

Solving the Mystery Of the National Wine Company

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Special to the Swirl

Shown here are an array of stoneware jugs and other artifacts bearing the very impressive name, "National Wine Company." The business identified itself as located opposite the Lima, Ohio, Post Office, shown here (Fig. 1). Beyond there being little other information to go on, other details did not add up. Lima is in Northwest Ohio but not part of the Lake Erie vineyard country and its well known wineries. Moreover, any really large company would cite an address not a location opposite a public building.

National Wine's jugs offered few clues. The numbers coming up for

auction indicated the company issued a great many half-pints, probably giveaway items to favored customers.

They came in a variety of styles, including an off-white Bristol glaze (Fig. 2, 3), a combination Bristol glaze and Albany slip (Fig. 4), and a plain salt glaze (Fig. 5). Some of these small ceramics have bail handles (Fig. 6, 7) and at least one is barrel shaped (Fig. 8).

Not all of National Wine's jugs were small. Shown here is one

standing six and one-half inches that probably held a quart of liquid (Fig. 9). Nor was Lima the only Ohio city claimed by the company in its advertising. At various time it claimed outlets in Galion, Massillon and Mansfield, . Shown here is a holiday giveaway National Wine mini-jug from Massillon (Fig. 10) and a shot glass from Mansfield (Fig. 11). The liquor store location in Mansfield was 22 South Erie Street.

