

A Tin of Trouble

by Joe Terry

In World War II, the good guys wore drab green and the bad guys wore swastikas. Imagine therefore, the consternation of a poor little Ohio pill maker whose diminutive containers displayed both. The medicine involved was Dr Edwards Olive Tablets and Frank M. Edwards was the proprietor of the misnamed pills.

The good doctor practiced medicine in the city of Portsmouth for many years. As any good physician knew, various medical complaints could be traced to constipation, and vice versa. If you didn't "go," you felt miserable. To this end, he compounded a pill composed of stramonium, podophyllum, aloin and cascarn. All are powerful botanicals, but the last three are especially good at prompting bowel action. In conjunction with these pills, he prescribed olive oil to help his patients maintain regularity.

So successful were the pills, that in 1908, Frank applied for, and was granted, a trademark. It consisted of a swastika, a good luck symbol borrowed from Native American art. It was meant to represent the "Indian herbal lore" from which he devised his pills. He formed the Olive Tablet Company, listing its address as 440 Waller Street. On January 12, 1909, the state granted corporation status to his fledgling company. As a harbinger, the firm's site was listed as Columbus, the state capitol.

Indeed, newspaper advertisements listed Portsmouth as late as 1911, but by 1912 were listing both Portsmouth and Columbus. By 1913 only the latter was listed and so it was to remain for over forty years. Frank was the president and general manager, and with the help of Frederick E. Rathburn, the company carried on a lucrative business. The pills came in two sizes of tin, the 10c and the 20c. The pills were coated in a bright green dye, and the tin containers also sported a green paint

job. The swastika was displayed prominently across the front, superimposed with the words "Dr Edwards Olive Tablets Will Act." [Figure 1]

In 1913, the pills attracted the notice of the American Medical Association, who investigated them and their advertising. They were found to contain no olive oil, making the advertising claims deceptive. However, one early statement was certainly accurate. "Every little Olive Tablet has a movement all its own" was profoundly true, as the components to the pill were extremely powerful. As the pills worked, few people complained, and the report faded into obscurity.

When Frank moved the company to Columbus, the first spot chosen was at 8 E. Chestnut Street. A couple of years later it moved to 199 E. Gay, followed two years later by their last move, to 29 E. Fifth Street. From 1917 until 1930 (the last directory I have for Columbus), the firm distributed the pill from that location. It is my belief that they remained in that locale until they closed.

The 1920s were good years, as they were for everyone, and even the 1930s weren't bad. The pills worked and they were cheap, so they remained a big seller. However big changes were coming. The problem started in Germany, primarily with a man named Adolph Hitler. He was gaining power, and in 1935 his political party's flag became the new German Flag. While the swastika

of the Nazi Party was the reverse of the one used by Dr Edwards, few would notice the difference at a glance. No one wanted to be associated with Nazi Germany and its ideals. This was even more important due to the fact that the firm was spending a small fortune to advertise in national magazines, such as *Farmer's Wife*, *Woman's Home Companion* and *Cosmopolitan*.

The first change was to amputate a couple of arms off of the swastika. The "Will" and "Act" portions were removed, leaving an unusual looking device on the label. [Figure 2] This lasted until January 7, 1936, when a new logo was applied for. This one showed Dr. Edwards face, in a circle, with the name of the medicine. [Figure 3] The mark was renewed in 1940, strengthening Frank's resolve not to be associated with the evil that was the Nazi party.

The firm had a certain amount of clout, exhibited by the fact that Rathburn was president of the Proprietary Association, a group of patent medicine manufacturers that had banded together some years before. He stepped down in May of 1944. The firm lasted another decade, closing in 1956. The pills were sold to Plough and Company, an out of state pharmaceutical company. They in turn divested themselves of the product to The Oakhurst Company of Levittown, New York. Today, Oakhurst still sells Dr Edwards Olive Tablets, along with a bevy of other old time remedies.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3

Collecting Bottles by State, The Iowa Part 6 - Beer Bottles Continued from Page 46.

The Casper Heil Brewing Company and the Moehn (pronounced Main) Brewery were two dominate breweries in Burlington and were highly competitive. Both had large elaborate buildings to house their brewing operations. Moehn had a huge new brewery constructed in 1903 and Heil followed with a large new building of his own in 1904.

