



# Half Moon Bay History Revealed Through Glass



Jo Fry

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Visit the Half Moon Bay Jail Museum and one of the first displays to greet you are bottles – glass in a variety of heights, shapes and colors that at first glance look no different from what you can buy today at Cunha’s. Look closer, however, and you’ll notice odd differences: advertising embossed up the side for a curious cure that the FDA would surely never approve of, glass in a blushing lavender hue, a warning not to refill, even one that can’t stand up.

Some held seltzer, others medicine, and many, keeping with our town’s history, clearly alcohol. They all have one thing in common: they tell a story. Each had a journey from the bottle manufacturer to the plant or factory that filled it, to the ship, stage, train or truck that brought it here, and finally to the person who bought it, used it and discarded it. Some of those people lived their whole lives in our town, others were just passing through. They all left behind their remnants, their trash for us to discover. From this we can learn a little of their stories. Dug up by accident during construction, washed out after a storm, uncovered in a forgotten corner of an old building, these bottles have been transformed into time capsules that reveal our coast’s past.

## The earliest coastsiders

Native Americans used glass, but the glass was not manufactured, rather it was a naturally occurring result of seismic activity. Natural glass such as obsidian can be formed into tools and weapons. Not local to our coast, the nearest source of obsidian is north of San Francisco, formed as a result of volcanoes that were active over 3 million years ago.

Although archeology shows that glass bottle-making technology had been around since 1500 BC in Egypt and Mesopotamia ([HistoryofGlass.com](http://HistoryofGlass.com)), our local tribes used grinding stones as a part of food preparation and tightly woven baskets to hold liquids and to cook.





## **The arrival of the Spanish 1769**

Glass bottle manufacturing waned after the fall of the Roman Empire, reappearing once more in Europe in the 1500s. Early medieval glass was expensive, and thus used only by the upper echelon of society. Commoners relied on pottery and stoneware vessels until the mid- 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the French, Dutch and English successfully developed technology to produce larger and thicker hand-blown bottles.

By the time that the Spanish arrived in California, these bottles were available to store and transport liquids like wine, often in a fortified form such as Madeira to prevent spoilage, but it is most likely that barrels would have still been the primary vessel to use ([vinepair.com](http://vinepair.com)). Manufacturing in our local Mission Dolores would have centered around more basic activities such as food production and candle making, rather than a luxury craft such as glass blowing. Vessels would have been primarily baskets or pottery.

Once the mission system was established, however, trade into California opened, bringing other nations to our shore. It is likely that traders would have carried liquids stored in glass bottles.



Bottles from the late 1700s to early 1800s were all free-blown, contained air bubbles, and most often came in a very dark – almost black – green or amber hue; coal was often used to create the dark color. Today these highly collectable bottles are commonly referred to as “pirate glass” as earlier forms are contemporary with the buccaneers who preyed the seas. The production of dark or black glass bottles for wine or spirits as a manufacturing technique was cheap and was able to be made using less skilled labor. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Eastern United States glass factories stopped using it in favor of other colors. However, these bottles were expensive to import West, so it was prevalent in San Francisco-made glass from the Gold Rush through 1870s. By 1880 it was generally phased out in favor of better-made and more brightly colored bottles. Spirit bottle glass didn’t need to be just this almost-black color any longer.



Above: A free-blown wine bottle from the museum. The punt (raised part of the bottom) of the bottle is very deep and contains a scar from where it was attached to the rod when blown. Swirls from the blowing process are evident in the neck of the bottle, and the glass contains bubbles.

Note the uneven, hand-formed lip. By the 1830s bottles were mainly mouth-blown into molds, rather than being free-blown, making this bottle a remnant of Spanish or early Mexican ownership of the coast, and one of the oldest bottles in the museum’s collection. It tells us that locals were able to enjoy imported wine or spirits. These goods would have likely arrived via horse from the port in San Francisco, so there was commerce; the earliest settlers to the coast were not isolated.



## Mexico holds “Alta California” 1821 – 1848

The Spanish colony of Mexico won its independence from Spain after a revolt in 1821. Alta California, as we were called, was ruled by Mexico for only a few decades. The missions were decommissioned during this time, and land dispersed. In 1839 Tiburcio Vasquez, the major domo of the Presidio in San Francisco, was granted 4,436 acres called Rancho Corral de Tierra, stretching from the southern part of El Granada to Pilarcitos Creek. To the south, Candelario Miramontes was granted Rancho Miramontes in 1841. Prior to this, our coastal area had been used mainly for the grazing of livestock from Mission Dolores. In the 1840s the town of San Benito – later called Spanish Town – began to develop and thrive.

During this time sea commerce became increasingly important, as more ships from countries such as Britain, which was interested in California, sailed into San Francisco Bay ([nps.gov/goga/learn/historyculture/spanish-mexican-period](https://www.nps.gov/goga/learn/historyculture/spanish-mexican-period)). Ships would also stop offshore in Half Moon Bay to inspect goods such as hides, as rowboats with merchandise could be sent out to the ships. A lively fishing community also began to exist.



With increased population and trade the demand for goods also increased. We find evidence of this in our bottle artifacts - from this period in Half Moon Bay history the museum has a pair of unique bottles with rounded ends.



