

THE BEER BARONS OF NEW YORK

BY GERALD HOLLAND

A COMMERCIAL brewery flourished in New York as early as 1612 and in it was born one of the first white children to open an eye upon Manhattan Island. This extraordinarily favored creature was Jean Vigne and he was not unaware of his halo, for he himself became a brewer in later life. His birthplace was the joint enterprise of Adrian Block and Hans Christiansen. Not long afterward one Mynheer Jacobus sponsored a second brewery and conducted a beer-garden in connection with it.

A third brewery of the period was the undertaking of Governor Van Twiller, who erected it near the site of the present Stock Exchange. His motives, however, were not altogether altruistic, for he was his own best customer and became, indeed, the foremost drunkard of the colony. The spectacle of his tipsy gyrations was not without its effect upon the burghers of New Amsterdam, and soon the entire village was reeling.

Although partial to beer, Governor Van Twiller was fond of all other kinds of drink. A friend of his, Cornelius Van Voorst, whose line is not yet extinct, one day received a cask of wine from the homeland. Van Twiller heard of it and with his friends Dominie Bogardus and Captain DeVries set out in a rowboat for Van Voorst's home on one of the islands in the Bay. These emissaries of State, Church and Army were received none too cordially, for Van Voorst suspected their

mission, but he was finally persuaded to bring out his treasure and soon the cask was emptied. Van Voorst and the dominie straightaway became involved in an altercation in which the befuddled Van Twiller joined. Paradoxically, it was the professional fighting man, Captain DeVries, who smoothed things over.

Finally, with Van Voorst shouting fervent pledges of friendship, the three made their unsteady way to the rowboat, and Van Voorst cast about him for some way to show his devotion. Suddenly struck, he staggered to a small cannon guarding his house. He would fire a salute to his friends. As the rowboat drew away, a mighty blast shattered the quiet of the Bay. But as Van Voorst waved proudly, the wadding from the gun dropped on his house and in a twinkling it was a pile of embers.

As generation succeeded generation, the New York breweries multiplied. It was a fancy trade in those days; only citizens distinguished by their character and godliness were entrusted with the work of providing beer for the rest. Among them were the Bayards, Rutgers, Stewarts, Lispensards, Kips, Van Cortlandts, Beekmans, and Van Renssalaers; their mark is left in the street names of the present city.

Meanwhile, brewing also made great gains in Pennsylvania, where it had been introduced by William Penn himself. In 1810 the State actually exhibited forty-eight breweries to New York's forty-two.

At the same time Ohio had thirteen and there were twenty-six others scattered through seven States and Territories. In all, the American brewers were turning out 6,000,000 gallons annually. In Pennsylvania brewing was quite as respectable as in New York; on one occasion, indeed, a brewery served as a house of worship. The Presbyterians and Baptists had been sharing a meeting place in Philadelphia but there was a row and the Baptists removed themselves to the old Morris Brewery, and there made the vaults roar with their unblushing hosannahs.

II

Through the first half of the Nineteenth Century the demand for beer was comparatively slight; the American preference was for hotter stuff. But the German invasion of the '60s brought thousands of thirsty immigrants swarming over the docks, bellowing for beer and a lot of it. There began at once the fortunes of the Rupperts and the Ehrets, for both were already on the ground.

If Adolphus Busch was later to be the king of the brewers, George Ehret was always their dean. He was the first great brewer in America and for many years he held top place. Later, alas, his technique was outmoded and he lost ground. He began his noble career in a blaze of glory; he died at ninety-two, robbed not only of his glory but of his faith in men.

Ehret came to New York in 1857, a stripling of twenty-two, full of technical knowledge gleaned from an apprenticeship in the Fatherland. With this edge on all the local brewmasters he took a job with Hupfel's Brewery and rose swiftly to the top. Nine years later he had saved enough money to undertake a venture of his own. So he bought a site on the East river at

Ninety-second street and erected a small building which he called the Hell Gate Brewery.

Ehret, in those days, was very scientific. He concerned himself ardently with improving existing methods and equipment, and many an innovation was his. In the beginning it was his particular ambition to match the Munich lager as closely as the difference between New York water and that of the river Isar would permit. To this end he drilled 700 feet for an artesian well. Lager was still uncommon in the United States in those days, and his skill soon produced the best available in his Franziskaner.

