

W.R. Van Vliet's Canning Jars

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Three of Warren R. Van Vliet's canning jars, made in Stroudsburg.

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Monroe County has had its share of individuals who have worked to make life a little better, or easier, for everyone. Warren R. Van Vliet was one such individual. During his inventive career, Van Vliet engineered canning jars that were better able to preserve foods than the other canning jars of his day.

Van Vliet was born in Stroud Township on December 1, 1833 to Charrick and Hannah (Barry) Van Vliet. Warren Van Vliet was the great-great-great grandson of Dirk and Rachel Van Vliet, two of the earliest European settlers of present-day Monroe County. The Van Vliet family was originally from Holland and immigrated to America in 1728. They first settled in Kingston, New York, before moving to Walpack, New Jersey, and then to present-day Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.



Photo: Warren R. Van Vliet with his great-granddaughter E. Ruth Breitwieser Dunning, in 1920.

Warren Van Vliet served in the Civil War as a recruiter for the Union Army. After the War, Van Vliet returned to a career in Monroe County, working as a teacher. He was a forward-thinking man who was best known for his invention and patent of the Van Vliet canning jar. Patents are, and originally were, intended to exclude people other than the patent-holder from using, developing, or selling an invention. Patents were first granted in America in the late 1790s, and with the onset of the Industrial Revolution, inventions, along with their corresponding patents, became common.

The smallest glass factory in Monroe County manufactured Van Vliet's canning jars. This factory was located on the Stroudsburg side of the Interborough Bridge (now Veterans Memorial Bridge). Warren Van Vliet partnered with Stroudsburg businessman Jackson Lantz who undoubtedly financed Van Vliet's canning jar industry.

Van Vliet's jar design was intended to advance the preservation of fruits and other foods by improving the jar's seal. His jars were narrow at the top and flared to a wider, more stable bottom. To seal the jars, Van Vliet developed a baling device that wrapped the jars with wire. The wire then secured a yoke-shaped clamp that tightly held the jars' lids when they were closed, creating an air-tight seal. Van Vliet's jars came in a variety of sizes from one-half pint to two quarts.

Warren Van Vliet's patent for his fruit jars was approved on May 3, 1881. The jars are imprinted with either "The Van Vliet Jar of 1881" or "Van Vliet Improved PatD May 3 1881." Unfortunately, the Van Vliet jars were only made for four years; the factory burned down in 1885, and the storeroom, fasteners and jars were lost. The factory was never rebuilt.

Because the Van Vliet canning jars were only made for a short time, there are very few in existence. The rare Van Vliet canning jars, designed to be functional and beautiful, are a great collector's item today.