

Deciphering A.M. Bininger

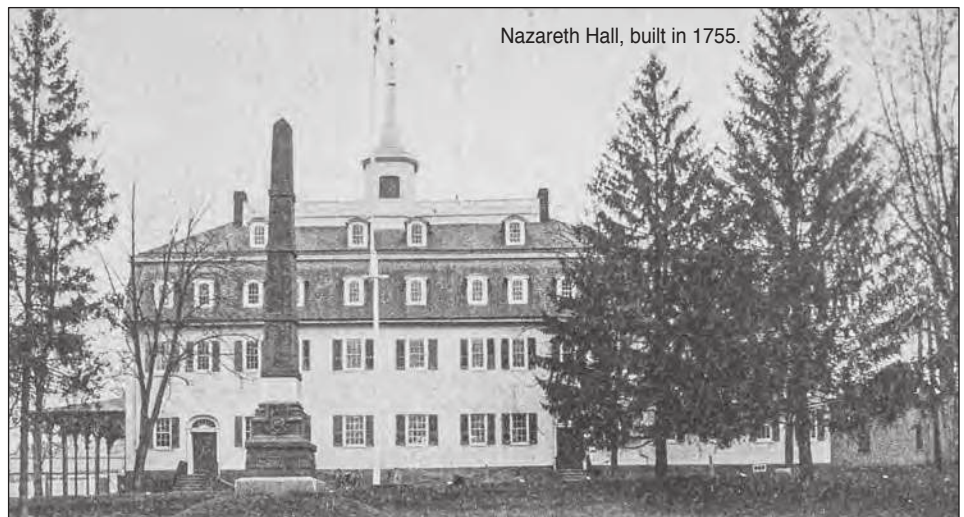
Part 2: Abram M. Bininger II and III The Continuation: Abram M. Bininger, Jr.

By Chris Bubash

At this time, I thought it might be interesting to present to the reader some information concerning A.M. Bininger, Jr. that I uncovered during the course of my research. Available information is somewhat sparse compared to his father. However, I was able to piece together a rough timeline of his life for your (hopeful) enjoyment. I'd be interested in hearing from you if you have any information to confirm, deny, or otherwise supplement this information. So many threads to pull, so little time...

Ten-year-old Abram, Jr. appears to have entered the Moravian Boarding School in Nazareth, Pennsylvania in 1857. The book *Nazareth Hall, An Historical Sketch and Roster of Principals, Teachers and Pupils* by H.H. Hacker lists Abraham M. Bininger of New York as a pupil at Nazareth Hall in both 1857 and 1860. It's unclear whether he was continuously enrolled in the school between those three years. Interestingly, the school's agent in New York was Messrs. A. Bininger & Co., Liberty Street, and references were provided by Messrs. Bininger & DeWitt, Warren Street, and by Messrs. A.M. Bininger & Co., Greenwich Street!

In the 1864-1865 *Sixteenth Annual Register of the Free Academy of the City of New York* (located on Lexington Avenue between 22nd and 23rd Streets), we see, among other things, a listing of students by class, of which there were five: Introductory Class, Freshmen Class, Sophomore Class, Junior Class, and



Senior Class. Among the list of students admitted to the Introductory Class in July 1865 appears the name "Bininger, Ab'm Merritt, Jr." Also included was his age at the time of admission (17 years 3 months) and his parent's name, occupation and home address (A.M. Bininger, Merchant, 131 West 45th Street). In the 1865-1866 *Seventeenth Annual Register of The Free Academy of the City of New York*, we see listed among the students of the Introductory Class "Bininger, Abraham Merritt, Jr." of 131 West 45th Street.

In the 1866-1867 *Eighteenth Annual Register of The College of the City of New York* (renamed from The Free Academy to eliminate the perceived stigma associated with having graduated from a "free" school), we notice something unusual. The name Abraham Merritt Bininger, Jr. is conspicuously absent from the listing of the students of the Freshman Class.

