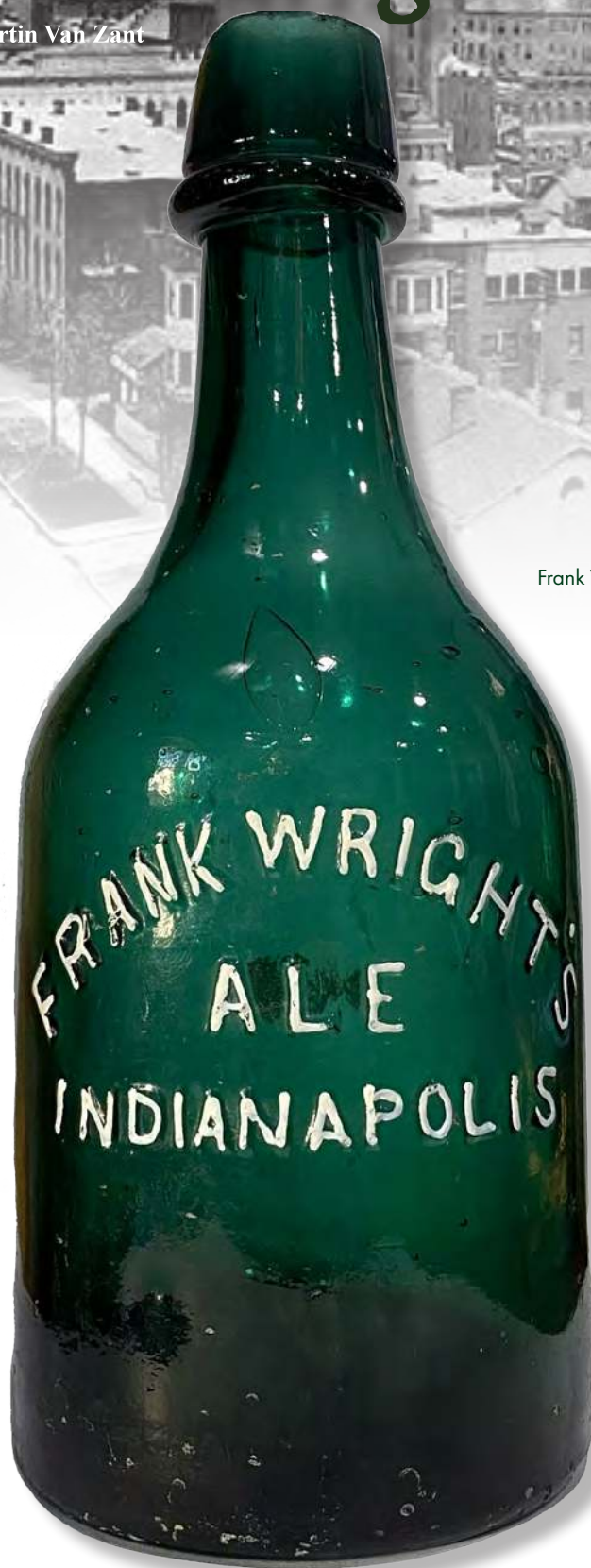


Capital Brewing

Frank Wright and Indianapolis

By Martin Van Zant



Frank Wright's Ale in a super green color!

I started collecting bottles in the 1990s and really haven't looked back since. I was collecting, probably like most, what I could find. I should say I started collecting what I could afford. There were many bottles that I found, but just couldn't afford. (Insert frowny face)

So my collection started with dug bottles, blob beers and Hutchinson bottles. I had to sell more than I could keep back in those days when I would dig for bottles. I still collect Indiana blob beers and Indiana Hutches. However, I've expanded into the earlier things and more groups of early Indiana bottles. This brings me to the topic of this article: *Capital Brewing Frank Wright and his ale bottles*. I saw my first ale bottle through an old-time collector named Bob Chaudon. He and my step-father (Billy Gonterman) were lifelong friends. I got to know Bob really well and was able to buy my first early flask from him. He let me choose between a scroll flask and a Washington/Taylor, I chose the latter.

