

# LETTER FROM POISONLAND

BY  
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Hello again. In this second letter, we examine another classic American poison bottle, the Carr-Lowery Glass Company irregular hexagons (KI-1 and KI-2). We call them "classic" (although archetypical might be a better word) because the bottle itself was designed to warn of its lethal contents intrinsically by its shape, color and embossing, in addition to and apart from whatever written words might be printed on the labels.

The subject of our first letter, the United Drug Company's KT-2s and KT-4s, were blown by different glass factories for one specific manufacturer, the United Drug Company, and were made to hold specific "brand name" products manufactured by United Drug. In the case of the KI-1s and KI-2s, however, the glass factory created a generic poison bottle to be sold to local druggists and pharmaceutical companies to hold whatever poisonous products the buyers wanted the bottles to hold. The KI-1 was identical to the KI-2 except the former bore the word "POISON" in large capital letters embossed vertically on the outer two of the three front panels. Both varieties apparently were available in a range of sizes: one-half ounce (about 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " high) and 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 16 and a massive 32-ounces (about 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ " high). The basic colors were cobalt (with natural variation from light blue to deep purplish blue) and emerald green, a color more typically found in British poison bottles. Although Carr-Lowery presumably could have supplied potential buyers with all of the stock sizes in either cobalt or emerald green, we are unable to document all sizes in existence today; for example, we have found no 16 or 32-ounce emerald green KI-1s. In addition to the two stock colors, we know of two "special" colors: KI-1 in both 6 and 8 ounces in moss green (also called olive green) and KI-2 in 3 and 4 ounces in a stunning peacock blue. The purpose of these two particular bottles--each a unique color apparently blown in only two sizes--remains hidden in the mists of time. Although subtle, the KI-2 with a "DYKEMA'S" slugplate and a few others appear to be made with a distinct blue-green colored glass. There also is at least one clear Carr-Lowery poison bottle known to exist: a 3-ounce KI-2 embossed with a center-panel slugplate saying "Chawg's Drugs" which lucky APBCA member Noel Cook (#47) purchased from a Southeastern dealer in the mid-1990's.

All KI-1s and KI-2s seem to bear the same base embossing: "C.L.G.CO./PATENT APPLIED FOR" with a numeral above the legend to signify the volume in ounces. The smaller sized bottles have the word "applied" abbreviated to "APPL'D". Does anybody know whether the Patent Office ultimately issued a patent to Carr-Lowery? To our knowledge, the company never changed the base embossing to include a patent number.

The Carr-Lowery Glass Company was founded in 1889 in Baltimore, Maryland by Samuel J. Carr and William W. Lowery, who both previously had been employed as glass factory salesmen. From the start, the company made glassware exclusively for perfumers and druggists. Perfumery bottles in particular "had to be elegant enough to grace dressing tables," in the words of author Julian Harrison Toulouse, and the production of such bottles required an unusually high level of glassmaking skills. As explained by Mr. Toulouse, "Ordinary bottles could be made at faster speeds with less attention to visual marks and striations." Messrs. Carr and Lowery were forced to "import" their first groups of glassblowers from New Jersey, where fine tableware was blown, and the situation apparently led to resentment and labor unrest among the less skilled local Baltimoreans. The company prospered in any event, and installed its first semiautomatic bottlemaking machine in 1915. By the late 1930's, the company's factories had

become almost entirely automatic "but some semiautomatic machines and some hand-blowing extends to the present date for short runs, particular demands and sampling," according to Mr. Toulouse, writing in 1971. The company still exists as a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Anchor Hocking Glass Corp. and interestingly, continues to specialize in perfume bottles.

In 1993, APBCA member Gary Perigan (#2), who has accumulated an impressive collection of Carr-Lowery poison bottles, spoke by telephone to Lee Rowe, then president and general manager of the Carr-Lowery Glass Company in Baltimore. At the time, Mr. Rowe had worked for the company for 43 years! Although Mr. Rowe did not have any records related to the KI-1s and KI-2s, he revealed to Gary a fascinating bit of information: that some of the Carr-Lowery bottles we call blown-in-mold in fact were made on small older machines (possibly the semiautomatic machines described by Mr. Toulouse) and that Carr-Lowery oldtimers continued to produce small orders of such bottles into the early 1950's, when the company finally took the venerable machines out of service. It is not clear whether these later-made bottles included any KI-1s and KI-2s.

In addition to the generic bottles, Carr-Lowery offered their KI-1s and KI-2s customized with a slug plate in the front center panel. Rudy Kuhn lists fourteen different druggists and pharmacies, including the ever-popular Sun Drug Company (KI-1 in emerald green) and Bowman's Drug Stores (KI-1 in cobalt), both of which existed as independent California pharmacies until 1925. However, APBCA members have documented the existence of twelve additional slugplates, many of which are known in only one or a few sizes: BACON; Brecklein; F & E Bailey & Co., Lowell, Mass.; Columbian Pharmacy, 461 State St., Perth Amboy, N.J.; Economy; Fred Howard Druggist, Lowell, Mass.; Friedgen; J.C. Goddard, Boston, Mass.; Goldner's Drug Store, 918 4th Ave., Bklyn; Paine Drugs, Rochester, N.Y.; and Willdun Drug Co. And of course there is Noel Cook's so-far unique Chawg's Drugs. (Does anybody out there know of any other slugplates? If so, let's hear from you!) Putting together the various combinations of sizes, colors and slugplates, Gary Perigan has estimated that over 250 potential variations exist of the KI-1s and KI-2s. If paper labels are added to the equation, the number of possible combinations is truly staggering!

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, of course, but we think the grace and elegance of their perfume-bottle genealogy is evident in the design of the Carr-Lowery KI-1s and KI-2s. Indeed, the peacock blue KI-2, although designed for utilitarian purposes, was "elegant enough to grace dressing tables" as long as nobody sneaked a little sip of its contents...

As with most bottles, prices of course vary widely; the more common sizes of both cobalt and emerald green KI-1s and KI-2s may sell in the range of \$25 to \$60, while a rare 32-ounce cobalt Bowman's Drug Stores KI-1 recently sold on eBay for \$3,340.00.

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### References:

Toulouse, J.H., "Bottle Makers and Their Marks" (Thomas Nelson Inc. 1971), pp. 134-7

The Poison Bottle Newsletter has published several articles about the KI-1s and KI-2s, including Vol. 1, No. 7, p. 4; Vol. 1, No. 8, p. 1; Vol. 1, No. 9, p. 1; Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 5-6 (article by Gary Perigan); Vol. 4, No. 2, p. 5 (Gary Perigan); and Vol. 4, No. 3, p. 5 (article by Noel Cook). Joan Cabaniss can provide members with a complete set of the newsletters, for the cost of copying.

