

# Kiefer's City Soda Works

## The Small World of Soda Bottlers in Indianapolis

By Steve Lang



Kiefer's City Bottling Works, Indianapolis, IND.



City Soda Works, Ph. E. K. Indianapolis



City Soda Works, Philip. E. Kiefer Indianapolis, IND.



City Soda Works, P.H.K. Indianapolis, IND.



The history of soda/mineral water goes a lot further back than I thought. I think of squat soda bottles and Hutchinson bottles being the correct time period. Not that the first man-made glass of carbonated water was produced by Joseph Priestley in 1767 or that the term "soda water" was coined in 1798. Joseph Hawkins received the first United States patent for the manufacture of imitation mineral water in 1810. The first effervescent lemonade was sold in Britain in 1833. Thomas Joseph Cantrell, an Irish Apothecary and Surgeon from Belfast, Northern Ireland, is credited with the invention of Ginger Ale in 1851. The soft drink industry expanded quickly and in 1860 there were 123 plants bottling soft drink water in the United States. By 1870, fueled by the Temperance Movement and the popularity of carbonated beverages, the number of plants more than doubled to 387 by 1870. Root Beer was mass-produced for public sale for the first time in 1876.

One thing I have noticed as I have researched Soda, Mineral Water & Beer manufacturing and bottling in Indianapolis is that a lot of the people working in the bottling business worked for several different bottlers/manufacturers over the years. I guess when you are skilled in a trade, work is available when you want a change of scenery. I started looking into Philip E. Kiefer and his City Soda Works, and found connections that lead back to two earlier bottlers and connections between those bottlers as well.

Philip E. Kiefer was born in 1834 in Germany and came to the United States in 1848 at the age of 14 with his mother and father settling in Indianapolis, Indiana. In his boyhood days he worked

in the bakery owned by his father. From 1874 to 1895 Kiefer worked in the bottling business for both Scribner & Firmin and for John R. Firmin after he leaves the partnership. Kiefer went into business for himself later.

George B. Scribner was a very successful businessman from 1858-1874 bottling mineral water and beer. He partnered with several different people over the years including William Smith in 1869 and again in 1873. An advertisement for Scribner and Smith in 1869 lists them as successors to L & J Kern who had bottled mineral water from 1865-1869. The 1869 City Directory listed Charles and Louis Kern as working for the company that bought them out. On January 17th, 1874, the Indianapolis News mentions in their "City News" column that John R. Firmin has bought out William Smith's soda works. In the 1874 City Directory Kiefer is listed as a driver for Scribner & Firmin. Scribner & Firmin are only partners for one year before Firmin sets out on his own. John R. Firmin is in business 1875 & 1876 at 44 S. Pennsylvania. William Smith who Firmin bought out in early 1874 is listed as a laborer with Firmin's new company along with driver/teamster Philip E. Keifer. Whew, need a scorecard?

Kiefer set out on his own in 1879 opening his own bottling company at 290 E. Washington Street. He moved to 215 E. Washington in 1881 and began manufacturing mineral water. Kiefer moved again in 1883 to 444 W. Washington and finally moved to 439 W. Washington in 1887. Kiefer was referred to as a bottler, mineral water manufacturer & beer / ale bottler over



City Soda Works, P. E. Kiefer  
Indianapolis, Ind.



Kiefer's Soda Works



Kiefer's Soda Works



Kiefer's Bottling Works, Indianapolis, IND (star embossed in center)





G.B. Scribner,  
Indianapolis  
Pontiled Soda



L & J Kern  
Indianapolis IND.



Jno R. Firman, (note the  
mis-spelling for his first  
name Jon) Indianapolis,  
IND.



W. Smith  
Indianapolis, IND.



Philip E. Kiefer  
Indianapolis IND.

CITY SODA WORKS  
PH. E.K  
INDANAPOLIS

The group of Soda bottles above are some of the Soda companies that gave birth to P.E.K. and his many embossed bottles, whether he worked for them or worked with them he learned the business and ran his own soda stand for 16 years or so.

these years. Kiefer referred to his business at least for a while as the City Soda Works or City Bottling Works as shown in the embossing on his Hutchinson Style soda bottles. There is no mention in City Directories or Newspapers from that time period of any City Soda Works or Bottling Works so I have to believe it was just what he wanted referred to but was never incorporated as.

He left the bottling business sometime around 1896/ 1897 and was listed as a lithographer, collector & canvasser over the years before retiring in 1905. Philip E. Kiefer passed away

on Saturday, June 25, 1910 at the age of 76. His obituary states he had been an invalid with paralysis for several months and suffered a fatal stroke. He was a member of Company C, 33rd Indiana Regiment during the Civil War serving from 1861-1864 in skirmishes in Kentucky and Tennessee for the Union Army. He was survived by 6 sisters and 2 brothers.

