

The Edgewood Man and the Family That Created Him

By Jack Sullivan

"Daddy, who is that fat man standing on top of the saloon?" (Fig. 1) That question probably was asked frequently in the early 1900s and Daddy likely knew the answer: "He's the Edgewood Whiskey Man." A Cincinnati family of Scotch-Irish ancestry named Paxton also knew the answer. They had created the Edgewood Man and the liquor that the figure represented.

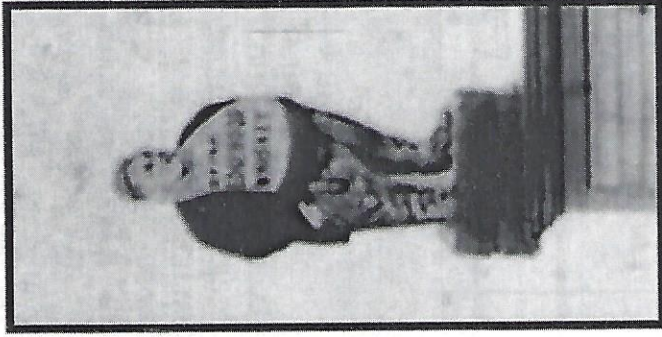


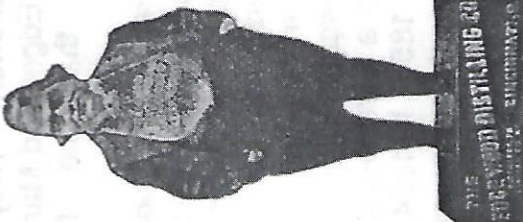
Figure 1

Thomas Paxton was born in the Ohio in 1844, the son of Samuel and Hannah Paxton, whose ancestors had emigrated from Northern Ireland in the 1700s. He would be joined in the family by a sister, Adelaide, born in 1849, and a brother, John born 1851. In 1874, age 23, Adelaide married A. G. Diehl, an enterprising young merchant.

In 1874 Cincinnati city directories A.G. Diehl & Co. Wines and Liquors first is listed, located at 32 East Second Street. A separate listing for the same address lists Paxton & Diehl, Distillers. A year later the company name became Diehl & Paxton Brothers. The brothers were Thomas and John. Two years later, the business listing was changed again to Paxton Bros. & Co., designating them as "wholesale dealers in wines, brandies, and whiskies." The directory noted that the house had been established by A.G. Diehl.

Paxton Bros. occupied a large brick building, four stories in height and 20 by 100 feet. According to a contemporary report, the company "enjoyed a large and permanent trade throughout all this section of the country." It stated 10 persons were employed at the company to supply its public and wholesale customers.

The Paxtons' business was highly successful and mentioned prominently in an 1886 book of leading companies in Cincinnati. At this time, Thomas Paxton was president and Samuel Paxton, his father, was an officer. John Paxton had died in 1881, only 30 years old. Moreover, A.G. Diehl was no longer in the picture.



EDGEWOOD

THE BEST
WHISKEY
MADE IN KENTUCKY

The Edgewood Distilling Co.
417-419 Elm St., Cincinnati, O.

Figure 2

During the late 1870s or early 1880s the company made Edgewood Whiskey its flagship brand of blended whiskey of both sour mash and rye. As an advertising gimmick the Paxtons selected the figure of a man wearing a Shriner's fez and a tuxedo. (Fig. 2) His most prominent features were a wide spreading belly and the words written across his chest: "I drink Edgewood Whiskey everywhere."



