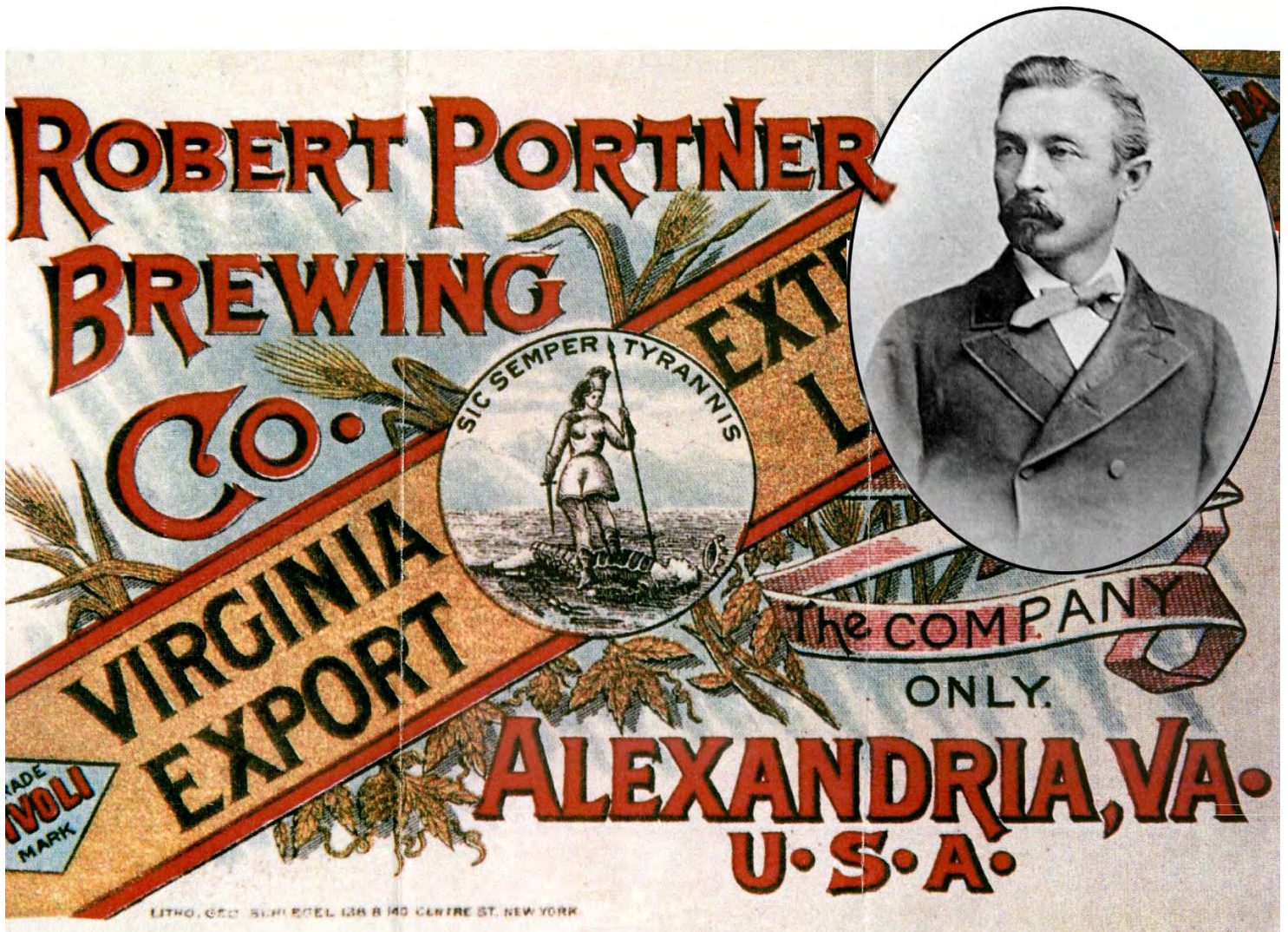


Robert Portner
Robert Portner and his Brewing Company



**Timothy J. Dennée
for Saul Centers, Inc.
Parsons Engineering Science, Inc.
and Alexandria Archaeology
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PREFACE



The following work is a companion document to and statement of historical context for an archaeological report and catalog produced by Parsons Engineering Science, Inc. and related to the 1998-2000 excavation of the site of the Robert Portner Brewing Company in Alexandria, Virginia (44AX196). For that reason, citations perhaps unfortunately follow the format accepted by the American Anthropological Association. Legal citations, however, are in their standard format and appear in footnotes. This edition is revised from that of 2002, mainly to incorporate the finally compiled archaeological data—here presented in abridged form in Appendix B—that this report was to accompany. Much new information has been incorporated into the text and corrections made.

I have not attempted a hagiography of Robert Portner but rather to understand his life and accomplishments in the context of German-American immigration, of the evolution of the American brewing industry, and of the development of the city of Alexandria, Virginia and, to a lesser extent, that of Manassas, Virginia and Washington, D.C. While the definitive work for the moment, this book cannot be the final word on Robert Portner or his brewery as new information and artifacts are always coming to light. It is, however, a fairly comprehensive account of the brewing enterprise, considering that the company's own records have not survived. A truly exhaustive account would make full use of newspapers and land records found throughout the brewery's market area, a pursuit whose costs did not seem justified within the scope of the immediate project. Combing through the relevant legal records relating to interstate commerce, alcohol regulation, antitrust, labor, contracts, and payment default within that vast territory would undoubtedly provide another chapter if not justifying a book of its own. Particularly as records become increasingly available and searchable in digital format, much additional information should soon be available, and it may well alter our current understanding of the business and the man in any number of ways. Indeed, such information has already permitted the revision and expansion of the account.

This work would not have been possible without the assistance of many individuals and organizations. I would first like to thank my father, John Matt Dennée, for inspiring me to study historic breweries, as his career in the industry gave us both access to early works on the subject. I am grateful to Parsons Engineering Science, Inc. and Saul Centers, Inc. for the opportunity to write up my years of research on the Portner brewery. I am also deeply grateful to the Portner family, and especially John A.D. Portner, Jr. and Peggy Portner Johnston, for furnishing a transcription of Robert Portner's memoirs, the single most important source employed. It forms the spine of the chapters on Portner's early life and the early years of his brewery, as well as providing crucial information on his family life, travels, and other business interests. For their generous contributions of crucial textual and graphic material, I would like to thank T. Michael Miller, Rita Holtz, Barbara Magid, Lawrence R. Moter, Jr., Al Steidel, George A. Didden III, Louise Abner Nemeth, George H. Beuchert Jr. and George H. Beuchert III, Don J. Williamson, Timothy A. Thompson, Raymond Frederick, Jr., Wesley Pippenger, Mack McCarthy, Edward

Semonian, Paul D'Ambrosio, Robert Birmingham, Ann C. Sherwin, Margaret M. O'Bryant and Robert Tatum. The project would not have been possible without the following museums, libraries and archives granting access to and assistance with their collections: the Alexandria Library Local History and Special Collections, the Alexandria Archaeology Museum, the Alexandria Circuit Court, the Lyceum, the National Archives and Records Administration, the Library of Congress, the National Museum of American History (Smithsonian Institution), the Manassas Museum, the Virginia Military Institute Archives, the Richmond Resident Office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Virginia Historical Society, the Library of Virginia, the Historical Society of Washington, D.C., the Bull Run Regional Library, the Western Australian Maritime Museum, the District of Columbia Public Library, the Fenimore Art Museum, the Danville Department of Parks and Recreation, the District of Columbia Recorder of Deeds, the U.S. Army Military History Institute, the Beer Institute, the United States Patent and Trademark Office, the Rahden City Archives, and the Albemarle Charlottesville Historical Society.

A note about format... The digital version of this document is laid out so as to be printed one-sided with the margins offset suitable for binding. It was originally intended to be produced on computer printers, and thus, the images are nearly all in black and white. The intention is to distribute the work in electronic form to hold down reproduction costs and to permit digital word searching and thus obviate the need for an index. The table of contents includes a summary of the themes and subjects in each chapter, not unlike nineteenth-century books. This medium also permits a few liberties with the layout; so, in the manner of nineteenth-century city directories, a number of vintage Portner advertisements appear in margins throughout as further illustrations.

This book is to be followed by a survey of the entire brewing industry in Alexandria from the 1730s to the present.

This work is dedicated to my great friend, the late John T. Sweeney. I wish that we could again enjoy a beer together.

Tim Dennée

Hanover, June 03, 1890

Writing down my life history, I fulfill a long desire, and I was stopped only because writing creates a nervousness (over reaction of nerves) brought on by mental stress. The reason for writing is that my beloved children should know the story of their parents, as my only duty in life is to educate my children to become able and good human beings, and as the other things I wanted to obtain from life I have reached with full satisfaction. I only want to send my children into life with good knowledge and education, so that my family tree, which has been removed to America, will bear good branches and fruits.

I write in German, not because I prefer Germany to my adopted country as—at the moment spending already two years in Hanover to give my children better schools and to become healthier (and I believe I reached this goal)—German has again become more fluent.

Now my beloved children, I want to remind you that you have to hold together in life so that the family earns respect through uprightness, as only this brings happiness in the last years of life.

It may be that some of you will make mistakes in life, and the others should guide them back to the right path with love and understanding, if necessary, with every means. Let no one come under thinking that everyone is not the same; each person makes mistakes. All of you come with the same prospects in life... Use your knowledge and wealth in the right way, but:

Behave well and stick together.

For this reason I have taken my beloved Annaburg and improved it, and I will continue to do this to provide you a pleasant childhood and to have a real home which brings you all together and reminds you of your childhood. This home I wish to reserve for you all. Those of you who feel tired or sick can return to this place and reminisce on a beautiful childhood to regain health and fresh spirit, and those who have had a hard time in life should regain their strength for a new beginning.

You all must meet once a year there and take care that the family FORJNER maintains a good name in America.

With all my heart, your papa,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Robert Forjner". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned below the typed name. It features a long, sweeping underline that extends across the width of the signature.

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Chapter 1

Before Portner: A short history of the Alexandria brewing industry

The difficulty and expence of procuring a supply of strong bottles, and a peculiar taste for lively or foaming beer, which our summers do not favor, have been the principal causes of the inconsiderable progress of malt liquors, compared with distilled spirits. The absence or infrequency of malting, as a separate trade, has also operated against brewing in the small way and in families. The great facility of making and procuring distilled spirits has occasioned them exceedingly to interfere with the brewery.

Tench Coxe, A Statement of the Arts and Manufactures of the United States for the Year 1810

*Here lies John Spinks who never did fear
To drink Rum, wine and good strong beer.*
Apocryphal epitaph on an eighteenth-century Virginia gravestone

Alexandria, Virginia is typical of American cities founded before the Civil War in that it boasted a succession of breweries through its history. Between 1770 and 1916 there were only two times at which there was no commercial brewery operating in town—one two-year gap in the 1850s caused by a fire, and the other a probable hiatus of a loyalist-owned firm during the Revolution. The city is not remembered as a great brewing center, however, and for good reason. During the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the state of Virginia and the entire South lagged far behind the rapidly industrializing Northeast and Midwest in the production of malt liquors. The people of the South also proved more susceptible to the pious claims of the temperance movement, prematurely terminating the few successful large brewing companies there even before national Prohibition. In spite of many obstacles, Alexandria managed to produce one of the greatest breweries of the South, led by the inventive, entrepreneurial, and politically adept Robert Portner.

Although a number of Northeastern and Midwestern breweries ultimately dwarfed the Robert Portner Brewing Company, Portner's firm was very much on the cutting edge of innovation and regional marketing during the late nineteenth century. As a result, Portner was respected by brewers nationwide and even served as president of their lobby in Washington. He applied his leadership abilities to local politics and to a profusion of diverse business interests. Most important, his brewery was said to be the largest beer producer in the South during the mid 1890s and the largest employer in Alexandria.

Largely agrarian, the nineteenth-century South lacked a degree of industrialization, urbanization and transportation infrastructure comparable to the North and the Midwest. The region consequently failed to attract nearly as many German immigrants, who increasingly provided both the skilled labor for brewing and much of the demand for malt liquors. The warmer climate was an additional obstacle to the production in quantity of lager beer, a variety introduced to America in 1840 and which became vastly popular after the Civil War. Prior to the introduction of artificial refrigeration, brewing was a seasonal activity. Lager beer brewing was especially dependent upon the availability of natural ice from the North. Although artificial refrigeration revolutionized the industry after 1880, permitting the production of lager anywhere in the world, Southern breweries still lagged and remained relatively scarce until the present day. (Van Wieren 1995:374-376)

The role of Alexandria's brewing industry is tied to the city's history as a southern port town. Established as a center for the export of northern Virginia tobacco, the city quickly diversified and grew into a mercantile center with small-scale craft industry by the late eighteenth century. At the turn of the nineteenth century it was a large urban center within an agrarian region, the tenth largest city in the nation, in fact.¹ But initially dependent on slave labor and attracting relatively few immigrants in the nineteenth century, Alexandria never after grew at the same rate or to the same extent as did several other mid-Atlantic cities.

The range of businesses typical of a port town was to be found in Alexandria during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the early years, industrial organization typically consisted of the artisan, often in a home-shop environment, assisted by slave, apprentice, and wage labor. Entrepreneurs attempted to provide goods that were too expensive or perishable when shipped from Europe.² It was in such an environment and for such a purpose that the native brewing industry arose.

During the 1700s and 1800s, much of the beer and ale consumed in America was made in the British brewing centers of London, Norfolk, Burton-on-Trent, and Glasgow. Their ales were regarded as superior and could be produced at a lower unit cost because of the scale economies of the established British breweries and the availability there of necessary materials and labor. Shipment across the Atlantic, however, added significantly to cost and promoted spoilage. In addition, there was little chance that imports could satisfy the entire American demand for alcohol; *per capita* consumption at the turn of the nineteenth century was very high, and a number of fermented substitutes, whisky and cider especially, were made locally. American brewers hoped to carve out a competitive niche on the bases of cost, freshness, and the ready availability of their supply. But their efforts were frustrated by the limited availability of ingredients, skilled labor, bottles and bottle closures, and by a market constrained by transportation obstacles.

