

STEPHEN CREADON GAVE CLEVELAND ITS ERIN BREW

By
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In a city full of ethnic German "beer barons" who owned and operated Cleveland's breweries, Stephen S. Creadon was an Irish anomaly (Fig. 1). The co-founder of the Standard Brewing Company, he gave the city a beer that, with "time out" for National Prohibition, sold for almost 60 years. Creadon called his beer "Erin Brew" and for the Germanic population, "Brew Brau."



Figure 1

Born in Cleveland in 1865, Creadon was from an immigrant family of modest means and forced to go to work as a teenager. He spent eight years as a sailor aboard a Great Lakes freighter, learning the skills of an engineer, before deciding to leave the maritime life to work for a Cleveland stove manufacturer. During four years in that employ, he earned enough money to strike out on his own, opening a saloon at the corner of Detroit and West Streets. There, according to a biographer, he demonstrated "business capacity and foresight."

The second-generation Irishman also was having a personal life. In 1894 he married Catherine A. McLaughlin, also of Irish descent, who had been born in Cleveland. They had one son, George, whom they were able to give a college education. He later would follow in his father's footsteps.

During the 1890s Cleveland saloon owners were being whipsawed by the city's breweries, most of them fiercely competing for market and increasingly attempting by various strategies to "tie" saloons to themselves — able to sell only the products from one brewery, sometimes at a price disadvantage. With financial backing from an ethnic Irish banker named John T. Feighan, in 1903 Creadon formed a brewing company in which the majority stock was held by the saloonkeepers themselves, allowing them to escape control by the beer barons.

The partners called their new brewery the Standard Brewing Company and located it in a former butcher shop located at the corner of Sacket and (now) 32nd Street. Within a short period, the product proved popular with Clevelanders and the brewery was able to move to larger quarters in an old flour mill on the north side of Train Avenue near the West 61st Street intersection (Fig. 2).

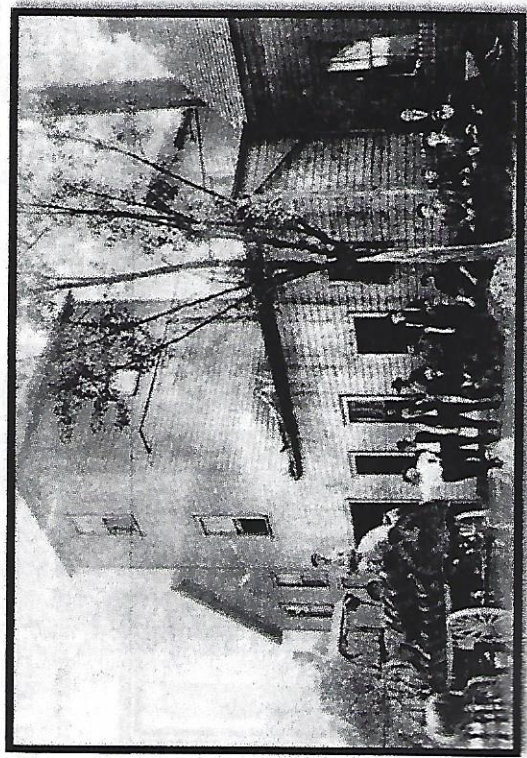


Figure 2

Success followed success, allowing Creadon to refit the mill and add significantly to it. An artist's drawing shows the greatly expanded facility, looking like a castle and dominating its West Cleveland neighborhood (Fig. 3).

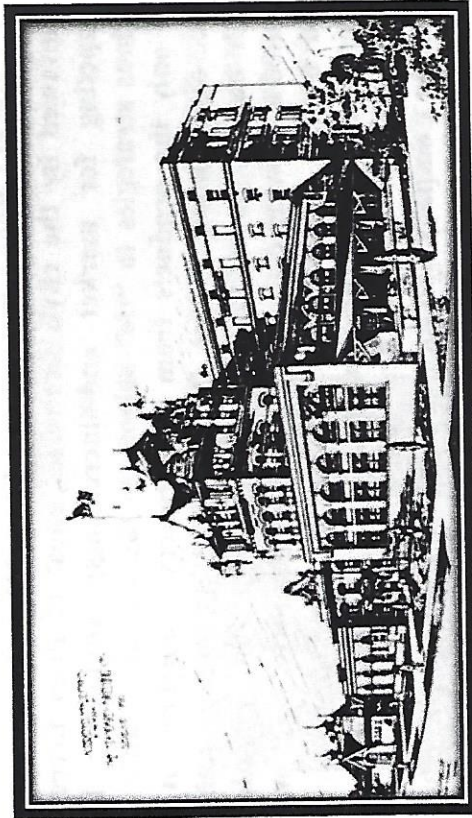


Figure 3

There Creadon was able during the period 1906-1813 to increase annual output from 40,000 to 70,000 barrels. One of the first Clevelanders to own an automobile, he outfitted his brewery with a fleet of trucks (Fig. 4) often piled high with wooden cases (Fig. 5) in which his beer was delivered in bottles to saloons all over the city.

