

Mobile Bottler Stephen Twelves Had Something to Crow About

By David Kyle Rakes

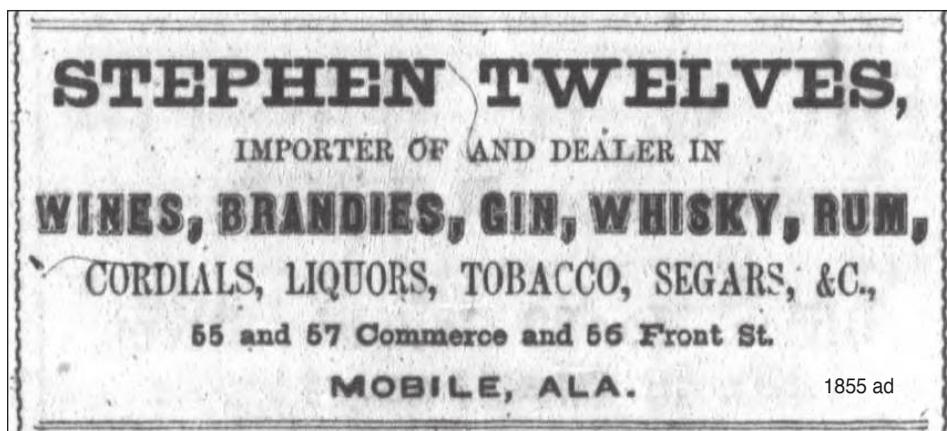
Collectors of early Southern sodas get to enjoy an infinite number of bottle shapes and colors, but I have become much more interested in researching the bottler and his background. You never know what might turn up.

I was able to uncover a lot of fascinating information about Charleston, South Carolina and Mobile, Alabama bottlers whose containers reside in my collection. I learned that A.P. Smith of Charleston was Andrew Pickens Smith and was a minister as well. Mobile's Miguel Monju was a direct descendant of Spanish aristocracy, and a hidden drawer in a family heirloom desk played a key role in uncovering his background.

My latest research was inspired by the emerald green and iron-pontiled S. Twelves soda from Mobile. Most Southern antique bottle collectors had discovered the "S" stands for Stephen, but what about his surname, a name with numerals 1 and 2? So I checked the genealogical records and discovered his name had nothing to do with numbers. It is an English surname dating to medieval times originating from "alte-waellaa," or "at the well" or persons who lived near a spring or stream.

Since Twelves was in the bottling business (selling whiskey as well as soda water), his origins seem fitting because he advertised his liquor as if it came from a well. Its cost was lower and easily purchased.

The Twelves story begins in 1822 when Stephen Sr., his wife and children emigrated from Boston, Lincoln, England to the Spring Garden section of Philadelphia, Pa. Twelve (there's that name



again) years later, he applied to become an American citizen in the Court of Quarter Sessions in Philadelphia on Oct. 10, 1834. It was granted, and his wife and children automatically became Americans, too. The children were Stephen Junior, Richard and Samuel.