Brewing in Alexandria began prior to the American Revolution. Area plantations, including George Washington's, are thought to have produced some beer for their own use at least as early as

¹ Alexandria was still technically incorporated only as a town until 1852.

² A protectionist tariff made American products more competitive with European imports.

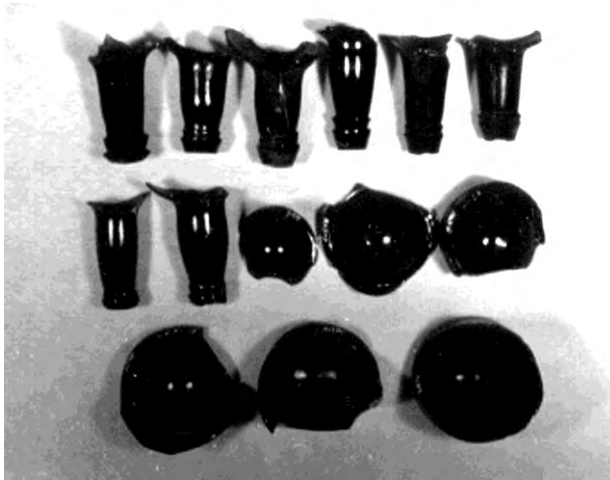
the 1730s. In 1770 Andrew Wales, a former plantation brewer, founded a truly commercial brewery in a leased public warehouse on Point Lumley at the foot of Duke Street. In 1774 he relocated to a site along what came to be known as Wales Alley, between Water (now Lee) and Union Streets, north of Prince Street. The Wales brewery, although undergoing several changes of ownership in the 1790s, continued to produce “Strong and Small Beer” until 1802. About that time, two other firms sprang up: the Potomac Brewery at the foot of Oronoco Street, and the Union Brewery at the southwest corner of Union and Wolfe Streets. James Kerr first brewed ale at the Potomac Brewery, a vacant tobacco warehouse at Point West rented from the county government. Abraham Morhouse founded the Union Brewery in the former Roberdeau distillery at the corner of Union and Wolfe Streets in 1794. These businesses too, knew a number of proprietors before closing in 1807 and 1797, respectively. (Netherton 1982; Washington n.d.; *Virginia Gazette* November 23, 1769 and July 16, 1770; Moore 1988:64,65,69,70,84,85,88; Hooe, Stone & Co.; Fairfax Deed Books J:429 and X:593; *Alexandria Gazette* January 4, 1790, March 14, 1793, May 26, 1801, November 16, 1802, May 27, 1807, August 2, 1809, and July 14, 1821; Miller 1991)

Especially at a small scale, brewing was a precarious profession. American breweries had to compete not only with British imports but also with the multitude of alternative, domestic, fermented and distilled beverages including wine and cider. Hard spirits, especially rum, then whisky, remained more popular than beer until the mid nineteenth century. Brewery proprietorships were often short-lived; turnover was frequent, and advertisements offering to rent or sell breweries were common during the Federal period. One Alexandria brewery of very brief duration was opened by Cornishman John Oates, former maltster to a Plymouth, England brewery, on the outlying estate called Howard, now the Episcopal High School property. Begun in 1817, Oates’s operation closed the following year. (Clark 1929:481; *Alexandria Gazette* May 24, 1814, November 25, 1817 and September 14, 1822; Fairfax County Personal Tax Assessments; Miller 1991a:334)

One long-lived brewery—as long-lived as Robert Portner’s later St. Asaph Street brewery—was founded in 1807 by Lancashire, England native Isaac Entwisle. Located on the waterfront at the foot of Wolfe Street, across from the former Union brewery, the new firm grew larger than any of Alexandria’s previous brewing plants. Run by the young James Entwisle for a decade after his father’s death, the brewery was purchased in 1831 by merchant brothers James and William Henry Irwin who retained him as brewmaster. At an eventual 3,000 barrels annual production (one American beer barrel equals 31 gallons) and a regional market area of about 1,000 square miles, it became perhaps the largest brewery in the South. The Irwin brewery also exported ale to the West Indies. Although there were already much larger American breweries, by the standards of the day this was indeed a large operation. At the time, American breweries that made “not more than 150 or even 100 barrels a year were not uncommon. It was quite a sizable business that made 300 or 400 barrels annually.” Unfortunately, the plant was lost to fire in 1854, and W.H. Irwin declined to start again. (*Alexandria Advertiser* November 7, 1807; Alexandria Real and Personal Property Tax Assessments; Alexandria Deed Book T-2:56; *Alexandria Gazette* May 4, 1839, June 14, 1843 and November 4, 1854; Hurst 1991:12,15; Elliott & Nye 1852; Siebel and Schwarz 1933:62)

Below: Dark green glass bottle sherds unearthed from the circa 1795-1821 Union/Entwisle brewery site at the southwest corner of Union and Wolfe Streets.

Right: The side of a large oak cask exposed during archaeological excavation of the Irwin Brewery site. Photographs courtesy of the Alexandria Archaeology Museum collection.



Only a few years elapsed before new establishments took its place in the local beverage market. Henry S. Martin opened a small ale brewery at the corner of Commerce and Fayette Streets in 1856. And in 1858 Alexander Strausz and John Klein commenced the construction of a brick-vaulted beer cellar on Duke Street in the “suburb” of West End. Their “Shooter’s Hill Brewery” (later known variously as Klein’s, Cook’s, Englehardt’s, and the West End Brewery) was significant in that it was there that the men introduced to Alexandria the brewing of lager beer. Compared with the ales and porters popular until after the Civil War, lager beer required a different type of yeast and colder temperatures for fermentation and aging. The requisite methods and yeast were introduced to America from Germany only in 1840, and John Klein was one of the first few lager brewers in Virginia. (Alexandria Deed Book R-3:414; *Alexandria Gazette* March 15, 1860; Barber 1988:9; Boyd 1870; Fairfax Deed Book A-4:347; Bull, Friedrich & Gottschalk 1984; Van Wieren 1995; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:99,100,207)

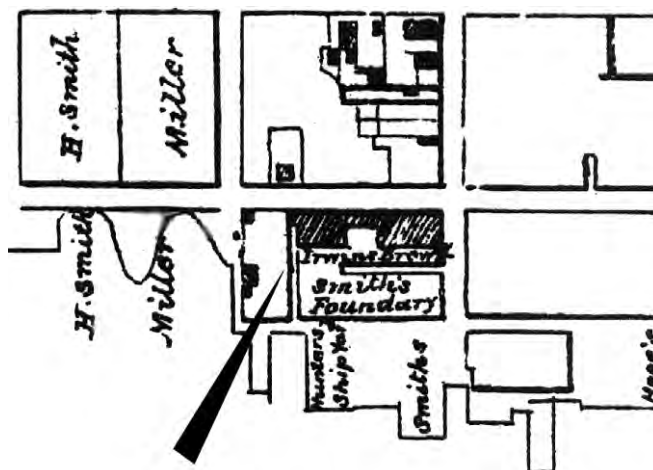
The Civil War was a time of rapid but temporary expansion in the Alexandria brewing industry. The presence of Union troops created an unprecedented demand for alcoholic beverages of all types, despite a prohibition of the sale of liquor and beer within the city limits. The two existing breweries increased production and capacity accordingly. A third, Portner & Company, was established in 1862 by a partnership of four men who had arrived during the Union occupation hoping to prosper from wartime demand for provisions. Between September 1862 and October 1865 the three breweries produced and sold a total of nearly 9,000 barrels of lager beer and ale. Also capitalizing on wartime prosperity, several other entrepreneurs, Christian Poggensee, Otto Portner³ and August Winterroll, and George Steuernagel opened very small restaurant-brewery operations after hostilities had ceased. These businesses were fleeting, the first two apparently failing within a year, the latter parlayed into a larger restaurant and inn at a new location. (United States Senate 1864:2; *Alexandria Gazette* August 25, 1862 and July 8, 1868; Portner n.d.:6; Erickson 1988:21; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866; Boyd 1866; Boyd 1867; Boyd 1870; Fairfax Deed Books F-4:434 and G-4:219; Alexandria Deed Books X-3:430 and A-4:215)

The collapse in demand following the war ruined or threatened all of the brewing firms. By the mid 1870s the Martin, Steuernagel, Portner & Winterroll and Poggensee breweries were no longer in operation, and the others had been in substantial debt. The former Shooter's Hill Brewery, under the proprietorship of John G. Cook, then Henry Englehardt, continued much as before, but at a level of production significantly diminished from its wartime peak.⁴ Portner & Company dissolved, but Robert Portner, now sole owner, purchased a new site on North Saint Asaph Street and constructed there a large modern brewery and cellars. These two breweries, Englehardt's and Portner's, would illustrate the contrast between the old and the new in the late nineteenth-century American brewing industry: small scale *versus* large; conservatism and tradition *versus* innovation; stasis *versus* expansion; high unit costs of small-batch production *versus* economies of scale and vertical integration; local *versus* regional marketing; and inadequate *versus* adequate capitalization. The West End Brewery merely limped along for another two decades, thanks largely to the leniency of its creditors and to the patronage of Henry Englehardt's adjacent saloon, through which he probably sold most of his product. The Robert Portner Brewing Company, on the other hand, would become one of the greatest pre-Prohibition Southern breweries, with a sophisticated and capital-intensive regional marketing system. (Boyd 1871; Fairfax Deed Book G-4:219; *Alexandria Gazette* September 23, 1869, May 5, 1877 and August 18, 1893; J.H. Chataigne 1876; Internal Revenue Service 1862-1866; United States Census 1870a; Alexandria Water Company; Internal Revenue Service 1874-1910)

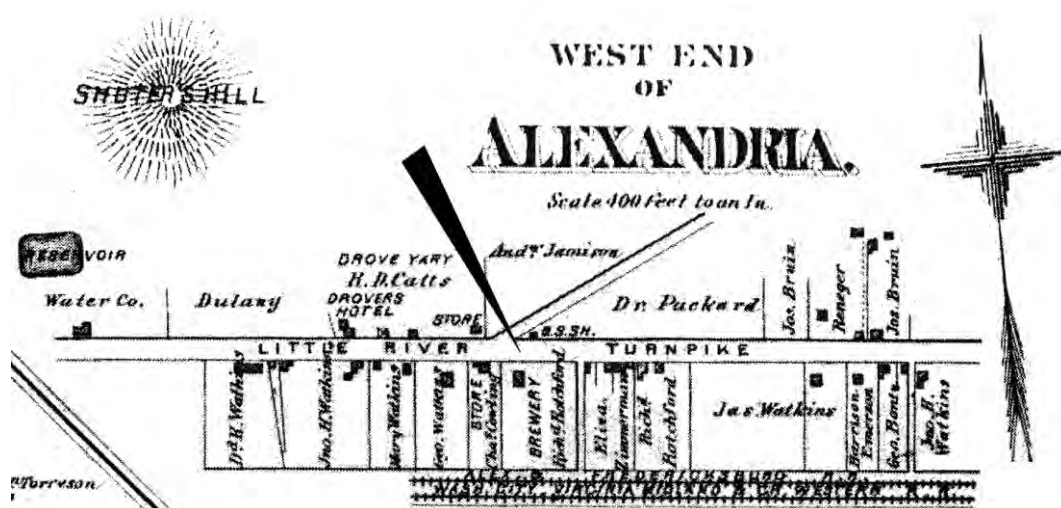
³ Otto was a younger brother of Robert Portner.

⁴ Cook was proprietor of the Shooter's Hill or West End Brewery as early as 1866 and until at least 1870, if not 1872. He then moved to Washington, where he operated a small brewery until about 1880. (United States Census 1870a; Van Wieren 1995:59)

Right: Detail of an anonymous, early 1850s map of Alexandria showing William Irwin's brewery at the southeast corner of Union and Wolfe Streets (indicated by arrow).



Below: An 1878 map of the village of West End depicting Henry Englehardt's brewery south of the Little River Turnpike (indicated by arrow). From G.M. Hopkins's Atlas of Fifteen Miles Around Washington.



Left: A brown stoneware bottle impressed with the name of Alexandria brewer George Steuernagel. Steuernagel began brewing small amounts of lager beer in a shed at the rear of a King Street saloon late in the summer of 1865. This bottle probably dates to that time or possibly to the operation of Steuernagel's later Royal Street inn, the Exchange & Ballard House of the 1870s.

Alexandria's Commercial Breweries and Their Tenants, 1770-1916

Despite frequently having distinct trade names, such as the Shooter's Hill Brewery or Union Brewery, it is important to note that the firms were commonly and interchangeably known by the names of their owners or proprietors. The most common and definitive titles for the breweries are given below, based principally on advertisements in newspapers and city directories. The personal names listed refer to owner or proprietor or, in many instances, both. In some cases—as with Morhouse & Co., John Towers, the Irwins, and even Portner's firms—the nominal brewers were actually merchants or investors who employed brewmasters to conduct the operations.