Known as “ballast” bottles, these free-blown containers were designed to only be able to lie on their sides. This design prevented the contents, which was likely mineral water, from losing contact with the cork and spoiling or evaporating. The color of the glass for both bottles is a natural green from the sand of which it was made, no clarifying agents were added to the glass to change its color. The bottles’ tops are thick and would have been corked with a wire to anchor the corks in place.

Ballast bottles were so called as they could be safely stored in a ship’s ballast compartment; it is likely that these were not made in California but imported via ship. Perhaps they came via trade, for hides or food.





This thick black-green glass bottle is also on display in the museum. Based on the shoulder seam you can tell it was made in a dip mold, and not free-blown. Dip molds were the earliest type of mold used. They were a step up from free-blown bottles, used starting in the 1820s – 1830s. The neck and top were hand-formed – you can still see tooling marks from the bottle maker.

Because later molds were more elaborate, we can tell that the spirits in this bottle were enjoyed before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was the time of the earliest saloons in town, when Californios lived along our coast.







## The Gold Rush and growth of California 1848 – 1900

The Bear Flag Revolt in Sonoma in 1846 highlighted the escalating tension between Mexico and the growing influx of American settlers. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago, a result of this conflict, ceded Alta California to the United States. Unbeknownst to the signers, gold had been discovered at Sutter's Mill a few weeks before, on January 24, 1848. California was forever changed, as millions of people poured into the state – and into our coastal area - from all over the world. The original Mexican land grants were broken into smaller parcels of land in the 1850s and 1860s, and many farms and dairies were established by the new American arrivals.

Settlers to the coast began producing crops such as potatoes, hay and oats, which found a ready market in the growing town of San Francisco. In 1868 Josiah Ames built a pier and warehouse near the Arroyo de en Medio so that steam-powered ships could stop, load our goods, and transport them north to the City.



Amesport pier, possibly taken prior to the restoration done in 1916.



The town of Halfmoon Bay, as we were now called, had become a thriving community. Main street offered livery stables, a butcher, bakery, and a good many saloons.

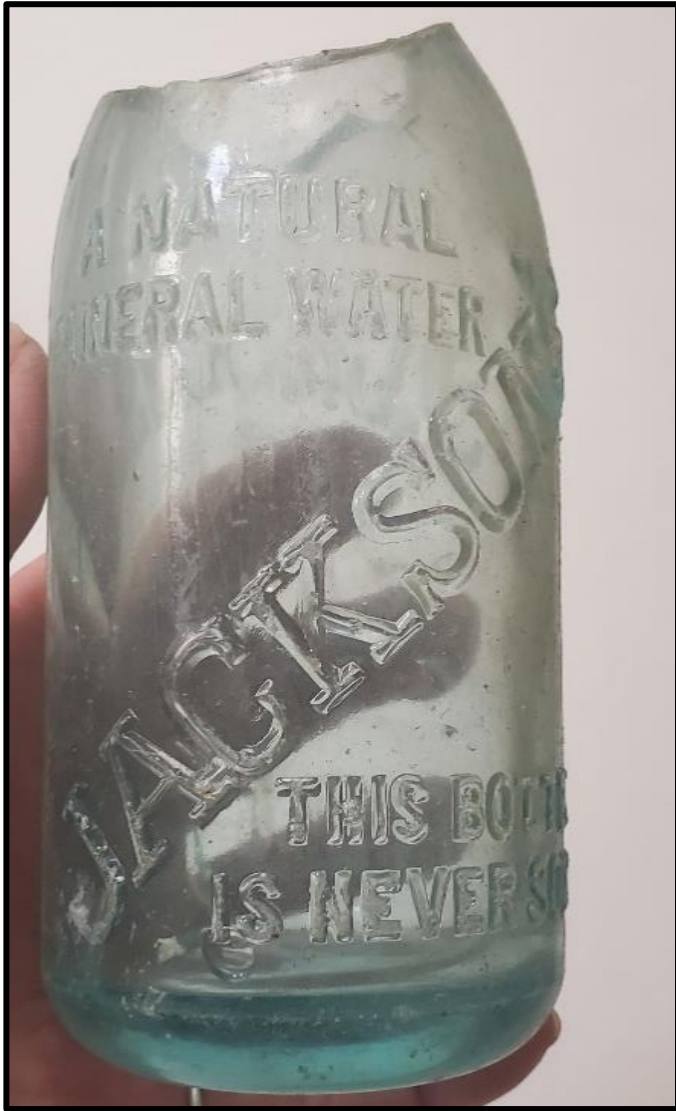
Beer and liquor could have come into our town from San Francisco, from other parts of the US, and from abroad via ship and stage. The bustling port just to the north entertained ships and immigrants from all parts of the world. Our community broadened too, as people found land, even if they did not find gold.

Glass bottles at this period were all mouth-blown into molds and stopper closed. Unlike today, they did not primarily hold food, which would have been caught or grown locally and consumed fresh, but items not readily available in town.

This bottle in the museum is a fine example of a blue glass post-mold spirit bottle from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Unfortunately, there are no marks on the bottom to indicate who made it or where it was made. It is elaborate and probably was not locally produced, perhaps arriving from overseas aboard one of the wooden ships that sailed into San Francisco Bay.



