IMAGE FILE

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Ocean Spray
CRANBERRY
COCKTAIL

5A-H735

THE CRANBERRY BOTTLE,
ONSET, MASSACHUSETTS, ON ROUTES 6 AND 28 TO CAPE COD

The giant Ocean Spray Cranberry Cocktail bottle, an unusual structure that drew more than 250,000 visitors, was a Cape Cod landmark. The connection between the item being advertised and the form of the structure is undeniable. This style of architecture, coined "programatic" by architectural historian David Gebhard, describes architecture whose identity includes an organization of meaning either directly or indirectly. Curt Teich Archives 5AH735. 1935. *See article beginning on page 3.*

GRASSROOTS GRAPHICS

By Cynthia Elyce Rubin

Outdoor advertising signs, bits and pieces of commonplace, everyday life, contribute to the way we see and understand our world. As old as civilization itself, such visual communicators reflect a lively collage, deriving from the complexity of public and community life that tacitly surrounds us day and night. By means of postcards, we view images of signs in all their metamorphoses, allowing us today to touch antiquity through a sign-language inheritance transmitted from a powerful past.

We are constantly made aware of graphic design and advertising, in part because of the extraordinary increase of communication products designed by advertising, marketing, and public relations professionals. By selecting typefaces and manipulating type sizes and shapes, professional designers and art directors have learned how to best establish a mood, evoke images, and suggest a tone. The full impact of these specialists, even in a subliminal mode, bombard us via print and telecommunications.

Outdoor signage, however, harkens back to ancient times. Having been around since recorded history, signs are among the earliest graphics ever produced. At a time when few people could read or write, signs, whose ultimate purpose was to attract attention by means of a strong, visual message, were indispensable to city life. Their evidence, traced to the Roman Empire, has been unearthed in the excavations of Herculaneum and Pompeii where painted and carved stone and terracotta pilasters proclaimed the nature of the businesses behind hidden storefronts. A painting of Bacchus pressing a bunch of grapes announced a wine merchant. A boy receiving a lashing with a birch rod appeared at the door of a schoolmaster. When archeologists found these same sculptured indicators on tombs in the catacombs, scholars concluded that Romans also carved images of tools into their houses to indicate professions.[1]

During the Middle Ages, with the spread of civilization, the trading community began to expand and simple emblems or tools of trades became signs, visual symbols of myriad occupations, often in the form of a product. At a time when few could read or write, these signs by necessity distinguished one place of business from another. A knife stood for the cutler, a stocking for the hosier, a hand for the glover, and a pair of scissors for the tailor. As luxury increased, the number of houses or shops dealing in the same article multiplied and something more was warranted. With reading still a hard-to-find skill, to spell out the owner's name would have been of little use.

Besides simple "tool" signs, coats of arms, crests, and badges gradually made their appearances at the doors of shops and inns. In the Middle Ages, vacant town and country houses of nobility were used as hostelries for travellers. While the family coat of arms always hung in front of the house, the most conspicuous object within its design gave a name to the establishment. Innkeepers soon adopted hanging out such signs as the best way to acquaint the public to the fact that they offered food and shelter. Their visibility even inspired popular ditties, such as "Good entertainment for all that passes, — Horses, mares, men and asses."

As both shops and trades increased, so did the variety of signage. Sometimes a rebus, a play on the owner's name or a visual pun was used. Names and symbols today can be traced to Greek and Roman mythology, medieval heraldic emblems, and guild designs. No possible source of material was overlooked or underestimated as animals, birds, trees, flowers, stars, and noted personages all contributed to a historic, kaleidoscopic world of symbolic advertising references. Described by Carl Jung in *Man and His*

We make the world brighter

Complete service in paints, glass and wallpaper

the paint pot

S. J. OTTLEY & SONS

2157 HIGHLAND DRIVE

Sugar House. Phone 7-2291

SALT LAKE CITY 5, UTAH

During the Middle Ages, when few people could read or write, signs were necessary to distinguish one business from another. These signs were often visual symbols of tools of the trade. Here the message is simple and direct. What better way to demonstrate the interior product but to exaggerate it on the building's facade. Like a column of a Greek temple, this light-hearted symbol makes an icon out of the store's business — a tradition that can still be found in the twenty-first century. Curt Teich Archives 8BH278. 1938.

Borrowing from the past that employed the hanging sign to convey meaning, this real estate office also used signs to advertise and sell services and products. In addition, painting signs directly on the walls of buildings and rural barns transformed them into giant advertising signs, the forerunner of today's billboards. Postcard courtesy of the author.

Symbols as possessing "specific connotations in addition to conventional and obvious meaning," these images are symbolic when they imply something more than an obvious and immediate meaning. A hare and a bottle stood for Harebottle; two cocks represented Cox. Portraits of great men of all ages, views of towns, articles of dress, implements of trades, domestic utensils, things visible and invisible, symbols direct and indirect — everything was fodder to attract attention and obtain publicity.