Wales Brewery (at Point Lumley at the foot of Duke Street)
Andrew Wales, 1770-1774

Wales Brewery (north side of Wales Alley)
Andrew Wales, 1774-1798 (probable wartime hiatus 1777-1783)
Cornelius Coningham, 1798-1799
William Billington, 1799-1802

Potomac Brewery (at Point West at the foot of Oronoco Street)
James Kerr, 1793-1795
Capt. John Towers (Henry Keppele, brewer), 1797-1802
William Billington and Thomas Cruse, 1802-1804
Thomas Cruse, 1804-1807

Union Brewery (southwest corner of Union and Wolfe Streets)
Abraham Morhouse & Co. (Abraham Morhouse and Baldwin Dade), 1794-1795
Robert Smock and Daniel Ketcham, 1795
Robert Smock, 1795-1797
Charles Young, 1797

Alexandria Brewery/Entwisle Brewery/Irwin Brewery (southeast corner Union and Wolfe Streets)
Isaac Entwisle, 1807-1821
James Entwisle, 1821-1831
James and William H. Irwin (James Entwisle, brewer), 1831-1839
William H. Irwin (James Entwisle, brewer), 1839-1854

Oates Brewery (at the Howard estate, now Episcopal High School, 1200 Quaker Lane)
William Oates, 1817-1818

Alexandria Ale Brewery or Martin's Brewery (corner of Commerce and South Fayette Streets)
Henry S. Martin, 1856-1872

Shooter's Hill Brewery/West End Brewery (south side of Little River Turnpike
opposite Diagonal Road, now south side of 1800 block of Duke Street)
Alexander Strausz and John Klein, 1858-1860
John Klein, 1860-1865
Robert Portner, 1865-1866
John G. Cook, *circa* 1867-1871
Henry Englehardt, 1872-1893

Portner & Co./Robert Portner Brewery (northeast corner of King and Fayette Streets)
Robert Portner, Fred Recker, Andrew Kaercher and Edward Abner, 1862-1864
Robert Portner, Fred Recker and Andrew Kaercher, 1864-1865
Robert Portner and Fred Recker, 1865
Robert Portner, 1865-1869

Christian Poggensee Brewery (west end of King Street)
Christian Poggensee, 1865-1866

Portner & Winterroll Brewery (northwest corner of King and Fayette Streets)
Otto Portner and F. August Winterroll, 1865-1866

George Steuernagel Brewery (north side of 200 block of King Street)
George Steuernagel, 1865-1868

Robert Portner Brewery/Robert Portner Brewing Company (after 1883), aka **the Vienna
Brewery and Tivoli Brewery** (600 block of North Saint Asaph Street)
Robert Portner, 1869-1883
The Robert Portner Brewing Company, 1883-1916

Chapter 2

The brewing process in brief

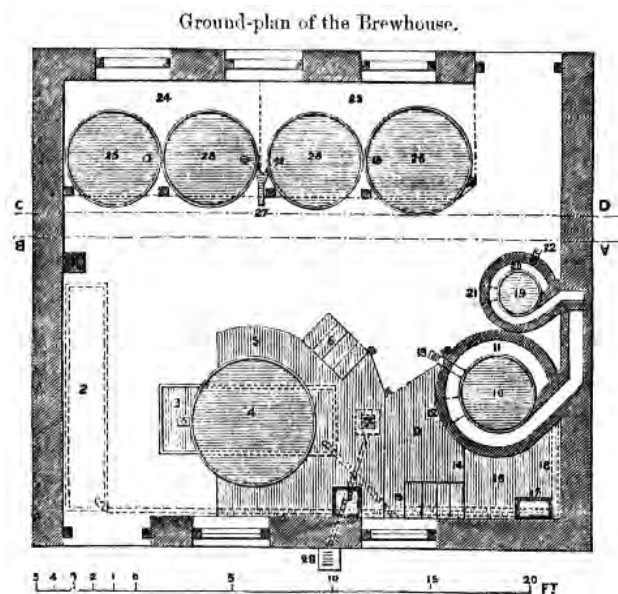
Malt does more than Milton can to justify God's ways to man.

A.E. Housman, *A Shropshire Lad*, LXII

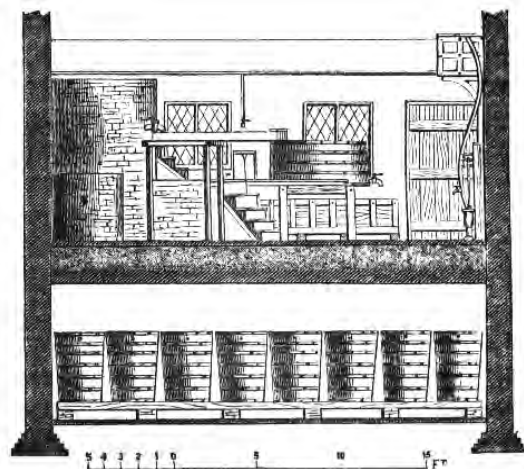
It is impossible to understand the arrangement and development of the brewery without a passing familiarity with the brewing process. Although the nineteenth and twentieth centuries saw enormous changes in the machinery and implements used for brewing, the essential process remained much the same as it had for centuries. The following is a simplified description of the steps of commercial brewing as practiced in the United States through the Civil War period. This account cannot present the full detail, variety and evolution of brewing practices and technology during the nineteenth century.

Beer generally consists of four main ingredients: barley malt, hops, yeast and water. Malt supplies the starch that, through mashing, boiling and fermentation, is eventually converted to alcohol. Hops, the flower of a vine of the nettle family, contains a bitter substance which flavors and helps clarify and preserve beer. Water is the main ingredient by weight and volume, of course, and is a necessary medium for the dissolution of the malt starch and for boiling. Brewer's yeast is added after boiling to ferment the beer, that is, to convert its sugars to alcohol and carbon dioxide.

The first operation in the manufacture of beer is *malting*. This process involves the forced germination of barley grains. Germination breaks up the husks of the grain and produces the enzymes diastase and peptase, instrumental in the release and dissolution of the barley starch and its



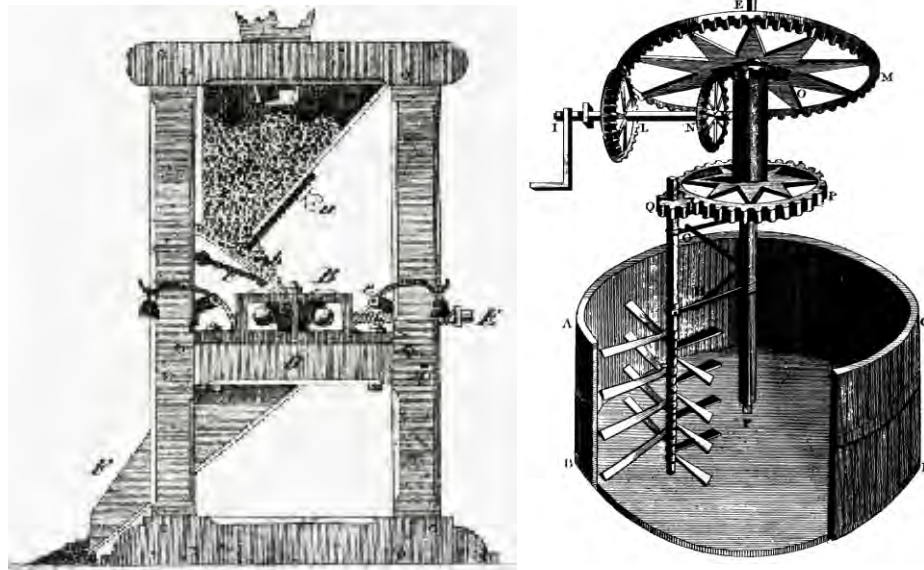
Plans of a small brewery, from John Pitt's How To Brew Good Beer. Alexandria's breweries of the 1860s were probably arranged similarly.



breakdown into maltose or malt sugar during the early stages of the brewing process. As practiced in the mid nineteenth century, barley was normally steeped in wooden tanks of water for 40 to 60 hours. Then the grain was laid several inches deep on a stone malting floor to dry. The drying period varied greatly, although it usually took less than a week. The barley was periodically turned with wooden shovels until it had dried enough to sprout rootlets. At that point, it was necessary to prevent further growth, so it was placed in a drying kiln, then removed and placed into a second kiln in which the drying process was completed and the malt was somewhat roasted. Finally, broken kernels, rootlets, dust, and other foreign matter were sifted out, and the malt was sacked and shipped to the brewery, where it was stored in grain bins or elevators until needed. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:58-62; Kears Publishing Co. 1907:9; Ronnenberg 1993:61)

In general, eighteenth-century brewers did their own malting, but for most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries brewers purchased malt from independent maltsters. By the end of the 1800s, however, some large breweries and syndicates had vertically integrated, returning to the practice of providing their own malt by acquiring or building malt houses. Although this basic process did not change, malting improved greatly after the Civil War. The use of thermometers to monitor floor drying was widespread. New floor materials, steeping casks, drying fans and kilns were invented and brought into common use. And by the end of the century, floor malting was largely discontinued in favor of mechanical pneumatic and drum-malting systems. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:63-75)

Even in small-scale operations, brewing was arranged to take advantage of gravity, thereby saving labor. Ground malt was typically elevated to hoppers or storage bins at the highest level of the brewhouse. It was then dropped into a mash tun with water, and from there the resulting liquid, called *wort*, was drained from each vessel to the next lower vessel, as it underwent each stage of



Images of a turn-of-the-nineteenth-century malt mill, left, and a mash tun with agitator, right, from Grundsätze der Bierbrauerei and One Hundred Years of Brewing, respectively.

preparation. A sale advertisement for a mid-eighteenth-century New Jersey brewery described its operation as “contrived for carrying the Liquor from Place to Place with ease, by the turning of a cock, or taking out of a Plug...” (Baron 1962:49)

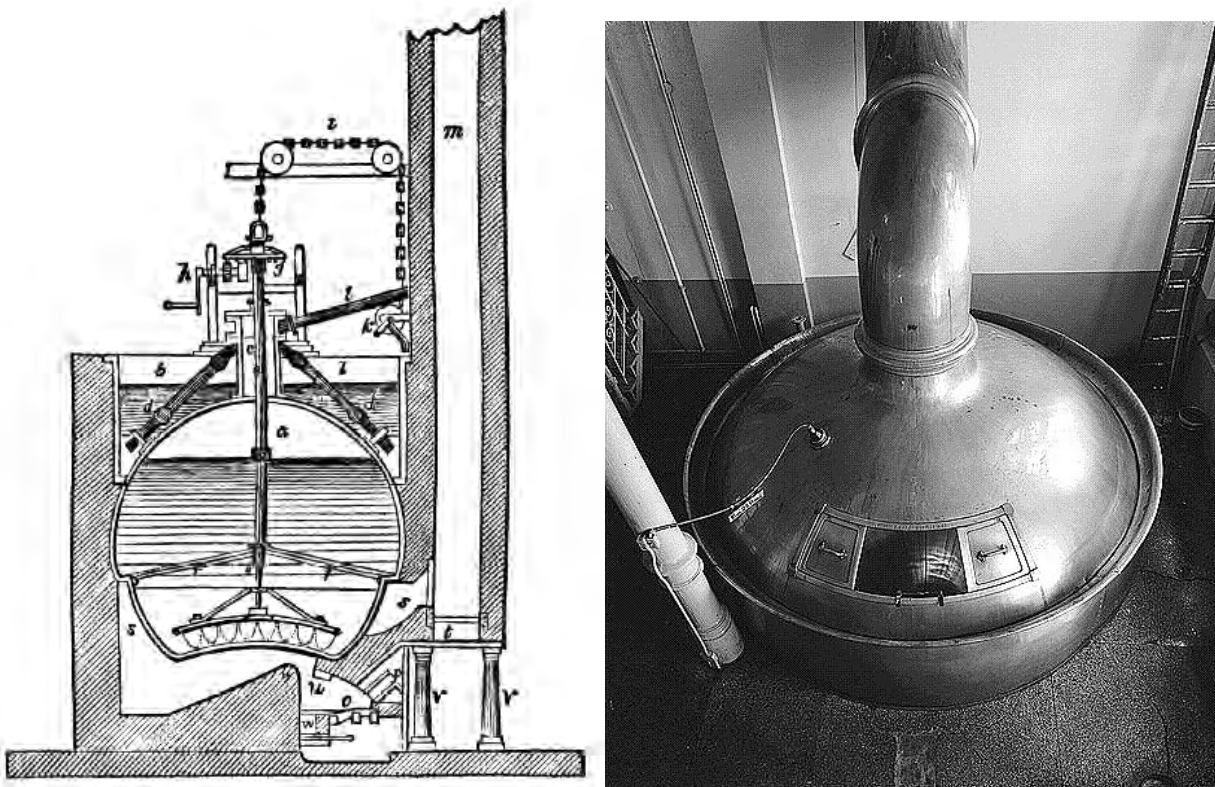
Barley malt was first crushed in a malt mill, then put into the large tub, known as a *mash tun*, for *mashing*. Hot water—between 140 and 190 degrees, depending on the type of beer being made—was pumped into the mash tun, and the mixture was agitated. This stirring helped release the malt’s starch from the kernels and broke it down into maltose, a fermentable complex sugar. The earliest method of mashing involved stirring by hand with a large oar. Gear-driven devices for this purpose were first employed in the eighteenth century and could be powered by hand, horse, or steam engine. After the first mash, the resultant liquid *wort* was released into a vessel called the *underback* or into a *brewing kettle*. At this point, hot water, usually five to ten degrees hotter than for the first mash, was added to the same malt in the tun, and it was again agitated. This procedure was usually repeated at least three times in order to extract as much starch as possible. It was a common practice in the early nineteenth century to keep separate the worts from the first and subsequent mashes. The first wort would obviously contain the greatest proportion of starch and went toward the brewing of the strongest beer; later mashes produced weaker beer. *Porter*, a hearty type of ale invented in England in the 1720s, was instead created from a mixture of successive, albeit strong, mashes. Lager beer brewers too, mixed the worts from different mashes for a more consistent product. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:81-82; Ronnenberg 1993:64)



Left: A "modern" mash tun, pictured in Western Brewer of June 1880. Right: A mid-nineteenth-century copper brew kettle, similar to that which Robert Portner would have used during the Civil War, from One Hundred Years of Brewing.