Review of the *Nineteenth* and subsequent registers failed to detect any further traces of A.M. Bininger, Jr. My conclusion, pending further research, is that he either withdrew or was expelled from the college. Perhaps he did not see higher education in his future?

In the 1870 U.S. Census, A.M. Bininger, Jr., 23, was listed as a bookkeeper, living with his parents. Later that year, his father passed away at the age of 70. In the years after his father's death, Abram Jr.'s life saw a see-saw in fortunes. On the upside, he married Anna Mary Whitney of Albany, New York on January 9, 1872. Anna was the daughter of James A. Whitney of the firm Whitney & Strong, dry goods merchants for over half a century in Albany. After living in New York City for a year, Abram and Anna moved westward, eventually taking up residence in Buffalo in 1874 at 237 Prospect Avenue. During

this time, he became the proud father of Abram Merritt Bininger III (born 1873) and Alice Morrell Bininger (born 1874).

In the 1875 N.Y. Census at Buffalo, A.M. Bininger, Jr., 27, was again listed as a bookkeeper, residing with his wife Anna (age 23) and his children Abram (age 2) and Alice (age 1). By June 1877, however, A.M. Bininger, Jr. was back in Brooklyn. It was at this time that he appears to have run afoul of the law. In a document containing so-called Restorations of Citizenship, we find the following entry:

“Whereas, at a Court held in and for our County of Kings in the month of April 1877, Abraham M. Bininger was convicted of Grand Larceny and was thereupon sentenced to be imprisoned in the King’s County Penitentiary at hard labor, for one year and six months, which term he served subject to the legal deduction for good conduct and he being represented unto us as worthy of being restored to the rights of a citizen: Therefore, Know Ye, That we have pardoned, remised and released, and by these Presents do pardon, remise and release the said Abraham M. Bininger of and from the offence whereof in our said Court he stands convicted as aforesaid, and of and from all Sentences, Judgments and Executions thereon, and he is hereby restored to all the rights of a citizen.”

The document was signed by Lucius Robinson, Governor of New York, on April 8, 1879, and also by George Moss, Deputy Secretary of State, on April 9, 1879.

Apparently, his offense and imprisonment did not sit well with his wife. During his incarceration, an article appeared in the February 6, 1878 edition of the *Brooklyn Times Union* in which “Mrs. Anna M. Bininger, a young lady of prepossessing appearance and modest demeanor, who is highly connected and resides on the Heights, has sued her husband, Abram M. Bininger, for absolute divorce. The case came on for trial to-day in the Special Term of the City Court before Judge McCue... His honor has decided in favor of the plaintiff, but has reserved the question of alimony for further consideration.”

Abram Jr.’s mother, Maria Long Bininger, took immediate action. On February 14, 1878, she recorded the following codicils to her will: “First. I hereby revoke the Fifth clause of my last will and testament, in which I gave One Hundred dollars each to my grandchildren Abram M. and Alice Bininger. Second. I hereby revoke so much of the Sixth clause of said will as gives a part of my wearing apparel to my daughter-in-law Anna M. Bininger, and I direct that all of my wearing apparel be given to my daughter Helen B. Wattles. Third. I hereby revoke the last

section of the Eighth clause of my last will and testament, and I hereby give, devise and bequeath the principal directed to be invested in said Eighth clause for my son Abram M. Bininger to my daughter Helen B. Wattles and to her heirs at law upon the decease of my said son.”

Abram Jr.’s misfortunes continued to mount. Soon thereafter, Abram and Anna’s daughter, Alice, contracted croup and passed away on November 29, 1878 in Brooklyn at the age of 4 years and 4 months. She was interred December 2, 1878 in the James A. Whitney plot in the Albany Rural Cemetery in Menands, Albany County, New York. Anna would later marry Ransom J. McKee, a former member of the New York 10th Heavy Artillery during the Civil War. She eventually passed away, after a nine year illness, in 1920. Her simple gravestone can be found in Hillside Cemetery, Scotch Plains, Union County, New Jersey.

