

Ernst Mueller and the Cleveland & Sandusky Brewing Co.

Special to the Ohio Swirl
by Jack Sullivan

Looking at the caricature of Ernst Mueller, identified as its president (Fig. 1) one might never know the discord that surrounded the Cleveland & Sandusky Brewing Company, a fractiousness that ultimately would cause Mueller himself to resign.

Beer probably had been made in Cleveland from its earliest days but the city's brewing industry blossomed with the great influx of German and Bohemian immigrants in the 1840s. At one time it was estimated that there were more than 60 breweries in the greater Cleveland area, most of them small, family run businesses that sold beer for local consumption. The 1890s was the era of "trusts" and monopolies in a range of industries and many believed brewing should be no exception.

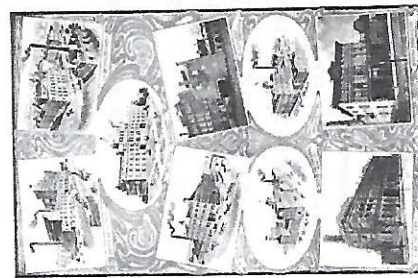


Figure 2

Mueller was born in the German Rhineland-Palatinate in 1851 and brought to America with his family when he was toddler. The



Figure 1

Muellers settled immediately in Cleveland where three of the father's brothers already were established. The young Ernst rapidly made a name for himself in the German-American community as captain of the prize-winning Turnverein gymnastics team at the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876. He also became known for his business acumen.

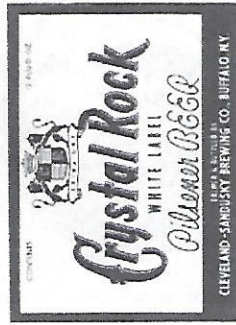


Figure 3

today to \$125 million. The Cleveland & Sandusky Co. issued its own brand of beer called "Crystal Rock," a German style pilsner that proved very popular (Figs. 3,4). Another brand was "Gold Bond," shown here on a serving tray (Fig. 5).

Chosen by his fellow brewers to lead the new "syndicate," Mueller proved to be a shrewd businessman, incorporating the organization and selling stock to the public equivalent



Figure 4

The effort to create a monopoly by Mueller and some Cleveland brewers did not go unnoticed, particularly as the new company began to shut down breweries to lessen competition. Three were closed down immediately after the merger and gradually over the years many of the others were shuttered.

Under Mueller's leadership, two other breweries were added to Cleveland-Sandusky Brewing,



Figure 5

Cleveland's Schlather brewery in 1902 and the Lorain Brewery in 1905. Brewers who did not join found their beers barred from saloons and taverns tied to the syndicate. Their loud complaints triggered legislative investigations into the syndicate, but to no avail. Cleveland-Sandusky continued to succeed, its C&S logos becoming a familiar sight in Cleveland (Figs. 6,7).



Figure 6



Figure 7

Strong disagreements continued to exist among the "beer barons" who had formed the organization and owned much of the stock. Mueller was able to contend successfully with them for about a decade but in 1907 he found himself at odds with the majority when he opposed buying the Fischel brewery. When his colleagues overrode his objections and bought Fischel, he resigned.



Figure 8

Not content at age 55 with simply retiring to his mansion home (Fig. 8), Mueller bought an existing brewery, rehabilitated it, and renamed it the Cleveland Home Brewing Company, in direct competition with the syndicate. Even as



Figure 9

Mueller aged (Fig. 9) he retained his ability, guiding this enterprise even through National Prohibition by manufacturing ice and a malt beverage. Mueller died in 1931.



Figure 10

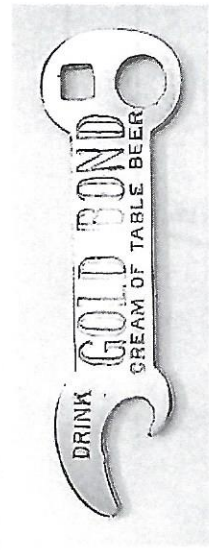


Figure 11

Meanwhile the Cleveland-Sandusky firm also survived the "dry" era but after Repeal only the Fischel plant reopened to continue producing beer. Company fortunes declined in the 1950s and the Cleveland-Sandusky Brewing Corp, as it was last known, closed in the mid-1960s. It left behind, however, a number of collectible items of breweriana, such as those shown here (Figs. 10, 11) and elsewhere in this article.

Illustrations:

- Fig. 1: Caricature of Ernst Mueller
- Fig. 2: Brewery photo flyer
- Fig. 3: Crystal Rock label
- Fig. 4: Crystal Rock tray
- Fig. 5: Gold Bond tray
- Fig. 6: C & S Brewery case
- Fig. 7: C & S Bottle cap
- Fig. 8: Mueller home photo
- Fig. 9: Ernst Mueller photo
- Fig. 10: C & S beer glass
- Fig. 11: C & S bottle opener