Brewers experimented much with the mashing process. The Scots, for instance, devised a method called *sparging*, which involved a prolonged first mash followed by the sprinkling of water over the malt several times so as to remove the remaining starch. The heating of the mash tun by steam coils was a later innovation. Also important was the invention of the perforated false bottom for the tun, which allowed the introduction of water from below and the easy drainage of the wort to the brew kettle. Other practices, such as the addition of milled raw grain to the malt and the use of corn

grits and rice for quick infusions of starch were commonly taken up by American brewers by the turn of the twentieth century. By then, most brewers had also begun to drain off individual mashes and return them to the tun for mixing and reheating at various but precise temperatures. Such procedures could produce optimal and consistent results in terms of density or *specific gravity* that would produce beer with the desired balance of color, body and alcoholic content. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:78-79, 82-85)



Left: A section of a mid-nineteenth-century brew kettle with firebox and flue. Right: A similar, late nineteenth-century, closed brew kettle at the Tivoli-Union Brewery of Denver. Historic American Engineering Record, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

Drained from the mash tun to the brew kettle, the wort was ready for *brewing* or *boiling*. Boiling helped further break down and dissolve the malt starch in preparation for fermentation. It also served to reduce the wort to its proper strength through evaporation and to separate out some of the unwanted particles. Brew kettles or *coppers* varied in size, shape, and whether they were open or closed vessels depending on the scale of production and the traditions and predilections of the brewer. Until after the Civil War most brew kettles were made of copper and were heated from below by wood fires. They were commonly encased in brick structures that contained a furnace whose flue rose behind the copper. Fire brewing was eventually superseded by the use of steam coils as the heat source. Steam brewing was found to be more even, steadier, cleaner, and more

labor- and fuel-efficient, although some brewers long claimed that fire-brewed beer was superior.¹ (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:87-89)

The wort was typically boiled for a time before the brewer added hops (*Humulus lupulus*). The female hop blossoms have at their base “a granular, resinous, bitter substance,” lupulin, which imparts to beer its bitter flavor and certain preservative qualities. The addition of hops also serves to clarify the wort. Much debated was the question of the timing of the addition of hops. “Gradually the conviction became general that long boiling would extract the coarser tastes from the hops while dispelling the more volatile and finer ones, shorter time of boiling became more general, hops were added in several lots, and the finest flavored ones left to the last.” (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:55; Siebel and Schwarz 1933:91)

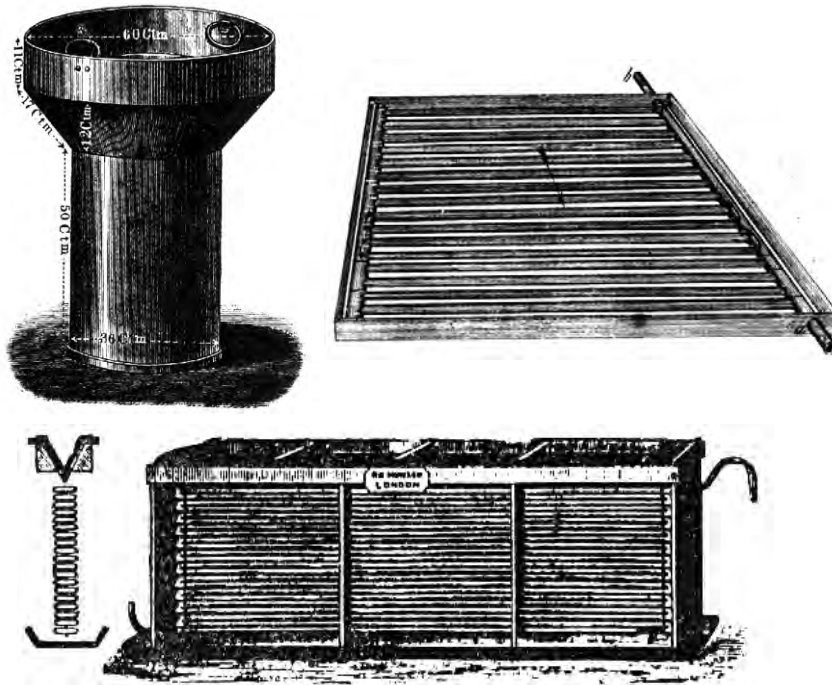
Boiling continued until the wort was completely “broken,” that is, until unwanted particles had clumped together and the wort had clarified. This required about three hours on average, or between one and five hours. The wort was then drained through a *hopjack* that strained out the hop leaves. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:89; Ronnenberg 1993:64)

The hot wort had to be brought down to a temperature proper for the introduction of yeast and the beginning of fermentation. The earliest method was simply to allow the wort to cool slowly to atmospheric temperature in open tanks or *backs*. This took several hours, however, and could expose the wort to “wild” airborne yeasts and bacteria that could spoil its taste. As a result, brewers tried many alternatives to open cooling. The most widely adopted solution was to run the wort over pipes through which circulated ice water. A more sophisticated device based on this principle was invented by the Frenchman Jean-Louis Baudelot in 1856. Variations on Baudelot’s invention were almost universally employed until ice water was replaced by other coolants, notably anhydrous ammonia and later, freon. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:91-92; Thevenot 1979:76)

Sufficiently cooled, the wort was ready for the fermenting tuns and the last step of manufacture, which would transform it to beer. *Fermentation* is the process of the conversion, by yeasts or other organisms, of sugar to alcohol and carbon dioxide. It provides beer with its mild alcoholic content and foamy head. Although it can certainly be said for the whole of the brewing process, the conduct of fermentation especially had always been more of an art than a science. Brewers kept and propagated yeast cultures for the purpose, but they had understood neither the nature nor agency in fermentation of the yeast organism. In fact, it was not until the research of Louis Pasteur and Emil Christian Hansen that pure yeast was isolated and the two main types of brewer’s yeasts were identified. Pasteur’s work on microbiology finally explained the previously inexplicable sourness of many a new batch of beer as resulting from exposure to wild yeasts and other microorganisms in the air. Before Dr. Hansen identified the brewer’s yeasts, brewers found that individual yeast cultures acted differently, promoted different tastes, and performed their function best at divergent temperatures. Many brewers, including the English, fermented beer at temperatures between 55 and 65 degrees Fahrenheit. During the process, the yeast (*Saccharomyces cerevisiae*) would rise to the surface of the beer where it was skimmed off for future use. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the Germans had cultivated a strain of yeast

¹ A Stroh’s advertising campaign of the mid 1980s touted that brewery’s “fire-brewed” beer.

(*Saccharomyces carlsbergensis*) that, at significantly lower temperatures, slightly above 40 degrees, would settle to the bottom of the tun and ferment the brew more slowly. Although American brewers had generally followed the English practice of top fermentation, bottom fermentation quickly caught on after the introduction of lager beer by German immigrants in 1840. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:96; Kelley 1965:444-445)



Wort cooling devices before artificial refrigeration. Far left: An attenuator or "swimmer." Left: A circa 1825 cooler which used ice water or brine. Images from One Hundred Years of Brewing. Lower left: An improved "Baudelot" cooler, post-1856, pictured in The Western Brewer, June 1880.

The relatively higher temperatures at which the English-style beers could be fermented permitted their production at ambient atmospheric temperatures in most parts of Great Britain and the United States during much of the year. In contrast, lager beer, which became increasingly popular with each passing decade, needed a cooler environment in which to complete fermentation successfully. Brewers were generally restricted to operating during the colder months and, prior to the invention of artificial refrigeration, they used underground cellars and liberal amounts of ice to achieve and maintain the requisite temperatures. Beer cellars were made from modified natural caves, were excavated and constructed of masonry, or were cut out of solid rock. Subterranean cellars offered cool—but not freezing—temperatures and insulation. By the addition of natural ice to the cellar, brewers and their cellarmen could further lower the temperature. Only after the adoption of artificial refrigeration could brewers properly ferment their lagers above ground.

Generally, the fermentation of beer consists of three stages: the principal fermentation, in which the bulk of the malt sugar is converted to alcohol and carbonic acid; the secondary fermentation, during which carbon dioxide builds up and many impurities are eliminated; and the fining stage, in which the beer is finished, becoming clarified and fully “ripe.” Primary fermentation was conducted in large vats called fermenting tuns. Open-top tuns were traditional for German brewers. These

vessels could be located inside or outside of the cellar. Fermenting tuns beyond the refrigerated environment of the beer cellar could be cooled by the introduction of *attemperators* or “swimmers.” Attemperators were used prior to the use of artificial refrigeration and were essentially large metal buckets of ice that floated in the wort and cooled it by conduction. This principal fermentation of lager beer came to be conducted at 41 to 43 degrees Fahrenheit and would occur in three stages lasting a total of perhaps 25 to 30 hours. Upon completion of the primary fermentation, the beer was “racked over” into large *ruh*—or rest—casks for the secondary fermentation in the cellars, during which some of the yeast and other sediment would settle out, and the carbon dioxide content would increase. Freshly brewed wort was often added to beer during the secondary fermentation in order to “freshen” or invigorate it to create a more effervescent product. This process is called *kräusening*. These first two fermentation stages would generally take from seven to ten days total. Finally, the beer was transferred to another set of casks, the chip casks, for clarification or *fining* at a temperature of about 40 degrees. These casks were partially filled with beech or maple tree shavings to which unwanted particles, sediment, and leftover yeast would adhere. Fining by these “chips” was an American innovation of about 1860, although the Germans and English had previously used for clarification the gelatinous substance isinglass from the air bladders of sturgeon. Of course, a beer could be rushed and undergo essentially no aging, or it could be held for up to six months, in the case of some American lagers. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:98-102; Thevenot 1979:76; *Washington Post* March 13, 1898).

At the end of fermentation, rest, and aging the beer was finished. It could then be racked off into barrels or bottles for storage, sale or transport. Thereafter lager beer was kegged or bottled and was considered best when kept and served at around 40 degrees. Late nineteenth-century advances in bottle manufacturing, pasteurization, closures, and mechanized bottling speeded the preparation of beer for sale and made possible a much increased durability and broad distribution of a company’s product. (Thomas 1887:17; see Chapter 7 for more information on technological innovation during the nineteenth century, and see Chapters 8 and 11 for more information on marketing and distribution)

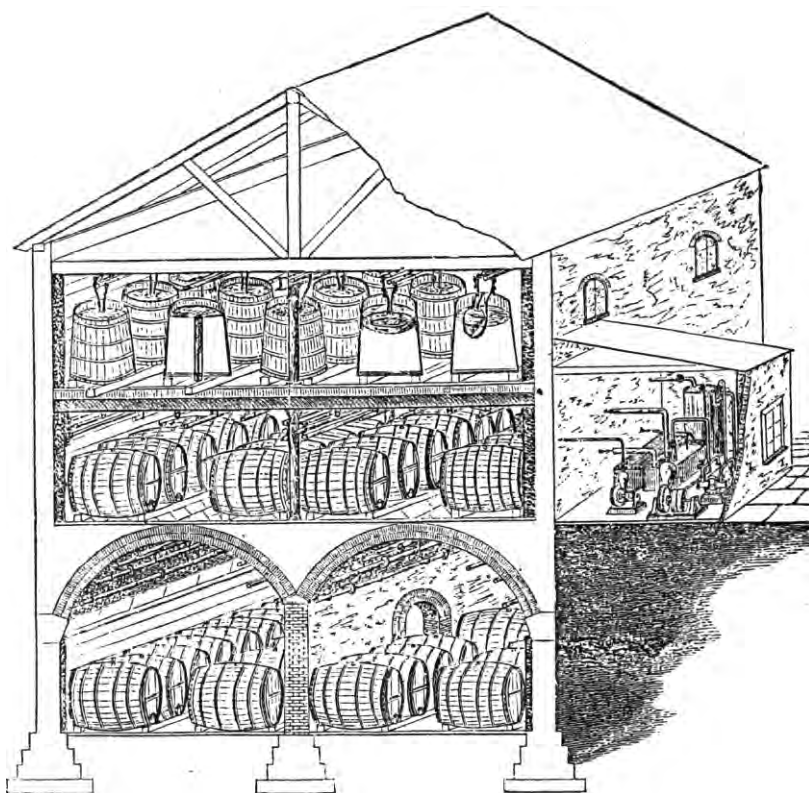
Clear and gold in color, somewhat dry and moderately hopped, lager is by far the most popular variety of beer in the world and has been for more than a century. The Philadelphian John Wagner was the first person known to brew lager in America, in 1840. From then on, most immigrant German brewers opened lager breweries. While lager consumption in America grew rapidly, it did not make serious inroads into the popularity of the English-style beers until the mid-1850s. By 1860 lager beer production still constituted less than one quarter of the total malt liquor production in the United States. During the Civil War, German soldiers’ demand for beer encouraged the establishment of lager breweries, such as Portner & Company, even in the Southern states, and non-Germans were exposed to the new beer. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:207; Baron 1962:186; Ronnenberg 1993:12; Siebel and Schwarz 1933:57; Schlüter 1910:58)

When introduced to America, bottom-fermented beers were of two somewhat different types, winter beer and summer beer, named for the seasons in which the beer was ready for consumption. Summer beer was brewed in the coldest months of December, January and February, and for that reason was cooled to a lower temperature, and its fermentation was conducted more slowly than that of winter beer. Winter beer was produced in the comparatively warmer months of October,

November, March, and April. Technically, only summer beer was true lager. The distinction between summer and winter beer was soon obscured and forgotten in the U.S., however; bottom fermentation quickly became synonymous with lager beer. Thus, there are many varieties that are now made by the lagering process. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:100)

Ultimately, it was the introduction of artificial refrigeration that permitted year-round production of lager beer anywhere in the world and secured its universal popularity. The particular tastes of the American public have encouraged the production of beer that is much paler and more lightly hopped than that of the mid nineteenth century and with less alcohol, less sediment, and a more lasting head of foam. Since the late 1800s most American brewers have added rice and corn to their barley malt to provide a lighter golden color and a cheap, plentiful and quick source of fermentable starch suitable for use with American varieties of barley.

In addition to ales and lagers, some Alexandria brewers also produced *weiss* ("white") beer, a German variety made principally from wheat meal (the varieties of beer produced by Portner and other Alexandria brewers will be covered in more detail in Chapter 11).



Fermenting tuns, chip casks and aging casks in an ice house/cellar of the 1880s pictured in The Western Brewer.

Notice the compressor at the right; refrigeration systems such as this were one innovation of Robert Portner's (see Chapter 7).

