

Bottles on Montana's Mining Frontier

by Ray Thompson



Fig. 1

from the bed of a foot hill stream near the present village of Gold Creek to know that there was a possibility of wealth in these valleys. In 1853, a railroad surveying crew under Captain John Mullen also washed gold here and named the stream Gold Creek. There are other reports of gold discoveries in Montana, but the most definitive was as Malone and Roeder¹ put it, "The first discovery definitely to be recorded occurred in the spring of 1858, when James and Granville Stuart [Figure 1], along with Reece Anderson, found traces at Gold Creek east of present day Drummond By the summer of 1862 the Stuart brothers and other men were at work here. A small settlement called American Fork sprang up on Gold Creek, but neither the diggings nor the town ever amounted to much." It was nearly a decade after the start of the western gold rush era that the streams of southwestern Montana revealed, in significant quantities, their centuries old secret - GOLD!

During this invasion of Montana's Rocky Mountains, newspapers across the country were being fed stories of fabulous strikes. Such accounts were great news to disappointed miners in Colorado, Nevada, California and Idaho. Their itinerant life styles were about to take another turn north to the glittering gulches of Montana.

Once the word got out that there was gold in "them thar hills", men came with what they could carry. Like ants on a hot summer day, they scurried over hill and dale in search of gold, the fabled substance of wealth and happiness. In quantities rivaling the California Mother lode, gold was found laced in the placers of Grasshopper Creek (Bannack, 1862), Silver Creek (Silver City, 1862), Alder Creek (Virginia City and Nevada City, 1863), Last Chance Gulch (Helena, 1864), Confederate Gulch (Diamond City, 1864), McClellan Gulch (Pacific City, 1864), Ophir Gulch (Blackfoot City, 1865), Lincoln Gulch (Lincoln, 1865), Cedar Creek (Louisville and Forest City, 1869)

Shortly after the great 1849 California gold rush, a trapper, Francois Finlay was alleged to have discovered gold in the northern Rocky Mountains in what is now Montana. He panned enough float gold



Fig. 2



Fig. 3



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

and many other significant locations [Figure 2]. It is estimated² that Montana population peaked in 1866 at 28,000 and by the 1870 census had only 20,595 residents. Tens of thousands were living from the land and on what they could get from early trading posts.

Trading posts were very scarce in the gold country of Montana Territory in the early 1860s. There were Fort Owen on the Bitterroot, Hell Gate [Figure 3] on the lower Clark Fork River near what is now Missoula, and Labarge City (Deer Lodge) on the upper Clark Fork. Fort Benton

[Figure 4], the upstream end of Missouri River steamboat navigation, was over 150 miles, as the crow flies, from the mines. None of these sleepy posts were prepared for the mass immigration of miners and those that followed. Hardware, foods and condiments, clothing, tobacco and whiskey were all in very short supply.

However, it did not take long for the goods to start flowing into the camps. Transportation routes existed and the well of goods and services was primed by the miners. The long distances to civilization was a significant problem. Distance was time. To place orders and receive them took months. Freight companies formed and grew [Figure 5]. Hauling out gold and returning with desperately needed supplies was a lucrative business. Established trading routes widened as mule and oxen teams passed over the often muddy and always treacherous trails. Goods poured in during the summers, but winters slowed or even stopped the wagon masters. High spring flows on the Missouri allowed the shallow draught steam boat from St. Louis to unload in Fort Benton [Figure 6]. Long strings of wagons regularly pulled the Mullan Road grade, topping the bluff above this upriver port, taking their loads to miners and the communities which grew along the gulches. Over the Mullan Road from the west, wagons rolled in from Ft. Walla Walla, Washington Territory and Spokane Valley, stopping at Cedar Creek, Hell Gate, Bear Creek, Gold Creek, and on to Deer Lodge [Figure 7] and Helena.