It wasn't until years later that I was able to buy my first Indiana Ale, which happened to be embossed "Frank Wright's Ale, Indianapolis, Ind." These bottles commanded a high price for a guy in college. I think it was around \$60 to purchase one of these prized bottles. Prices vary now and more likely you'll spend around \$140 for a standard amber-colored ale from Wright's. If you add a little color/molds in there, the price goes up just like anything else.



Here is a really neat envelope from the 1860s

Over the years, I have seen only a handful of different colored ones, and really not too many for sale as they are highly coveted by their current keepers. The colors range from light amber to almost black amber. The glass can be as crude as they come or just a regular old early amber. Some of the applied lips look like they were laid on with skill and precision; others look like they were just placed on and then moved to the next one. I really like the crude ones where the necks are slightly leaning to one side or the other. The seedy or bubbly appearance in the glass looks excellent in the greens and lighter colors. The greens can range from grassy green to really dark almost can't see through it green. Most ales around here that you find are in the amber colorations unless you can find some of those early black glass-looking ales in super dark ambers and greens. However, there are not many of those from Indiana!

We should start at the beginning with Frank's father, John H. Wright, born in 1807 in Maryland. He then moved to Richmond, Indiana during his childhood. John started a dry goods business in Richmond and did rather well. In September of 1831, he married Mary Ann Mansur and have three children, Frank (1833-1896), Mansur (1835-1885), and Mary Jane Wright (1837-1839). Their only daughter died at the mere age of two for unknown reasons.

John eventually moved to Indianapolis in 1838 when Frank was just 5 years old. He was a fine businessman during his small stint in Indianapolis. He had a large business in the sale and purchase of dry goods. He also was one of the first to purchase and pack pork in Indianapolis. For some reason or another John died in the summer of 1846, leaving a wife and two sons. Mary remarried after John's death to Dr. Charles Parry. Frank was only 13 when his father died. Dr. Parry must have had a great influence on Frank as he named his first son Parry Wright. On another note, Frank's brother Mansur was a practicing physician following in Dr. Parry's footsteps.

Frank Wright was born in 1833 in Richmond, Indiana. In 1838, his father brought the family to Indianapolis. Frank married on March 3, 1856 to Laura Lawrence and they went on to have three children, Parry, Fannie and Marianne. I didn't find much other information

FRANK WRIGHT.	J. W. JENNINGS
Wright & Jennings,	
No. 18 South Meridian Street,	
D EALERS in Flour and Feed of all kinds, keep constantly on hand A No. 1 Family Buckwheat Flour, Bran, Middlings, Shorts, Corn Meal, Corn, Hay, Oats, &c. All articles delivered, on short notice, to any part of the city.	
ALSO,	
Agents for old stock choice Ales, from the celebrated brewery of <i>Dozier, Bemis & Co.</i> , Chicago, in barrels, half barrels, kegs and bottles, for the trade and family use. Delivered to any part of the city.	

First ad January 8, 1861 for Wright & Jennings

CLIP We clip the following from the Indianapolis correspondent of the Richmond *Jeffersonian*:

Indianapolis has had a fair business season, and her manufactories have somewhat increased. Frank Wright has erected a large brewery, (making the seventh in the city,) in which he has commenced the manufacture of Chicago ale. Mr. Defrees, from Evansville, has put in operation a large steam barrel factory; and Redstone & Co. have opened a machine shop, making the seventh or eighth in the city. Evans & Co., from your city, have refitted and put in operation a steam flouring mill; and James Starr has put in operation a steam agricultural manufactory.

January 11, 1861 ad from an Indianapolis paper, talking about the large addition made by Frank Wright

Dissolution.

