

# THE GOLDEN HILL: OHIO'S WHISKEY FRANCHISE

By Jack Sullivan

## *Special to Bottles and Extras*

More than a half century before Starbucks was conceived, an enterprising Columbus whiskey merchant devised a franchise scheme to market his products throughout Ohio by establishing retail outlets in multiple cities. The merchant was Harry Bayer. The network he created was linked by a single name -- The Golden Hill.



**Fig. 1. Golden Hill Rye bottle**

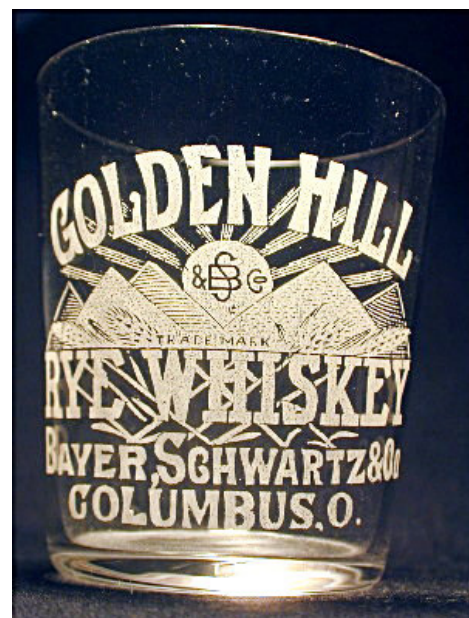
Bayer began as a partner in Bayer, Schwartz & Co., a whiskey distributor first listed in Columbus business directories in 1903, located at the northwest corner of Town and Fourth Streets. The firm, probably whiskey rectifiers, advertised several brands, including Genesta, Grover Rye, and Red Lion. Its flagship was The Golden Hill Rye Whiskey (Fig. 1) Shown here is a highly decorated etched shot glass from those early days, advertising the brand by showing the sun rising over five hills (Fig. 2).

## **Harry Bayer Tries Franchising**

Bayer was eager to expand his market, both in Columbus and throughout Ohio. At the time many breweries were buying up saloons or securing exclusive rights to provide beer to selected drinking establishments. Bayer saw an opportunity to do something similar for his whiskey trade. In 1905 he applied to the Federal Government to register "The Golden Hill" as a whiskey brand. This move was an attempt to discourage anyone else from appropriating the name.

The same year he opened two more liquor outlets named "The Golden Hill," in Columbus, one at 76 W. Broad Street and a second at 1020 Mt. Vernon Avenue. Then Bayer went statewide. He soon made arrangements with saloon owners in Cleveland, Toledo, Akron and Youngstown to change the name of their establishments to the Golden Hill and to provide his whiskey on an exclusive basis. A corkscrew advertising the brand was issued during this period (Fig. 3). It stated: "For sale wherever good whiskey is sold."

How Bayer operated was suggested in evidence from an early 1900s lawsuit.



**Fig. 2 Bayer, Schwartz shot glass**

An Ohio court decision described how the Columbus entrepreneur had loaned a Cleveland saloonkeeper named Hornstein a sum of money. In return Bayer controlled a chattel mortgage that covered all of Hornstein tangible assets and held an unsecured note for an additional \$1,200. When Hornstein went bankrupt Bayer seized the property and caused the sheriff to sell



**Fig. 3 Golden Hill cork screw**



the saloonkeeper's liquor licens From the proceeds Bayer collect the amount of the note. Although the settlement was challenged i court by Hornstein's wife, Bayer actions were upheld. A Golden Hi Liquor Co. outlet subsequentl opened in Cleveland at 619 Superic Avenue.