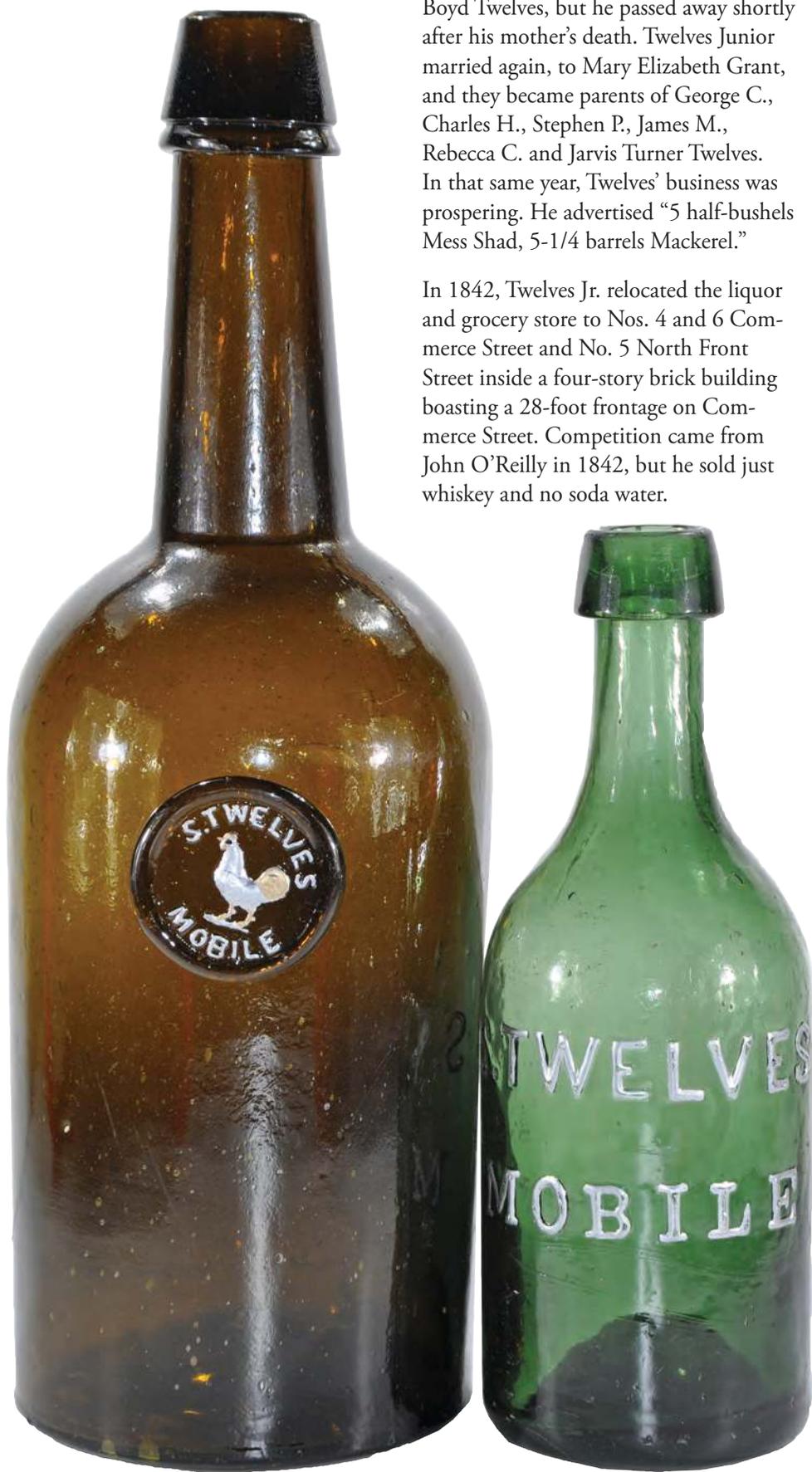
Stephen Sr., born in England on Sept. 10, 1816, was believed to have operated a drug manufacturing business at 560 North Front Street in Philadelphia until his death in 1842. While growing up, Stephen Junior apparently strayed from the straight and narrow path and became entangled with authority before moving to Mobile. While in his early twenties, he wound up in court in a couple of cases, one in which he was accused of operating a "tippling house." He pleaded not guilty and was acquitted. Before leaving, he advertised his licensed Oyster Cellar business for sale at 92 North 2nd Street, nothing the establishment was doing a good cash business, but he was planning "to leave the city in a few days."

In 1838, he moved to Mobile, where he opened a liquor and grocery business at

56 Front Street and 55 Commerce Street. A year after his departure, his Schuylkill, Pa., property and home were seized and sold by the sheriff to settle old debts. In 1842, he was joined in business by Henry Leitman and the business became known as Stephen Twelves & Co. Seven years later after nearly ten years in business, Twelves was now a big supplier of wines, liquors and groceries.

The city itself was experiencing an explosive growth because of the emerging cotton trade. Planters used slaves to pick the crops, which were shipped down river to Mobile for trade and transferred to ocean-going ships. Records reveal staggering annual cotton export numbers, averaging about 100,000 bales in the 1830s to 500,000 bales by the 1850s. The city's population at Twelves' arrival was some 12,000 inhabitants. By 1860, it had increased to 29,000.