Several great freighters handled much of the cargo bound for these new camps. Of note are Alexander Toponce, Ben Holladay, J. J. Mann, A. J. Oliver, Peabody and Caldwell, Sweet & Metzgar, and the Diamond R Company. In 1865, Alex Toponce³ had a contract to haul 90,000 pounds of freight from Ft. Benton to Virginia City. He was to be paid \$0.11 per pound, payable in Alder Gulch gold for every 100 pounds delivered. Maybe with additional research one could determine what was in the load. It could be that some of the bottles I am discussing in this paper were carried on these wagons. Toponce was also a freighter on the road from Utah to Virginia City. His book is filled with interesting incidents and people he encountered in his travels. As competition for freight increased the price per 100 pound dropped fifty percent or more at the peak of the rush in the late

Fig. 6



Fig. 7



Fig. 8



1860s.

The Mormons' early settlement in Utah and their establishment of a strong agricultural economy gave them a great opportunity to supply the mines of Montana. There were already good trails

north to the Idaho mines in the Boise Basin and on the Salmon River. The road to Montana split from the main trail to Salmon just south of what is now Dubois, Idaho. This branch became the main route to the new mines almost overnight. With

the completion of the transcontinental railroad across northern Utah in 1869, the stage was set for easier and more regular transportation of goods from Corrine, Utah to Virginia City, Mont. [Figures 8-9] and other Montana mining camps.

Manufacturers, ranchers, and merchants, used to supplying western gold rushes, were eager to send their goods to more insatiable pioneers. The myriad of supplies arriving in Montana in the 1860s stocked the shelves of businesses and cabins. They were used and used up. Many items, including bottles, were often reused until they became tainted with disagreeable contents or were broken. They were usually left behind, along with any other unnecessary gear, when the miners moved on to better diggings.

It is what was left behind by the prospectors, traders, wagon masters, hurdy gurdy girls, saloon keepers, preachers, thugs, gamblers and agricultural men that entices our generation. A ghost camp has become the Lorelei, which in a silent calling beckons those of us too weak to resist entering. The rewards of a visit to the gray skeletons, which contrast against the deep blue mountain skies or the flowered meadow, are the chill of the breeze, the warmth of the sun and the haunting of knowing that you are not the first to stand on this spot. Every time I see an artifact of those days, I cannot help but be taken back, even momentarily, to when it was new and necessary. Whether it is a perfume, syrup pitcher, ointment container, lamp or other necessity, the user was grateful for it [Figure 10].

Maybe I will raise your awareness of Montana's history by talking about a few types of bottles representing the 1860-1870 mining era in the newly established territory. Some of the finest products available in the United States at the time were available in the raucous, ephemeral camps. Memories of what was good and useful back home, or the insistence of an ever-present peddler, introduced bottles of all kinds to these raw and distant mountain valleys. These bottles, most often found in shards, contained whiskey [Figure 11], schnapps, champagne and wine [Figure 12], ales and brandy [Figure 13], soda and mineral waters, spices, catsup, mustard, pickles and pepper sauces [Figures 14-15], perfume, ink [Figure 16], medicine [Figure 17], bitters [Figures 18-19] and almost anything else you can imagine being shipped and stored in a bottle.

The cargo of the steamboat *Bertrand* is a time capsule of glass containers once destined for the mining camps of Montana Territory. The flat bottomed steamboats plied the Missouri with all the mining gear and goods you can imagine necessary on the frontier; all this in return for a load of gold, hides and passengers. As a testament to the success of many journeys up river, we see the remnants of their cargo scattered across the landscape. The *Bertrand* was not so lucky to have delivered its cargo, but left it on the bottom of the Missouri River. It hit a snag about 20 miles north of Omaha, Nebraska on April 1, 1865. Its cargo, lost to the ages, was discovered and excavated nearly 100 years latter. This story is told in vivid details, and the cargo is archived and displayed at the Steamboat *Bertrand* Visitor Center on the DeSoto National Wildlife Refuge in Missouri Valley, Iowa.