Although mold-made glass was easier and faster to produce than free-blown bottles, these glass bottles were still a valuable commodity. They would have been re-used and refilled; note the “THIS BOTTLE IS NEVER SOLD” embossing on the seltzer bottle below:



Whiskey needed a mixer – This bottle is from Napa Valley, and Jackson’s Napa Valley Mineral Water must have been very popular here, as several samples have been found. Our museum bottle came from a saloon site near Purissima. It was bottled at the source, a natural spring discovered in 1853. Colonel John P. Jackson took ownership in 1872 and built a health and pleasure resort. A Napa resident named Charles Allen discovered how to carbonate and bottle the water to sell commercially. In May of 1892, the springs shipped 1,500 bottles of water in one day, the most ever. It required seven wagons to haul them to a steamer for shipment. The water proved so popular that in 1897 the Napa Daily Journal reported that San Francisco saloons had run out, resulting in an all-night bottling shift.

There was one bottled commodity that was even more vital than alcohol, and that was ink. New settlers in Half Moon Bay would have wanted to write their loved ones back home. Businesses needed to keep records and write customer receipts. Fittingly, the museum collection contains an ink bottle; it is from Sanford Inks, a company founded in Chicago in 1857.

Interestingly, their ink factory burnt down in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871, but was rebuilt and continued to make ink into the 1940's, when ballpoint pens came into use. The company did not die out, however, and pioneered the Sharpie pen in the 1960s! ([madeinchicagomuseum.com](http://madeinchicagomuseum.com)).

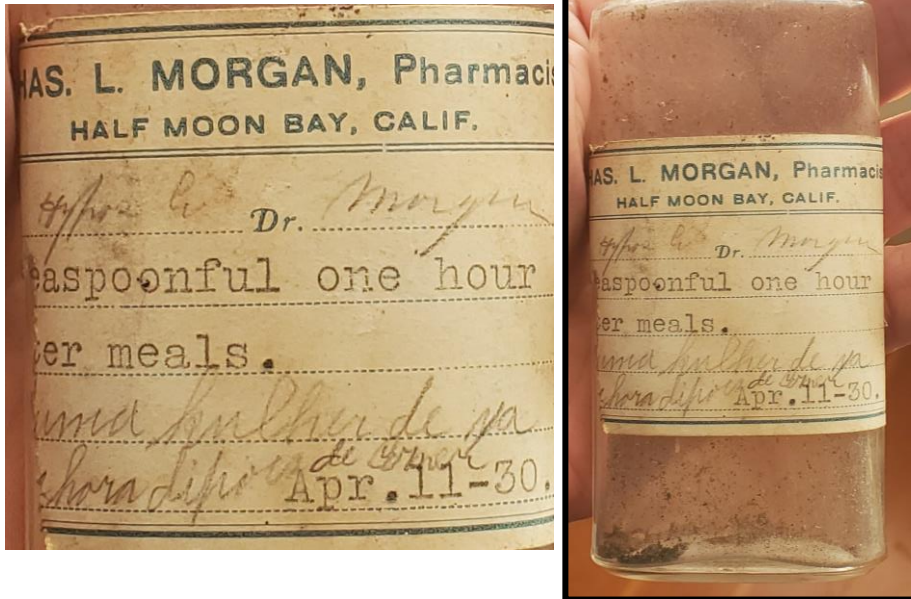
Below, a classic naturally green inkwell glass bottle from Sanford Inks; it is a part of the museum collection.





Surprisingly, most of the bottles in the museum dating from this period are for medicines. While our rural community did have doctors, many locals would have used self-care to treat their ailments, even if the treatments were sometimes of a dubious nature.

Whereas modern medicines such as cough syrup come with a plastic cup to help measure usage, many 19<sup>th</sup> century medicine bottles had dosage indicators embossed in the glass of the side of the bottle.



As mentioned, glass bottles were valuable, and often re-used instead of just tossed. In the museum collection is the little medicine bottle on the left.

Note the paper prescription label, dated “Apr. 11-30.”

As of 1930 all new glass bottles for medicine would have been machine-made and had screw-closure tops, yet this bottle was clearly old at the time of this prescription. It was formed using the 19<sup>th</sup> century technique of blowing glass into a mold and stoppering it with a cork.

Was it an old bottle that Doctor Morgan had on hand and re-used, or was it the patient's and refilled many times over decades?



The Crescent Moon shaped mark found on the base of the little post-mold medicine bottle below is indicative of prescription bottles typically found on the East Coast of the United States, and so thought to be from an unknown manufacturer in the Vermont, Massachusetts, or New Hampshire area ([Glassbottlemarks.com](http://Glassbottlemarks.com))

Originating from across the country the medicine could have been mail-ordered for a resident or left behind by a seafaring visitor.







This green medicine bottle in the museum is one of the more curious from this period in our history. It is labeled “Piso’s Cure for Consumption” – consumption was the name for the disease we now call tuberculosis, a much-feared and devastating illness in the 1800s.