In his first year he turned out 34,000 barrels. After that flying start, he began to direct his attention to the delicate art of saloon-financing. Here he excelled also. His generous terms for fixtures and licenses brought hordes of ambitious bar-keepers under his wing. Five years later his production had doubled. In the place of his first small plant stood a handsome building which was to form the nucleus of the vast layout still standing.

By this time the Germans had communicated a taste for beer to the rest of the populace and all the New York brewers had to toil hard to meet the demand. In 1874 a fire gutted the Ehret Brewery, but George, undismayed, came back, and five years later he was the first brewer in the land, brewing and selling 220,000 barrels a year. Adolphus Busch had just taken command of the Anheuser-Busch Brewery in St. Louis and was making himself heard with 131,000 barrels, but Jake Ruppert was still an outsider and had not yet touched 100,000 barrels.

Ehret held the lead until bottled beer came in. As everything was turned topsy-turvy by this innovation he lost ground and Busch seized the shipping business.

George himself never thought enough of bottled beer to install a bottling department. Whatever bottled beer carried the Ehret label was bottled outside the brewery. Meanwhile, New York clamored for Franziskaner and the Ehret Brewery burst forth anew. Soon it sprawled and towered over seventy-five city lots.

Ehret's production, like Ruppert's, was always restricted to three or four brands. There were Franziskaner, a Special and a Double X by Ehret, and Knickerbocker, Ruppiner, Extra Pale and Rosebud by Ruppert. Meanwhile, Busch was turning out sixteen varieties.

Franziskaner, Ehret's best-seller, was dispensed directly from the keg, and an extensive free lunch usually went with it. There was a place in Third avenue at Thirty-fourth street that gave away barrels of steamed soft clams daily and threw in sandwiches, sausage, cheese and pickles by the hundredweight. During the Summer months the demand for Franziskaner was so great that the town barkeepers were hard pressed to keep it chilled. The Silver Bar in Park row solved the problem by erecting four huge ice tanks on the bar and detailing six bartenders to man them.

Ehret's wagons clattered through the streets of Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx and boarded the ferries to spread the fame of Franziskaner in the surrounding country. A lover of horses, old George was always pained at the spectacle of his big full-chested beasts straining at his heavily laden wagons. He gave orders that they were to be treated with all consideration; a driver who used a whip would be fired on the spot. One of his best customers had a place on Jersey City Heights. George decided that the climb uphill was too much for the horses, so he ordered the beer dumped at the bottom and the customer had to come down and fetch it.

As the Nineteenth Century drew to a close, Ehret yielded first place among American brewers to Busch, but he was certainly doing well enough, for his annual production was 600,000 barrels. Only Ruppert was really pressing him, and only Busch, with nearly a million barrels a year, was ahead.

Ehret, nearing seventy but destined for many more years on earth, faced the Twentieth Century with his hair slicked in a pompadour, robust, broad-shouldered and deep-chested. A trim mustache and a refined goatee gave him the air of a man of substance. His fellow brewers looked to him as one of the glories of their profession.

III

The elder Jake Ruppert was born in New York on March 4, 1842, the son of Franz and Wilhelmina Ruppert, who had arrived from Bavaria in 1835. Franz spent ten years as a grocer but in 1845 he switched to the malting business. Five years afterward he spotted the old Atkien Brewery for a bargain and bought it. He reopened it under the name of the Turtle Bay Brewery and put a beer-garden in the backyard. The place was in Forty-fifth street between First and Second avenues.

Before Jake was ten years old, he was making himself handy around the brewery and by the time he was eighteen he was a journeyman. Those were arduous days for father and son. All the work was done by hand; there was scarcely a piece of machinery in the place. Soon Jake rose to be manager, but the venture was doing poorly, so he surveyed new fields. In 1867 he decided to branch out for himself. At that time George Ehret was working extra shifts at the then prodigious task of turning out 34,000 barrels a year.

Undaunted, Jake, who three years before had married Anna Gillig, daughter of another brewer, George Gillig, bought a piece of property just west of Ehret's. He cleared the ground of timber with his own hands and erected a little building, fifty feet square. This was the first Jacob Ruppert Brewery. One August night Anna gave him their first son. They called him Jacob after his pa.

The proud young father threw himself into his work. He toiled feverishly. He knew beer, and people were beginning to like his. He was all business. When that first year ended he had sold 5000 barrels. Years later he was to tell his son:

"Jacob, my ambition was to sell 5000 barrels of beer in a year and I did it."

"Pop," young Jake was to answer seriously, "my ambition is to sell 5000 barrels of beer a day!"