Figure 3

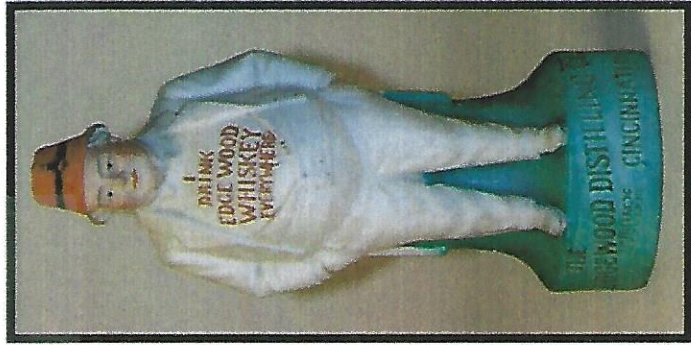


Figure 4

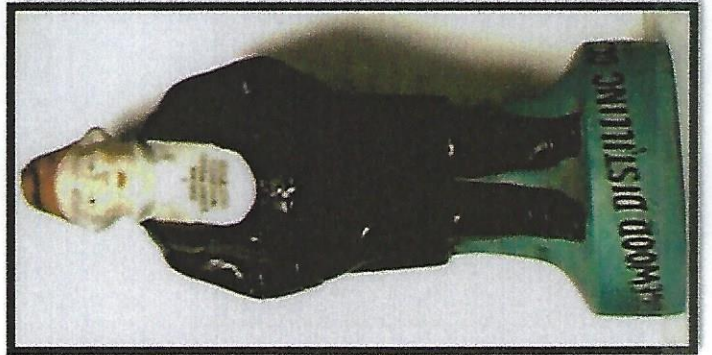


Figure 5



Figure 6

He quickly became widely known as the Edgewood Man and his bulging belly became a familiar sight both on top of and inside saloons across the much of the United States. He was presented to the public in painted plaster (Fig. 3) and ceramic (Fig. 4) figurines, as well as a flask (Fig. 5) and on a back of the bar bottle (Fig. 6). The Fat Man even appeared on a corkscrew, lying prone (Fig. 7).



Figure 7

Edgewood Whiskey was sold to the public in several types of containers, including ceramic jugs (Fig. 8). Among them was a fancy jug created by Fulper Pottery of Farmington, New Jersey (Fig. 9). Embossed glass flasks also were employed (Fig. 10). The company issued shot glasses for Edgewood and its other brands (Fig. 11,12) Those labels included "Bellbrook," "Bullied," "Coney Island Club," "Cuvier Club," "Island Queen Rye," "Paxton's Private Stock," "Pearl XXX Rye," "Purewater Rye," and "Queen City Club."

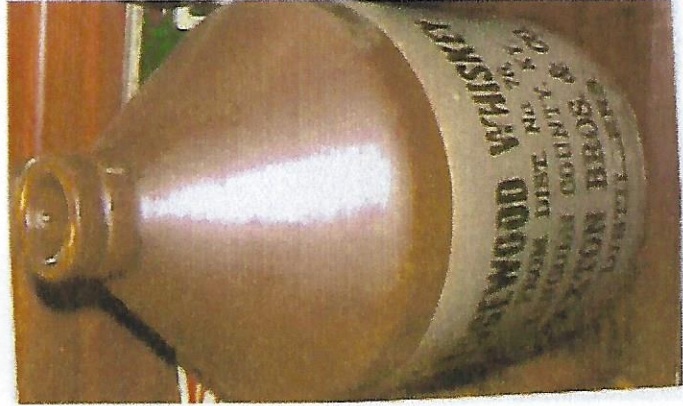


Figure 8

Throughout its existence the company was principally identified with the Fat Man and in 1887 its name was changed to the Edgewood Distilling Co. The Edgewood Man's celebrity was such that at the 1906 National Homeopathic Convention, an audience presentation described a subject male: "He stares before a convex mirror and sees himself broadened into the proportions of an Edgewood Whiskey advertisement." Describing San Antonio, Texas, in the early 1900s, a memoir stated: " There were big signs all over town of the Edgewood Whiskey fat man, and these words were inscribed: "I drink Edgewood Whiskey."



Figure 9

When A.G. Diehl's son, George P. Diehl joined the firm, ultimately to become its chief executive officer, a publication devoted to Cincinnati business leaders included a caricature of Diehl that portrayed him as the Edgewood Man (Fig. 13). Diehl succeeded Thomas Paxton in running the company, when his uncle, a diabetic, died in 1904 of "pyermia". This was