THE Partnership heretofore existing between Frank Wright and J. W. Jennings, under the name and style of Wright & Jennings, was dissolved on the first day of this month. Said Jennings withdraws from the firm. The business will be carried on as heretofore at the old stand, by Frank Wright. Those indebted to the old firm will please call and settle. mar5 d3t

March 5, 1861 dissolution for Wright & Jennings



Early amber version, embossing on front only, small letters. Tall skinnier version



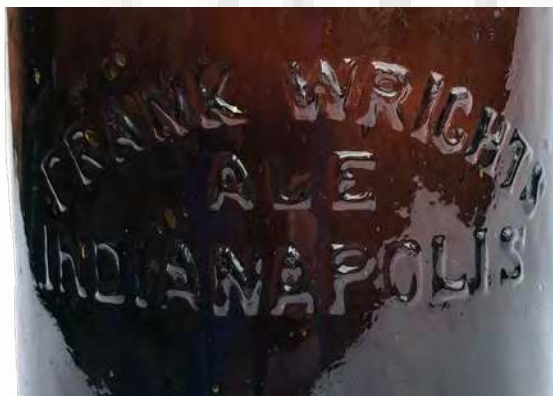
Early green version, embossing on front only, small letters. Peened out embossing on the back. Looks the same as the front. I would image same mold as amber bottle however used for such a long time they reused the mold



Later version with medium size letters, New Albany glass works on the base Circa 1867-1872



Later example, rarely seen version with extra large embossing, notice the taller letters compared to the others



Latest example, standard version you see most, embossing with small letters

about Frank until the 1860s when he followed his father's footsteps and began in the sales of dry goods and grains. On a side note, Laura's family is from Richmond, Indiana, and her father was a judge in the county and a prominent member of the community. The couple may have met during one of Frank's visits to Richmond since his father grew up there and had many friends. The Lawrences could have been family friends to the Wrights.

The first evidence of Wright's business is from the "*Indianapolis Daily Journal*" dated Jan. 8th, 1861. There is an ad for Wright and Jennings, dealers in feed and flour of all kinds. He also mentions selling ales from the celebrated brewery of Downer, Bemis & Co. out of Chicago in half-barrels, barrels and bottles. It's possible he was doing business for sometime prior to January 1861.

SPARKLING ALE.—Frank Wright, at the south-west corner of Pearl and Meridian streets, is agent for the celebrated Chicago Champagne Ale. This delightful beverage for spring and summer is very properly named. It has a very close resemblance in its effervescence to champagne wine, and is a far more wholesome drink than that liquor. It is made of pure malt—no drugs being used to give it body or "head." In short, it is the best and purest ale ever offered to the people of Indianapolis. Mr. Wright has it for sale by the dozen or half-dozen bottles to consumers, or by the barrel or half-barrel to dealers. He also has the London stock ales, five years old, that would make an American Johnny Bull smack his lips with delight. Consumers or dealers wanting pure ale should try Mr. Wright's. The several articles he has for sale are excellent tonics for invalids, and a number of debilitated persons are now using them to the exclusion of all other stimulants.

April 9, 1861 Frank Wright runs this great ad

A week later, Wright runs another ad, only this time it's an announcement. The ad is in a Richmond newspaper called the *Richmond Jeffersonian* and is clipped for the Indianapolis correspondence, inserting into an Indianapolis paper. The ad from Jan 11, 1861, paper announces that Frank Wright has erected a large brewery in which he has commenced the manufacture of Chicago Ale. There is no mention of his own brand of ale. The fact that Frank builds a large brewery means he has the demand for such a quantity. I am certain it would take more than a week's worth of sales in order to build a large brewery.

The Wright and Jennings ads run for a couple of months. Then in

A NEW STOCK OF ALE.—Frank Wright, South Meridian street, agent for Downer, Bemis & Co.'s Chicago Ale, received the other day an addition to his stock that is better than any heretofore offered the public. The water used in brewing it is from Lake Michigan, and obtained in as pure a state as it was possible to get it. The greatest care has been observed in producing this article, and the effect is seen in the best quality of ale ever offered in any community. Mr. Wright keeps it only for dealers, or those who purchase for family use.

