

## WESTERN WHISKEY: SALOONS & RETAIL MERCHANTS

by Bret Heinemann

### The Bottles

During the period 1876-1901, the bottles used in Western saloons came primarily from one of two sources—Eastern glass factories or the San Francisco & Pacific Glass Works. Starting in 1901, most of the bottles produced in the West came from the Pacific Coast Glass Works (base marking PCGW.) By 1880, a third of the wholesale and retail San Francisco liquor dealers were using embossed bottles.<sup>1</sup>

In the 1890's and continuing until Prohibition, easy-to-open screw thread bottles became popular. Most liquor continued to be dispensed in the traditional cork top bottles, which maintained their popularity even after (or perhaps because of) the 1903 introduction of the Owens automated bottle machine.

### Early Saloons

The saloons were often decorated in a lavish and luxurious style made possible in part by the re-investment of some of their profits. By the 1870s, most saloons were in competition to sell good quality whiskey. Hence, they had given up (or at least most had given up) the practice of diluting and altering whiskey, which had been common in the Gold Rush era.

The Excellent Saloon, owned by Theodore A. Barry and Benjamin A. Patten, is an example of one early saloon in San

Francisco. The saloon was first located at 116 and 118 Montgomery Street, later moving to 413 Montgomery Street (1864 to 1879).<sup>2</sup>

A saloon known as The Kremlin was located at 236 Montgomery Street. The saloons operated by William Schreiber included the Elite Saloon at 21 Kearny Street from 1879 through 1898. Bill Williams was his partner from 1878 to 1880.<sup>3</sup>

Nicholas Ahrens and Bill Tamm operated a saloon together from 1874 until 1878, when Ahrens left the partnership. In 1889, Ahrens opened his own saloon at 19 Market Street, and began operating two more saloons in the 1890s.<sup>4</sup>

In 1875, John J. Ferguson opened the Occidental House, his first saloon in San Francisco, and three years later, he moved to another location and opened the Sunnyside Saloon. In 1885, he opened the ABC House, which lasted until 1918.<sup>5</sup>

### Legal Aspects

Saloons operating at a permanent location were licensed and issued revenue

stamps, a practice that would continue until Prohibition. The retail sale of wines and liquors at temporary events like fairs or traveling locations like trains or steamships required special stamps.<sup>6</sup> This included railroads like the Central Pacific, Union Pacific, and Southern Pacific.

In a typical saloon of this era, the bar, where liquor was sold, had to be in plain view of the street and not hidden by any screens.<sup>7</sup> By 1900, a typical saloon would contain a wide variety of advertising and promotional items from distillers and wholesalers to promote specific brands of whiskey.<sup>8</sup> Some of the items used to advertise whiskey included shot glasses, decanters, mirrors, pictures, calendars, and match boxes.

Most of the laws affecting saloons came from local authorities. Many of these regulations were intended to help protect saloons from peddlers and traveling salesmen. Sale of liquor was also restricted on Sundays to help safeguard the morality of the community.<sup>9</sup>

Examples of local regulation in San Francisco included the board of police commissioners' authority to determine who received liquor licenses and who did not. The United States Supreme upheld this authority. The court ruled in the case of P. Crowley vs. Henry Christensen in 1890. Also, the court ruled in the case of Foster vs. the San Francisco Board of Police



The Elite / 21 Kearny St S.F.



N. Ahrens / Market / & Steuart Sts / Goods / As Represented



Louis Taussig & Co / Importers / S.F.