In today's computer-driven age, a sign can be an ephemeral object. It was not always so. When few people received schooling, signs were an integral part of a town's appearance and vital to city life. As education spread, they became less necessary and when in the last century, literacy grew commonplace and urban systems, such as house numbering, became widespread, symbolic trade signs for thoroughfares were no longer a positive necessity. Today their original value may have partially disappeared, but trade signs still manage to linger, not so much by reason of utility, but as homage to the decorative humor and whimsicality of their makers.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, signs had long been compulsory for English innkeepers, their use optional for tradesmen. Charles I, on his accession to the throne in 1625, granted a charter to London giving the citizens the right to hang out such signs and signboards as they pleased "for the better finding out such citizen's dwelling, shops, arts or occupations, with impediment, molestation of interruption of his heirs or successors." As businesses grew more competitive, one recognizable effect increasingly revealed itself. Growing larger and more elaborate, signs reached gargantuan proportions. Competitiveness, so highly touted as today's hot topic, was more distracting some three hundred years ago when, in rainy and windy weather, monstrous, hanging signs creaked and groaned, frequently causing accidents to passing consumers.

A writer in London's *Spectator* of April 2, 1710 inveighed against the use of unsuitable signage:

> I would enjoin every shop to make use of a sign which bears some affinity to the ware in which it deals. What can be more inconsistent than to see a bawd at the sign of the Angel, or a tailor at the Lion? A cook should not live at the Boot, nor a shoemaker at the Roasted Pig; and yet, for want of this regulation, I have seen a Goat set up before the door of a perfumer, and the French King's Head at a sword-cutters.

Though street numbers had been in partial use in England since the beginning of the eighteenth century, it was not until the latter part that they came into more general use. Even then many shopkeepers seemed reluctant to adopt them.

the middle of the century, street names caused their virtual disappearance. Their use to distinguish inns and shops, however, remained.

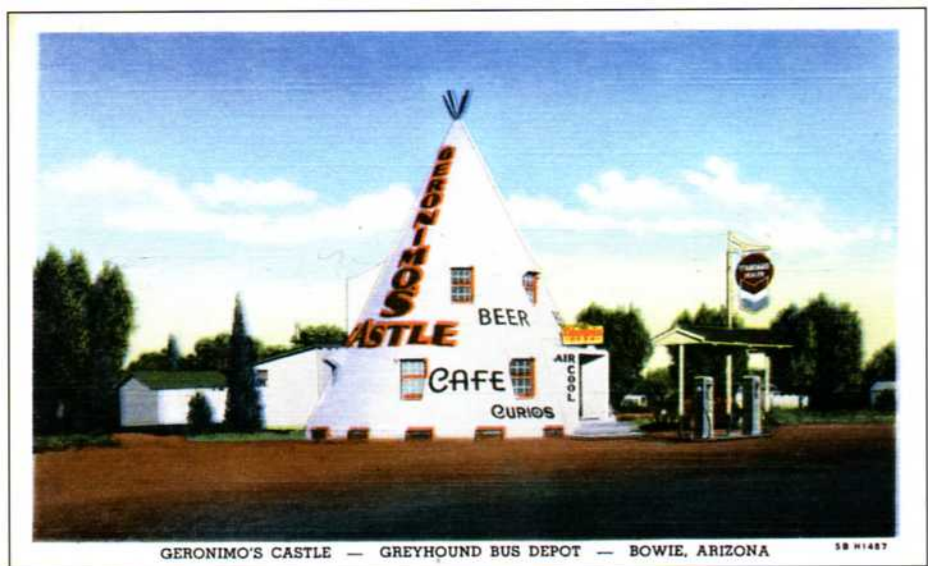
One can say that the trade-sign seed was literally transplanted to the New World when Thomas Hariot reported the discovery of tobacco in his 1588 publication, *A briefe and true report of the new found land of Virginia*. Unwittingly, he aided the spread of tobacco's popularity and the rise in shops to promote its sale. Signs for these shops took on a commercial significance and since the Indian was indelibly connected to the product in the popular imagination, "Virginians," Indian-figured signs, became fashionable appearing over and outside shop doorways. The earliest representation, illustrated in a 1617 English book, was one designed to sit on a store counter, an African-like figure wearing a feathered skirt holding a roll of tobacco leaf.

With the spread of tobacco shops, by 1860 the common sign for American tobacconists was the three-dimensional cigar-store Indian. Its earliest documented use as a sign is illustrated in an 1880 watercolor drawing by Baroness Hyde de Neuville, now owned by the New York Public Library, which displays a small Indian beside a shop's doorway in what is today's Greenwich Village. Later, cast-iron figures were considered more practical since their paint, applied at the time of casting, lasted longer in the outside elements than that of their wooden counterparts. Men, like William Demuth in New York City, manufactured a complete line of metal figures and proudly advertised their durability.