As a significant archaeological discovery, it is the perfect time capsule for this decade of Montana Territorial history. Locally found artifacts can be closely associated, undeniably attributing them to the first major influx of gold miners into the new territory. As stated in the preface to Leslie Peterson's *The Bertrand Stores*,⁴ *"Seldom do we obtain more than a partial glimpse of the past from archaeological endeavors. In the case of the BERTRAND collection, however, the condition of excavated objects was as incredible as their diversity. Lack of oxygen and a slightly acidic soil assured the survival of inorganic and some organic materials. Even foods survived; a variety of canned or bottled fruits and vegetables were bound for Montana gold fields! Indeed, no collection of historic objects from the 1860s in any other federal museum compares to the BERTRAND materials. The significance of this collection remains its research value for archaeologists. Type specimens of every variety help determine the chronology for other archaeological finds."*

Ronald Switzer⁵ has provided us with an excellent discussion and view of the *Bertrand* bottles. Jerome Petsche⁶ covers the wider array of artifacts from the *Bertrand*. All of these descriptions help me date other artifacts found in association with a described *Bertrand* item.

Needless to say, the conditions in which the used and discarded artifacts are found in Montana differ considerably from those of the steamboat excavation. These bottles,

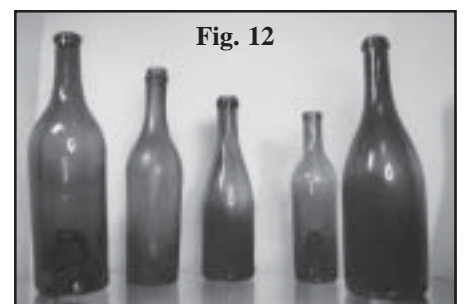




Fig. 14

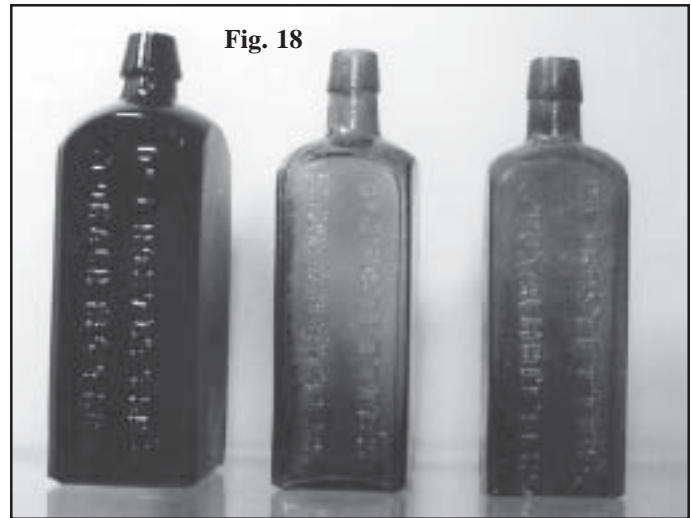


Fig. 18



Fig. 15

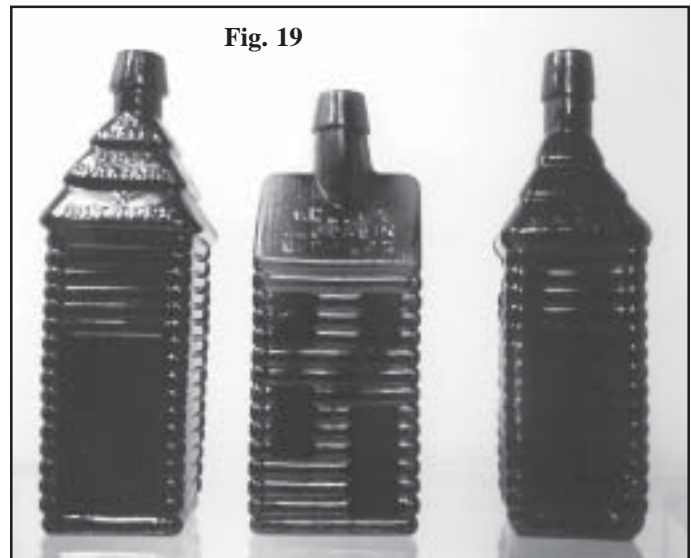


Fig. 19



Fig. 16

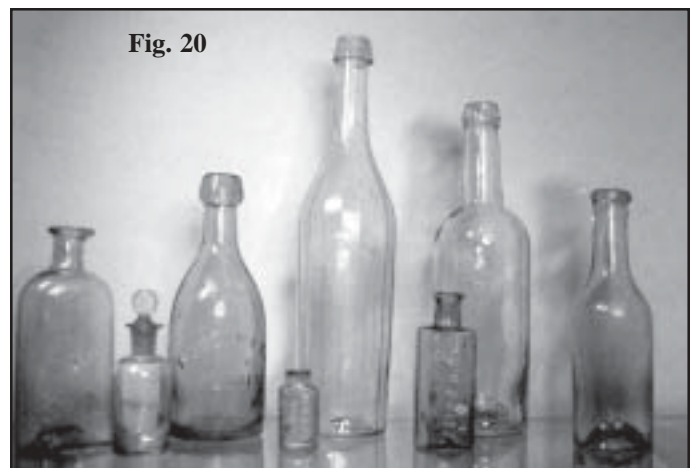


Fig. 20

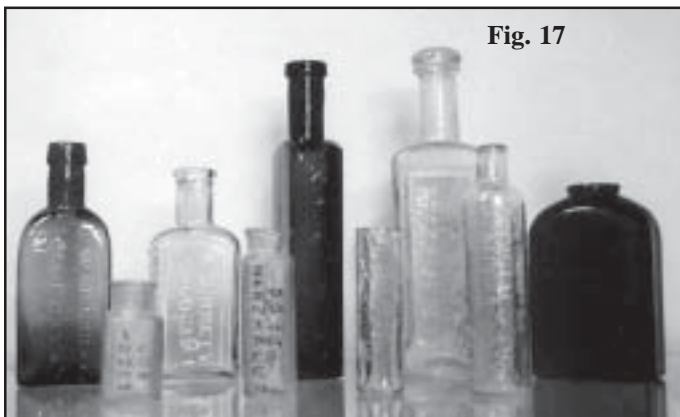


Fig. 17

