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August Anheuser Busch's Wall Mounted Bottle Opener By Don Thornton

Despite his silver spoon history, when the family brewery faced a problem with saloons in the early 1900s, August Anheuser Busch ostensibly stepped up. At issue were barkeeps reusing bottle caps to unload inferior beer. Busch's solution – a bottle opener that perforated or dented crown caps rendering them useless.

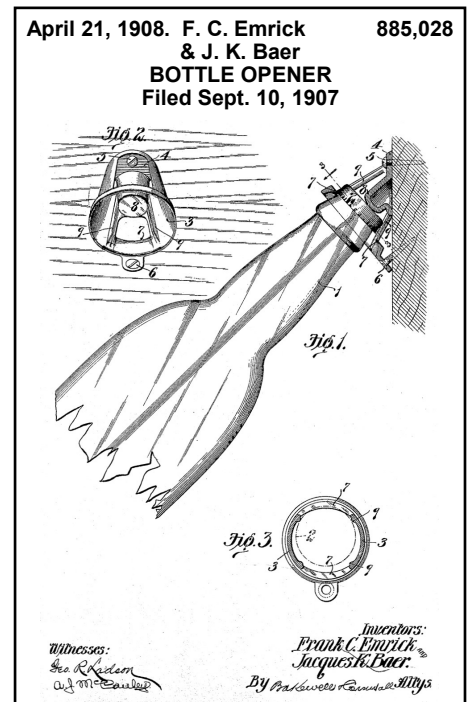
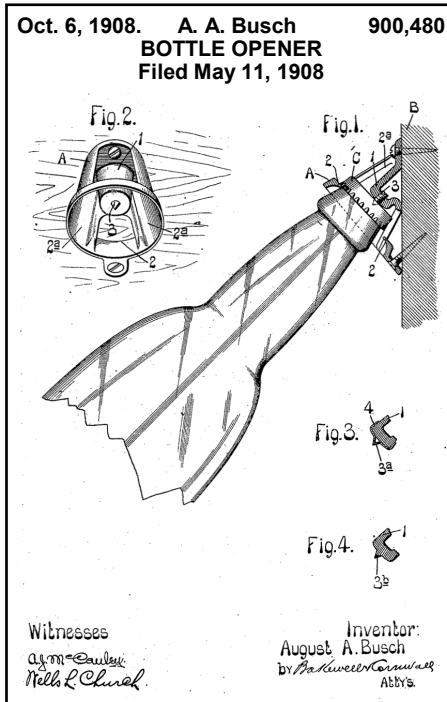
Busch was 42 years old when he applied for a patent for his opener. It was during his preordained ascension in the Anheuser-Busch beer empire before he was named president of the golden, St. Louis-based brewery the age of 47.

Busch was awarded Patent No. 900,480 on October 6, 1908 for an opener of the type "permanently connected to a stationary support such, for example, as a wall or bar in a saloon." The patent has a complicated but engrossing story with a cast of four characters, in addition to August. The four were Otto S. Busch, August's cousin, Morris Freund, a Busch family friend, Jacques K. Baer, a silent partner, and Frank C. Emrick, an inventor.

Busch assigned one-third of his wall-mount opener patent each to cousin Otto Busch and Freund. The two men had launched the Busch-Freund Brewers Supply Company of St. Louis with silent partner Baer, incorporating the firm in 1907 with \$64,000 in capital.

In his patent application, Busch cited another wall-mount patent granted only six months earlier, No. 885,028 dated April 21, 1908. The patent was awarded to Frank C. Emrick and Jacques K. Baer (yes, the silent partner). They assigned the patent to the Busch-Freund Brewers Supply Company. Emrick was described in a newspaper profile as an inventor who manufacturers hired to create solutions to their problems. At the time, there was a major problem that needed to be solved -- wall-mount openers then in use (mostly in saloons) chipping or breaking the mouth of the returnable bottles.

Presumably, this is how the Emrick patent came about: Bottles supplied by Busch-Freund to breweries were returnable, but great numbers being returned for reuse had damaged mouths because of faulty openers. Otto Busch, Freund and Baer approached Emrick to devise an opener that solved that problem. Baer stuck around to help Emrick and got credited on the resulting patent.



UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

AUGUST A. BUSCH, OF ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, ASSIGNOR OF ONE-THIRD TO OTTO S. BUSCH AND ONE-THIRD TO MORRIS FREUND, BOTH OF ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI.

BOTTLE-OPENER.

UNITED STATES PATENT OFFICE.

FRANK C. EMRICK AND JACQUES K. BAER, OF ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, ASSIGNORS TO BUSCH-FREUND BREWERS SUPPLY COMPANY, OF ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI, A CORPORATION OF MISSOURI.

BOTTLE-OPENER.

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Emrick said in his patent papers that the introduction of a “central post or projection” in the opener would contact with the metal crown cap away from the glass mouth and “consequently there is little liability of danger from chipping or breaking the mouth of the bottle.”

The 2 1/4-inch opener with two screw holes for mounting was manufactured and marketed – but examples are considered super rare with only three known to exist, according to Harold J. Eblen Jr., author of the comprehensive 2020 book *Wall Mounted Stationary Openers 1893-1970*.



All opener photos courtesy of Harold J. Eblen, Jr. (John Eblen)

Now back to August Busch's patent. He used the same patent drawing in No. 885,028, and some of the same language in his patent. In fact, Busch said the only difference in the two patents was his addition of a “sharp, pointed screw” on the inside “post” of the opener. Its purpose, he said, was “for indenting or perforating the metal caps of the crown seal closures ... so that said caps cannot be used again.”

Probably due to Busch's power at the time in his family's beer domain, the opener got past the patent stage and made to the market -- but just barely. That assumption is based on the number of such openers that survive today -- only one. It is in wall-mount historian Eblen's collection. He had designated it an Emrick model until information in the Busch patent came to light. Is it the only one or are there others out there waiting to be discovered? Either way it is an intriguing bit of trivia in Busch's biography.

Asked the response of the collecting world to the story behind the Busch opener, Eblen said: “The discovery of an opener that can be matched with a patent is a true dream. It enhances the value and the appreciation of who designed or produced it such as in the Busch opener being tied directly to the Anheuser-Busch brewery. Any new discovery or information like this is what drives our continued search for them to add to our collection. The missing history is a bonus.”

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SIDEBAR: One of Busch's more interesting of many important business triumphs was his creation of Bevo, a grain concoction introduced by the brewery just before alcoholic beverages were prohibited in 1916 in the United States Armed Forces, followed by national Prohibition in 1919. Bevo was a nonalcoholic malt beverage or so-called "near beer" that at its peak in the 1920s sold more than five million cases a year. A 1916 advertisement said: "The Unusual Non-Intoxicating Beverage." Bevo helped keep Anheuser-Busch alive for more than a decade during Prohibition before production ended in 1929 as bootleg beer and homebrew flooded the market. Five years later it was a sad and distressing ending for August Anheuser Busch. He committed suicide in 1934 with a bullet to his stomach after suffering in pain for several weeks with heart disease, dropsy and gout. Adolphus Busch III succeeded his father as company president.



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It tastes like no other soft drink you ever drank before—but when you taste it you'll say "At last!!"

And **Bevo** has more than this for you—it is nutritious—not a heavy drink, understand, but a bright, lively, foamy beverage with the extra virtue of having real food value. Purity that's ensured by pasteurization and sterilization.

Served Everywhere—10 cents a Bottle

ANHEUSER-BUSCH, ST. LOUIS

Guard Against Substitutes
Have the bottle opened in front of you, first seeing that the seal is unbroken and that the crown top bears the Fox.

You Will Find Bevo
at bars, restaurants, groceries, department and drug stores, picnic grounds, baseball parks, soda fountains, dining cars, steamships, cottages and other places where a refreshing beverage is sold.

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THE ANHEUSER-BUSCH BREWERY covers an area larger than the downtown district of America's second largest city—the famous "loop" of Chicago. It has 160 individual buildings—covering 70 city blocks or 142 acres of ground area—with more than 4,450,000 square feet of floor space. Its own private utilities take care of its heat, light, power and refrigeration needs.

ANHEUSER-BUSCH  ST. LOUIS, MO.