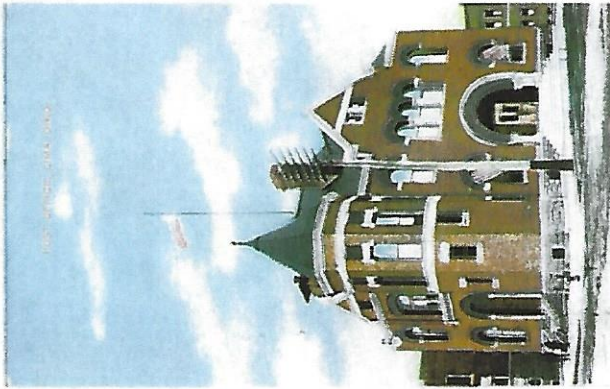


Figure 1

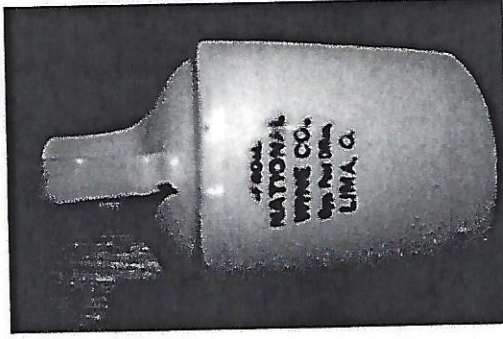


Figure 3

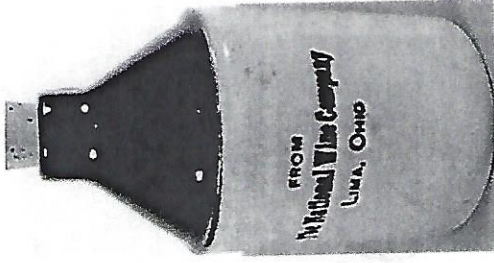


Figure 4

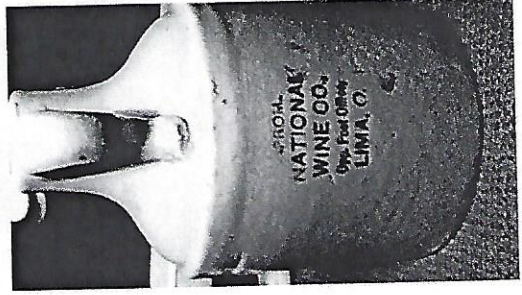


Figure 5

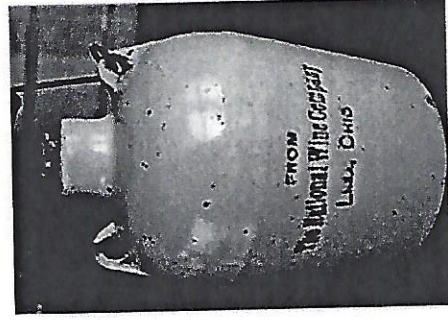


Figure 6



Figure 2

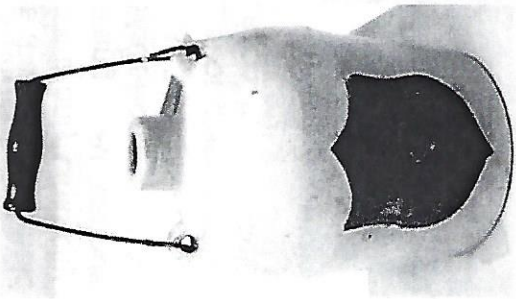


Figure 7

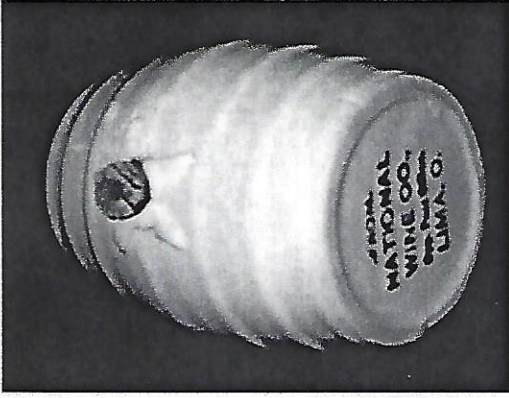


Figure 8



Figure 9

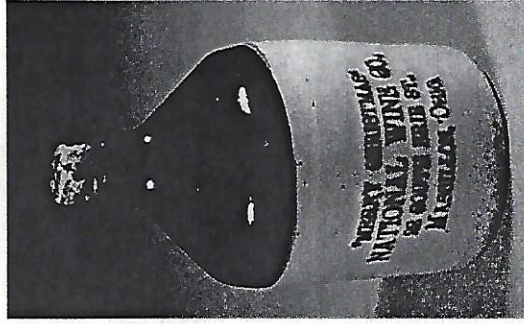


Figure 10

After several months of vainly seeking information on the National Wine Company, I turned to the Allen County Library in Lima for help. A brief e-mail from the librarians gave me the requisite clues: National Wine Company was a liquor store, selling wine, yes, but also whiskey and other spirits. It first appeared in Lima directories in 1902, owned by Harry and Samuel Michael and Isaac B. Stein.

Harry and Sam had come from Germany and were the brothers of Nathan L. Michael, who had immigrated earlier and was said to have arrived on American shores with only \$1.00 in his pocket. Locating in Lima, he had done well in the mercantile trade and by 1900 owned a large clothing store downtown. My guess is that Nathan provided the financing to establish the National Wine Company. He may even have been responsible for naming it. His brothers, however, apparently did not like the liquor trade, left National Wine and by 1904 recorded were working for Nathan in his store.

That left National Wine, located at 130 West High Street, in the hands of Isaac Stein. His parents were Abraham and Amelia Stein. The father was an immigrant from Poland, the mother from Germany. They had initially settled in Ohio but in the late 1870s Abraham, a barber, uprooted the family, seeking greener pastures, and went to California. Isaac was born there about 1882. Before too long, possibly disillusioned about prospects, the family returned to Ohio, settling in Lima.

The 1900 census showed Isaac as a 17 year old working as a bookkeeper in a Lima liquor store. His talent clearly manifested itself early and the Michaels tapped him when he was only about age 20 to help manage the National Wine Company. Initially Isaac lived with an older married brother named Robert who later also worked for National Wine. About 1913 Isaac married an Ohio girl named Cora, three years his junior. At the time of the 1920 census the couple had their own home and three small children, Harry, Charles and Marie.

Under Isaac's leadership the National Wine Company prospered. The company began blending ("rectifying") and bottling its own brand of whiskey called National Standard Private Stock (Fig. 12). He furnished it with a fancy label that included a patriotic banner and the American eagle. Isaac also expanded the liquor stores to other Ohio towns. By 1916 he was joined by another relative, Joseph Stein, in the company's management structure.

The National Wine Company appears to have prospered until Ohio went "dry" in 1919. It shut down that year, never

to reopen. According to Lima's library sources, Isaac Stein shortly after went back to California with wife Cora and their children. According to the 1920 census, Robert Stein found work clerking in a local grocery store. Joseph Stein also stayed in Lima and died there in 1926.

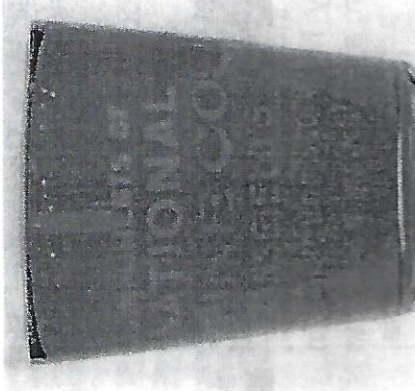


Figure 11

such as census data and local newspaper articles, to provide other details.

Note: Allen Country librarians must be credited with putting me on the track of the history of the National Wine Company after my earlier, fruitless efforts. Once they had identified the names of the business owners, it was possible to use other sources,

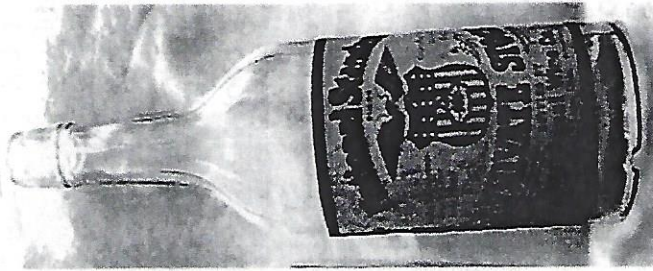


Figure 12

Illustrations:

- Fig. 1: Postcard view of the Lima Post Office
- Fig. 2: National Wine mini jug #1
- Fig. 3: National Wine mini jug #2
- Fig. 4: National Wine mini jug #3 (two-toned)
- Fig. 5: National Wine mini jug #4 (salt glazed)
- Fig. 6: National Wine mini jug #5 (bail handle)
- Fig. 7: National Wine mini jug #6 (bail handle/paper label)
- Fig. 8: National Wine mini barrel
- Fig. 9: National Wine quart jug
- Fig. 10: National Wine Massillon jug
- Fig. 11: National Wine shot glass
- Fig. 12: "National Standard Private Stock" bottle