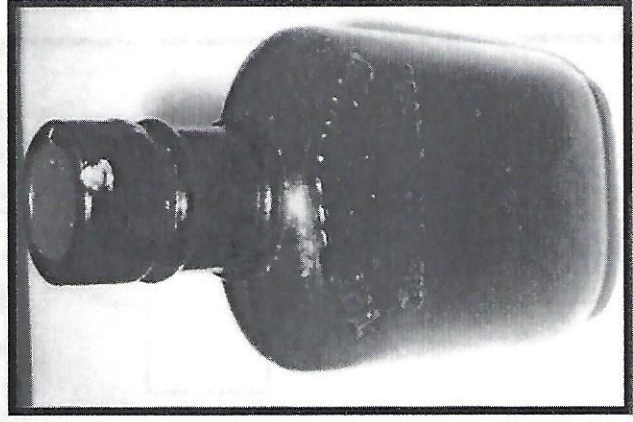


Figure 10

Reference: The material for this article has been taken from a number of Internet and other sources.

Illustrations:

Fig. 1: Edgewood Man on

Saloon

Fig. 2: Edgewood Man plaster

statue

Fig. 3: Edgewood Whiskey ad 1906

Fig. 4: Edgewood Man ceramic statue

Fig. 5: Edgewood decanter

Fig. 6: Edgewood back of the bar bottle

Fig. 7: Edgewood corkscrew

Fig. 8: Paxton Bros. jug

Fig. 9: Edgewood jug - Fulper

Fig. 10: Edgewood mini bottle

Fig. 11: Edgewood shot glass

Fig. 12: Bellbrook shot glass

Fig. 13: George Diehl caricature

Fig. 14: Paxton family grave marker

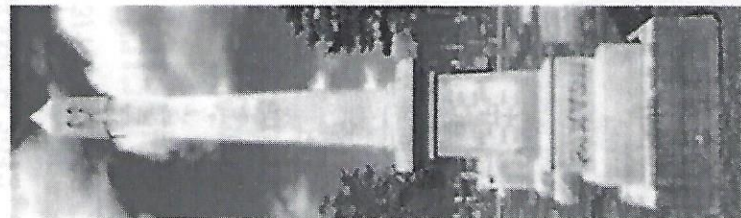


Figure 14

the name given to a condition caused by a massive bacterial infection. Paxton was buried in Loveland Cemetery in Clermont County, Ohio. He lies in the same plot with his mother and his father (Fig. 14).

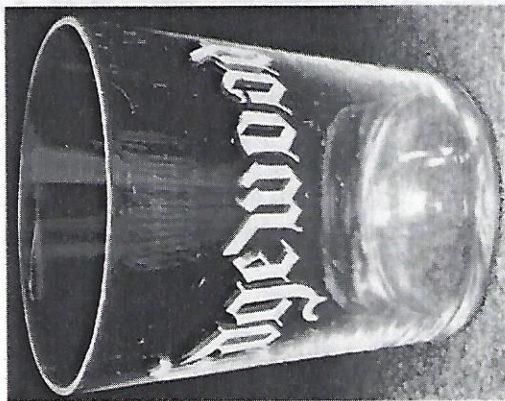


Figure 11



Figure 12

The nephew guided the company successfully for the remaining 12 years of its life. When Ohio voted complete prohibition of alcoholic beverages in 1916, Edgewood Distilling and Paxton Bros. Co. went out of business forever. The Edgewood Man, as a result, faded from the scene. Left behind were a great many artifacts to remind us of the portly gentleman with the fez.

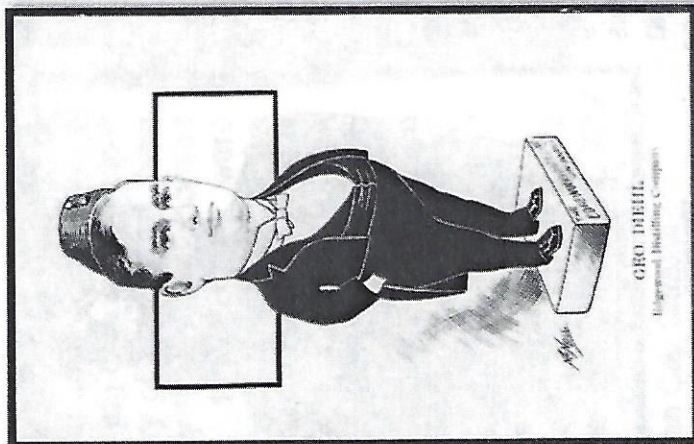


Figure 13