

Shot Glasses: Cincinnati's "Dandy Dozen"

By Jack Sullivan
(Special to the Ohio Swirl)

Of all the cities in the entire United States, Cincinnati for a time prior to Prohibition was the center of the American liquor trade. It boasted more distillers, "rectifiers" (blenders), importers, wholesalers and dealers than even metropolises like New York and Chicago. Moreover, the city's proximity to Kentucky and its thriving whiskey industry guaranteed Cincinnati merchants a ready supply of product to bottle and sell.

The sheer numbers of companies also bred a spirited competition for customer loyalty, not only from the ultimate consumer but from the hundreds of thousands of saloons throughout America. A favorite giveaway was the shot glass embossed with a label advertising the whiskey. As the bartender poured a shot of booze, customers were repeatedly reminded of the name of the product. Because competition among Cincinnati liquor outfits was so keen, many shot glasses there tended to be elaborate and thus memorable.

This article features a "Dandy Dozen" of such barware, all from the Queen City on the Ohio River. So as to avoid partiality to one or the other, they will be presented, with some data on each, in alphabetical order.

"Alark Rye" was a brand from the Henry M. Rubel Co. (Fig. 1). Rubel's firm was listed as a whiskey wholesaler in Cincinnati directories from 1895 until 1918. His shot glass is distinguished by a bird (likely a lark) perched in a large "A." Beset by business difficulties, Rubel



Figure 1

himself is said to have died by his own hand in 1917. "Avondale Club Whiskey"

was the product of Kayser & Hegner Company whose K&H logo is displayed on the shot glass (Fig. 2) shown here. Located at several addresses on Cincinnati's East Second Street, the firm was in business from 1878 to 1918. It merchandised a number of brands including

"Belle of Washington," "Moscow Rye," "Selby Run," "Small Still," and "Yacht Club."

H. Rosenthal & Sons was founded in 1871 and continued in business for almost a half-century before being closed by Prohibition. During that period it operated at some eight different addresses. The particularly ornate shot glass shown here advertises the firm's "Wm. Berkele Sour Mash Whiskey" (Fig. 3). A report of the Cincinnati Chamber of



Figure 3

Commerce identifies the executives running the company as Charles H. and Meyer S. Rosenthal.

"Billy Baxter's Best" was a whiskey brand from Charles M. Pfeifer & Co. and was merchandised, as shown on a shot glass, with distinctive calligraphy (Fig. 4). It was



Figure 2



Figure 4

one of several brands from that organization, which also marketed "Estil Springs," "Three Owls," "XXXX Golden Rye," and "Yellow Label." Located at five different Cincinnati locations, the Pfeifer firm was founded in 1882 and remained in business until 1916.

Established in 1900 The Brookville Distilling Company featured a flagship brand that bore its own name (Fig. 5).

During its 15 years in business it operated at four successive locations in or near downtown Cincinnati. Among its brand names were "Martells Pure Malt" and "Watermelon Gin." At a time when many of its competitors were joining cartels seeking to limit competition, this firm in a 1907 advertising flyer stated "Not members of any Trust or Distillers Combination."

"Creme of Kentucky" (Fig. 6) was a brand of Trager & Co., a firm that originated in 1887, located on Sycamore Street. This company was being supplied by the Old Darling Distillery of Prestonville, Kentucky, and featured such other labels as "Creme de la Creme," "Deerfield," "Edgemont," "Forest Hollow," "Old Colony Club, and "Black Warrior." According to Cincinnati Chamber of Commerce reports its executives were Newton Trager and J. Garfield Trager.

Some whiskey companies issued giveaways only for flagship or featured brands. Others provided advertising merchandise for most of their labels. Thus



Figure 5

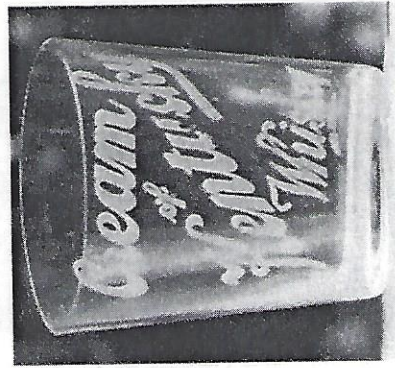


Figure 6

H. Rosenthal and Sons, cited earlier, also were responsible for a "Forest Grove" shot glass (Fig. 7). The next item is a highly decorated glass bearing an embossed crest and the name Gannymede "76" Rye (Fig. 8). It is from Sigmund and Solomon Freiberg, brothers from the Freiberg whiskey merchant family. This firm first showed up in city directories in 1899 and appears to have been successful for almost two decades.