The company that produced this drug was founded in Pennsylvania in 1869, and it was a popular drug throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At different times in the company history the medicine contained opium, morphine, hashish, marijuana, chloroform, and alcohol. If it didn’t exactly cure consumption it certainly would have rendered the user unable to tell if it was working or not – perhaps getting them hooked on its product in the process.

Due to the alcohol content, the brand came under attack from the Temperance movement. The Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906 forced the company to change its name to just “Piso’s Cure”, then “Piso’s Remedy” for coughs and colds. It ceased production before World War II. (Antiquecannabisbook.com).

Our artifact has the older, original name.

This unique post-mold six-sided medicine bottle was manufactured in Germany and imported through New York. Gude's Pepto Mangan was a liquid iron-manganese preparation for the treatment of anemia, invented around 1890.

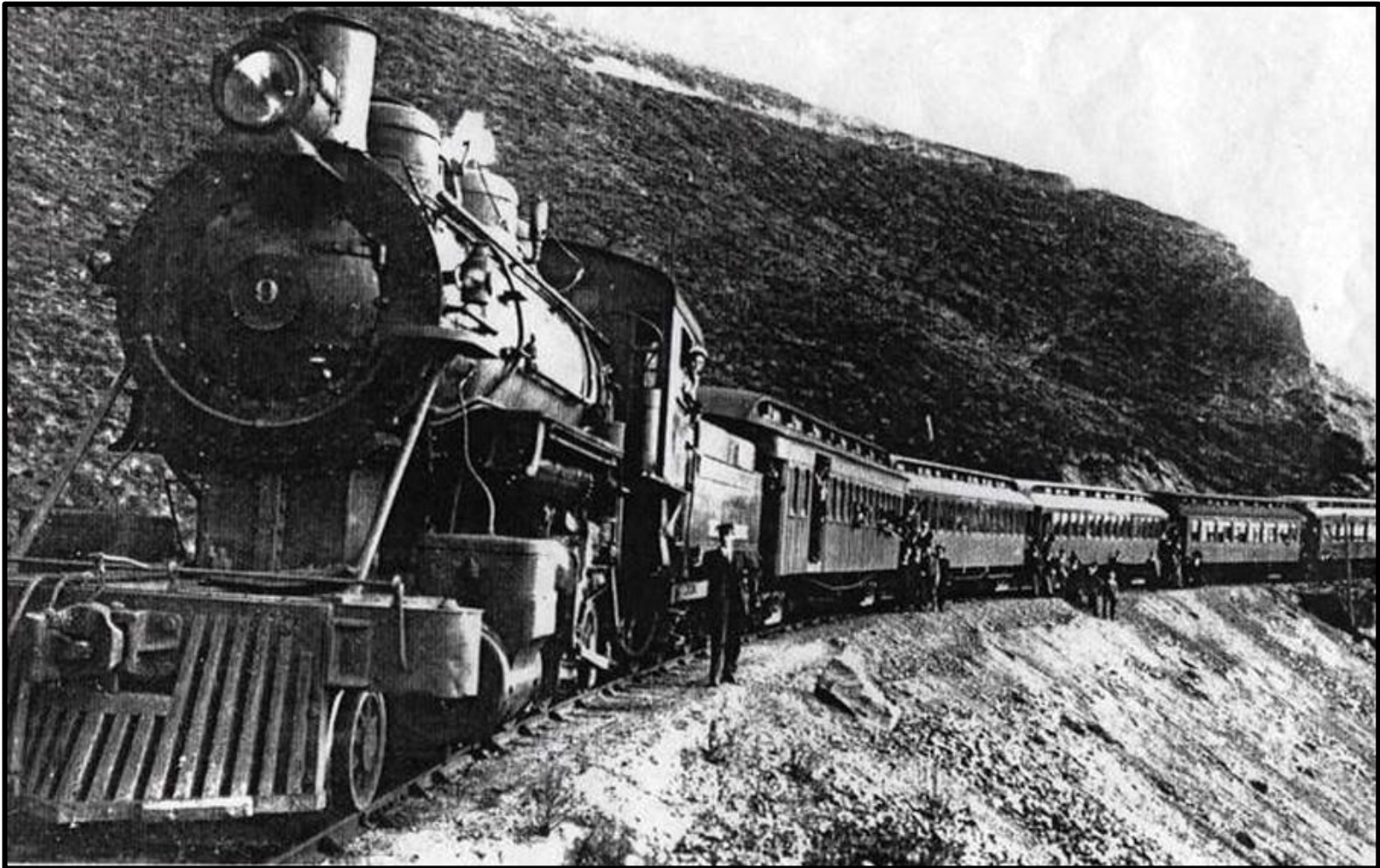
By the latter half of the century residents of our town could purchase the same types of goods that people in San Francisco were able to buy.





## The Ocean Shore Railroad years 1908 – 1922

Construction on the railroad from San Francisco began in 1905, but the great earthquake of 1906 sent equipment working on Devil's Slide tumbling into the sea. Finally reaching Half Moon Bay in 1908, it brought trainloads of day trippers and prospective land buyers to the coast. The Ocean Shore company bought up lots in El Granada, planted trees and put in curbs that can still be found today.



Unfortunately, as with modern tourists, these rail travelers came to our shores and left trash behind.