Abram Jr., upon his release, appears to have briefly moved-in with his sister, Helen, and brother-in-law, Alden Wattles, at their home at 488 Vanderbilt Avenue, Brooklyn (ironically, a stone’s throw from his former residence at the King’s County Penitentiary). Abram’s mother, Maria, passed away later that year on August 7, 1879 at the age of 63. She was interred in Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn, Kings County, New York.

Number.	Examination Number.	PUPILS.				PARENTS AND GUARDIANS.		
		NAMES.	Age.		School No.	Time in Gramm. Schools.	NAMES.	OCCUPATIONS.
			Y.	M.		Y.		
20	153	Beattie, Frank	15	8	18	5 1	Thomas Beattie	Builder
21	377	Beckman, John Townsend.	14	6	35	2 2	Henry Beckman	Secretary
22	232	Beekman, Charles Wm.	14	9	40	3 0	Charles Beekman	Cartman
23	94	Bensel, Edwin Briggs.	15	11	10	3 8	William P. Bensel	Cooperage
24	53	Bernhard, Abram.	14	10	28	1 4	B. Bernhard	None
25	197	Berrien, Peter Woods	15	1	17	3 3	Peter Barrien	Mason
26	63	Betieman, Christian H'y.	14	6	49	9 0	Nicholas Betieman	Builder
27	54	Bininger, Ab'm Merrit, Jr.	17	3	28	3 10	A. M. Bininger	Merchant
28	71	Bisbee, Fred. Warren.	17	7	49	2 0	Aaron Bisbee	Manufacturer
29	98	Black, Charles Oscar	14	8	32	7 1	Joseph Black	Express
30	335	Blodget, Charles William.	14	3	35	1 5	Charles F. Blodget	Sec. Williamsburg Gas Co.
31	366	Bloomfield, Chas. Augustus.	16	7	35	1 0	William Bloomfield	Lawyer
32	21	Borchers, Wm. Stillwell.	14	10	44	2 5	John W. Borchers	Butcher
33	329	Bouchet, Almyre Paul.	14	6	35	2 0	Prosper Bouchet	Piano Forte Maker
								219 Lexington avenue.

From the Register of the Free Academy of the City of New York (1864-1865)

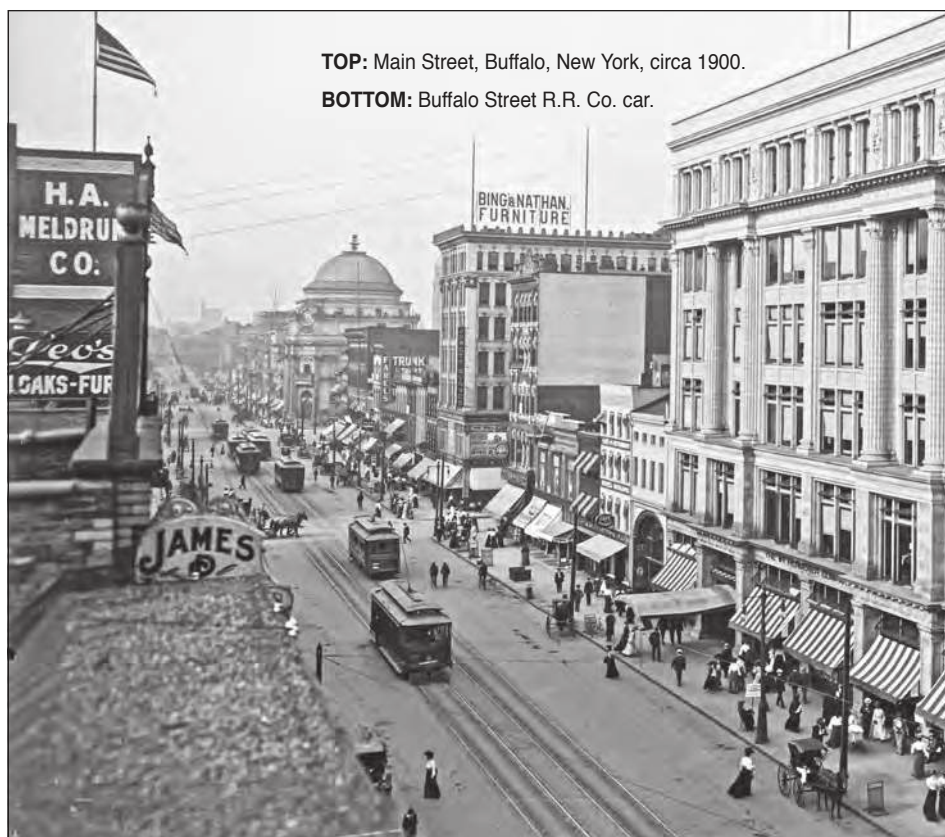
To heap insult upon injury, the firm of A.M. Bininger & Co. was acquired at this time by Emanuel Eising of E. Eising & Co. and relocated from 15 Beaver Street to 47 Front Street, later 51 Water Street, thus ending the Bininger family's involvement in the storied firm of A.M. Bininger & Co. A.M. Bininger & Co. remained in business up until the onset of prohibition, which ended the firm's fortunes for good.

