

BRITISH AMMONIAS

Part 1

Bob Barbour, #19

In 1923 The Dangerous Drugs and Poisons Amendment Act was enacted to bring under control lethal poisons. Coinciding with this legislation was the rise of the chemical industry. Toxic cleaning and disinfectant products were being marketed to the general public. Ammonia, carbolic acid and bleach had been widely used for decades with little or no controls. They were used both in the home and in hospitals through the late Victorian and early Edwardian periods. If any of these substances were accidentally consumed internally by the user, they could cause a severe reaction and even death. Children and the elderly were particularly susceptible to these cleaning agents and disinfectants, because they couldn't read the warning labels.

Fortunately in the early 1900's these products began to be sold in clearly marked bottles or containers often distinguishable by touch, and may be prominently embossed with one or more warnings, hobnails, ribbings vertical or horizontal and cross hatching. They were often conspicuously embossed and labeled with "Caution, Not To Be Taken, Poison, Poisonous" etc. Ironically, there were more deaths recorded from this group of products as a result of accidental or mistaken consumption than any other medicines during the same time period. Which brings up the often asked question, "Did these attractive and colorful containers actually do more to attract a potential victim rather than warn of a possible dangerous substance?"

This first article will look at some of the Oval ammonias. This group comprises the largest segment of the general ammonia containers. One of the attributes of these bottles is the large variety of colors these bottle were produced in. The most common color is aqua, but they are also found in: (in ascending order of rarity) cobalt blue, sapphire blue, various shades of amber, various shades of green, teal and black. They were also heavily embossed with warning bumps or vertical ribbing. Additionally, these bottles would have Poisonous or Poison, Not To Be Taken and Caution embossed on the front panel.

There were literally hundreds of companies that produced these products. Some of the better known companies, at least to poison collectors are: Burgons, responsible for one of the rarest of all oval ammonias, the infamous Burgon's Cloudy Ammonia, found in cobalt blue and aqua, adorned with warning bumps and an elephant embossed on the front panel. Yapoo, Emka, National and Beehive actually have the manufacturer's name embossed on the front or back panel. This group begs the question, "Why did companies like Yapoo and others use a range of colors to sell their products in?" Did the colors represent different concentrations or was it some kind of early marketing ploy to see if consumers preferred a particular color over another? Or was it the glass manufacturers just produced colors based on what was readily available in the pots? I don't know the answer, so if someone out there does, please let me know.

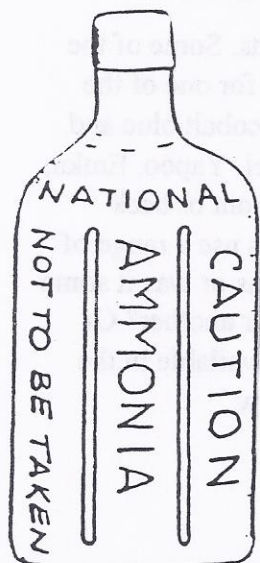
Again most of this material was borrowed from The Consummate Poison Collector, Brian Thatcher. I have tried to add some of my own bits where I could, but the overall thrust was Brian's.

I have included 3 pictures with descriptions of nine of my ammonias.

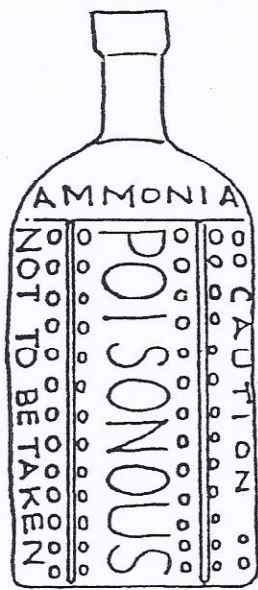
And of course I am always looking for colors I do not have. So if see a color I don't have and you are interested in selling or trading, please let me know. Enjoy!! Bob



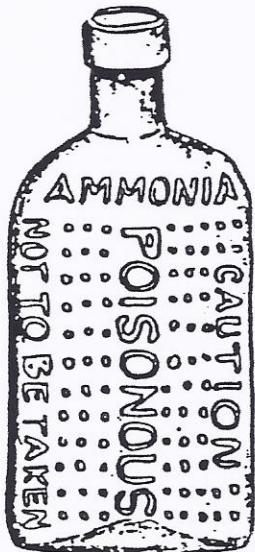
Picture 1: NATIONAL AMMONIAS



KO-18: Cobalt Blue, Sapphire Blue, Scarce, Rare in Amber, Extremely Rare in Green, 6.5in tall, Embossed NATIONAL horizontally top of front panel AMMONIA vertically down center, NOT TO BE TAKEN vertically left side front panel, CAUTION vertically down right side front panel, two vertical lines on either side of AMMONIA
Price: \$40 - \$500, depending on color



Picture 2: BEEHIVE & EMKA AMMONIAS
 KO-21: 6.25in - 6.375in. Embossed AMMONIA horizontally top of front panel, POISONOUS vertically down center, NOT TO BE TAKEN vertically left side front panel CAUTION vertically down right side panel, 5 vertical rows of warning bumps, two on either side of POISONOUS and two bumps above and below the word CAUTION
 From left to right: Citron, Beehive embossed top rear panel, Cobalt Blue, EMKA embossed top rear panel, Yellow Olive Amber, no top rear panel. Price: \$100 - \$200



Picture 3: YAPOO AMMONIAS
 KO-19: 6.25in. - 6.375in., Embossing same as above except YAPOO top rear Panel and third example is embossed POISON vertically down center rather than POISONOUS
 Price: \$35 - \$350, depending on color and embossing