The thick broken seltzer bottle, below, was found buried at the beach near the location of the old rails. It was mouth-blown into a cup mold, and not machine-made. Interestingly, it was clear when found last year, and thus clear when discarded, it is slowly turning light lavender; this is due to the manganese added to the glass to make it clear. The manufacturing style and color composition date it to no later than 1915.

The broken Coke bottle was found as is, no bottom half, cap still tightly attached, in an eroding beach cliff. It has a 1915 patent date – likely broken before it could be enjoyed.



In the railroad period we first begin to see bottles that were used for commercially produced food, usually condiments. Prior to this, it is likely that all food items would have been locally sourced and prepared at home. The number on this Heinz bottle, although curiously not present in the Heinz data base, date it to a range of 1903 – 1910. Beach Picnic?

The distinctive logo on the museum's medicine bottle below belonged to San Francisco's Owl Drug Stores.

Founded in 1892, the first store on Market Street was destroyed in the 1906 earthquake. Proving popular, they spread to Oregon, Washington, and other states. Stores were open 24 hours a day, with the motto "The Customer is Always Right". They also had a mail-order business, with a catalog that customers could order from, and shipped bottles of their product via rail to all parts of our country; wonder if this one got to Half Moon Bay via the Ocean Shore line?





## Prohibition 1920 – 1933

We know from eyewitness accounts that boats landed on our beaches carrying illegal alcohol from Canada. We also know that several citizens ran stills. It is likely that bottles were hidden, destroyed, or re-used from these activities, so we cannot prove that a certain bottle was involved in rumrunning or making alcohol. Bottles in the museum from this time are typically for food or food storage, not so “glamorous”.



The Bath House in Granada was originally located at the modern site of Surfer's Beach. Built by the railroad, it was a location that rumrunners used for illegal alcohol. Its location is now eroded into the ocean.

(Recollection of Gino Mearini from Half Moon Bay Memories)

This screw top bottle is from the 1920s – 1930s and would have held sauce or a condiment.



By the 1920s all commercial glass would have been machine-produced; it was cheaper and more efficient than the old method of blowing glass into molds. A machine could produce more bottles in one hour than a factory of laborers could in one day. The method of closing bottles also changed. Gone were the old corks and stoppers. Threaded screw-tops came along in the 1920s and metal lids were used.

This museum artifact is a Mellin's food jar and dates from this period; it has a screw-top closure. Mellin's Food was a dry powder made mostly of wheat and barley. It was touted as a food additive that could give cow's milk all the nutritional properties of breast milk. Despite the questionable nutritional value, by the 1890s Mellin's Food was the most popular infant brand sold in the United States. This success was due primarily to the company's marketing efforts — advertisements for Mellin's included smiling babies and parent testimonials detailing how Mellin's had brought their children back from the brink of death.



In 1902 they even had their own advertising air ship in London. Being the face of Mellin's often launched a baby on a career in modeling or show business - Humphrey Bogart got his start as a Mellin's Food poster baby. Left, a typical ad for the product that ran from the late 1890s through to the 1930s. (Graceguide)

The museum has one curious bottle, however, that could date it to be a wine bottle from the 1920s.

The dark, almost black color on this larger sized glass first made me think that it was 19<sup>th</sup> century, but the “VE” mark on the bottom is not listed in the common American bottle manufacturer data bases, and the manufacturing used looks to be machined and not mouth-blown. In my research I have located an Italian bottle-maker in Savona named “Vetreria Etrusca” whose signature color glass is this dark green. Their modern logo is an intertwined “VE”, but could this be an old logo? They started making glass in the early 1920s. It is tempting to think that one of our Italian/American local families was enjoying a glass with their meal, even if it was illegal. I have emailed the company and will see what I can find out.





One of the hottest and hardest to find commodities of 2020, besides toilet paper, are Mason jars. Although the jars themselves have been a hipster necessity for the past few years, the pandemic has created an increase in home gardening and cooking. With this, sales of the ubiquitous canning jars have increased 46% over 2019! In fact, jar sales since the Civil War have fluctuated with the economy, hitting peaks in 1918, the Depression, during World War II, the 1970's, and the downturn of 2008-2009.

([marker.medium.com/why-everyones-suddenly-hoarding-mason-jars](https://marker.medium.com/why-everyones-suddenly-hoarding-mason-jars))

Not surprisingly they were a kitchen staple in our agricultural community, and there are classic jars in the museum's collection.

Food preservation in glass dates to the Napoleonic Wars. The jars as we know them were invented in 1858 by New Jersey tinsmith John Landis Mason; his innovation was a glass container with squared shoulders and a continuous threaded neck (hand-made, not machine-made until 1897) that could attach a zinc lid with rubber ring. A milk glass lid liner was added to the design shortly afterwards, to protect food from the metal. The Ball Brothers began producing the jars in 1884. They were made of lime-soda glass with minerals that gave them a distinctive blue color; this color was used until 1937.

The style of logo changed over the years, making jars easy to date. The "Perfect Mason" designation on our artifact above was used from 1913 – 1922, and the "Ball" script without underline dates from 1923 – 1933. This establishes the date of the museum's jar to the early 20's.