Chapter 3

The early life of Robert Portner, 1837-1860

Writing down my life history, I fulfill a long desire... The reason for writing is that my beloved children should know the story of their parents as my only duty in life is to educate my children to become able and good human beings, as the other things I wanted to obtain from life, I have reached with full satisfaction. I only want to send my children with good knowledge and education in life so that my family tree, which has been removed to America, will bear good branches and fruits.

Introduction to Robert Portner's memoirs

By the early 1850s the Portner family had fallen on hard times. Of humble origins,¹ the family had nonetheless become ensconced among the middle-class burghers of the medieval town of Rahden, in the northeast corner of Westphalia, by virtue of Heinrich Portner's service in the war against Napoleon. As a young man in the Prussian army under Field Marshal Blücher, Heinrich distinguished himself in battle. As a result, he was later given the position of court clerk of Rahden, a town whose economy depended mainly upon linen production and the grain raised on surrounding farms. A job in the government bureaucracy paid modestly, but Heinrich ultimately saved enough capital to open his own business. Thus financially secure, he married Henriette Gelcker, daughter of the local tax assessor. Her father bought them a house on the Mühlendamm ("Mill Dam"), one of the more respectable streets in the "Little Village" section of town, and they proceeded to have a large family of two daughters and six sons. Again because of Portner's many years of government service, at least some of the sons, including the sixth child, Robert, born March 20, 1837, were sent to the military school at Annaburg Castle in Saxony to be educated at public expense. (Portner n.d.:3; Tyler 1909:350; *The Western Brewer* June 1880; Kirchhoff 1995:106-107)

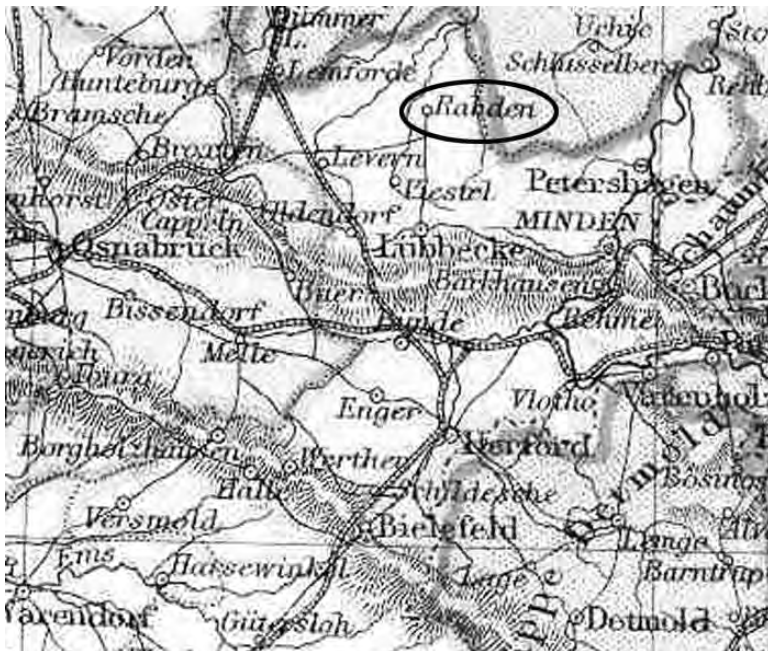
Busy at court, Heinrich left his business in the charge of his brother-in-law, August Gelcker. August, more skilled at practical jokes than at management, soon drove it into the ground. In 1845 the family had to sell nearly everything they owned to satisfy the debts and were thereafter forced to rely upon Heinrich's salary alone. At the time, most of the children had still not reached the age of majority. (Portner n.d.:3)

The situation only became bleaker. Heinrich passed away less than three years later, likely from cancer. The family managed as well as it could thereafter. Henriette Portner may have received financial assistance from her relatives, and her eldest son began a career in the army. A gunner in the Prussian artillery, he undoubtedly sent home some of his pay, but he was killed accidentally in war games, depriving Mrs. Portner of "a great help and support." (Portner n.d.:3)

¹ The name Pörtner (or its High German variant, Pfortner) means "porter" or "doorman," suggesting that an ancestor had had that humble occupation. (Sherwin 1999)



“Stone Street” and Saint John’s Church in Rahden, Westphalia, 1907. Rahden City Archives.



A detail of an 1882 military map of the western part of the Prussian empire, including portions of the states of Westphalia, Lippe-Detmold, and Brunswick. Rahden, Westphalia is near the top center.

All this was occurring within the context of generally difficult times in the German states. Serious crop failures alternating with occasional bumper crops led to short food supplies and produced great privation in the countryside and towns. Taxes, which helped pay the salary of Heinrich Portner and for the education of his sons, were prohibitively high, a consequence of the Napoleonic Wars and aggravated by the trade barriers and redundancy of political administration in the petty states of Europe. Meanwhile, Germany and Austria, like much of Europe, were in the throes of political crises; revolutions and protest movements against the authoritarian monarchies were quickly and sometimes brutally suppressed in the early 1830s and in 1848. Many liberal and socialist dissidents were forced to flee to other countries. One result of these problems was a surge in emigration, especially to the United States. After 1820, 85 to 90 percent of all German emigrants sailed to American shores. During the decade following the 1848 revolution alone, more than 1,000,000 Germans arrived in the U.S., principally seeking economic opportunity. This huge wave, which peaked in 1853-1854, consisted mainly of farmers and craftsmen motivated by overpopulation in rural areas. (Johnson 1997:207; Palmer and Colton 1978:451, 476-480; Holborn 1969:5-7, 14, 122-123; Miller and Faux 1997:97; Behr 1996:64)

Augusta, the eldest daughter of Heinrich and Augusta Portner, married Carl Augustus Strangmann, a native Hanoverian who had lived in New York City for a decade and there manufactured furniture and refined sugar.² One can only guess at the stories of exotic urban America with which Strangmann regaled his teenage brothers-in-law, firing their youthful imaginations. With conditions as they were at home, and facing the prospect of imminent compulsory military service, it is no wonder that the boys soon joined the multitudes of their countrymen crossing the Atlantic. The second oldest Portner son, Louis, born 1825, emigrated first, arriving in New York in 1848. He tried his hand at baking pies and selling liquor before removing to Williamsburg, Virginia, where he bought a small tobacco factory in 1854. Unsuccessful, he returned to New York shortly thereafter, again engaged in the liquor business and local politics, and died just before 1880. The next oldest, Hermann, followed, first working in Louis's pie bakery and then spending some time in Savannah, Georgia, where he contracted a fatal case of yellow fever. He died in a Staten Island hospital in 1854. (Portner n.d.:3-4; Genealogical Publishing Company 1906:169; United States Census 1870d; Trow 1853; Trow 1854; Wilson 1855; Wilson 1856; Wilson 1857; Wilson 1861; Wilson 1862; Trow 1879)

Despite the precariousness of business and even life in nineteenth-century America, it must have offered a brighter prospect than Germany, and this promise lured the younger Portner sons. Their hometown was a backwater with a population already leveled by emigration. Near the end of 1852 Louis and Hermann wrote to Carl and Robert, asking them to join him in New York. Then about eighteen and sixteen years old, respectively, the boys were at an age where they faced likely military conscription. The older brothers had included tickets for the passage, and so in 1853 the teenagers set out on the short journey from Rahden to the North Sea port of Bremen, where they embarked on the schooner *Amaranth*.³ A family legend relates that while aboard ship, the young Robert tossed his few coins into the sea, vowing to begin a career in the United

² That is to say, Carl Strangmann, Sr., the father of the man who would later serve as "C.E.O." of the Robert Portner Brewing Company.

³ That year, the Rahden area suffered another bad harvest and outside speculation in grain that caused a food shortage among the poor. The town was forced to buy and distribute rye to the destitute. (Kirchhoff 1995:193)

States without a *Pfennig* from the Old World and to succeed by dint of hard work alone. It is a charming but unlikely tale, uncharacteristic of the thrifty and practical future businessman. The boys landed June 27, 1853.⁴ The ship manifest suggests that they intended to work for Louis, listing the occupations of these young men, just out of school, as bakers. Indeed, they stayed with and worked for Louis for several weeks. (Portner n.d.:4; Valaer 1969; Glazier and Filby 1989:171; Kirchhoff 1995:103,193)

In 1853 there was certainly no foretelling the future success of Robert Portner.⁵ This teenage immigrant—five feet nine inches tall, with light blue eyes, light brown hair, and a fair complexion, who spoke only German and spent his first days in a new country elbow deep in pie dough—was in many ways no different from his peers, his brothers and millions of other Germans. Yet perhaps he *was* different. Well educated and ramrod straight from his five years at the Annaburg military academy, young Robert was gifted with considerable native intelligence and learning ability. Progressing from job to job, first as grocery clerk and then as a bookkeeper in a Brooklyn factory,⁶ he quickly learned to speak, read and write English from interactions with Americans and from reading the New York papers. And he would soon develop considerable business acumen from his many small enterprises. (Portner n.d.:4; Department of State)

The summer of 1855 saw Robert in Williamsburg, Virginia, where Louis had already set up his little tobacco products factory. Robert toiled six months as a salesman. Then, taking his earnings and pawning the gold watch he inherited from brother Hermann, he started his first business. It was essentially small-time tobacco wholesaling—buying cut plug and chewing tobacco, wrapping it in tin foil, and traveling around the countryside by wagon selling it to groceries and restaurants. He later claimed to have invented a new sort of cigarette paper at the time.⁷ Robert earned about \$3 a day, many times what he was making upon his arrival in the U.S. So successful was he, in fact, that Louis borrowed all of his savings to keep the factory going. Robert then decided to take on a partner who offered \$150 in capital and a chance to divide the labor. The partner turned out to be an alcoholic, however, and sold little. Discouraged, Robert walked away from the enterprise and returned to New York broke—one of his first hard lessons in business. (Portner n.d.:4-5; *Manassas Journal* June 1, 1906)

At the beginning of 1856, Robert Portner returned to the grocery where he had started out, but was not satisfied with his \$15 monthly pay. Encouraged by friends, he borrowed some money

⁴ The translation of Portner’s memoirs appears confused about the departure and arrival dates of the ship, said to be July 3 and February 1, respectively. The dates are more believable in reverse, but still excessive, and the information from the ship’s manifest has to be considered more credible as it was recorded at the time and not, like Portner’s memoirs, begun sixteen years later and subsequently translated and transcribed. The Portners’ arrival occurred more than two years prior to the opening of Castle Garden, New York City’s first official immigrant receiving station.

⁵ Two sources—one a posthumous secondary source, and another, a single building permit application not completed by Portner himself—give Robert Portner’s middle initial as “A.,” although he appears to have used no middle initial in his signature, and most sources are silent on the matter. If he had a middle name at all, the name August is a possibility, as it is a common enough German name and one frequent within the Portners’ extended family. (Work Projects Administration 1941:121; District of Columbia Building Permits)

⁶ The factory apparently manufactured items, such as combs and buttons, from animal bone, a cheap, easily worked and commonly used material, a “plastic” of its day.

⁷ Portner and John N. Sigel did receive a patent for an improvement in waterproofing paper, but Sigel was credited as the inventor, and the patent application was dated 1864. (United States Patent and Trademark Office 1864)

and purchased a restaurant across the street for \$150. Only four months later he sold it to lend his brother Carl money for a half share in a new pie bakery. Robert served as the bakery's bookkeeper and salesman. Then Carl's partner bought him out, but Robert remained with the firm six more months, into late 1857. At the time of Carl's death in 1873, he had still not paid back his younger brother—another lesson not lost on Robert. Like many recent immigrants and their fellow German-Americans, the Portners supported each other, but Robert makes it clear that that support sometimes seemed a little too one-sided. (Portner n.d.:4,5)



A copy of a circa 1860s photograph of Robert Portner. The photograph is in the possession of the Portner family, and was reproduced with the translation of his memoirs.

Robert desired independence from his brothers and found a home for himself at 148 Chambers Street. In the spring of 1858 he partnered with an acquaintance, a Swiss by the name of Nicholas Hoffman, and opened a café. The men were quite successful, but Hoffman left at the end of 1859 to marry an affluent widow and manage a business she owned. A few months later Portner sold the restaurant for

\$1,650 cash. Already with years of hard work behind him and memories of the difficult times of his youth, that pocket full of gold made Robert Portner feel like “the richest man in the world.” With his newfound wealth he started a new enterprise, a liquor store at 272 Greenwich Street. (Portner n.d.:5-6; Wilson 1856; Wilson 1861; Wilson 1862)

He expected to stay settled a while. Robert was quickly assimilating into the culture of his adopted country. His English had improved immensely, and he took the oath of American citizenship October 20, 1859. He also became active in politics. Like many Northern, wage-earning, recent immigrants, Robert could identify with the young, anti-slavery, pro-industry Republican Party. He voted Republican in the November elections and, with the milestone 1860 campaign approaching, he set up a meeting place for the local Republican club and served as its secretary. Portner could not have known how the repercussions of that election would affect the course of his life and the history of the entire nation. (Portner n.d.:5-6; National Archives and Records Administration, Index to Naturalization Petitions)

Chapter 4

John Barleycorn goes to war, 1861-1865

*Dem Deutschen mens mit Sigel's¹ band
At fighting have no rival;
Und ven Cheff Davis mens we meet,
We schlauch ,em like de tuyvil;
Dere's only vong ting vot I fear
Ven pattling for der Eagle,
I von't get not no lager beer
Ven I goes to fight mit Sigel.
From "I Goes to Fight Mit Sigel"²*

As Robert Portner opened his little liquor store in lower Manhattan, portents of a civil war were appearing much further south. Many Southerners were growing hostile to the idea of remaining in the Union—disadvantaged as they were by tariffs that protected northern industrialists but raised consumer prices and fearful of erosion of their Congressional representation because of the North's rapid population growth. Most important, however, was an increasingly bitter conflict over the prospect of the expansion of slavery. Beginning with the controversy over slaveholding in the Louisiana Territory, the federal government managed to paper over differences through a series of legislative compromises and a Congressional gag rule on the introduction of anti-slavery legislation. But the genie could not be kept in the bottle. The dispute over permitting slavery in Kansas Territory erupted into armed conflict between partisans in 1855. And in October 1859—a few days before Robert Portner became an American citizen and nearly four years after he left Virginia—John Brown led his famous raid on the federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry.

