst Blue Ribbon and Budweiser, among others, ordering millions with their names.



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In the late 1930s, Vaughan, by then very, very wealthy, turned to his first vice president, John M. Grace, to guide the manufacturing and branding concern. Vaughan and his wife, Dora, meanwhile, jetted back and forth from Chicago to their adopted second home in Miami, enjoying high society life. World War II turned things at Vaughan upside down. From 1942 through 1945 the company stopped making can openers and all its other products, going to work for the U.S. government, producing bomb fuses for the Army and Navy. Following the war the company ramped up its peacetime pursuits, producing 100 million can openers a year by 1947. But Harry Lockwood Vaughan wasn't part of that success. He died of pneumonia in 1945 at the age of 74. His widow, Dora, died in 1956 at the age of 80. Vaughan Manufacturing (the Novelty part of the name was dropped in 1950) ceased operations around 1985, the victim of, among other things, screw off bottle caps and can pull-tabs.

SIDEBAR: Michael J. La Forte went from designing bomb fuses used by the U.S. Army and Navy in World War II to designing church key beer can openers and pop-off bottle openers, sometimes with a cork screw thrown in for good measure.

La Forte joined the U.S. Army Air Corp. in 1942 and served with its aeronautical engineering group. He was recognized for his design innovation in perfecting bomb fuses used in air raids. He was stationed in Chicago where he helped blueprint fuses in conjunction with the Vaughan Novelty Manufacturing Company.

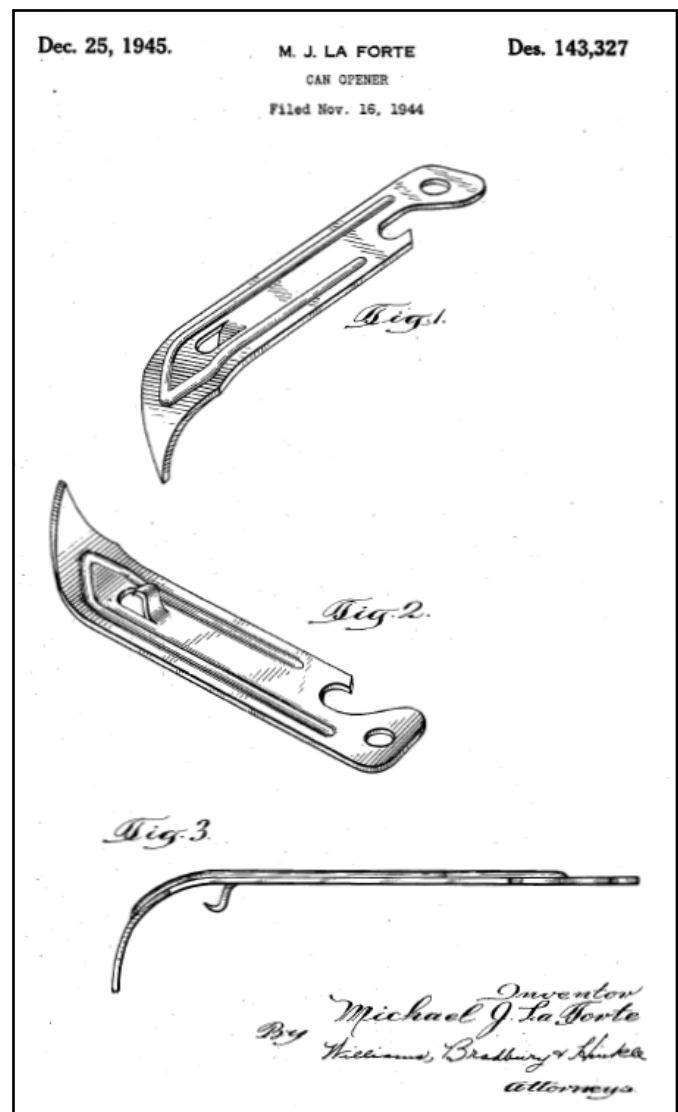
When the war was over, Vaughan went back to making housewares and La Forte stayed on, taking up residence in nearby Park Ridge, Illinois. In fact, La Forte stayed on for 40 years, working his way up to executive vice president and assigning more than 10 patents to the company before his retirement in 1985.

La Forte's first invention for Vaughan was Design Patent No. 143,327 granted on December 25, 1945 for a sleek church key can punch and bottle opener.

The 4 1/4-inch device was first marketed with the familiar name **"QUICK AND EASY CAN OPENER"** on the top and **VAUGHAN CHICAGO MADE U.S.A. PAT. 143,327 1,996,550** (Sampson/Hothersall) on the bottom side.

It was offered for branding with breweries lining up with orders including one example marked **RAINIER BEER ALE**.

La Forte's patents resulted in at least eight other products highly successful products for Vaughan, including church keys, combo corkscrews and rotary can openers. Although some had catchy names such as Quad Fold and Tap Boy, none of them were offered for branding.



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La Forte, who retired in 1985, died at the age of 91 from heart disease complications. In his obituary in the *Chicago Tribune* November 12, 2001, his son, Michael Jr., noted the career switch from the military to housewares. "It was a big change from making weapons but my dad really loved that (housewares) business. They clicked."



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