

## The Maple Syrup Bottle with the Odd Little Handle: A Closer Look at its History

Matthew M. Thomas

A popular maple history topic circulating on the internet claims to explain the origins of the iconic flat jug or oval flask-shaped glass maple syrup bottle with the small handle on the neck. These articles argue that the appearance of the seemingly useless handles on this syrup bottle are an intentional design element meant to be a stylistic representation reminiscent of the handles on ceramic jugs used in the past to package maple syrup. As quaint and fanciful as this idea may be, research into the history of the design of this particular bottle, combined with an understanding of the history and evolution of the use of glass bottles in the maple syrup industry, presents a more accurate and evidence-based storyline.

It is certainly true that ceramic jugs were used for holding all sorts of liquids in the past and could have held maple syrup. However, taking it further than accepting that they could, it is important to ask what is the evidence that ceramic jugs were used for storing syrup? What is missing are written accounts and examples of images showing the use of ceramic jugs by maple syrup makers. There are little to no archival or photographic records, nor verifiable evidence from collections of maple industry antiques and artifacts of significant use of ceramics jugs for

storing maple syrup. The maple industry does have a tradition of selling syrup to tourists in miniature gift-sized ceramic containers and jugs, but these containers were only introduced in the 1950s. Instead, the use of ceramic jugs for holding maple syrup is more of a romanticized image of the past as opposed to a demonstrated fact.

One important reason that we do not see references to or the appearance of ceramic jugs for maple syrup is that during the 1700s and most of the 1800s, the era when ceramic jugs were in greatest use for holding liquid products, maple sugar, not maple syrup, was the primary product of the sugarbush. If one wanted maple syrup you could reconstitute maple sugar by adding water and heating it in a pan to form syrup. It was not until the 1890s and after that we begin to see a significant shift from producing maple sugar to maple syrup, and by that time glass bottles were being mass produced and readily available for storing syrup.

A careful examination of advertisements for the sale of maple syrup and glass bottle manufacturers' catalogs dating back to the 1880s shows that maple syrup was packed in metal cans and glass bottles, but not ceramic jugs. The glass containers were in shapes and designs similar to round and square long

neck liquor bottles, condiment style bottles, and short necked eight-sided bottles similar to water bottles. None of these bottle styles featured small loop handles on the neck the bottles.

Loop handles on bottles do not begin to appear in the catalogs of bottle manufacturers until the mid-1920s. The mid-1920s catalog from the Illinois Glass Company, who later merged with the Owens Bottle Company in 1929 to form the Owens- Illinois Glass Company, introduced a number of new glass containers with loop handles on the neck and a reinforcing ring of thicker glass at the juncture of the neck and shoulder. The loop on the handles of the bottles introduced in the 1920s are large enough that one can actually fit a finger through to lift up and hold the glass jar for pouring. The new loop handled food container bottles in the 1920s catalogs were referred to as jugs, cruets, and decanters, and quickly became very popular designs in the food industry.

One of the earliest clearly dated examples for packing maple syrup in a jug-style bottle with a loop handle on the neck comes from Vermont Maid blended syrup around 1925. At that time Vermont Maid Syrup was bottled by the Vermont Maple Syrup Company in St. Johnsbury, Vermont under the ownership of George C. Cary. At this same time, a few other maple companies began using the new Illinois Glass Company loop handled bottles, notably Boston's New England Maple Syrup Company and St. Johnsbury's Maple Grove Candies. Not surprisingly,

both these maple companies had strong ties to George C. Cary and the Cary Maple Sugaring Company. The introduction and use of these early handled bottles set in motion the evolution of syrup bottle design that eventually led to the iconic oval shaped flask.'

Following on the introduction of earlier forms of the loop handled glass bottle in the 1920s, in 1933 a new circular, jug style bottle was introduced, with a smaller and more angular handle and similar reinforced neck ring as appeared a decade earlier. Designed and patented (USD89301) by Edwin W. Fuerst (1903-1988) of Toledo, Ohio for manufacture by the Owens- Illinois Glass Company, the design was proprietary in the United States to the Cary Maple Sugar Company, who used it bottle their Highland 100% Pure Maple Syrup in 2, 8, 12, and 24 ounce sizes. The bottle designer, Edwin Fuerst was an experienced commercial artist who worked closely with the Owens-Illinois and Libbey Glass companies.

Also in the mid-1930s, the Pacific Syrup Company out of San Francisco began using a bottle in with a small handle on the neck on a body of flatter jug-like flask,-featuring rounded shoulders and a shape that tapered to a splayed out base. Pacific Syrup used this design for their Tea Garden Syrup, a cane and maple blend. This exact design does not appear in the glass company catalogs and a design patent has yet to be discovered, but it is a clear precursor to the familiar oval-flask syrup bottle of the maple syrup industry.

In 1950, the iconic oval flask with the little handle, sometimes called a flat jug, was introduced to the maple syrup industry. Under the less than glamorous title of "JUG OR THE LIKE," the bottle was designed and patented (USD162147) by Brooks D. Fuerst (1905-1998) of Sylvania, Ohio, with the patent again assigned to the Owens-Illinois Company. Brooks Fuerst was the younger brother of Edwin Fuerst and like his brother, Brooks Fuerst was an experienced designer of glass bottles and jars for food and liquid packaging and worked extensively with the Owens-Illinois Glass Company and the Libbey Glass Company, both in Toledo, Ohio, a place that is sometimes called the Glass Capital of the World.