July 24, 1861 Frank Wright talks up the Chicago Ale

early March, we see an ad in the *Indianapolis Daily Journal* on March 5, 1861, for dissolution for the partnership of Wright and Jennings. The ad calls for those indebted to the old firm to please call and settle. It is also noted that Jennings is the one withdrawing from the firm. There is no record of, or any that I could find, that describes why the partnership failed. I would love to find a bottle with Wright and Jennings ale, Indianapolis, Ind., embossed on it.

OYSTERS.—Frank Wright, No. 20 South Meridian street, is receiving Gramus & Taylor's famous Monumental Oysters daily, per express.

September 13, 1861 Frank Wright ads famous Monumental Oysters

In April, Frank is at it again, announcing his new shipment of Chicago Champagne Ale. The ad in *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, dated April 5th, 1861, talks up the ale and how great it is. My favorite quote from this ad: "He also has London Stock Ales, five years old, that would make an American Johnny Bull smack his lips with delight." There is another ad in May with almost the same verbiage of being the sole agent in this city of Downer, Bemis, and Co., Chicago Champagne Ale. The difference in this ad is in the middle of the ad he talks about stock ales. Then at the end of the ad for the first time, the ad says physicians and others proclaim Wright's Ale to be the best and purest in the city. So I suspect he used his embossed bottles to bottle the Chicago Ales and just used a paper label to note the product. (If anyone has any information about a label of any sort, I would love to know.) Again on July 24th, 1861, he had another shipment of new stock of ale, only this time does not mention Wright's Ale.

1861 was a busy year for Wright, as noted in the Sept. 13th, 1861 *Indianapolis Journal*. Frank was now selling Monumental Oysters

FRANK WRIGHT. JOHN W. JENNINGS.
WRIGHT & JENNINGS,
GENERAL PRODUCE, FORWARDING,
COMMISSION MERCHANTS,
DEALERS IN ALL KINDS OF
GRAIN, FLOUR AND FEED.
ALSO, AGENTS FOR
Downer, Bemis & Co.'s Celebrated Old Stock and Champagne Ales,
No. 18 South Meridian Street,
INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

Ad taken in the 1861 City directory, taken out early in the year as they were dissolved only a couple months later



FRANK WRIGHT,
—AGENT FOR—
Downer, Bemis & Co.'s
CHICAGO CHAMPAGNE ALES,
NO. 20 MERIDIAN STREET,
INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

Ad taken in another city directory in 1861, which must have been printed later, as there is no mention of Jennings

178 INDIANAPOLIS

FRANK M. WRIGHT. W. S. DOWNER.

CAPITAL BREWERY.

 **WRIGHT & DOWNER,** 

Manufacturers of

PALE STOCK, AMBER,

AND

CHAMPAGNE ALE.

OFFICE AT THE BREWERY,
BLAKE STREET,
NEAR WHITE RIVER BRIDGE,
INDIANAPOLIS, IND.

1862 city directory ad, listing for a short lived Wright & Downer and first appearance of Capital Brewery

T. G. & T.

MONUMENTAL OYSTERS

RECIVED daily by Express, direct from Baltimore, at the Wholesale Agency, No. 20 South Meridian street, Indianapolis.

The celebrated **Monumental Oysters** are branted **T. G. & T.** Sold at retail by most of the leading Grocers, and served up by the best Restaurants in this place and throughout the country. Sold to dealers at a **LOWER** figure than they can be had elsewhere. Also, keep constantly on hand a supply of Fresh **SHELL OYSTERS**, by the bbl.; **COVE** and **SPICED OYSTERS**; all of which are sold to dealers at a very low price. Also, manufacturer of

WRIGHT'S PURE ALE,

Warranted free from all ingredients, except **BARLEY, HOPS** and **PURE WATER**; is used by the Hospitals, and recommended as a *pure, harmless Tonic* by many of the leading physicians of this place and other parts of the State. Dealers furnished on liberal terms.