The proximate cause of the American Civil War was the election of Abraham Lincoln as President. To the South, Lincoln was the anti-slavery candidate and the agent of a Republican-led regime inimical to the region's interests. To many Southerners, the election of the Republican candidate presented a stark choice, "submission or secession." (McPherson 1988:213) Indeed, Lincoln's election triggered a secession movement initiated by South Carolina and ending with the declaration of the Confederate States of America, the capture of Fort Sumter, the calling up of Union volunteers, and open warfare.

¹ Major General Franz Sigel graduated from the Karlsrühe Military Academy and served in the Prussian Army. He fled Germany in 1848 because of his part as a leader of the failed revolution of that year. Commissioned an officer at the beginning of the Civil War because of his status as a prominent German, anti-slavery Unionist, he acquitted himself well at the Battle of Pea Ridge. He was relieved of field command, however, after his defeat at the Battle of New Market in 1864. He later became editor and publisher of a New York German language newspaper. As the highest-ranking German in the U.S. Army, Sigel had a great deal to do with rallying his countrymen to the Union cause.

² The humorous dialect song was composed to the tune of the old English air "The Girl I Left Behind Me" with new lyrics by J. Fitch Poole.

“At first, everybody thought that the soldiers would come and then the South would give in right away, the war then being over,” Robert Portner wrote. “But things developed differently.” Carl Portner was among the first volunteers who signed up for three months’ service, mustering into Captain Henry Heitmann’s Company B of the 5th New York State Militia Regiment at Washington on May 16, 1861. Commanded by Colonel Christian Schwarzwaldler, the unit occupied Arlington Heights eight days later and then was transferred to western Maryland before being mustered out in New York in August. The Portners’ cousins Wilhelm and Otto Burbaum had also enlisted, joining Louis Blenker’s all-German Eighth New York Infantry.³ Despite his father’s and eldest brother’s military backgrounds and his own military school education, Robert had no taste for soldiering. But he liked the idea of visiting the battlefields. His motivation was more than mere voyeurism; he was also seeking opportunity. Even purveying an article as popular as liquor, Portner’s New York store had not done very well, and for whatever reason, the war “br[ought] the business to a standstill.” One of his German friends, Frederick Recker, had a similar notion to see the theater of war. With the backing of liquor and cigar merchant John Flaacke, the two men left for Washington, D.C. in September 1861 to seek a favorable situation for a store. (Portner n.d.:6; New York Adjutant-General’s Office 1864:190,415; National Archives and Records Administration, Military Service and Pension Records; Phisterer 1912; Wilson 1863; Wilson 1864)

But we looked there in vain for a suitable place. Everything was taken, and at that time Washington was only a small town with about 50,000 inhabitants, with dirty streets and no beautiful houses. Only when Congress was in session were there many people, and of course now it was crowded with soldiers. After we had stayed there about five or six days, I had an opportunity to cross the bridge to Virginia in a sutler’s waggon. As I had no passport—without which nobody could cross the bridge—this was the only way for me to get to Virginia.⁴

Near Alexandria, I went to see my cousin Wilhelm Burbaum and stayed overnight with him in his tent. The next morning I went to Alexandria. The city was deserted because most of the inhabitants had fled south. Most of the stores were closed. There was a large army stationed in the neighborhood and would—as I figured—be stationed there for a long time to come. That was the reason why I decided to open a business there. (Portner n.d.:6)

Alexandria, strategically important as a rail hub, river port and a line of defense for Washington, had been held by the Union army since Virginia ratified its ordinance of secession. The army quickly consolidated its position, building fortifications and settling down to an occupation in earnest. In contrast to Washington, Alexandria did seem deserted. The residents of the old, red-

³ There are no military service records or military pension records on file at the National Archives for Otto Burbaum; the author assumes that Otto joined the same unit as his brother Wilhelm, and he was killed early in the war. Wilhelm or “William” Burbaum, 22, was mustered into Captain Augustus Thum’s Company G for two years’ service on April 23, 1861. (New York Adjutant-General’s Office 1864:190)

⁴ Sutlers were private merchants appointed to a regiment in order to sell goods, beyond the military ration, to the soldiers. The Potomac River crossing Portner took was, of course, the Long Bridge, which once stood approximately where the Fourteenth Street Bridge is located now.

brick seaport town were overwhelmingly loyal to Virginia and ultimately sympathetic to secession once Lincoln called up troops to put down the nascent rebellion. About two thirds of the citizens fled southward, many to join the Confederate army, and others to escape expected reprisals and abuse by the occupying army. Surely, many expected and all hoped that they would soon return. Washington, on the other hand, offered no vacancies and high rents, filled as it was with soldiers, office seekers, correspondents, opportunists and camp followers. So Portner and Recker instantly agreed to open a store in Alexandria. They committed to buying a grocery at the southeast corner of King and Saint Asaph Streets. Its former owner, J.E. Douglass, was a slaveholder who had fled south. The government seized his property and asked \$1,000 for the remainder of the goods and equipment, “practically everything that was of value had already been sold.” But their backer, John Flaacke, refused to risk lending the partners money or delivering goods to one of the seceded states, something “he regretted this very much later on.” Able to scrape up only \$250 of his own, Robert Portner returned to New York fearful that he could not raise a \$500 down payment. He appealed to a merchant friend, Louis Mueller, who freely lent \$500 cash, unsecured, and extended credit for the purchase of goods to stock the new store. (Portner n.d.:6-7; Alexandria Real and Personal Property Assessments)



Union troops advancing to occupy Alexandria, May 1861. Harper's Weekly.

Four months later we paid [Mueller] back everything, but I shall be eternally grateful to this man. As a matter of fact, later on when he came to visit us, I gave him a beautiful horse, a deed which was greatly appreciated by him. With my \$500

in gold, carried in a belt around my waist, I arrived very happily back in Washington. The very next day—September 21, 1861—we opened our store. At first, we had but little to sell, but we had ordered enough. So we displayed our few goods as well as possible in order to let the empty shelves appear full. The first day we only saw some citizens pass the house, and we took in two dollars from soldiers; the next day it was nine [dollars]; and when we had butter and cheese to sell, we already did such nice business with the inhabitants that soon we were almost sold out....

On closing the books for 1861, we realized that we had already earned three thousand dollars, and we were able to buy large quantities of goods; although it was very difficult to get the goods from New York by railroad or ship, we succeeded in receiving more and more goods, and many a time I drove to Washington early in the morning to get a cargo of oranges and lemons and sold them the same morning to sutlers, whose requirements we were always anxious to meet first. (Portner n.d.:7)

Portner considered the partnership successful. “Recker was a good businessman; and although a little too [fastidious], he was otherwise a fairly nice man, and we always got along well and never quarreled. He liked to take care of the shipping and the retail selling, while I handled the other things—money, books, and buying. In 1862, we had already made about \$10,000 and had a sound business.” Before long, Portner could claim to have the largest grocery business in town. (Portner n.d.:7)

Alexandria Gazette
advertisement for
Portner & Recker's
grocery, June 1862.

PORTNER & RECKER'S
GROCERY STORE,
NO 146 KING STREET,
(*J. E. Douglass's Old Stand.*)

P RIME NEW YORK CHEESE, by the box,
at 9 cents.
Prime New York Cheese, by the box, at 10c.
Do. do do do 11c.
Prime Goshen Butter, by the tub, at 16c.
Do. do do 19c.
Do. do do 22c.

je 7—1w*

In fact, the business had expanded enough that the work was too much for two men. Robert gave up his New York liquor store, turning it over to his brother Louis. In late 1861 Recker returned from New York with a horse and wagon to be used for transporting goods to the army regiments in the countryside. He also brought along a twenty-year-old, German-born clerk, Bette Edward Julius Eils, who would become an important friend and associate of Portner. Carl Portner and the recently

immigrated, youngest Portner brother, Otto, also came to Alexandria to help out.⁵ Carl later led some of the firm's selling excursions to the Army of the Potomac in the field, and Otto represented Robert's business interests while the latter journeyed home to Germany in 1863.⁶ (Portner n.d.:7-9; Internal Revenue Assessments 1862-1866; District of Columbia Supreme Court; Wilson 1861)

"There were hectic days; sometimes there were only a few soldiers in our district, while at other times there were many. Fort Lyon, Fort Ellsworth and all the other forts on the surrounding hills were occupied. We provided the sutlers with beer—which we had shipped from New York—and with other goods." The presence of the army made Alexandria a wartime boomtown. By the middle of the conflict, "Rents [were] higher in this place, at this time, than they have ever been within the recollection of the oldest resident." Beer and other alcoholic beverages were in great demand by soldiers and citizens alike and were very profitable. An inadequate supply of transportation, shipping restrictions upon such articles, and guards at the Potomac crossings made the beverages scarce in Alexandria. (Portner n.d.:7; Miller 1987:225; United States Senate 1864)

Among the steady customers of Portner & Recker was caterer Wilhelm Eduard "Edward" Abner. A 28-year-old native of Wiesbaden, Abner, like Portner and Recker, had immigrated to New York in the mid 1850s and had come South for employment during the war. He was under contract as the caterer and provisioner of the headquarters of Brigadier General William B. Franklin.⁷ Franklin led a brigade in the defenses of Washington, including at First Battle of Bull Run, and was given command of a division in August 1861 and then the entire Sixth Army Corps. In 1861-1862 his division was mainly stationed in the vicinity of Alexandria, and Abner tried to satisfy his customers' particular interest in beer. When Portner and Recker's supplies got low, he suggested that the partners brew their own. Abner even introduced them to a friend named Kaercher, a brewer by training.⁸ And so Portner, Recker, Abner and Kaercher agreed to pool their resources and

⁵ Carl arrived in 1862 and Otto by spring 1863. Otto was three years Robert's junior and had immigrated to the United States in 1857. (Alexandria Real and Personal Property Tax Assessments; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866; United States Census 1870a; United States Census 1900b; *New York Times* May 24, 1863)

⁶ Robert Portner returned to his hometown, Rahden, Westphalia, in June 1863, sailing from New York May 23. One purpose of his trip was to recuperate from an illness that he took to be malaria. A German doctor diagnosed liver troubles. This is the first mention of chronic and apparently stress-aggravated maladies that continued to plague him until his death. Ironically, shortly after his recovery and return to Alexandria, Robert was hit in the elbow by a bullet accidentally discharged by a man cleaning his pistol. Fortunately, the spent ball did little damage. Robert's visit to Germany was also the last occasion to see his mother, who died in 1869. He also visited his sister, Felixine, who would accompany him back to America, and his eldest sister, Augusta, whose son, Carl Strangmann, Jr., would later emigrate and progress from a teenage shipping clerk to the secretary-treasurer, board member and chief executive officer of the Robert Portner Brewing Company. Despite being a U.S. citizen, Portner heard while in Germany that he was to be arrested for not reporting for military duty under the Prussians' universal conscription law. Nothing came of the threat, however. (Portner n.d.:5,8,17; *New York Times* May 24, 1863)

⁷ This probably explains why Abner's name has not been found as a regimental sutler among tax records, shipping records, licenses, or regimental histories of Army of the Potomac units. (Dennee n.d.)

⁸ Portner does not provide Kaercher's first name. In fact, there were three men in Alexandria in the 1860s with similar last names, John Kaercher (or Kircher), Andrew Kaercher (or Kaircher), and Gottlieb Kircher (or Kircherer or Kitcher). John Kaercher had a beer garden in Washington during the war and may not have come to Alexandria until early 1865, when he briefly operated a tavern, the Nebraska Restaurant at 275 King Street. Alexandria Water Company records showed that he occupied a building only one or two doors away from the King Street brewery in mid 1867—and Portner does state that a partner was becoming preoccupied with running an inn next to the brewery at the end of the war. A John Kaercher or Karcher was also operating a Philadelphia brewery before 1874. On the

establish a small brewery. Portner and Recker shared a one-third interest, while Abner and Kaercher each controlled one third—although Abner later stated his share to be one half, perhaps reflecting a subsequent transaction between him and the brewmaster. In return, Portner and Recker received an interest in Abner’s business.⁹ But Kaercher was broke, and Portner’s account suggests that Abner’s money was tied up. Kaercher’s contribution was apparently his labor and know-how. Abner’s was mainly his connections and his position to retail the product, but he later claimed to have contributed all his spare cash to the enterprise. The men rented an old flour warehouse owned by Philip H. Hooff and located at the northeast corner of King and Fayette Streets. The total initial capital investment was \$960, including the purchase of a nine-barrel, copper brew kettle. By casting lots, the partners came up with the firm name of Portner & Company, although one source refers to Portner as a silent partner at this point. Portner had primary responsibility for keeping the books, while Kaercher did the actual brewing, and Abner was absent with his unit. (Portner n.d.:7-8,12; *Evening Star* n.d. [January 1909]; Nemeth 2005; Dennee n.d.; United States Census 1870e; *The Western Brewer* June 1880; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:402; Erickson 1988; Hopkins 1877; Elliott & Nye 1852)

The brewhouse itself was similar to most earlier Alexandria breweries in that it was not purpose-built. Like them, it occupied the large, undifferentiated space of an older warehouse. In fact, the structure was probably quite similar to several extant King Street and Union Street warehouses. Constructed of load-bearing brick and timber, it stood two or two and a half stories tall. A party wall divided a front section (then number 279 King Street) from a rear one (then 3 North Fayette Street). The partners may have installed some of the brewing equipment on platforms in order to maximize the energy savings inherent in the use of gravity to move the beer through each stage of processing, and therefore required the assistance of only one pump. The huge beams of the typical warehouse could also support the firm’s malt hoppers and other storage on the second floor. The first floor would have contained the brewing vessels, firebox, a mill for grinding malt, and possibly an elevator or hoist for moving the malt to the upper story. Steam power was employed before 1867, with an engine and boiler installed in the rear section of the building. This back portion may also have housed the wort coolers beneath a rooftop ventilator. The main block of the warehouse contained an office where orders were taken and Portner labored over the books. (Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Books X-3:513; Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Books X-3:513, Y-3:204 and Z-3:58; Alexandria Water Company)

A notable and confusing aspect of Portner’s account is the fact that he places the establishment of the brewery around February 1863, with the first beer finished in April of that year. Abner later reported that it opened “near the close of the war.” Two primary sources, however, indicate that the brewery actually opened a year earlier than Portner reported. The Alexandria Water Company installed a supply line to the Hooff warehouse while Portner & Company was tenant, on or about

other hand, Andrew Kaercher was likely the brewmaster, because his capitation assessment is listed next to Otto Portner’s in the Alexandria tax records for 1864. John Kaercher was likely a relative of Andrew and possibly already a former Philadelphia brewer. Gottlieb Kircher was a farmer and butcher in the village of West End but also had a home in town. (*Daily National Republican* October 2, 1861; Alexandria Real and Personal Property Tax Assessments; Boyd 1867; Alexandria Water Company; Van Wieren 1995:336,339; *Alexandria Gazette* May 21, 1866)

⁹ Recker also independently owned a half interest in a bowling alley, at least during 1863. (Internal Revenue Service 1862-1866).