In 1877, when Jake had been ten years in business, he was producing 85,000 barrels a year. Meanwhile, Ehret's output had climbed to new heights; his 138,000 barrels paced all the brewers in America. Best & Company, of Milwaukee, were crowding him with 122,000 barrels, and Bergner and Engel were serving up 119,000 barrels in Philadelphia. Over in Newark, Ballantine had passed 100,000 barrels. Out in St. Louis, the E. Anheuser Brewery, which had a young man named Adolphus Busch working for it, was still struggling along with an annual production of 45,000 barrels.

But Jake Ruppert was coming along. He had a new building and the money was rolling in. Soon he was dabbling in real estate and profiting greatly; he bought a silk factory, a lumber yard, a stock farm and an ice plant. He saw the value of social contacts and signed up with every German singing society that had a place to meet. He fancied horses and bought a

string; an expert rider and a crack shot, he assumed the rôle of sportsman.

Beer, however, remained his chief interest. He drilled his squad of *Todsäufer*, lined their pockets with treat money, and equipped them with an assortment of stories. They rushed forth, scoured the city, flung the Ruppert money on the bars, went to all weddings and funerals, and regaled the mourners with their wit and Ruppert's beer. Sales soared.

Meanwhile, the Ruppert family was also growing. Now there were young Jake, George, Frank, Cornelia, Anna and Amanda. The father ruled. He was a hard taskmaster but not unfair. He sent Jake, ever his favorite, to Columbia Grammar-School. When the boy had finished there his formal schooling was at an end and he was put to work at the meanest job in the brewery—keg-washing.

But young Jake was willing. He had his father's romantic passion for brewing. He loved it with a tender devotion. He climbed through all the departments in the brewery and emerged in 1890 as general manager of the vast plant, now well past a half million barrels in its yearly turnout.

Young Jake cultivated the Tammany district men. He assembled celebrities for dinners still famed. He acquired the reputation of a gay and witty young beau. He drilled with the old Seventh. He was a joiner like his father, and his club dues each month presented a staggering total. Finally, Governor David B. Hill made him a colonel. Old Jake was proud of him; father and son were inseparable. Together, they made a fine picture—ruddy, robust, mustached old Jake and well-groomed Colonel Jake, Jr., with his round, plump, pink face, his slicked hair and strong, smiling mouth. Knickerbocker, Ruppert's Extra Pale, and Ruppiner filled the money chests.

Presently Anna Ruppert lost her heart to Brewer Schalk's young son, Herman, and old Jake gave her a swell wedding. But he strongly disapproved of pretty Cornelia's love affair. This romance began with glances exchanged between Cornelia, as she sat in a box at the Metropolitan, and a young violinist playing in the pit. The violinist, Nahan Franko, pursued his courtship through the personal columns of the newspapers and in 1895 the young couple eloped. They were barred from the Ruppert home and the marriage ended tragically with the death of Cornelia two years later.

As the century waned the Rupperts drew close to their rival, Ehret, and the race was neck and neck. Both were reaping golden harvests. The Rupperts, by now, were established in a Fifth avenue mansion and on great estates in the country. Tammany liked Colonel Jake and put him up for Congress. He licked Phil Low in 1898 and Tammany sent him back for another sitting in 1900.

IV

The dawn of the Twentieth Century found all the New York beer barons riding high into the dark days ahead. Whereas there had been scarcely more than 100 breweries throughout the land a century before, now there was that many going full blast in New York alone. Ehret and Ruppert were leading by handsome margins, but Doelger, Hupfel, Clausen, Bernheimer and Schmid, Jetter, Stein, Flanagan, Hawkins, Ballantine, Trommer, Mayer, Kress and the rest were doing nicely too. The town was lapping up the stuff at a stupendous rate. Beer-gardens, however, were rare, for *andante* drinking wasn't to the city's taste. It preferred to gulp.

Colonel, clubman, Congressman, sportsman and *bon vivant*, young Jake Ruppert was now the Prince of Wales of beer. He dressed extremely well but without ostentation. He developed a fondness for fine dogs and bought a pack of blooded St. Bernards. The newspapers wrote him up. He spent a great wad of money on a stable of race horses, thus incidentally incurring some inconvenience for his collectors, for whenever one of his horses lost a race the collectors would be greeted thus by the saloon-keepers: "Sorry, I can't pay today. I bet on the colonel's horse."