([frenchcreekfarmhouse.com/2018/03/how-to-date-ball-mason-jar](https://frenchcreekfarmhouse.com/2018/03/how-to-date-ball-mason-jar))

The milk glass lid shown on the right was found on the beach in Pescadero.



## The Great Depression 1929 - 1941

When the stock market crashed in 1929, the country, and the world, was plunged into an economic Depression. Residents of our coast would have been luckier than many; we were an agricultural area, growing (as we still do) artichokes, Brussel sprouts, hay, oats. We had cattle and dairy, and a fishing community. As one old-timer told it in an interview on file in the museum: “we took care of each other, and no one went hungry.”

Unsurprisingly, The repeal of prohibition in 1933 is evidenced In the alcohol bottles that make a re-appearance in the museum’s collection. Unlike their 19<sup>th</sup> century counterparts, however, these were modern, machine-made bottles.

The bottle below is from National Distillers and is embossed on the shoulder with “FEDERAL LAW FORBIDS SALE OR RE-USE OF THIS BOTTLE”. This was a mandated note for all spirit bottles sold between 1935 – 1963.



Albert's Bar, Palace Miramar

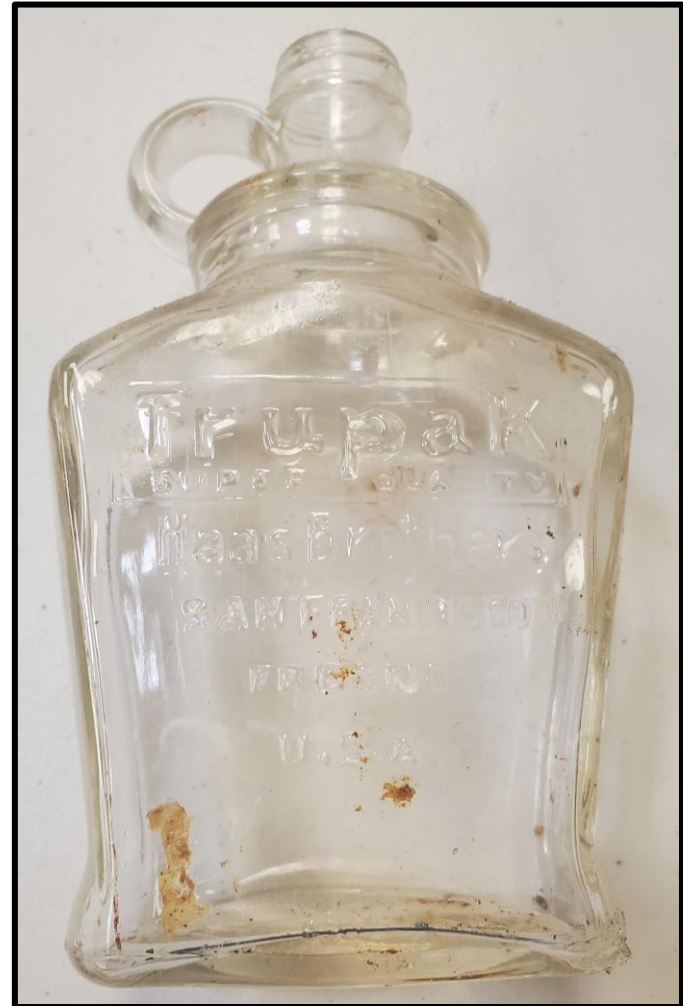
National Distillers was founded in 1924 during Prohibition. In anticipation of repeal they stockpiled, but did not sell, whiskey. In 1933 they owned 45% of all whiskey in the US.



This 1930s “Trupak” whiskey bottle in the museum’s collection is from San Francisco distributors the Haas Brothers.

Haas Brothers had its roots in the California Gold Rush. In 1851 Kalman Haas and Leopold Loupe, Bavarian natives and peddlers, opened a general grocery store on the corner of Davis and California Streets named Loupe and Haas. As Kalman’s brothers and cousins joined the business it branched into wholesale distribution between San Francisco, Portland and Los Angeles and changed its name to Haas Brothers in 1865. They supplied miners in California and Alaska with sour-mash Bourbon.

Alcohol distribution was ceased during prohibition, but they began to distribute Cyrus Noble Bourbon in 1931. The grocery business closed in 1954, but the firm continues as a distributor of fine sprits and is one of the oldest companies in the Bay Area.





Normal life went on in our community during the Depression. Even though times were hard, we were able to keep up our homes and even enjoy a little personal indulgence.

Right: 1937 Clorox bottle from the museum collection.