FRANK WRIGHT,
No. 26 South Meridian street,
Indianapolis, Indiana.
nov26 d3mawlm

1863 ad in the December newspaper with the first mention of Wrights Pure ale.

BEER—During the July month Frank Wright sold three hundred and sixty-three barrels of beer. The revenue tax paid thereon was one dollar per barrel.

1866 ad in the August newspaper, you can see Wright selling over three hundred barrels of beer/ale

BEER ITEM.—One thousand nine hundred and forty-one barrels of beer were manufactured during the month of August, by the firms below mentioned, on which a revenue tax of one dollar per barrel was paid:

C. F. Schmidt	930½ barrels
Gagg & Co.	433½ "
Frank Wright	341 "
J. P. Meikel	213½ "
Harting & Bros	78 "
Casper Maus	58½ "
George Cobb	16 "

1866 ad in the August newspaper, Frank was competing with the big boys. On a side note Schmidt would later merge with Maus and Lieber to become the Indianapolis Brewing Co.

MARION COMMON PLEAS COURT.
HON. SOLOMON BLAIR, JUDGE.

In the cause of **La Rue vs. Johnson** the jury returned a verdict for the defendant.

Kraft & Co. vs. Frank Wright. The plaintiffs, who are Baltimore oyster jobbers, bring suit against defendant for the non-payment of a note for merchandise. Defendant admits the execution of the note, but pleads that since its execution he has discovered that certain delays by plaintiffs in forwarding the merchandise for which the note was given, and which resulted in loss to the defendant, might have been prevented by plaintiffs. **Hammond & Howland** for plaintiffs. **Bitter contra.**

1868 December newspaper clipping that was the start of the downfall for Frank and his business

BANKRUPTCY.

DISTRICT COURT OF THE UNITED States, for the District of Indiana.

In the matter of **Frank Wright, Bankrupt.** In Bankruptcy.

A Warrant in Bankruptcy has been issued by said Court against the estate of **Frank Wright**, of Indianapolis, of the county of Marion, of the State of Indiana, in said District, adjudged a Bankrupt upon the petition of his creditors; and the payment of any debts and the delivery of any property belonging to said Bankrupt to him, or for his use, and the transfer of any property by him, are forbidden by law; a meeting of the creditors of said Bankrupt, to prove their debts and choose one or more assignees of his estate, will be held at a Court of Bankruptcy, to be holden at Indianapolis, in said District, on the 20th day of March, A. D. 1871, at 10 o'clock a. m., at the office of **John W. Ray, Esq.,** No. 24½ East Washington street, one of the Registers in Bankruptcy.

BENJ. J. SPOONER,
U. S. Marshal, District of Indiana.
feb21 2t Messenger.

1871 Frank Wright files for bankruptcy

ALE AND BEER.		
	Manufactured. Barrels.	Sold. Barrels.
S. F. Schmidt, lager	1,445	1,818½
P. Lieber & Co., lager	792	1,121
J. P. Meikel & Co., lager	792	817½
Sponsel & Bals, lager	117	102½
Casper Maus, lager	58	53½
Casper Maus, ale	28	16
Harting & Brother, beer	144½	119
Frank Wright, ale		
Margaret Stephens, beer	12	10½
Charles Schriber, ale	9	6¾
Totals	3,907½	4,044½

September 1871 Frank Wright sales zero ales

BREWERS' RETURNS.