Jake collected rare books and hunted fine paintings. He was a bachelor and he had an eye for beauty. The newspapers were accustomed to send a gal reporter out periodically to ask him—"the town's richest, gayest, wittiest beau"—why he never married.

"Because," Colonel Jake would reply, "married women are the most charming in the world—if you are not married to them."

Old Jake contemplated the scene from his Fifth avenue palace with satisfaction. In 1906 he relinquished active control of the brewery to young Jake, who had by then completed a fourth and last term in Congress.

George Ehret, on the other hand, never loosened his grip, and until his death every decision of moment at his brewery was his. His sons, George, Louis and Frank, always respected his wishes. Old George was firmly established. He was held in high regard by all New York as one of its solid citizens. Nor was his life without its color. On his birthday German street bands from all over town would beat a path to his palace in Park avenue. The first might come as early as five o'clock in the morning and the stream would continue all through the day. Sometimes there

would be as many as thirty-five and all would join in a mighty tribute. Old George would appear and smile as a servant passed through the crowd and presented each musician with a dollar. Then there would be an adjournment to the brewery for free Franziskaner.

It was a grand life. Occasionally, to be sure, Adolphus Busch would drop into town, take over a floor at the Holland House, and make the local brewers look drab before departing with his pockets crammed with orders for Budweiser. But New York continued to respect old George and to admire young Jake.

Meanwhile, the brewers of the United States were not unaware of the disfavor accorded their trade in the drawing-rooms of moral bankers and Christian drygoods merchants. So the United States Brewers Association was formed, and presently it employed the scholarly pen of Gallus Thomann and instructed him to dignify the art of brewing. Without hesitation, Mr. Thomann dived into the archives, swam through the histories and came up a little breathless. In books published under the imprimatur of the association he set forth the glorious story of American beer. This country, it appeared, was literally born in beer. The Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock only because their beer ran out. Samuel Adams was the son of a brewer and himself one; so were the Revolutionary generals, Putnam, Weedo and Sumner. Dr. Thomann, tracing the records still further, contrived to elevate the trade so vastly that the brewers throughout the land shoved out their bellies in honest pride.

When, in 1908, they heard in convention a communication which ended ominously, "The saloon must go!", they shook the rafters with their laughter. However, a few foresighted ones put their fingers to

the wind and called for a "housecleaning",—that is, for a campaign to eliminate the bad saloon and the vices it fostered.

When they met again in 1910 there were more wrinkled brows. The W. C. T. U. ladies were beginning to make themselves heard. The brewers argued that beer, after all, was the medium of temperance; the trouble was that Americans didn't know how to drink it. So in Chicago, at the International Brewers Exhibition, a *Bierstube* was set up. The brewers asked the Hon. James J. Davis, later to be Secretary of Labor, to accept the honorary presidency of the exhibition. While they awaited a reply the Chicago pastors prayed publicly that he would refuse. But he accepted.

In the *Bierstube*, visitors were seated at tables and served beer at 45° Fahrenheit to the strains of Bach and Wagner. This, the brewers indicated, was the way to drink beer. But New York scoffed, gulped, and crashed its fist on the bar for more. Production went soaring.

In 1913 the Rupperts made their final great expansion. Forty-six years after he had erected his first tiny building on the same site old Jake watched the dedication of a huge, modern plant of 2,000,000 barrels capacity. Orators called it the finest in the world. It was worth more than \$30,000,000. The value of Ehret's plant was about the same. More than 1000 men were employed in each.

Great crowds attended the Ruppert opening and marveled at the marble lobby and the four great brew-kettles, each of 25,000 gallons capacity. Everyone had plenty to eat and the beer flowed like water.

Proud and happy, old Jake circulated through the crowd arm in arm with Pete McGinnes, who owned the saloon down at the corner and had bought the first barrel of beer Jake ever sold.

In 1914 America drank more beer than ever before or since. The following year, production generally slipped a bit, but Ehret held his own and the Rupperts kept on gaining.

When war was declared, old George was trapped in Germany and there he remained until the Armistice.

In 1915, Colonel Jake made a significant investment. He purchased the New York American League Baseball Club, and when legal beer passed at last it was the Yankees, and their Mr. Babe Ruth, who were to keep the money rolling in.

A year later old Jake died. He was seventy-four. Thousands attended his funeral and he was eulogized as a distinguished citizen and a public benefactor. He left a fortune of considerably more than \$6,000,000. Like Adolphus Busch, who had died three years before, he was spared the trials in store for Colonel Jake and the Ehrets.