Commissioners that the law denying liquor licenses to people who had employed female waitresses was not unconstitutional.<sup>10</sup>

At the national level, regulations took the form for the most part of revenue taxes collected by the Treasury Department. For example, on March 30, 1898, it was determined by the Treasury Department that all retail partnerships should be required to purchase a new special stamp when there was a move to a new location. Another method of regulation was how much the revenue taxes would be. These taxes varied from 70 cents per gallon of 100 proof liquor in 1872 to 90 cents in 1875. By August 2, 1894, the tax was \$1.10 per gallon. On July 1, 1898, to help raise revenue for the Spanish-American War, a war revenue law was passed requiring a special stamp. Samples that were given away by saloons and wholesale merchants for free were not subject to taxation, however.<sup>11</sup>

#### Wholesale Merchants as Saloon Owners

There were some wholesale merchants who were also involved in saloons. Francis Cassin and Patrick Cassin, for example, were involved with John H. Daly in the Our Opera Saloon in the 1860s. Also, Amandus Fenkhausen, from 1861 to 1863, operated a saloon on Kearny Street.



C.J. Stubling / Wholesale Dealer /  
In Wines Liquors / The Dalles, Oregon



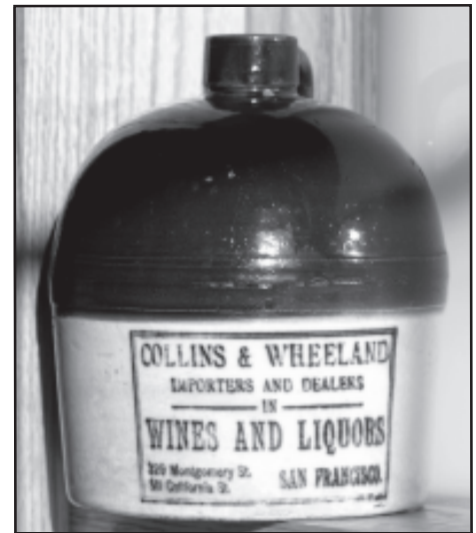
S.P. Collins & Co. / 329 Montgomery St. /  
& 511 / California Sts. / San Francisco, Cal..

William C. Hildebrant, in 1877, opened a saloon at the corner of nineteenth and Howard. In 1884, he opened a second saloon, and sold it in 1885. Louis Taussig operated the Congress Hall saloon at 318 Bush Street for a short time in the 1860s.<sup>12</sup>

Salvin P. Collins and Horace Porter operated the Clayton restaurant and saloon from 1859 to 1865 at 605 Commercial Street. In 1866, Salvin Collins went out on his own and began operating his own saloon at 329 Montgomery Street. In 1874, James Wheeland was hired as a bartender for Collins' new 511 California Street Saloon. Collins ran both enterprises until he turned the business over to Wheeland



John Ferguson / ABC House / 501 Kearny St /  
S.F. clear pumpkinseed



Collins & Wheeland / Importers and Dealers  
/ in / Wines and Liquors

in 1884.

Collins died shortly thereafter in 1884 and Wheeland became the senior partner from 1884 until his death in 1895. Silas Collins (Salvin's son) was the junior partner during this period until 1895 when he became the senior partner and Samuel Wheeland (the son of James Wheeland) became the junior partner. The firm continued until 1914.<sup>13</sup>



John Ferguson / ABC House / 501 Kearny St /  
S.F. amber



## Other Saloons

The Laurel Palace was one of the more lavishly decorated saloons. The interior was decorated with polished laurel wood, mirrors, frescoes, and paintings. John Kahman opened the saloon in 1872 at 301 Kearny Street, and sold it in 1874 to Thomas H., Cunningham and Timothy Downey. By 1876, Cunningham had bought out Downey, and in 1886, sold the saloon to Rome Harris and John S. Merigan. In 1890, Harris bought out Merigan and the saloon continued with Harris as the owner until it was destroyed by the earthquake and fire on April 18, 1906.<sup>14</sup>

Charles Richter was operating a saloon in Trinidad, Colorado by 1888. He tried wholesale liquor sales from 1895 to 1898, but he switched back to a saloon. Just prior to Prohibition, he formed a partnership with McNaughton in the drug business.<sup>15</sup>