March 15, 1862. In addition, Portner & Company's product was assessed under the new federal excise tax law beginning in autumn 1862. It would seem that the only possible explanations for the discrepancy are a memory or writing error by Portner or a transcription error by the translator of his memoirs.¹⁰ (Portner n.d.:8; *Evening Star* n.d. [January 1909]; Erickson 1988; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866)



Left: Edward Abner, circa 1870. Courtesy of Louise Abner Nemeth. Right: How the Portner & Company brewery may have looked—minus the modern storefront and 1880s window arches at front. The long vanished Hooff flour warehouse, occupied by the wartime brewery, was probably similar to this extant example a block away. The interior layout may have resembled John Pitt's model small brewery shown on page 9.

Portner & Company ordered many of their ingredients and supplies, such as barrel staves, from New York, just as Portner & Recker purchased merchandise there from such merchants as Louis Mueller and Louis Portner. Between their grocery and brewery businesses, Portner and Recker had as much as \$10,000 worth of goods delivered at one time. It is unknown from whom they bought their capital equipment. Their hops, however, apparently came from the Pearl Street mercantile firm of Dutcher & Ellerby. Barley malt was obtained closer to home, from the Baltimore maltouse of Francis Denmead. Obtaining much ice would have been a problem. Because the brewery did not yet have had a proper cellar, enormous amounts of ice would have been required to permit the slow fermentation of lager beer at the proper temperature. Ice was available, but it

¹⁰ Secondary sources place the founding of the brewery variously in 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864 and 1865. The account published in *One Hundred Years of Brewing*, almost certainly drawn from an interview or correspondence with Portner, states that the brewery was organized in the fall of 1862 and produced its first beer in April 1863. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:402) But it is unlikely that Portner would have taken his May 1863 voyage to Germany just as this business began. It is not impossible that Portner's manuscript memoirs actually read 1862 and were simply misread, as handwritten "2s" and "3s" of the period are often confused.



A portion of a bird's-eye view of Alexandria, 1864, by Charles Magnus. The Portner & Company brewery was in the former Hooff flour warehouse at the northeast corner of King and Fayette Streets, indicated by the black arrow, in the western end of Alexandria.

was undoubtedly very dear, as it would probably have been shipped from the far North, while the availability of shipping was limited by the many other wartime demands upon it. Portner & Company undoubtedly dealt with the problem of insufficient ice in three ways. First, like most brewers, the partners did not brew during the summer, because the high average atmospheric temperatures were too much for which to compensate. They laid off at least during the two or three hottest months of the year. Second, they may have produced a substantial amount of ale,

which could be fermented at a higher temperature. Third, the men may have coped by not taking particular care crafting their product. By speeding up the fermentation process and cutting down on aging time, they would have saved a great deal of the money and effort spent on natural refrigeration—at the expense of quality. The goal, after all, was to get as much beer as possible, as quickly as possible, to the multitude of thirsty soldiers. From the beginning, Portner & Company was bringing in anywhere from \$12 to \$16 a barrel. Although Portner may have recognized a good beer when he tasted it, at this point, the former baker, bookkeeper, salesman, liquor purveyor, restaurateur and grocer knew little about brewing. A temporary priority on quantity over quality at this stage in his career is borne out by some of his methods in the immediate postwar period (see pages 45 and 50). (Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Books W-3:126 and X-3:333,513; *Alexandria Gazette* December 15, 1862; Wilson 1862; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:100; Kelley 1965:200, 317; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866; Portner n.d.:8)

In addition to the usual inputs and overhead costs, breweries, as most other trades, were required to purchase licenses whose fees supported the Union war effort. Under the Excise Tax Law of 1862 brewers also had to pay a tax of a dollar per barrel produced, a hefty sum, which naturally raised prices.¹¹ The tax records thus provide us with first-hand information about period breweries' production. (Estee 1863:35,44; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866)

Portner & Company was not without competition. There were already two breweries in Alexandria, Klein's and Martin's. In 1858 John Klein and Alexander Strausz founded the first lager brewery in northern Virginia in the unincorporated village of West End along the Little River Turnpike immediately west of Alexandria. Klein, who bought out Strausz's interest in 1860, had a well-established firm, with two copper kettles (the larger of 30 barrels capacity, more than three times the size of Portner's) and a "deep Lager Bier cellar." Largely because of this cellar, Klein's "Shooter's Hill Brewery" remarkably managed to brew year-round throughout the war and produced nearly as much beer as the other two local breweries combined. (*Alexandria Gazette* March 15, 1860; Fairfax County Circuit Court Deed Book A-4:347; United States Census 1860b; Bull, Friedrich and Gottschalk 1984; Van Wieren 1995; Walker, Dennée and Crane 1996; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866)

Henry S. Martin had lived and operated his "Alexandria Ale Brewery" across King Street from the future Portner & Company location since 1856. He also had an advantage in that he was the first of the wartime breweries to use a steam engine, no doubt to save the time and labor involved in the mashing process and for running pumps and hoists. According to one account, Martin's establishment had been quite popular with the Confederate militia prior to the Federal occupation of the city. (Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book R-3:414; United States Census 1860b; Bull, Friedrich & Gottschalk 1984; Van Wieren 1995; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903)

Guard duty at that time was rather pleasant.... The post most sought by the boys was that on the south side of King Street between Henry and Fayette, and many were the tricks and maneuvers resorted to in order to get posted on that and other desirable stations.

¹¹ Brewers did convince the federal government to drop the excise to 60 cents per barrel, but only temporarily. (Schlüter 1910:77-78; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866)

On this particular post eatables and drinkables were plentiful at all times, and until a late hour there was also the company of bright and pretty girls. As an added attraction a Mr. Martin, who owned a brewery at the corner of Fayette and Commerce Streets... and who lived just opposite at the southeast corner of King and Fayette Streets, kept a keg of ale on tap in his front vestibule for the benefit of those who cared to indulge. (Warfield 1996:23)

As difficult as they were to ship, beer and liquor were also “imported” from the North, just as Portner and Recker had done prior to the establishment of their brewery. Alexandria already had plenty of wholesale and retail liquor dealers and taverns, and the presence of all the troops simply attracted more purveyors of alcohol, including sutlers and peddlers. Beers from New York, Newark, Philadelphia, Albany, Washington—and even England and Scotland—were available in Alexandria at the time. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 1, 1860, March 17, 1864, February 16, 1865 and September 12, 1865; Lord 1969:129-130)

The first major obstacle placed in the way of the local brewing industry came in the summer of 1862, but it ultimately proved a boon. Many of the Union troops demonstrated the sort of behavior one might expect from men, young and not so young, far from home, living in enemy territory, and occupied in pursuits which were tedious at best and brutally lethal at worst.

By February [1862], the downtown section afforded a good time on every block.... [M]ore than twenty liquor halls greeted customers. On February 3, civil authorities granted twenty-three more licenses... [I]n spite of exorbitant prices, “wine and lager flowed freely....” Soldiers who had consumed their quota of drink tumbled onto the streets and into the hands of guards, who marched them to the slave pen. On February 3, more than 125 men were arrested. The following night, 100 other rowdies sobered behind bars. Authorities policed the city as best they could by putting prostrated men in wheelbarrows and pushing them over rutted streets “sufficient to restore consciousness to the most befogged reason.” Proprietors... [of saloons often] robbed [drunken soldiers] and dumped them in distant streets. After several deaths resulted, [Brigadier] Gen. John P. Slough, the new military governor... banned the sale of intoxicating beverages. (Barber 1988:26-27)

Actually, Slough’s “Special Order No. 3” only decreed evening curfews for the soldiers and citizenry. But at the same time, Provost Marshal Lieutenant-Colonel H.L. Taylor, undoubtedly under orders from Slough, forbade the sale of “intoxicating drinks” to any soldiers or officers under pain of arrest, fine, and seizure of beverage stocks. A typical sweep on August 27, 1862 netted the stocks of at least two wholesale liquor dealers, Anthony Ihms and Levick Palmer, who petitioned Congress for restitution after the war. This was not the first move against alcoholic beverages. Almost immediately after the occupation of the city, Colonel Orlando B. Wilcox, commander of the 1st Michigan Infantry, its first garrison force, “proscrib[ed] alike „the retail of ardent spirits and all conspiracies and combinations against the United States.” But this did not affect brewing and, as we have seen from the situation as Slough found it more than a year later, enforcement was spotty, and bootlegging and evasion were endemic. As during a later experiment

Provost Marshal's Office,
Alexandria. Aug. 29th, 1862.

General Order No. 4.

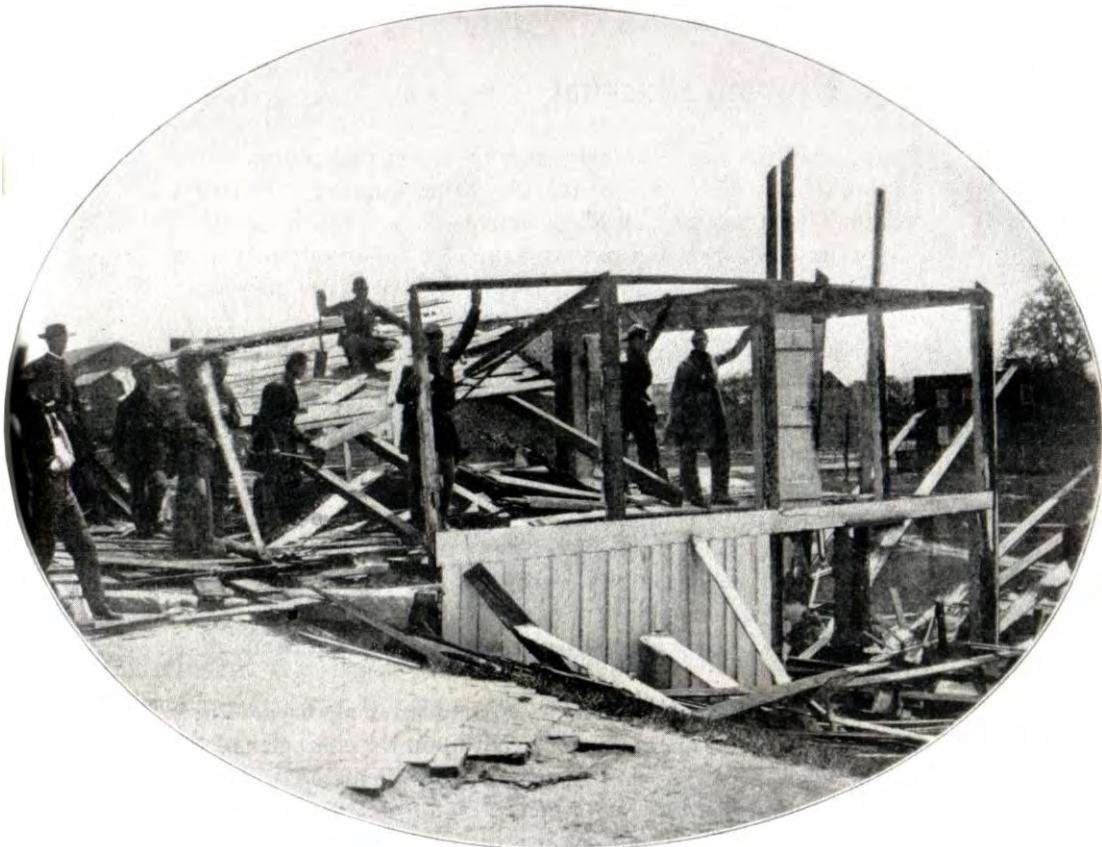
Notice is hereby given until further orders from this office, that the distribution of Spiritous Liquors by sale or gift either to Officers, Soldiers, or Citizens, is hereby prohibited. Any person violating this Order will be arrested and their liquors confiscated.

By order of

Col. H. L. TAYLOR,
Provost Marshal.



Above left: The Provost Marshal's original prohibition order. Above right: The Alexandria Provost Marshal's office in a former bank building, photograph by Andrew Russell (Library of Congress). After the war, this became the home of the German Banking Company, one of Robert Portner's other business interests. Below: The Provost guard razing an illicit saloon, from Miller's The Photographic History of the Civil War.