Although the design patent was submitted in 1949 and awarded in 1951, the Cary Maple Sugar Company began using the oval flask bottle as early as 1950 with the release of its the most popular glass container in use in new brand of Cary's 100% Pure Maple Syrup in 2, 8, 12 and 24 ounce sizes. With the introduction of the Cary's brand of pure maple syrup, the Cary's brand of pure maple syrup, the Cary Company's older label of Highland Syrup was converted into a blended maple and cane, syrup, but also bottled in the new oval flask. Along with the Cary Company,

Pacific Syrup Company also began to sell their blended Tea Garden Syrup in the early 1950s in the new small-handled bottle.

Use of the bottle appears to have been limited to branded syrups in the 1950s and 1960s. Sale of the oval flask for use by individual producers picked up significantly in the 1970s and by the 1990s the glass oval flask had become the most popular glass container used in the United State maple industry. The fourteen-year window protecting the design patent has long since expired. With the design no longer protected and in the realm of free-use, the original angular loop handle with two sharp corners has been replaced with a more rounded handle. As a design that was specifically introduced for bottling maple syrup and saw near-exclusive use by the maple industry, over time the glass oval flask with the little handle on the neck developed into unmistakable and iconic symbol associated with maple syrup.

Matthew Thomas is a historian who researches and writes about all aspects of the history of the maple syrup industry. You can contact him and read more of his research at the website [www.maplesyruphistory.com](http://www.maplesyruphistory.com).



Image 1  
Two examples of early loop handled syrup bottles from the 1920s and 1930s.  
Note the larger size loop.

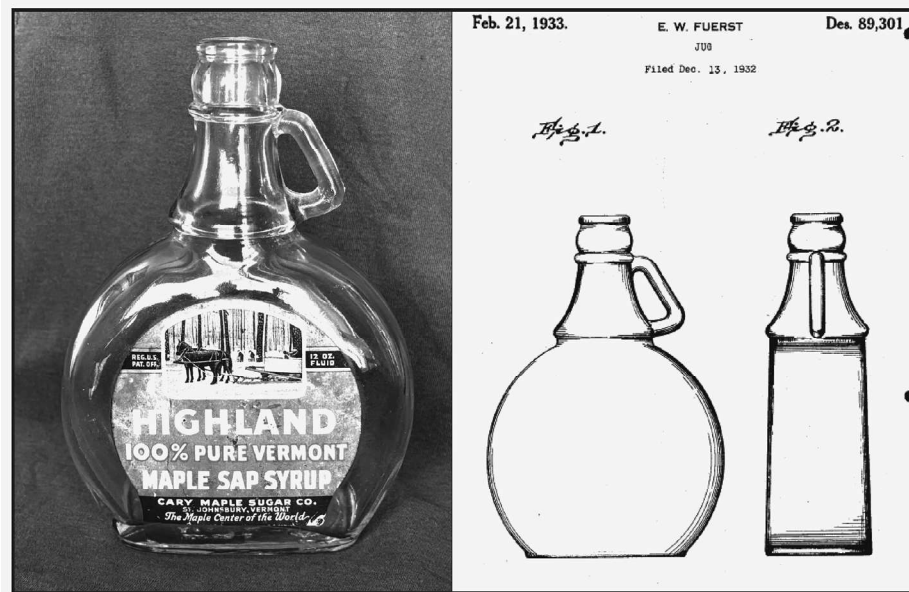


Image 2  
E.W Fuerst design for circular syrup bottle from 1933 that was precursor to the oval shaped flask or flat

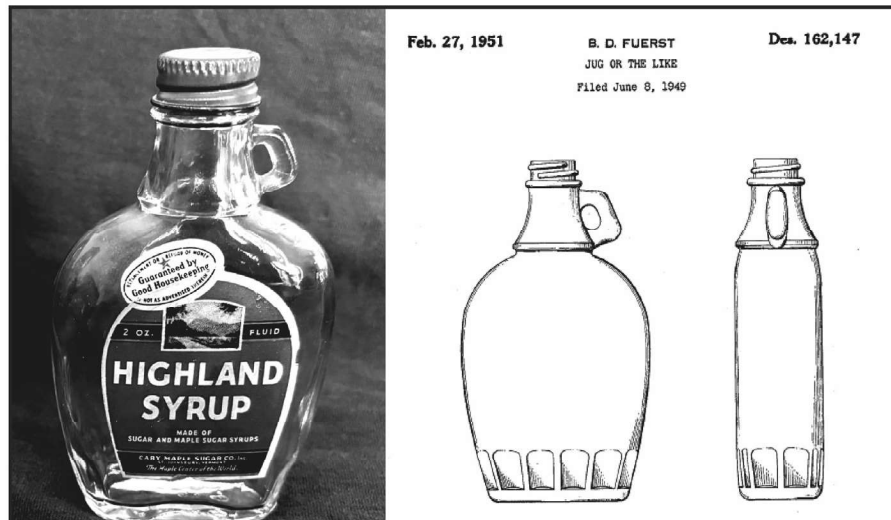


Image 3  
Early example and 1951 patent design for the maple syrup industry's iconic oval-shaped flask with the small handle. Note the angular shape to the handle which was later replaced with an even smaller rounded handle.