thrown to the rocks below, were never to be given another slice of importance. That is until their stories, so faint that most never heard the whispers, were heard. The few with keen ears and eyes came forth after a hundred years to find and retrieve these discards, resurrect their stories and give them, once again, important places in history and on warm and lighted shelves. Very few early bottles, such as these pontiled examples found in Montana [Figure 20], survived this precarious pedigree. These were discarded very early and luckily survived and are among

the few in Montana collections.

Many are discovered in pieces and after careful reconstruction give a good representation of how glass-house fresh house examples may have appeared [Figures 21-22].

The items pictured in this article are all attributed to Montana. I have used them to characterize the early mining occupation of Montana Territory from 1860-1870. They have been acquired by the author from many sources over the past 40 years.

The included figures are examples of bottles and the places they were used. The bottles are grouped to conserve space, but you can see that they represent a considerable variety of glass ware. I have described the figures below. I hope this provides an illustration of what the gold seekers left behind in those first fleeting years of Montana's mining legacy.

References:

¹ Malone, Michael P. & Roeder, Richard B., *Montana, A History of Two Centuries*, University of Washington Press, 1976.

² Ibid. page 53.

³ Toponce, Alexander, *Reminiscences of Alexander Toponce, Pioneer, 1839-1923*, Published by Katie Toponce, 1923.

⁴ Peterson, Leslie Perry; *The Bertrand Stores, An Introduction to the Artifacts from the 1865 Wreck of the Steamboat Bertrand*, Desoto National Wildlife Refuge, Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior; published by Midwest Interpretive Association, 1997.