Additional forms of English descent were intricately connected to early settlement. Apothecaries used the mortar and pestle, their well-known implement for

By the seventeenth century, the mortar and pestle was used to indicate an apothecary, a practice still seen today. The Cocke Pharmacy in Manassas, Virginia displayed the mortar and pestle at the top of their sign in a powerful link to the past while extolling the virtue of a popular contemporary drink on the side wall. Curt Teich Archives A117644. 1927.

pounding drugs. Different combinations of the ball symbol introduced myriad shops, with three blue balls indicating a pawnbroker's establishment. Today's most recognizable sign, however, was that of the barber-surgeon. At the time when barbers performed bloodletting, the patient grasped a long pole in order to ease his blood flow. Since the pole readily stained from the blood, it was painted red. When not in use, barbers habitually suspended it outside the door with white linen twisted around it, giving rise to today's modern interpretation. In a very eloquent refusal to die, few contemporary barbers carry out their tonsorial duties without displaying such a pole. The same can be said for the pawnshop with its distinctive logo of three hanging balls and the druggist's mortar and pestle.



The juxtaposition of the exotic architectural form of the castle with ownership by an Indian Chief jars today's sensibilities, but at the time, it was undoubtedly meant to amuse. This visual oxymoron was undoubtedly seen as simply that of a teepee, the Indian's home and a man's home is his castle, after all. Curt Teich Archives 5BH1487. 1945.

In the 1920s and 1930s, a restive American populace encountered outdoor signage on a scale and significance that defied credulity. When automobile-mania arrived, the nation's highways became "the most hugely extensive market the human race has ever set up to tease and tempt and take money from the human race." Blacksmiths, wheelwright shops, and taverns gave way to hot dog stands, gas stations, and motels as the alchemy of progress transformed the rural turnpike into the modern highway.

The automobile, declared *Fortune* magazine in 1934, "became a hypnosis . . . the opium of the American people."[2] Thanks to the auto's popularity, spellbinding temptations along the roadside lured people throughout the landscape as each and every creative American entrepreneur attempted to cash in en route. Driving hardly any distance at all, the viewer could encounter fantastically-shaped motels, restaurants, and roadside stands. From Connecticut to California, the roads were strewn with not only signs and billboards but "stands built like tamales, tea rooms built like teapots and papier-mâché owls lettered 'I-SCREAM,' laughing swine with neon teeth and in fact almost any eye-widening outlandishness you can imagine."

In addition, *Fortune* asserted "the roadside took the ice-cream cone to its bosom," and regional culinary delights including hot dogs, "thick along both coasts, thickest east of the Mississippi" were on their way to becoming American icons. Westward the Bar-B-Q sandwich held the lead while the hot tamale took hold in the Southwest. Down along the Gulf Coast, the road hungry found native specials of the "snack-and-run" sort — creole pralines, pecan pies, and the famous fried-fish sandwich, specialty of Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

Gullibility reigned on the road, particularly in California where "fresh from the farm" vegetables were often fresh from the nearest city market. "For in Southern California at least it is almost a tradition for housewives to buy perhaps half their vegetables along the roadsides, and with such a volume the temptation to cheat seemed irresistible."

The American Automobile Association estimated the average American on tour in 1934 spent about $7 per person per day on the road. One dollar forty went for transportation costs, including gasoline, garaging, and accessories bought en route. An equal amount went for lodging. One dollar forty-seven cents was spent on eating. One dollar seventy-five cents was in exchange for linens, lotions, goggles, Kodak films, postcards, beads, baskets, pottery, blankets, antiques, balsam cushions, and the like. Forty-two cents more went into candy, ice cream, hot dogs, and similar snacks. And fifty-six cents was spent in theatres and places of amusement.

Commercial as well as mom and pop owners did their best to capture their own portion of this expenditure. Creating bizarre and whimsical formations to function as advertising was one way to beckon the newly initiated American traveler to stop and partake. Even during the Depression's hard times, people couldn't stay put. Roads, such as U.S. Route 20, wrote Daniel R. Porter, became a "hypnotic spellbinder that lured and transfixed its devotees" as nothing else did.[3]

Along every mile of Route 20, as early as 1927 when it was designated a U.S. highway, "antique shops, tourist courts, diners, filling stations, roadside stands and a host of nondescript structures selling everything from concrete lawn ornaments to rubber tomahawks sprang up beneath screeching, tasteless, oversized symbols and signs that with their very garishness sought to attract and hold the traveler long enough to part him from his pocket change."

With neither zoning restrictions nor the policing of any Better Business Bureau, marketing easily incorporated sleazy and tacky strategies on the highways that now served as the all-American main street. Windmills, teepees, and assorted

This real photo postcard boasts that this building is the "Only petrified wood filling station in the world." Built in 1932 by W. G. Brown, a lumber dealer, the station still stands in Lamar, Colorado and is used as an office for a tire dealer. Postcard courtesy of the author.