Twelves tried to start a family when he first settled in Mobile, but in 1841 his first wife, Mary B., also a Philadelphian, died at age 24. They had a son, Thomas



Twelves whiskey and soda bottles

Boyd Twelves, but he passed away shortly after his mother's death. Twelves Junior married again, to Mary Elizabeth Grant, and they became parents of George C., Charles H., Stephen P., James M., Rebecca C. and Jarvis Turner Twelves. In that same year, Twelves' business was prospering. He advertised "5 half-bushels Mess Shad, 5-1/4 barrels Mackerel."

In 1842, Twelves Jr. relocated the liquor and grocery store to Nos. 4 and 6 Commerce Street and No. 5 North Front Street inside a four-story brick building boasting a 28-foot frontage on Commerce Street. Competition came from John O'Reilly in 1842, but he sold just whiskey and no soda water.

There is only one type of soda bottle and one whiskey bottle known for Twelves. The soda is emerald green, iron-pontiled and is simply embossed S. Twelves / Mobile. The whiskey bottle is unique. It is olive amber in color, tall and cylindrical in shape with an applied top. There is an applied seal on the bottle shoulder containing the image of a rooster with the lettering S Twelves / Mobile surrounding it. No one knows why the proprietor chose the rooster. Perhaps he wanted a product he could crow about!

In 1843, he offered cash for any empty bottles. "Persons having Bottles they wish to dispose of can have them sent for cash paid by leaving word at my store, No. 55 Commerce Street." He also ran ads selling sperm (whale) candles, strained sperm oil, cigars, ale, peach brandy, bitters, scotch and whiskey.

The businessman was the victim of a few incidents he could have done without. He inserted a newspaper ad offering a \$20 reward "for the person who put the (fire) crackers under my horse while (it) was standing opposite the Franklin House on the evening of the 4th of July, or any information thankfully received. (s) Stephen Twelves. In another ad, he offered a \$50 reward for the return of a stolen watch: "Stolen from my house on Joseph Street, Mobile, a gold patent lever watch, double case, marked inside of outer case as follows: F.S. & Co.-U 18 and some dry hieroglyphics, No. 4056. My house was entered and the watch stolen between the hours of 4 and 6 o'clock A.M. The above award will be paid on the delivery of the watch or \$25 on the conviction of the thief. Stephen Twelves, 55 Commerce Street, Mobile."

In 1848, his ads listed brandy, gin, wines, cordials syrups, groceries, porter, ale and cider for outfitting hotel and steamboat bar stores, He also had become a popular public figure and ran for public office as an alderman. He may have been elected in 1855.

STEPHEN TWELVES,
WINE AND LIQUOR
STORE,
 4 and 6 North Commerce and 5 North Front Sts,
 MOBILE, ALABAMA.



IMPORTER AND DEALER IN
FOREIGN WINES, LIQUORS, CIGARS,
 Etc., Etc., Etc.

HAS CONSTANTLY ON HAND A FULL SUPPLY OF
French Brandies, Holland Gin,
 PORT, MADEIRA and SHERRY WINES,
 PEACH AND APPLE BRANDIES,
 JAMAICA, ST. CRUZ and NEW ENGLAND RUM,
 CORDIALS, SYRUPS & BRANDY FRUITS.

Segars, Tobacco, &c., with a constant supply of Porter, Ale, Lager
 Beer and Cider, at the lowest prices.

Twelves ad from 1861

Worse yet was an 1860 newspaper ad claiming Mobile businessmen Stephen Twelves, Joseph Tucker, Haviland, Clark & George (druggists) and I.C. DuBose & Co., sold the dangerous and fraudulent Hosteiter's (sic) Celebrated Stomach Bitters. The ad claimed the men would wind up in court and warns the public not to buy this product. Twelves may have pulled the product from his shelves. Of course, the true spelling was Hostetter's.

By 1860, Twelves' business continued to grow. He now owned as many as eleven slaves and his son Samuel was employed at the store. The census for that year noted the value of his real estate was \$14,000 and his personal estate was worth \$5,000. He advertised extensively in local newspapers, with one example saying he is "An importer of, and dealer in, wines, bran-

dies, whisky, rum, cordials, liquors, tobacco, segars. Liquors and Groceries for sale at the Lowest Prices." One of the cleverest ads I came across had a rendering of a salty sea captain that could be viewed two different ways: turning it one way reads: "I bought my Brandy at Twelves" with the captain smiling. Turning the image the other way, it says, "I Didn't," and the captain was scowling. The eye-catching ad was used time and again in newspapers of the late 1850s to the 1860s.