⁵ Switzer, Ronald R., *The Bertrand Bottles, A Study of 19th-Century Glass and Ceramic Containers*, National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C., 1974.

⁶ Petsche, Jerome B., *The Steamboat Bertrand: History, Excavation and Architecture*, Office of Archaeology and Historical Preservation, National Park Service, Washington, D.C., 1974.

Illustrations:

Figure 1: Granville Stuart. He and brother James were early mining and ranching pioneers, later to become prominent Territorial businessmen. They were consignees of much of the brandy and Udolpho Wolfe's schnapps on board the Bertrand. (Courtesy of Northwest Reprographics, Helena, Montana. 1976.)

Figure 2: Sketch map of Montana, by

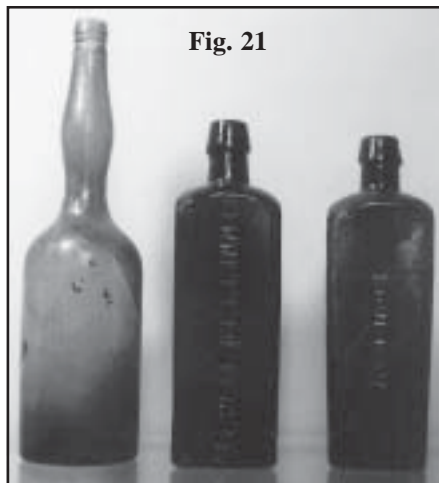


Fig. 21

author.

Figure 3: The Worden and Co. store at Hell Gate circa 1860. Judge Woody is in the foreground of this later image. This store stood four miles down river from present day Missoula. (Courtesy of Northwest Reprographics, Helena, Montana, 1976.)

Figure 4: Northeast view of Ft. Benton in 1869. (Courtesy of Northwest Reprographics, Helena, Montana, 1976.)

Figure 5: A bull team in front of Murphy, Neel & Co. in Ft. Benton on its way to one of the Territory's mining camps. This company was the consignee of many cases of bitters aboard the Bertrand. (Courtesy of Northwest Reprographics, Helena, Montana, 1976.)

Figure 6: The banks of the Missouri River at Ft. Benton shortly after a river steamer unloaded. The boxes in the near center and right likely contain bottled goods. (Courtesy of Northwest Reprographics, Helena, Montana, 1976.)

Figure 7: Deer Lodge, M.T. in 1869. This was Granville Stuart's business location. (Courtesy of Northwest Reprographics, Helena, Montana, 1976.)

Figure 8: The destination of much of the freight on board the Bertrand was Virginia City, M.T. The gulches around

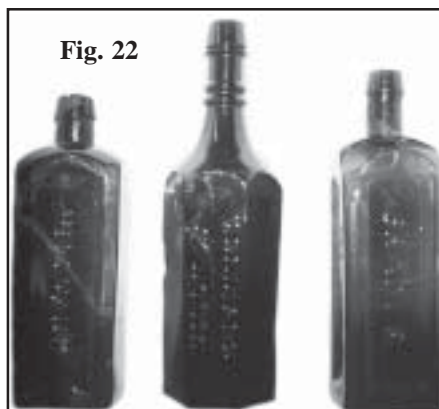


Fig. 22

this city supported some of the richest gold finds in the Territory. (Courtesy of Northwest Reprographics, Helena, Montana, 1976.)

Figure 9: Wallace St. in Virginia City was home to many of the city's businesses. The hand painted advertisement on the box to the right attests to the presence of Drakes Bitters in the 1860s. (Courtesy of Northwest Reprographics, Helena, Montana, 1976.)

Figure 10: L to R: fancy perfume; syrup pitcher with applied handle and sheared lip as the original pewter pour spout; Cherry Tooth Paste pot lid; utility BIMAL pint; 12-sided ointment container of white pottery; lamp base with applied handle and sheared neck. (Photo by author.)