Research leads me to believe that Abram, Jr. returned to Buffalo, where he found employment in various menial jobs. Review of 1879-1902 Buffalo City Directories revealed a sampling of his occupations during that period, all for the Buffalo Street Railroad Company: Street-car Conductor (1879 and 1880), Starter (1884 and 1886), Conductor (1888 and 1890), and Clerk (1892-1902). Interestingly, the 1904-1912 Buffalo City Directories revealed a return to his former occupation of bookkeeper. Though his employer during that timeframe was not specifically mentioned, it was presumably the Buffalo Street Railroad Company.

During his time in Buffalo, Abram, Jr. was an itinerant nomad, calling no fewer than fifteen different residences home. Several of them, built between 1860 and 1880, still exist today. He was still living in Buffalo at the time of his sister's death on October 21, 1915, as announced in her obituary in the October 22, 1915 edition of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. Though I was unable to discover much information about Abram, Jr. after that date, I did discover that an Abraham M. Bininger passed away on April 25, 1917. It's unclear from the record whether or not this was A.M. Bininger, Jr. Chances are good, but not definitive.

Abram Bininger III

Information on Abram III was, interestingly, even harder to locate than information on Abram, Jr. Other than mention of his birth in Titusville, Pennsylvania on April 3, 1873 in "The Whitney Family of Connecticut" and his appearance as the



TOP: Main Street, Buffalo, New York, circa 1900.

BOTTOM: Buffalo Street R.R. Co. car.



child of Abram M. Bininger and Anna M. Whitney in the 1875 New York State Census, he seems to have made no further appearance in recorded history. Deepening the mystery: Anna M. McKee's (formerly Anna M. Bininger's) obituary stated that "She leaves one son, Irving W. Bininger, with whom she has always made her home." Mysteriously, I could find no mention of the birth of a third child before her divorce from Abram, Jr. in 1878. What could explain this inconsistency?

Research into the background of Irving W. Bininger provided what I believe to be a solution to this mystery. On his World War I Draft Registration Card, Irving W.

Bininger listed his birthdate as April 3, 1873. On the August 3, 1931 Arriving Passengers and Crew list for the *SS Duchess of Atholl*, Irving W. Bininger listed his birthdate as April 3, 1873 and his birthplace as Titusville, Pennsylvania — the exact same birthdate and birthplace as Abram M. Bininger III! My conclusion: At some point after Anna's divorce from Abram, Jr. in 1878, Anna changed her son's name from Abram Merritt Bininger to Irving Whitney Bininger, presumably to dissociate him from his father's checkered past in the King's County Penitentiary and, perhaps, his less than impressive ongoing employment as a nomadic streetcar conductor.