The following is a statement of the number of barrels of lager, ale and beer manufactured and sold in this, the Sixth Revenue District of Indiana, together with the quantity on hand, October 1, as returned to the Assessor for taxation, during the month of September, 1872:

	Man'f'd.	Sold.	On hand.
Mrs. C. F. Schmidt, lager	1,445	1,899	2,883½
P. Lieber & Co., lager	570	1,180½	1,12½
J. P. Meikel, lager	594	445	1,912½
Peter Bals, lager	221	184½	184½
Casper Maus, lager	116	105½	149½
Casper Maus, ale	8	12½	18½
Frank Wright, ale	40	30½	19
Harting & Bro., beer	59½	70½	9½
Margaret Stephens, beer	9	8½	5½
Total barrels	3,022½	3,937	5,697½

October 1872 Frank Wright was back in business and doing on selling 30 barrels that month

from Gram & Taylor's daily. I didn't find much news from Frank during the year 1862. This could have been due to the fact that there was a war going on? There was a Union camp in Indianapolis, and I wonder if the troops were able to enjoy Wright's Ale?

In 1862, with Jennings out of the picture, Wright takes on another partner. D.S. Downer, who was the Chicago supplier as noted in the early ads. This must have been short-lived since it was the only advertisement I could find in the annual city directory. This is also the first time Capital Brewery is mentioned, the same name used by the Frank Wright's Brewery.

It's not until 1863 that we see a new ad for Wright's Ales. In the Dec. 9th, 1863 issue of the *Indianapolis Daily Journal*, we see Wright's ad for his different types of oysters and his ale. It's the first time I saw an ad strictly for "Wright's Pure Ale" with no mention of his Chicago connection. Frank must have been selling ales and oysters like candy. In 1864, he added cigars to the mix and he is listed next to another brewer.

The war must have taken a toll on everyone as there was limited advertising for Frank Wright and his Capital Brewery. There are no newspaper advertisements, and the only listings were in the 1865 city directory. He is listed again as the Capital Brewery in the business section of the city directory. I would love to find the sign that was hanging on the building "Capital Brewing," Indianapolis. I can imagine a wood-painted sign with gold lettering. Oh, man! Imagination can go wild.

1866 seems like a good year as Wright sold around 3,000 barrels of ale, nearly double what everyone else sold. In these reports, there is no mention of how many bottles of ale were sold. I think that would be a more interesting number, to the how many bottles I need to search for? Capital Brewery is doing great for the next two years.

In 1868, all seemed well and things were going well. Frank is on course to sell more than double his previous record -- well over 4,000 barrels. Sometime in December, his oyster suppliers have trouble getting the oysters to Frank and a lawsuit soon follows for



Here we have a few Images of Frank Wright Ales from a private collection, the two in the middle are the older versions and green and amber

DISCHARGES IN BANKRUPTCY.

Yesterday was discharge day in bankruptcy and the following persons were favored with discharges:

Silas W. Williams, Muncie; Jas. W. Davis, Jeffersonville; Solomon Slayback, Lafayette; John T. Carver, Park county; Samuel D. Butts, George W. Pickerill and Samuel T. Quick, Indianapolis; Frank Wright, Indianapolis.

1873 Frank is discharged from bankruptcy

DIED.

WRIGHT—Fannie E. Wright, eldest daughter of Frank and Laura Wright, on the 13th.

Grief has a strange power in opening the hearts of those who sorrow is common. None who have not suffered such loss as is contained in the above brief announcement can possibly have any appreciation of the terrible anguish of the kind father and more than devoted mother, whose eyes for weeks and months have rested with fond sadness upon the little struggling victim of sickness, until, on Thursday last, when scarcely had the gray light of morning shown through the crevices of the closed blinds, bringing stir and bustle to the world, but to this home only darkness, she passed peacefully beyond the sphere of temporal trials in triumph. She sank to rest not as the sun sets behind the darkened west, to shine upon the same scenes again to morrow, but dissolved away into the eternal sunshine of God's presence. Death is a harvest that never fails. No class escapes it. The bravest and the best; the high and the low; the rich and the poor, are alike swept away when least prepared for it. It seems doubly hard that one so young and full of life should be taken away in the springtime of her existence, and just as the story of her girlish dreams began to be realized, and her fond parents commencing to feel that she gave promise of a brilliant future.