Colonel Jake grabbed the throttle. In 1917, he touched a new high mark in production with 1,250,000 barrels. That was far beyond Ehret's best but still—and it was to remain—short of Busch's record, 1,650,000 barrels.

V

Colonel Jake saw, perhaps more clearly than any brewer in New York, the threat of the Prohibitionists. He launched a counter-campaign. He enlisted medical testimony that beer, all things considered, was safer than milk. It was, he argued, a tonic.

America's entry into the war knocked the pins from under every brewer in the land. Jake was dethroned as a hero and the United States Brewers Association came to be looked upon as a flank of the Hindenberg Line. The full force of white hot patriotism struck the brewers through

Arthur Brisbane's purchase of the *Washington Times*.

Ehret's Brewery had been seized by the government, although George, marooned in Germany, was an American citizen. The Alien Property Custodian found in the Ehret books a record of a \$50,000 loan to Brisbane. Young George was confronted with it. He explained that he and Colonel Jake had each lent Brisbane that amount.

The government men descended upon Jake.

"Sure," said he. "I gave him the money. But that's all right. He's good pay."

The net result of the episode was the indictment of the association of brewers, in the popular mind, as an agency of German propaganda. From that moment Ruppert and the Ehrets knew no peace. The temperance ladies gloried in this new and deadly ammunition as heaven-sent.

The war at an end, old George Ehret came home to fight for his brewery. It was returned to him after a battle. But Jake's good fight to stem the dry tide was unavailing. Bewildered, old George refused to consider Prohibition anything more than a ghastly practical joke, soon to be exposed and forgotten over a round of drinks. Prohibition went into its first, second and third years and still he held his ground. His great brewery stood there, its workers poised for the word which never came. In 1926, stripped of his glory, and scarred by the venom of the war, he went to his death—a sad patriarch of ninety-two. His son Louis closed the brewery. It stands today, poking its spires and towers skyward against the East river, a ghostly relic.

But Jake carries on. His great plant playfully dishes up a daily quota of malt syrup, near-beer, and hunks of ice. There is not enough work for the several hundred men, but it is Jake's creed that you can't fire an old hand.

LEAVES FROM A WASTE-BASKET

Babbitt in the Athenaeum

OF THE superstitions prevailing in the United States one of the most curious is to the effect that business men make good university trustees. Not infrequently—nay, usually—it is carried to the length of holding that they make the *only* good ones. It would be hard to imagine anything more untrue. In point of fact, very few men trained to business seem to be capable of grasping what a university is about: they constantly assume that it is simply a kind of railroad, or a somewhat odd and irrational variety of rolling mill. That it differs as radically from such enterprises as a string quartette differs from a two-ton truck, or an archangel from a United States Senator, or Betelgeuse from a baseball—this seems to be quite beyond their comprehension. Sometimes one hears that trustees must be business men because running a university costs a great deal of money, and they alone can raise it. But there is no proof of this last in the record. Most American universities, though they are run by business men, are always on the edge of bankruptcy, and if it were not for occasional windfalls they would slip over. The trustees seldom have anything to do with bringing down these windfalls; they are fetched by members of the faculty—either by making a noise in the world professionally, or by making a noise otherwise. In one of the greater American universities a single member of the faculty has raised more money during the past thirty years than all of the trustees combined—indeed, more than all of them mul-

tiplied by ten. This gentleman knows nothing whatever about business: his private check book has not balanced since 1885. But he has kept his university going for a generation, despite the complete failure of the trustees to finance it and their constant effort to ruin it by converting it into an outhouse to Big Business. I believe that the first American university which bars business men—and especially bankers—from its board will leap ahead so fast that in five years the rest will be nowhere. Let it substitute any other class of men it pleases—movie actors, Turkish bath rubbers, steamboat captains, astrologers, bootleggers, even clergymen. No matter which way it turns it will be on the up-and-up. Business men unquestionably have their virtues, and no sensible person would deny their great value to society. Many of them, in their private capacities, are highly intelligent. But there is something in their make-up which makes them distrust and misunderstand a university as they distrust and misunderstand the Bill of Rights. They are as out of place in the grove of Athene as they would be in the College of Cardinals.



Elegy on Journalism

WHEN the New York *World*, after herculean efforts to differentiate itself from the other New York newspapers, succumbed in the struggle for existence, the first thing some of those other papers did was to imitate, as closely as they could, all of its special characters. It was precisely