In which year the name change occurred isn't clear. However, the first mention I was able to discover of the reinvented Abram M. Bininger III was in the 1893 Plainfield (New Jersey) City Directory, which contained a listing for Irving W. McKee, clerk, living with his mother at 311 Orange Place (Ransom McKee being his now-deceased stepfather). The 1897 Plainfield City Directory and all subsequent directories listed his name as Irving W. Bininger, living with his mother at (primarily) 70 Westervelt Avenue. On January 26, 1905, Irving married Sallie Mae Jeter, dressmaker, formerly of Lynchburg, Virginia. After a year on their own at 147 E Fifth Street, the couple moved in with Irving's mother (Sallie's mother-in-law) at 70 Westervelt Avenue, where they would remain for the rest of their lives. The house still stands today.

Over the next several decades, Irving Bininger appears to have focused on two primary occupations. Other than brief stints as Board of Health Inspector (circa 1905), baker (circa 1914-1915), and machinist for International Motor Company (circa 1916-1918), Irving spent much of his life working in the insurance and dry goods industries. Available records provide the following rough timeline of his employment: Before 1909, he worked as a clerk, agent, or assistant superintendent for the Prudential Insurance Company and the Colonial Life Insurance Company. From 1909-1913, he worked primarily as a window dresser, or window trimmer, for A.E. Force & Co. ("The White Store"). From 1918 onward, he appears to have worked as a floorwalker, floor manager, or salesman for Tepper Brothers Department Store.

It was during his employment with Tepper Brothers that Irving Bininger experienced a brush with death. As reported in the July 23, 1924 edition of the *Plainfield Courier-News*, Dr. R.W. Emerson and Irving W. Bininger, returning from a fishing trip near Bangor, Maine, were among those who escaped



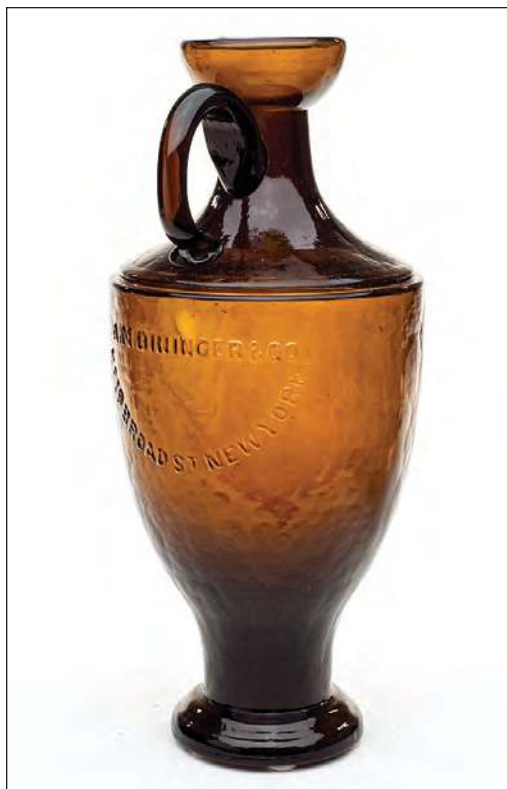
Tepper Brothers, where Irving Bininger worked.

from the crash of the steamer *Boston*. "Returning in a condition of severe shock, after an experience at midnight, on a sinking steamer in Long Island Sound, Monday night, Dr. R.W. Emerson of 813 Webster Place, and Irving W. Bininger of 70 Westervelt Avenue, arrived home yesterday afternoon, glad to have escaped the fatality which came to five passengers, and the injuries which others incurred." The article went on to describe how their ship, *Boston*, was struck amidship by an immense oil tanker in dense fog off Point Judith. Male survivors were taken aboard the oil tanker, and later transferred to a responding ship, *Priscilla*.

Irving W. Bininger's name appeared in print several more times over the years, once as a speaker at a Tepper Brothers banquet in 1925, once as a jury member in 1931, once as a jury member in 1934, and once as a Republican Election Officer for Plainfield's 1st Ward, 1st District in the May 15, 1934 primaries. Irving W. Bininger passed away on December 3, 1939. Private funeral services were held at the Memorial Funeral Home on December 6, 1939, Rev. Henry L. Bell officiating, and burial was in Hillside Cemetery, Scotch Plains, New Jersey. Several years

later, Sallie Bininger passed away on September 23, 1945 in Muhlenburg Hospital after a lingering illness. Burial, like her husband, was in Hillside Cemetery. No children were mentioned in her obituary or in any of the census documentation that I was able to locate.