The loss sustained by the bereaved family is one which no earthly power can temper, or no human sympathy can lessen; and this should lead us all to recognize our dependence upon the beneficent will of the Creator of the world.

The obsequies take place from the family residence at 10 o'clock this morning.

Feb 14, 1874 Fannie, Franks daughter dies from illness

BURGLARIES.

The Knights of the Jimmy Reap a Rich Harvest—A Night and Day of Developments.

The industrious housebreaker made himself exceedingly numerous about the neighborhood of College and Home avenues and Rohampton street night before last, and succeeded in getting away with about \$600 worth of jewelry, silver plate and other valuables. Rev. J. P. Miller, residing on Home avenue, lost \$50 in money and some silverware; Wm. L. McKenzie, on College avenue, just above Seventh street, \$80; Mr. Hibben, \$20 and a lot of silver. Two others, whose names were not given to the police, were also numbered among the victims. The last visit the rascals made was to the residence of Frank M. Wright, deputy prosecutor. Mr. Wright chanced to be awake when the burglar opened the door leading to his room. Springing out of his bed, he seized his revolver and drew a bead on the depredator at a distance of not over ten feet. The revolver failed to "go off," but the burglar didn't, and in less than ten seconds the heels of his rubber boots were disappearing over the garden fence. Mr. Wright fired two ineffectual shots at him from the kitchen door.

Sept 1875 burglars tried to rob his home, mistake!

NOTICE IN BANKRUPTCY.

In the District Court of the United States for the District of Indiana.

In the matter of Frank Wright, a petitioner for adjudication of bankruptcy of himself, and Ebenezer Nutting and Francis F. Randolph, against whom a petition for adjudication of bankruptcy was filed on the 31st day of December, A. D., 1875.

Notice is hereby given to the said Francis F. Randolph of the pendency of the said petition against him, and that, unless he do appear in said Court, at the city of Indianapolis, in said District, and answer the same on or before the 11th day of January, A. D., 1876, the same will be adjudged against him by default.

By order of Court.

J. D. HOWLAND, Clerk.

McDonald & Butler, for Petitioners.

1876 Frank is in bankruptcy again and this is the last newspaper clipping we find for him and his businesses

non-payment. This will be the start of the downfall of the Capital Brewery.

In 1869, the brewery sold less than 900 barrels of ale. Frank's business would last another two years before declaring bankruptcy. In September 1871, he was noted as selling no ales. I'm not sure what happened at this time, perhaps family troubles, or just poor management, I'm just not sure. Two months later, Frank has resumed sales in a small way, perhaps 30 barrels a month for the next couple of months.

1872 turns out to be a decent turnaround and Capital Brewery is still selling about 30 barrels a month. Frank Wright was discharged from bankruptcy in April of 1873. Things are starting to go in the right direction. Then disaster strikes: Fannie Wright, Frank's eldest daughter, dies, the cause of death is illness. It is noted that Frank's father-in-law, the honorable Edmund Lawrence of Wayne County, was visiting for a few days. I like to read the old newspapers from the 1800s because everybody's business was everybody's business and was recorded in the daily newspaper. This was the form of communication in their day.

Sometime in 1875, someone decided to break into Frank's home. The perp did not know Frank was home and barely made it out alive as Frank fired two shots from his gun.

In December of 1875, Frank declared bankruptcy again and this is the last we see of the Capital Brewery. There are no more ads, no more listings in the city directories. The last mention I have of Frank Wright is in the 1880 census in which he is listed as working in a pork house.

Frank died in 1896 and is buried in Crown Hill Cemetery near the heart of Indianapolis. He leaves us many wonderful specimens of ale bottles to find. Thank you, Frank, we appreciate your bottles and only wish for a taste of the great Capital Brewery Ale!