Malter was the owner and operator of the St. Georges Vineyard near Fresno, California. The firm had an office in San Francisco, and the Lash's Bitters Company distributed it until the earthquake of 1906. In 1907 a bottle was produced for that firm.<sup>16</sup>

A saloon operated by C.J. Stubling was located on Second Street near Court Street in The Dalles, Oregon. He may have opened it as early as 1887.<sup>17</sup>

The Tavern Saloon was located at West Third Street in Los Angeles, California. In 1908, the McCoy Brothers operated a saloon at this address and continued it until 1915. Peter Wenigar operated a store in Vallejo from the 1890s to 1902. From 1900 to 1902, he had a partnership with Bielenberg in San Francisco, but in 1910, Peter's widow was the sole proprietor.

Jeremiah J. Hanifin arrived in Oakland in 1869 and became the owner of three saloons. He later was involved in local politics, serving as Chairman of the Board of Supervisors from 1915 to 1919, during which time his business interests included dealing in wholesale wines and liquors.<sup>18</sup>

The Hotel Lorenz in Redding was built in 1902. Hoyle was the manager, and later became a partner, having married into the family in 1920.<sup>19</sup>

Louis H. Orr owned a retail ale and liquor store at 151 J Street in Sacramento in 1856. He moved to San Francisco, and was involved in wholesale liquor sales from 1892 to 1893.<sup>21</sup>

## The Advent of Prohibition

Most of the saloons continued to operate until Prohibition in 1920, after which most either switched to the sale of non-alcoholic beverages, near beer or completely shut down. Legally, those were their only choices, unless they were renegades and became involved in the underworld and crime.

## Endnotes:

<sup>1</sup> William Wilson and Betty Wilson, *Spirit Bottles of the Old West*, (Wolfe City: Henington Publishing Company, 1968) 20-21.

<sup>2</sup> John L. Thomas, *Whiskey Bottles of the Old West*, (Bend: Maverick Publications, 1977) 1.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas, *Whiskey Bottles of the Old West*, 10, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Thomas, *Whiskey Bottles of the Old West*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, *Whiskey Bottles of the Old West*, 63.

<sup>6</sup> William Mida, *Mida's Compendium of Information for the Liquor Interests*, (Chicago: Criterion Publishing Company, 1899) 97, 214-215.

<sup>7</sup> William Mida, *Mida's Compendium of Information for the Liquor Interests*, 97, 144-145.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald Carson, *The Social History of Bourbon*, 49.

<sup>9</sup> William Mida, *Mida's Compendium of Information for the Liquor Interests*, 97-99, 219, 316. Jeremiah W. Jenks, "The Developemt of the Whiskey Trust," *Political Science Quarterly*, 4(1889) 299.

<sup>10</sup> William Mida, *Mida's Compendium of Information for the Liquor Interests*, 67.

<sup>11</sup> Jeremiah W. Jenks, "The Developemt of the Whiskey Trust," *Political Science Quarterly*, 4 (1889) 299. William Mida, *Mida's Compendium of Information for the Liquor Interests*, 97-98.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas, *Whiskey Bottles of the Old West*, 2, 9, 45.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas, *Whiskey Bottles of the Old West*, 8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas, *Whiskey Bottles of the Old West*, 30-31.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson, *Spirit Bottles of the Old West*, 121.

<sup>16</sup> Wilson, *Spirit Bottles of the Old West*, 137.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, *Spirit Bottles of the Old West*, 137.

<sup>18</sup> Wilson, *Spirit Bottles of the Old West*, 77, 141, 147.

<sup>19</sup> Wilson, *Spirit Bottles of the Old West*, 84, 137, 141, 147.

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, *Spirit Bottles of the Old West*, 112.

<sup>21</sup> Wilson, *Spirit Bottles of the Old West*, 114.

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Hotel Lorenz Bar / Redding, Cal.



Hoyle & Lorenz / Hotel Lorenz / Redding