So, there you have it. Some brief highlights from the lives of Abram M. Bininger, Abram M. Bininger, Jr., and Abram M. Bininger III (aka Irving W. Bininger). As this article and associated timelines were assembled from numerous disparate (and occasionally conflicting) sources, I leave open the possibility that their stories, as recounted above, may contain some amount of inaccuracy. I would very much appreciate hearing from any readers who possess complimentary or contradictory information that would help me, and others, form a more complete picture of the lives of these interesting individuals. Regardless, we can all be glad that A.M. Bininger & Co. left behind for us a wonderful myriad of bottles that can be enjoyed not only by current collectors, but by generations of collectors yet to come. Thanks, Abram!



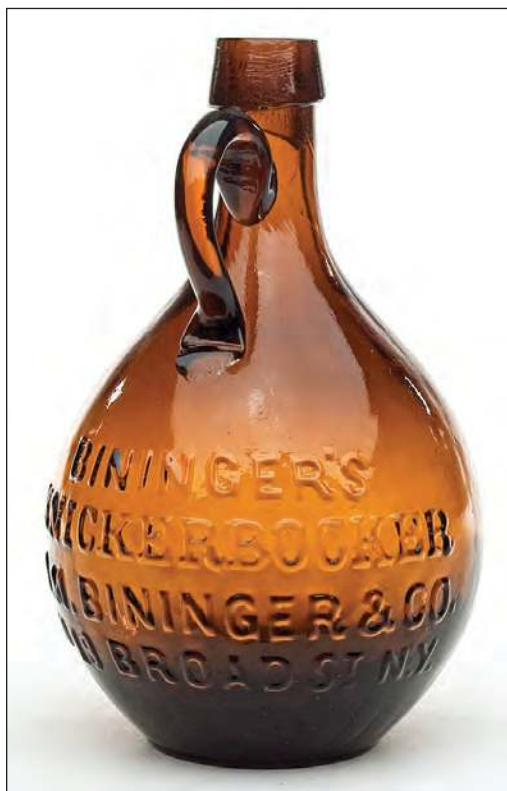
Rare A M Binger figural handled urn.



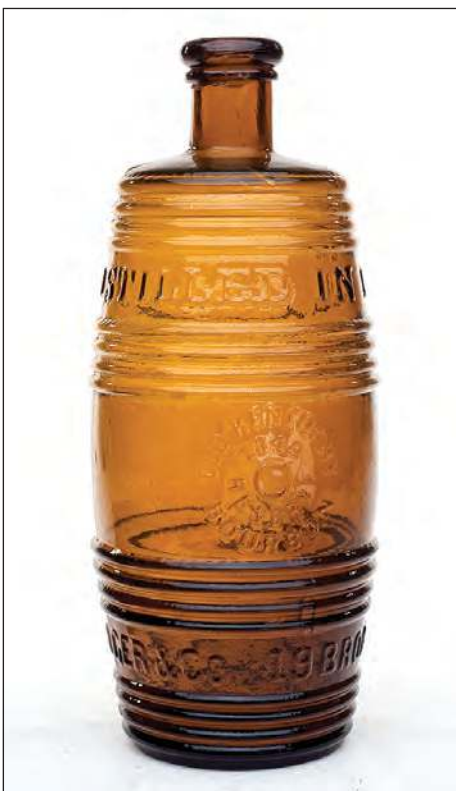
A. M. Binger's handled cylinder bottle.



Binger's 'Old Times' Family Rye bottle with label.



Binger's Knickerbocker handled jug.



A. M. Binger & Co. Old Kentucky Reserve,
Distilled in 1848, figural barrel.



Binger's Old Kentucky
Boubon, 1849 Reserve.