

~ Lash's ~ Not Just Bitters

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This article was contributed by Douglas Lash, who is a member of the Lash Family Hierarchy and originally appeared in: "PHARMACY IN HISTORY JOURNAL – VOL. 43 No 1, 2001." "LASH'S BITTERS: From the Bathroom to the Bedroom", by Benjamin C. Torbenson, Jonathon Erlen, & Michael S. Torbenson.

If you ever attend antique bottle shows or antique malls, you will notice Lash stoneware root beer mugs as well as Lash bitters bottles. Until now, we did not realize that these were products of the same company. The soft drink bottlers & drug companies were typically different industries. So herein is another mystery solved, thanks to Douglas Lash, who we met at the Ohio Bottle Club Show in Kirtland, Ohio. We are still seeking more Lash family genealogy.

From 1850 to 1899, many questionable medicines were promoted & sold in the USA. These were called: patent medicines, proprietary medicines, or nostrums. Bitters was one category of these early medicines.

During the reign of King George II, (1727-1760) the term bitters originated in England, in response to taxes levied on the sale of alcoholic beverages. Small amounts of bitter tasting plants were included in the liquor, and the transformed beverage was sold as a medicine.

There is relatively little historical information on the Lash Bitters Co., in business from 1884 to 1966, and also manufactured soft drinks. After Hires, Lash root beer mugs are most commonly seen at antique bottle shows, which may be attributed to several regions of Lash bottling plants.

The Lash Bitters Co. was established by Pharmacist, John Spieker. John was born in 1855 and moved Cincinnati to Sacramento in 1875. A year later, he formed a partnership with Pharmacist A.C. Tufts, to produce a medicine called Yerba Santa Cough Balsam.

John Spieker married Cornelia Ackley in 1882. John was an independent druggist for the next few years and developed patent medicines.

T M LASH & CO.

In February, 1884, John Spieker formed a new partnership with Tito M. Lash, a

filter manufacturer and named the company T. M. Lash & Co. to produce Lash's Liver & Kidney Bitters. Other products were Homer's Kidney & Liver Cure, Lash's Magic Liniment, Lash's Wild Cherry Tonic, Lash's Honey of Horehound & Tar, and several non-alcoholic soft drinks, including Lash's Root Beer.

Tito Lash, mainly responsible for acquiring new clients, shared the duties within T. M. Lash & Co with John Spieker, who was the manager of the medical products and also the treasurer. The company was very successful and Lash's Bitters became very popular in many regions.

Tito hired an accountant in 1889, who found questionable accounting problems in the company's books. In October, an injunction was granted that denied Spieker from access to any accounts, money, or property, and the partnership was officially terminated.

Ten days later, Spieker bought out his former partner, and also Lash's half of the rights to produce and market the firm's line of products.

LASH'S BITTERS CO.

John Spieker then established a new company called Lash's Bitters Co. and continued to manufacture Lash's Bitters, and a few other medicines, including Homer's Kidney & Liver Cure, a product he purchased from Homer Williams.

The company moved to San Francisco in 1893, and a year later, it was officially incorporated as Lash's Bitters Co. The business was very successful and in 1901, the Chicago office was opened, and in 1904, the New York City office. Their financial situation was quite promising, and the rights to make Peruvian Bitters, another already successful product, was purchased. The new labels included: "Lash's Bitters Co."

George M. Pond, the manager of Lash's

Chicago business, left and started his own bitters company and produced Pond's Bitters for the next 15 years.

John Spieker died in 1914 at the age of 59. John's wife, Cornelia Ackley Spieker became the new manager of Lash's Bitters Co., with their son, Warren Spieker, as president, in the San Francisco Office.

The Lash's Bitters Co. had a long history of bottling soft drinks and other non-alcoholic beverages, as well as their main line of patent medicines. At that time, their production changed to soft drinks. Prohibition prevented selling of liquor, so any Lash Bitters had to be sold as a medicine.

The New York operation closed in 1930, still during Prohibition. The Chicago and San Francisco offices closed in 1934 and the business offices and manufacturing were consolidated in Anaheim, where they continued production through 1943.

Lash produced beverages at their Passaic, NJ. bottling works, which opened in 1925 and remained in production through 1966, following the death of Manager, Martin O'Shea. Lash's Bitters was a prominent medicine, claiming to cure: Biliousness, Malaria, Dyspepsia, Indigestion, Headache, Sour Stomach, Neuralgia, Back Pain, and all afflictions of the Kidneys and Liver.

The principal active ingredient in Lash's Bitters was an extract from the bark of the buckthorn tree, and also contained cinnamon bark, licorice, cardamom seed, coriander seed and sugar. Lash's Root Beer probably also had great medicinal value, as well as some similar ingredients.

The Lash Root Beer mugs were made of stoneware by the Sherwood Brothers Pottery in New Brighton, Pennsylvania. Many thanks to Douglas Lash for contributing this article on his family history.

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