Figure 7



Figure 8

Very little information exists on the Kleco Club shot glass (Fig. 9). It advertises a liquor brand from Isador Klein & Co. of Cincinnati. This firm, whose dates and locations are uncertain, also issued a whiskey named "Whispering Brook."

By contrast a great deal is known about the firm behind the "Red Top Rye" brand and shot glass (Fig. 10). It was issued by the Ferdinand Westheimer & Sons Company. That firm originated in St. Joseph, Missouri,

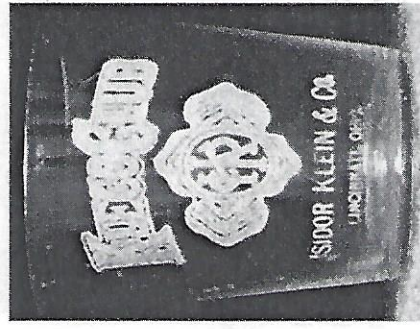


Figure 9

in 1879, and early opened a sales office in Cincinnati that was listed in local directories until Prohibition.

Perhaps the fanciest shot glass in this array was another issued by Kayser & Hegner (Fig. 11). It is the only one shown here that displays a color in addition to its etching. Because of the additional cost involved by adding color, most whiskey merchandisers avoided it.

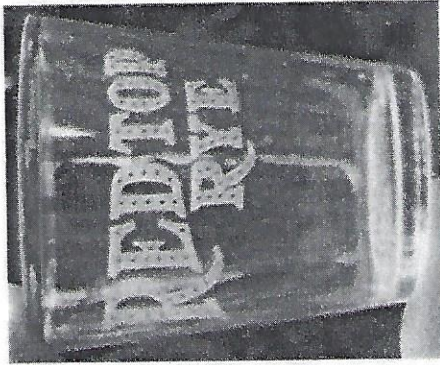


Figure 10

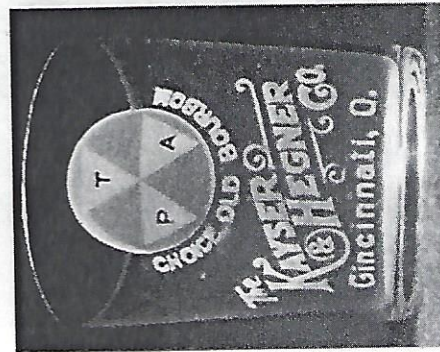


Figure 11



Figure 12

Certainly Charles Lehman & Co. did in crafting a shot glass for its "Tremont" brand of whiskey (Fig. 12). The Lehman firm was in business from 1897 until 1910, located at two Cincinnati sites. Tremont may have been the firm's sole brand.

There they are, a "Dandy Dozen." Albeit among the most attractive and decorative of Cincinnati shots, they represent but a fraction of the many shot glasses that originated in there. A lifetime of searching would face anyone trying to assemble anything close to a

comprehensive collection of Queen City shots.

Notes: The material for this article was obtained from a number of Internet and print sources, chiefly the www.pre-pro website maintained by Robin Preston. The images of shot glasses are also were obtained through the courtesy of Mr. Preston.

Shot Glass Illustrations:

- Fig. 1: Alark Rye
- Fig. 2: Avondale Club Whiskey
- Fig. 3: Berkele Sour Mash
- Fig. 4: Billy Baxter's Best
- Fig. 5: Brookville, Compliments of
- Fig. 6: Cream of Kentucky Whiskey
- Fig. 7: Forest Grove
- Fig. 8: Gannymede "76" Whiskey
- Fig. 9: Kleco Club
- Fig. 10: Red Top Rye
- Fig. 11: T.P.A. Bourbon
- Fig. 12: Tremont Whiskey