Figure 11: From left: WILLINGTON GLASSWORKS with backward "Ns"; Wm. McCULLY and Co., PITTSBURGH PA with PATENT on shoulder; ELLENVILLE GLASS WORKS in green. (Photo by author.)

Figure 12: All free-blown bottles from L to R are a large olive green wine and a smaller amber liquor; a "standard" champagne; wine with a long, intrusive kick up; and a magnum champagne with a graphite pontil. (Photo by author.)

Figure 13: Black glass - four ales of different shapes and lip finishes surround a three-mold quart brandy. (Photo by author.)

Figure 14: L to R: three-mold olive oil; a very crude aqua, ground lip mustard, WHITNEY GLASSWORKS GLASSBORO, N.J. pickle with PATENTED MARCH 23, 1869 embossed on the neck ring; PARKER BROS. / LONDON CLUB SAUCE with a LEA & PERRINS stopper; cathedral pickles in three sizes and patterns, WORCESTERSHIRE SAUCE on shoulder with plain glass stopper. (Photo by author.)

Figure 15: Back row has four pepper sauces and an olive oil. The sauces are six-sided, eight-ribs and ring-necked, cathedral square, and round with eight flutes. Front row has an H. T. HELMBOLD/GENUINE FLUID/EXTRACTS//PHILADELPHIA, a pontiled French Mustard, "W" embossed on a raised oval ring for Wichert out of San Francisco, and E. R. DURKEE & CO/NEW YORK. (Photo by author.)

Figure 16: A variety of pottery inks and a wood case for a traveling ink. The bottle

is missing from the wood case. The pottery pints are stamped from P & J ARNOLD/LONDON. The labeled white cone is from THADDEUS DAVIDS & CO. (Photo by author.)

Figure 17: This grouping has a G.W. MERCHANT/LOCKPORT N.Y.; JOB/MOSES on two sides; M. DIMMETT/ST. LOUIS//COUGH//BALSAM; DOCT/MARSHALL'S//SNUFF: NY MEDICAL//UNIVERSITY (with backwards N) in cobalt; DR J.H. McLEAN'S/CANDY VERMIFUGE/ST LOUIS which looks like a lozenge cylinder; R.R.R./ENTd ACCORD/TO ACT OF/CONGRESS//RADWAYS// SARSAPARILIAN / RESOLVENT; rolled lip MRS INSLAWS/SOOTHING SYRUP/CURTIS & PERKINS/ PROPRIETORS; and an amber rolled lip snuff. (Photo by author.)

Figure 18: DR. J. HOSTETTERS/STOMACH BITTERS in olive green

(large size) plain base; a greenish yellow with L & W 10 on base with two dots under R; and amber with S. McKEE & Co. 1 on base. (Photo by author.)

Figure 19: L to R: ST/DRAKES/1860/PLANTATION/X/BITTERS six-log black cranberry color; an amber KELLY'S/OLD CABIN/BITTERS//PATENTED/1863; four-log DRAKES in olive green. (Photo by author.)

Figure 20: All these bottles have open pontils except the soda, third from left, which has a graphite pontil. From L to R these are: a flared lip Jamaica ginger; acid with fitted stopper; blob top soda embossed H. GRONE & CO/St (with two dots under the T) LOUIS/Mo with letters FRL on the reverse; AYER'S //LOWELL/MASS // PILLS; 18 Paneled catsup; GIROLAMO/PAGLIANO; two-piece mold catsup; and a utility two-piece mold bottle in very heavy glass. This one was found

protruding from a cow trail. (Photo by author.)

Figure 21: L to R: Light amber lady's leg; BENNETT. PIETERS & CO//RED JACKET/BITTERS, amber; C. H. SWAIN'S//BOURBON//BITTERS on a yellow-amber, case-shaped bottle. (Photo by author.)

Figure 22: L to R: HELLMAN'S// CONGRESS BITTERS//ST LOUIS. Mo; C. LEDIARD/ST LOUIS six-sided with double neck ring; BRADY'S//FAMILY// BITTERS. (Photo by author.)

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