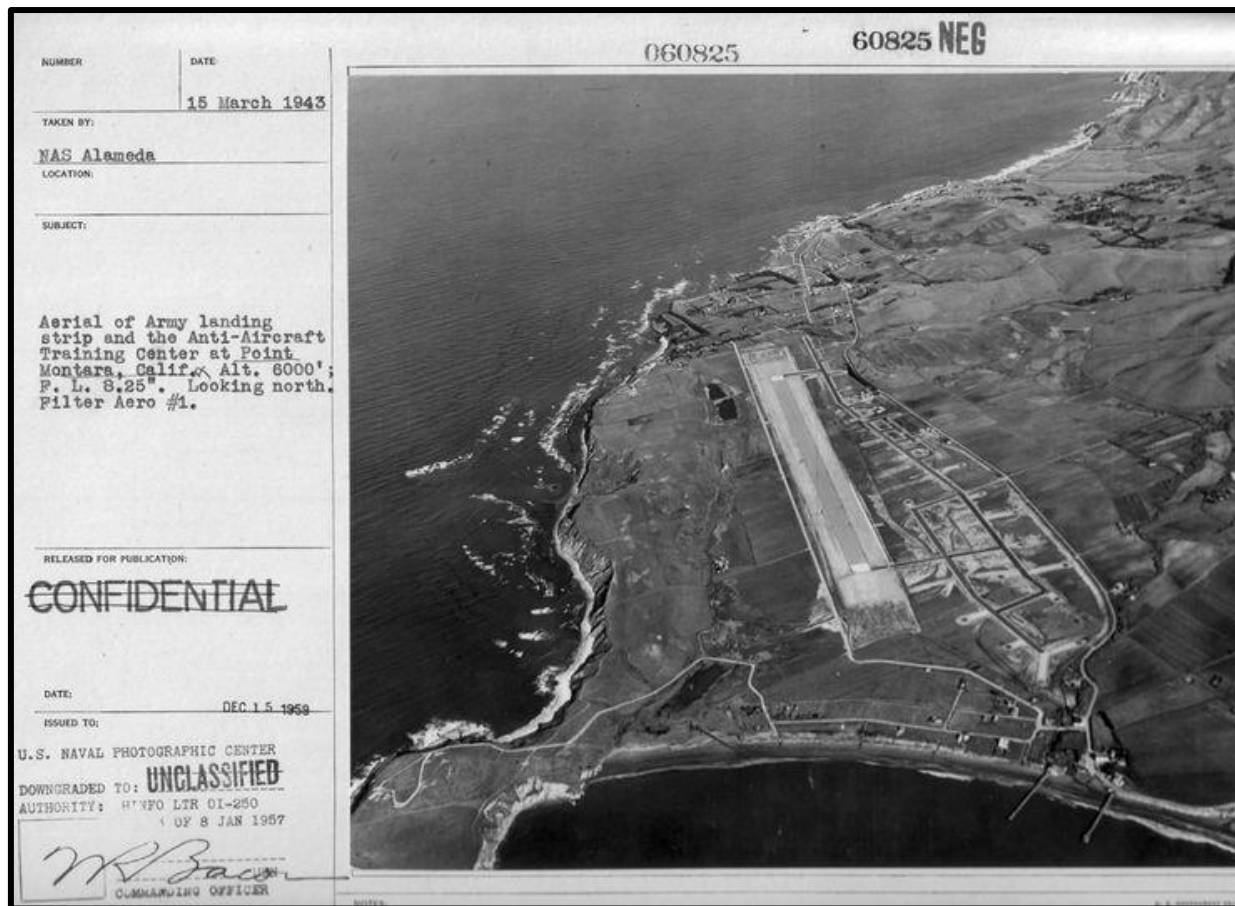
Below: Paris Perfume bottle from the author's collection. Cody created this scent in the 1920s, so it is tempting to think that a coastal flapper owned it. However, it was found in a location with other household bottles dating from the 1930s. Was it left from better times, or a gift from a loved one when times were hard? It was found with its metal lid intact, and you can still get a hint of the scent when you open it.



## World War II 1941 – 1945

World War II brought an influx of military personnel to our community. There was a fear along the West coast that Japanese bombers could attack. Ship building started in full force in San Francisco, and the military occupied certain local sites, such as the building that is now Cameron's, and Point Montara. In 1943 the Palace Miramar Hotel was commandeered as Camp Miramar and a pre-fab military city was erected around it.

Citizens of Italian, Japanese or German heritage were unable to venture west of Main Street. An interview with a member the Half Moon Bay High School Class of 1942 revealed that she had a friend unable to attend school, due to the geographic location of the school at that time and her friend's heritage



Ghosts of the World War II military presence can still be found along our coast, in bunkers still used as storage down by Smith Field, and in glass that can be found in our cliffs.



This wine bottle was found near the site of Camp Miramar. Manufactured by Owens Illinois, it has a date code on the bottom showing that it was manufactured in 1943- the exact year that the site was an active military camp . A story from Half Moon Bay Memories by Command Sergeant Major Dan Sebby:

“Camp Miramar was established on 21 April 1943 when the U.S. Army entered into leases with several landowners in order to provide for a camp to house infantry units assigned to the Western Defense Command. The 1 June 1943 edition of the Station List of the Army of the United States, issued by the Adjutant General of the U.S. Army, stated that a single rifle company, Company G of the 125th Infantry Regiment, was present at Camp Miramar.”