Both used the usual promotional items such as etched glasses and mugs, numerous advertising giveaways, and signs to promote their breweries.

While it is not known which brewery began the use of the trim lip bottle, it's obvious not much time elapsed before the other began using the same style bottle. Evidently both switched over to the newer crown top bottle shortly thereafter as the trim lip bottles are harder to find than the newer crown top examples.

As stated before, both breweries were shut down after 1915. The Moehn Brewery building is still standing with its original tin sign on the front of the building. Likewise, Casper Heil's mansion still stands majestically on top of one of the hilltops in Burlington.

With the turn of the century, many of the smaller breweries were closing down as the larger Iowa breweries continued to dominate the market. One of the innovations used at this time by the larger breweries was the use of large half-gallon sized beer bottles commonly referred to as a "picnic" bottle because there was most likely enough beer in one container to easily refresh everyone present at a small picnic!

The picnic beer bottle is almost always made of amber glass, many times marked on the base with the A. B. Co. glasshouse mark, and employed the use of a blob top. While many of the breweries were

switching over to the more modern and efficient crown top closure, the picnic bottles continued to use the blob top with a wire closure and a porcelain stopper with a rubber seal. The use of picnic beer bottles seems to be limited to the mid-west states of Iowa, Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin although there are a very few examples from other states. The bottles generally stand 13 to 14 inches tall and have large slugplates with plenty of room for embossing. Some have more attractive embossing than others such as the bottles from the DUBUQUE BREWING & MALTING CO. and the DAVENPORT BREWING CO.

The most elaborate embossing however was used by the brewery from the small town of New Vienna, Iowa. The details on the slugplate show a large flying eagle with a banner perched on a globe. Smaller quart size versions of the New Vienna bottles exist but all with crown top lips. This picnic size bottle is perhaps the most desirable and hardest to obtain of all the picnic beer bottles from Iowa.

If you're trying to amass a complete collection of the picnic beers from Iowa, be prepared for a challenge as there are several tough examples besides the New Vienna bottle.

The following is a list of all known embossed Iowa picnic beers:

Clinton - Clinton Brewing Co.

Davenport - Davenport Brewing Co.

Davenport - Independent Brewing & Malting Co.

Des Moines - P. Dapalonia

Des Moines - Des Moines Brewing Co., two slug plate varieties and one in olive amber

Dubuque - Dubuque Brewing & Malting Co.

Dubuque - Dubuque Star Brewing Co., base embossed only

Keokuk - Phil Glaser, two slug plate varieties

Keokuk - Pechstein & Nagel

Maquoketa - Fritz Staemmele

New Vienna - New Vienna Brewing Co.

Ottumwa - Ottumwa Brewing & Ice Co.

Many of the smaller Iowa breweries and some of the larger ones undoubtedly used unembossed bottles with paper labels. This was a big savings in expenses as embossed bottles were more expensive than the unembossed versions. Few paper labeled examples exist from the Iowa pre-prohibition era prior to 1916 but one example is shown here. The label is marked OTTUMWA Budd SELECT BEER / OTTUMWA BREWING & ICE CO. / OTTUMWA, IOWA. It also has the nice graphics of the eagle flying through the "O" which is very similar to the etching found on the beer glasses from this company. This brewery was established in 1905 and closed around 1913.

While this article dealt mainly with the older style beer bottles, there are a number of embossed crown top beers from Iowa which I won't cover at this time.

Again, with the established statewide prohibition law enacted in Iowa in 1916, all the breweries in Iowa were forced to close their doors or switch over to manufacturing a nonalcoholic product. Some of the larger breweries did attempt this but with limited success. What is left for bottle collectors is a limited number of embossed beer bottles from Iowa to collect.

As always, it's the pursuit and the people you meet along the way that make our hobby so enjoyable and unique.

A special thanks to Bruce Mobley for the use of his pictures in this article.

Stay tuned for my next article which will describe the few liquor and whiskey bottles known from Iowa. As always, enjoy the hunt the people you meet during the journey!