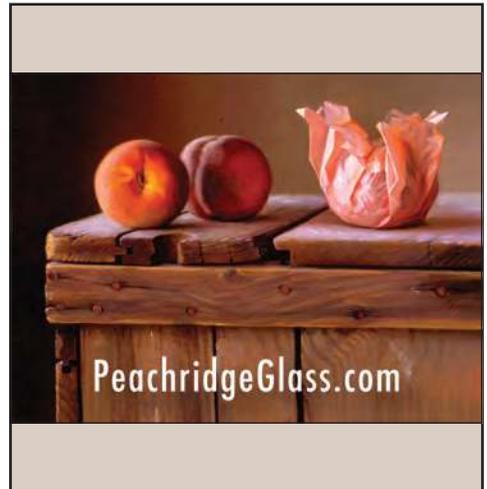
On April 25, 1861, Stephen Twelves Jr., died in Mobile at age 45 from consumption (tuberculosis). His second wife, Mary Elizabeth, died March 15, 1886. All of the Twelves family are buried in Mobile's Magnolia Cemetery, third largest in the city, covering 100 acres. It is listed on the National Registry of Historical Places and more than 80,00 persons are buried there.

The S. Twelves whiskey is extremely rare, with only one known example. The soda is considered very rare, with approximately ten to twenty known examples.

SOURCES: Rod Vining, Grand Bay, Ala., contributed photos, ads and records relating to Twelves' bottles and life. Denisha Logan, librarian at Mobile Public Library, provided numerous Twelves records. Professional genealogist Robert David, Hanceville, Ala., contributed vital Twelves records. Stephen Twelves Sr., Spring Garden, Philadelphia, Pa., 1830 Census, page 338. Philadelphia Naturalization Records, Page 662; funeral notice for Stephen Twelves Sr., Public Ledger, Philadelphia, Sept. 9, 1842, Vol. XIII, issue 48, Page 2. Stephen Twelves Jr., census returns, 1850 Mobile Roll M432-11, page 301A, Image 56; slave schedule, household 19750; 1850 Mobile Census, 1860 Mobile Census, 1st Ward. Stephen Twelves, 1836 Court Case, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Supreme Court Records 1754-1845, Vol. 52-53. Stephen Twelves charged with keeping a tippling house, Public Ledger newspaper, June 13, 1838, Vol. 5, issue 67, Page 2. Stephen Twelves, Oyster Cellar business, Public Ledger, Oct. 30, 1838, Philadelphia, Vol. VI, Issue 6, Page 3. Stephen Twelves Schuykill, Pa., property seized, June 5, 1839, Philadelphia Inquirer, June 17, 1839, Vol. XX, Issue 144, Page 4. Death of Mary B. Twelves, Mobile Daily Commercial Register and Patriot, Aug. 18, 1841, Vol. 21, Page 3; Twelves' marriage to Mary E. Grant, The Independent Monitor, Tuscaloosa, Ala., Sept. 7, 1842, Page 7; Stephen Twelves liquor, grocery addresses, 1842-1861, local history and genealogy, Mobile Public Library, Stephen Twelves newspaper ad with salty sea captain drawing, 1859 Mobile City Directory via Rod Vining, Grand Bay, Ala. Dangerous fraud caution to the public, Mobile Register, Jan. 27, 1860, Vol. VI, Page 3. Will of Stephen Twelves Jr., April 12, 1861, Will Bok 3, abstracts, 1857-1870, Pages 264-265. Death of Stephen Twelves, Findagrave.com, Affiliate record 89071763, Magnolia Cemetery, Mobile, Ala., interments for the week ending April 27, 1861, Mobile Daily Advertiser, May 4, 1861; Mobile County Death Records 1843-1875 Index, Mobile Genealogical Society Inc., 1994. Death of Mary Elizabeth Grant Twelves and children, Magnolia Cemetery stones and markers, photos at Findagrave.com.

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