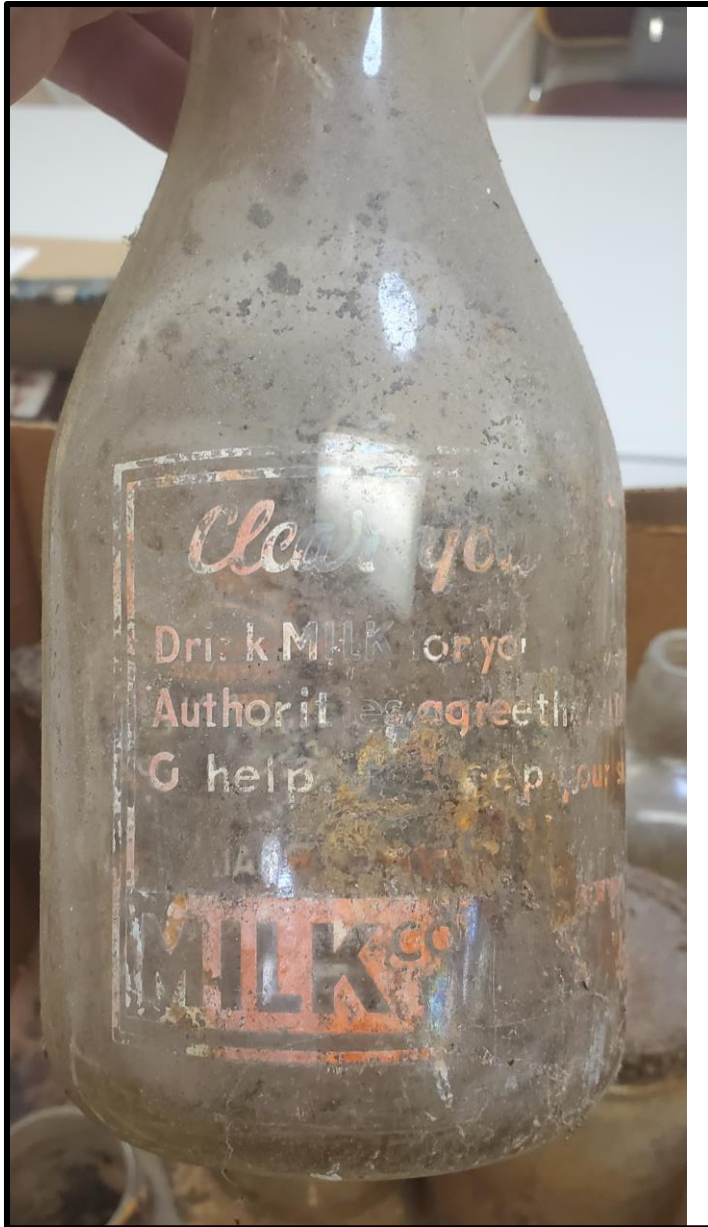
By January of 1944 the site was deemed unnecessary and vacated.



The military installed communications along our coast, as evidenced from the only non-bottle glass item listed in this article. Insulators went on the top of telephone poles. This clear glass example below was found by a local family living near Poplar Beach. It was manufactured by the Hemingray Company and has a date code from 1941. (insulators.info. author's collection)



On the home front our lives continued, even if restricted and difficult We find bottles that held milk and food, both from local and Bay Area producers.



Left: Milk bottle in the museum's collection from the Milk Dealer's Bottle Company, San Francisco. The enameled lettering means that this bottle was made after 1936, and likely dates from the WWII period. During the war polyethylene was introduced as a waterproofing material for fiber paper cartons.

Left and Below: Food bottle with metal screw top lid still partially intact. Cal Cons most likely stands for "California Conserving Company", a food processor originally founded in San Francisco in 1860, moving to Hayward in 1900. By 1925, it claimed to be the largest pickle and tomato plant "in a single unit" in the U.S. The company merged with Hunts in 1946. The mold codes on the base date it to the early 1940s, before the 1946 merger.





## The Post-War Years

Returning from war, soldiers started families, bought homes, and spent weekends in leisure. Many visited our beaches to relax. Our town too got back to normal life – restrictions on travelling west to the beach were over, and the new highway 1 construction opened-up our ability to drive and buy goods from San Francisco and the Peninsula.

Bottles found dating from this period show how good life was; we find wine and many types of soda.



Left: Pair of Coke Bottles, dated 1946 and 1950

Below Left: Grapette soda bottle from a beach site and matching 1950s ad

Below Right: 1952 Paul Masson wine bottle found protruding from a cliff after a storm. (all author's collection)





In a November 13, 2020 NPR TED Radio Hour episode of “The Life Cycles of Cities”, New York archeologist Alyssa Loorya states:

**“Archeology is about everyday people using everyday objects”.**

This rings as true in a small community such as ours as it does in a major metropolis. Our glass artifacts tell us how people here lived their lives, what they ate, what they drank, what they valued. I love glass for its beauty, for the fact that it remains behind even when cork or wood is gone. When our waves and tides sweep over the remnants of a long-gone dump, they bring pieces back to the land and those pieces can still give us a link back to those who once lived here.



This exquisite 19<sup>th</sup> century bottle from the Jail Museum is from Roger & Gallet of Paris and would have held Eau de Cologne. They were a favorite brand of the Emperor Napoleon.

If it was good enough for Napoleon, it was good enough for Half Moon Bay!

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[FierceSirenStudios@gmail.com](mailto:FierceSirenStudios@gmail.com)

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