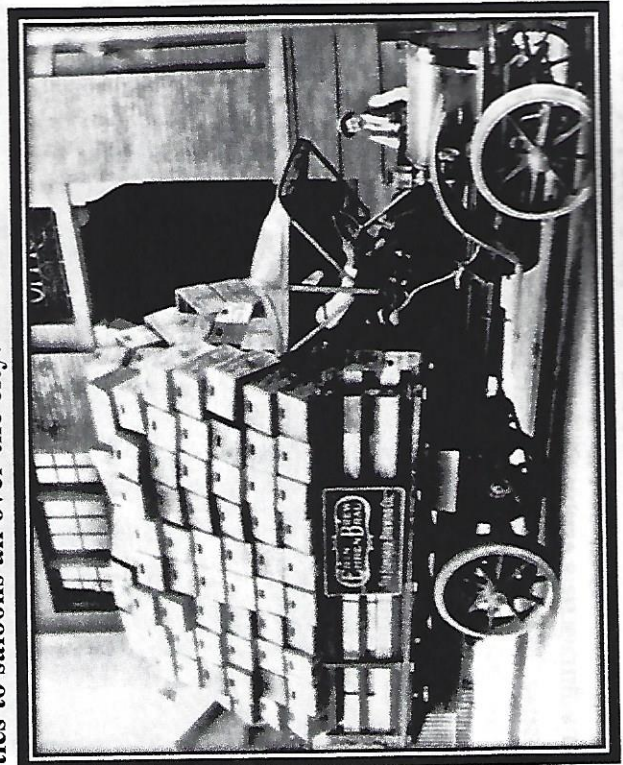


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6

To those favored customers, Creadon provided serving trays (Fig. 6) with his advertising prominent on them, including his name — one that was increasingly important in Cleveland commercial circles. A circa 1910 “History of Cleveland” said of Creadon:

“Entering the field against formidable competition, the success of his undertaking has been remarkable.... The prominent part that Mr. Creadon has taken in the success of this industry reflects no small amount of credit upon him. He organized the Lake City Ice Company in 1896 and has been its president ever since. He has shown himself to be a man of unusual business capacity and adaptation, for whatever he has undertaken he has carried to success.”

No amount of business savvy, however, could fight off the forces of prohibition. When Ohio voted dry in 1918 to be followed by National Prohibition two years later, Creadon was forced to halt beer production. Once again, he was up

to the challenge, switching production to ginger ale and a line of soft drinks. Unfortunately, he was not to live long enough to see Prohibition repealed, dying in 1921 at the relatively young age of 55. After funeral services at St. Colman's church, he was buried in Calvary Cemetery (Fig. 7).



Figure 7

But Creadon's legacy lived on in the persons of his son, George, and John Feighan. When Repeal occurred in 1933, they quickly shifted production back to making beer, re-introducing Erin Brew to parched Cleveland beer drinkers. Once again, the bottles and their labels were common on bars and tables throughout the city (Figs. 8-9). Nor did George forget his father's practice of giving out advertising items like metal trays (Fig. 10).



Figure 9

Figure 8

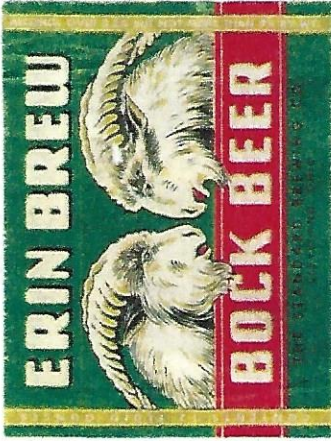


Figure 10



Figure 11

For the next 27 years, Standard Brewing Company flourished as Erin Brew regained its rank among Cleveland's most popular beers. During the 1950s, however, the industry changed as large national breweries with big advertising budgets found success at the expense of smaller local breweries. In 1961 the Standard Brewing Company was sold and then re-sold to a large Philadelphia brewery that in the mid-1960s discontinued the Erin Brew line.

This ending, however, in no way tarnishes the memory of Stephen Creadon, a man who start his working life as a sailor on the Great Lakes and ended as the founder of one of the most successful and long-lasting breweries in Cleveland history.

Illustrations:

- Fig. 1. Stephen S. Creadon photo
- Fig. 2. Early brewery building
- Fig. 3. Later brewery building
- Fig. 4. Standard Brewing truck
- Fig. 5. Standard Brewing crate
- Fig. 6 Erin Brew tray
- Fig. 7. Creadon gravestone
- Fig. 8. Post-Prohibition bottle
- Fig. 9. Post-Pro Erin Brew label
- Fig. 10. Post-Pro bock beer label
- Fig. 11. Post-Pro metal tray