Fig. 4 Harry Klein pictured, postcard

#### Bayer Adds Toledo, Akron and Youngstown

Most of Harry Bayer's business moves, however, do not appear to have been adversarial. In Toledo Harry H. Klein, pictured here on a postcard (Fig. 4), had opened a saloon and liquor store at 520 Monroe Street, doing business as Klein Bros. Company. About 1905 he joined up with Bayer and changed the name of his establishment to Golden Hill Liquor. Described in business directories as a



Fig. 5 Toledo Golden Hill location

distributor of "wines & brandies & fine whiskies," the firm initially occupied a building in downtown Toledo at the corner of Monroe and Adams Streets, then moved next door to 519-520 Adams Street (Fig. 5). Klein also opened an outlet at 520 Monroe St.

Unlike Bayer's parent organization and its souvenir shot glasses, Klein



Fig. 6 Harry Klein half pint

specialized in giving away decorative half-pint ceramic jugs of whiskey. One was issued with his own name (Fig. 6) while other half-pints bore the Golden Hill logo (Figs. 7-9). He also gave away a Golden Hill mini-jug (Fig. 10) and a wooden tip tray with his Toledo Golden Hill addresses (Fig. 11).

Two other Golden Hill franchises opened in 1905, one in Akron at 13 Market Street and the other in Youngstown. Business directories provide information about the Youngstown outlet. Under the name Golden Hill Liquor Company,



Fig. 7 The Golden Hill half pint #1



Fig. 8 The Golden Hill half pint #2



9. The Golden Hill half pint #3.



saloons (or stores) were located at 308 W. Federal St. and 277 E. Federal St. In 1908, the latter outlet moved to 282 W. Federal.

In 1907 Bayer incorporated his firm under a new name, The Golden Hill Distilling Company, as shown on a shot glass (Fig. 12). It was common for such firms to claim to be distillers when, in fact, they bought their stock by the barrel from Kentucky



**Fig. 10 Golden Hill mini**



**Fig. 11 Toledo Golden Hill tray**

distilleries, mixed it in the back room, filled bottles, and slapped their label on it. Court documents indicate that at Golden Hill Distilling, the hard-charging Bayer held the positions of President, Treasurer, Chairman of the Board and Manager. The newly-christened firm also added two new whiskey brands, American Beauty and Rob's Rye. Bayer registered both with the government in 1907.

### The Golden Hill Appears in Lima and Fostoria

About the same time N. Trotstein opened a Golden Hill outlet in Lima, Ohio, likely as an adjunct to his saloon. It was located at 34 Public Square, a prime location in downtown Lima, shown here in a period postcard (Fig. 13). Tronstein's shot glass advertising Golden Hill Rye is virtually identical to the Columbus-issued versions (Fig. 14). The similarity solidifies the notion that the two organizations were closely

linked. A labeled bottle of The Golden Hill Rye also bears Tronstein's name and Lima address (Fig. 15). A 1909 ad in the Lima Citizen depicts a quart bottle of Golden Hill and an offer of a decanter and four glasses with the purchase of a case of the rye whiskey (Fig. 16).

No artifacts have surfaced from the Golden Hill location in Fostoria, Ohio. It was housed in the downtown Foster Block building, shown here on a post card (Fig. 17). The building also housed a haberdashery, shoe store, bank and grocery. The Fostoria Golden Hill was identified as both a saloon and a liquor store. City records show the owner/operator to be L. J. Schild.

### The Rapid Decline and Fall of The Golden Hill

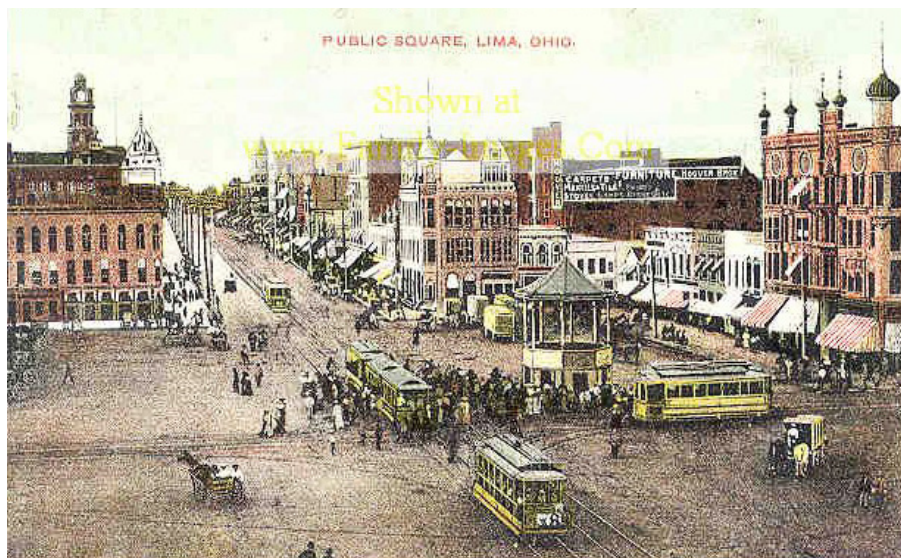
Whatever dynamic was catapulting The Golden Hill into prominence in the Ohio whiskey trade was short-



**Fig. 12 Columbus Golden Hill shot glass**

lived and appears to have waned by 1908. That year the Akron Golden Hill disappeared from directories. By 1910 the franchise was in a severe decline. A Gold Hill outlet opened that year in Cincinnati and closed within months. The Toledo Golden Hill disappeared from directories as did one of the two locations in Youngstown.

At the parent organization in Columbus, the Broad St. and Mt. Vernon Av. units closed and the company moved to two High St. addresses. Bayer hired a new manager for his Columbus operations named Samuel Weinfeld. Weinfeld stayed two years, then left to found his own wholesale and retail liquor business.



**Fig. 13 Lima Public Square postcard**





**Fig. 14 Lima Golden Hill shot glass**

The Cleveland Golden Hill apparently closed in 1913 and the remaining Youngstown outlet terminated in 1914 -- both gone from local business listings.

From this distance we can speculate about the causes for the rapid fall of The Golden Hill Distilling Co. retailing "empire". The company may have become financially overextended during a period of economic downturn. Individual saloon owners may have found the arrangement less than profitable. Court records from 1914, however, may provide the best clue to the decline. That year Harry Bayer was hauled into court by a man named Bump for sending whiskey by express mail to Mayville, Ohio, a completely "dry" town. Bump was an undercover agent for Prohibition forces and had conducted a sting on Bayer. After a trial in Mayville, the whiskey dealer was found guilty and fined.

Bayer appealed on the grounds that he should have been tried in Columbus where the shipment originated. The Ohio Supreme Court agreed and threw out the earlier conviction. Bayer's victory was hollow as town after town

under local option in Ohio voted to ban alcohol. The Columbus Golden Hill Distilling Co. -- the linchpin of Bayer's empire -- disappeared from business directories the following year, although it continued to be listed in a national directory of shippers as late as 1916.

Bucking the trend, a new Golden Hill Liquor Company was formed in Zanesville, Ohio, in 1914, operating at 228 Main Street. Although information about the outlet is scant, it continued to be listed in local business directories until 1919 and the advent of statewide Prohibition.

The Golden Hill proved to be an early experiment in franchising that fell far short of Starbucks. Today its legacy is represented by a few bottles, jugs, shot glasses, corkscrews and a wooden tray -- not much to document Bayer's grand but failed vision.



**Fig. 15 Lima Golden Hill whiskey bottle**



**Fig. 16 Lima Golden Hill ad**

Notes: The material for this article was gleaned from a range of publications and Internet sites. The pre-pro.com website maintained by Robin Preston provided the photos of shot glasses. Thanks go to ePodunk for the postcard view of Youngstown. Portions of this article previously appeared in the Swirl, the monthly newsletter of the Ohio Bottle Club.



**Fig. 17 Fostoria Block building postcard**