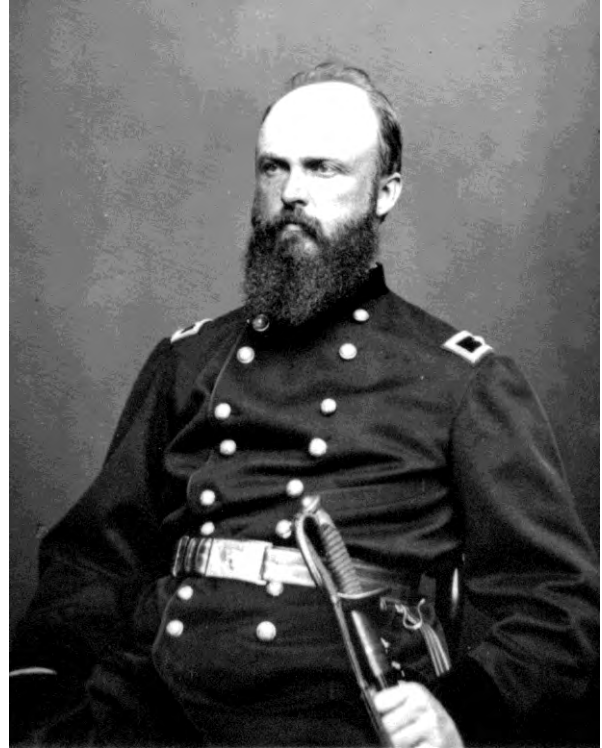


with national Prohibition, bootleggers favored smuggling and selling the more potent, less bulky, and thus more lucrative whisky instead of beer. (*Alexandria Gazette* August 26, 1862; U.S. House of Representatives 1880; *The Local News* January 22, 1862)

All the successors of Col. Wilcox here have been almost as severe with John [Barleycorn], and yet “he has sore surprised them all.” They have fined those who harbored him, sent to prison his best friends, and rolled him in the gutters, and yet “John Barleycorn gets up again.” For the past two or three days the contest has been especially vigorous, and on many streets the gutters reek with the newly emptied “crather,” yet John Barleycorn comes into the Mayor’s Office every morning, charged with fighting, stealing—disorderly conduct, or something worse. He goes very obediently to jail or the work house, and the next day makes his appearance again... Drive him from public places, and he finds secret resorts, where, to make up for extra trouble, he uses more drugs and demands additional tribute. When we know that women have carried jugs under their hoops, and retailed the stuff in side-alleys—when it is found concealed in flour and salt—or hid away among old barrels, one-half full... when even coffins have been used to transport it, the difficulty of stopping the traffic may be estimated. Magistrates may well declare that they believe there are more people going to the devil from this town than from any where else in the world, for there is no other conclusion to be drawn from past history and present experience than that which the Great Bard puts substantially in the mouth of the wounded and drunken Cassio: John Barleycorn you’re the devil. (*The Local News* January 22, 1862)

Slough’s harshness did not wipe out the trade, but it quickly had an effect. The newspapers could soon report that at merchants’ stands “instead of brandy and whiskey, cider and soda water are the popular drink.” As aggressive as enforcement often was, it was not always uniform throughout the area. The Military Governor’s proclamations applied only in the city; he had no authority over the army commands in the surrounding camps and fortifications. Although few unit commanders were lenient about allowing the men strong drink, beer was generally considered harmless and even not intoxicating.¹² While the Provost Marshal’s men dumped liquor in the streets and shuttered and even demolished drinking establishments, Portner & Company concentrated on sales directly to the troops nearby or to their sutlers. They transported beer in their own wagons and also shipped on order. It is likely that competitors Martin and Klein did the same; there is independent, indirect evidence that Henry Martin sold his ale to sutlers, and Klein’s success as the most productive local

¹² Congress explicitly included lager beer as an item that could be sold by regimental sutlers in the trans-Mississippi region, for instance. Some court-martial proceedings against beer-vending sutlers within the defenses of Washington acquitted the accused based on earlier District of Columbia case law finding that lager beer was not intoxicating. Unlike the ordinary soldier, officers and doctors were permitted to purchase spirits on order from sutlers for their own use or for “medicinal” purposes. Beginning in mid 1863, the Treasury Department began granting wholesale and retail liquor licenses to sutlers for a fee. About the same time, General Heintzelman, commander of the forces in the Virginia sector of the defenses of Washington and perhaps not coincidentally a German, attempted to lift the Alexandria prohibition but kept in place restrictions on liquor dealers, including license requirements from the city and the military governor. A week later, his order was countermanded. (Lord 1969:39; *National Republican* October 2, 1861; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866; *Alexandria Gazette* February 14, 1863 and February 21, 1863)



Left: Clinton Rodgers, sutler of the 40th Regiment New York Volunteer Infantry (the “Mozart Regiment,” also known as “the Forty Thieves”), had a federal license to retail alcohol. He was with his unit in Alexandria early in the war. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Army Military History Institute. Right: Brigadier General John P. Slough, Military Governor of Alexandria. Library of Congress photograph.

brewer during the war speaks for itself. (United States Senate 1864:1; *Alexandria Gazette* September 16, 1862, February 4, 1863 and May 29, 1863; Miller 1987:224; Portner n.d.:8,11; Lord 1969:139; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866)

As staunch Unionists and Northerners, Portner and his partners enjoyed a privileged status among the residents of Alexandria. Portner generally got along with the military commanders and even used his increasing influence “to get people out of prison, where one was taken easily in those days.” With direct military rule, orders, such as the enforcement of prohibition, were subject to the vagaries, temperament and political favor of the rulers. Slough’s policy against alcohol sales to soldiers led to many accusations, true and false, leveled against tavernkeepers and restaurateurs as a way of settling scores. It was one way, for instance, for natives to get back at the “carpetbagger” entrepreneurs and an avenue for businessmen to indirectly attack rivals. Soon there was discontent among even the loyal and successful merchants. A group of the disgruntled met in January 1864 and petitioned the Secretary of War to transfer Slough, protesting his conduct. Fred Recker attended the meeting and, without Portner’s knowledge, signed his own name and Robert’s to the petition. To the more politically astute Portner, “This was very stupid, indeed.” Upon later seeing the document, Slough was furious at the signatories and questioned their loyalty—loyalty, that is, to his administration. (Portner n.d.:9; United States Senate 1864:2)

Shortly thereafter, a tavernkeeper was arrested on charges of selling beer to soldiers. Upon questioning, he revealed that he had purchased the beer from Portner & Company. According to Portner, the next morning the new Provost Marshal, Captain William McLean Gwynne, summoned him to his office and solicited a bribe in return for allowing the brewery to continue operation. Robert refused, maintaining that he was permitted to do so under federal law. Gwynne threatened to shutter the business and imprison him for 60 days. He gave Portner a few hours to settle his affairs—or perhaps to think over the bribe. The brewer later wrote, “If I had been as sensible then as I am now, I would have gladly paid him \$500 or more, but I believed myself to be in the right.”¹³ He instead went to see Circuit Court Judge Andrew Wylie, who promised help.¹⁴ Robert returned to Gwynne’s office in the afternoon and was taken to jail—possibly in the former Mount Vernon Cotton Factory on Washington Street. (Portner n.d.:10)

I passed the night in a small room with about eleven other persons, mostly political prisoners and people who had been there for a long time without ever being heard. We slept on the floor which provided just enough room for all of us. There was a fire in the fireplace. A real house order had been established among the prisoners, who were very kind to me. Most of them were educated people, although some of them were ragged. It was a terrible night for me but I calmed down when, one after the other, they told me their stories. I promised some of them to intervene in their behalf after my release, which I did.

The next morning, the commandant of the prison (it was a military one), a lieutenant, summoned me and told me he would make my stay as pleasant as possible. I, together with another gentleman, [were allowed to stay in the lieutenant’s?] room, and a few days later we were even allowed to sleep there and to have our food sent from outside. We received visitors and led such a pleasant life that I actually gained weight. I could have even left the prison at night, but I did not want to take that risk. In the meantime, many people intervened on my behalf, but nothing seemed to work. When I had been alone in the room, I had written to Judge Wylie and explained everything to him. He had gone to see Secretary of War Stanton, who had promised to look into the matter. But this did not satisfy the Judge. He went to President Lincoln, who was also so busy that he could not do anything right away. Thus Judge Wylie had a Senator introduce a resolution on the floor of the Senate demanding an investigation of General Slough and his administration. That helped. At 9 o’clock that same evening (after I had spent nine

¹³ In September 1863, a saloonkeeper named D.P. Farquhar accused a detective of accepting a \$100 bribe. The complaint apparently originated from the fact that this gratuity had availed the saloonkeeper nothing! In a Senate hearing the following spring, General Slough admitted to requiring a \$500 *bond* from Farquhar, who then had to forfeit that amount after repeated violations of the prohibition order and was eventually banished from the city for his infractions. Tellingly, Portner defended his “rights” instead of pleading innocence of having supplied the tavernkeeper, whether Farquhar or someone else. (United States Senate 1864:2; *Daily National Republican* September 7, 1863)

¹⁴ Judge Wylie lived in Alexandria from about 1849 to 1860. He was admitted to the bar of the D.C. Circuit Court in 1849 and by the end of the war sat on the D.C. Supreme Court. He may be best known for issuing a writ of *habeas corpus* for the imprisoned Mary Surratt, accused of conspiracy in the 1865 plot to kill Lincoln. (Proctor 1930:230)

days there), I was notified by a special messenger from the General that I was released and that my sentence had been commuted into a fine.... (Portner n.d.:10-11)

Judge Wylie had also made complaint directly to the Military Governor himself, who replied that, “Portner... has been by me fully advised of his rights and duties under Military orders, on several occasions and his disobedience as fully proven to Capt Gwynne has been willful. Before the receipt of these papers I had released him upon bond because he reported that the credit of his house was being seriously affected.” (U. S. Army Continental Commands)

Months later, the parties were still not reconciled to each other. In response to an August 1864 inquiry from Secretary of War Stanton about Captain Gwynne, Slough responded angrily, plaintively, defensively:

The „Piepont’ and „Liquor selling’ cliques, the enemies of the military Government here, have conspired towards the ruin of my Staff, and myself being defeated in every other effort, will employ perjury if necessary to accomplish our destruction. As part of their programme my late Provost Marshal and Staff Officer is to be pursued by banished rascals and perjured villains—then, next, myself.

I have ever challenged and still challenge the fullest investigation of my conduct and know that all of my permanent Staff Officers do likewise.

Are my enemies made so, by a faithful discharge of my difficult duties, to have even a temporary triumph, or am I to be trusted and sustained? (U. S. Army Continental Commands)

Although Slough himself was exonerated of wrongdoing by a favorable Senate committee report, the investigation had larger consequences. The Alexandria city government was reconstituted, and Robert Portner was elected as one of the Council members. In addition, in June 1864 Slough ordered that “All loyal and respectable hotel, saloon and restaurant keepers... who can show... that they have never violated military orders upon the subject of the disposition of liquors” could, with the presentation of a bond and a license from the city, proceed to sell malt liquors to civilians only. At about the same time, short-term licenses for the sale of “ardent spirits” were again being granted by the city government, but probably for firms who shipped whisky and brandy to field officers, rather than dispensing it in town. Merchant James Molan, for instance, requested the patronage of sutlers at his King Street store, offering mainly wines and spirits. Some form of prohibition would last until after the war, however, extended to maintain order after the assassination of President Lincoln. (United States Senate 1864:1-4; Portner n.d.:11,12; *Alexandria Gazette* June 14, 1864, January 5, 1864, September 14, 1864, April 12, 1865, April 27, 1864, and May 3, 1865)

Portner & Company’s brushes with the authorities were not over. The prohibition that so limited the supply of alcoholic beverages only stimulated consumers’ thirst and their willingness to pay. Beer was selling at \$12 to \$16 per barrel (i.e., 31 gallons), compared with \$6 to \$7 during the 1850s and \$10 to \$12 shortly after the war. Retail, from the troops in the field, a glass of lager beer could

fetch 25 cents. If we can assume generously that a glass was as much as a pint capacity, gross profits were at least in the neighborhood of 400 percent per glass. The partners were keen on exploiting this lucrative market and reached farther to capture it. While part of the Army of the Potomac was at Fredericksburg, they rented a schooner and shipped a full cargo of goods there.¹⁵ Having made a great haul, Fred Recker and Carl Portner and some of their employees went with a second shipment, but only half the goods were sold, because most of the army had moved on. Suddenly, Recker was arrested aboard ship and held for \$2,000 bail. He was charged with crossing the lines and selling goods to the enemy, but he was quickly proved innocent. Instead, it turned out that the guilty party was one of Portner & Recker's men, who left Alexandria with a wagon load of goods presumably bound for one of the Union regiments. He claimed that he had lost his way on the bad roads, but was passing himself off as Fred Recker. Portner immediately discharged the man for skimming revenue from the trip—not for selling to the enemy.¹⁶ (Portner n.d.:11-12; United States Census 1850, 1860b, 1860d, 1870b and 1870d; Heurich n.d.:15; Dennee n.d.)



*Union soldiers line up to purchase lager beer from a sutler or peddler.
Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper.*

¹⁵ From the chronology of Portner's account, this was probably in May 1864, when Fredericksburg was taken over as a hospital center for the Union wounded at the Battle of the Wilderness. It also became a point for disembarking fresh troops sent from Washington to join Grant's army at Spotsylvania. (Catton 1953:101-105)

¹⁶ Earlier, in October 1862, Portner and Recker were found with a U.S. Army horse in their possession. (U. S. Army Continental Commands)

Carl Portner later took another cargo to the great federal base at White House Landing on the Pamunkey River where he set up a tent to supply the sutlers. The best merchandise was loaded onto two wagons sent forward to the unit to which Edward Abner was attached. When they arrived they found the camp empty—until the sudden appearance of a foraging Confederate cavalry force.

They seized everything including the horses and waggons, made our men prisoners, and took them to Richmond. The remaining goods at White House Landing had been burned by our soldiers to prevent their falling into the hands of the enemy. These were great losses, but by and by, Recker, brother Carl, and other employees returned home.... This was the last cargo we shipped. (Portner n.d.:12)

Seizures of goods by the enemy were all too common occurrences for sutlers and peddlers and an occupational hazard of doing business with the army during war. We have little alternative but to accept Robert Portner's account of these two incidents in which his merchandise fell into Confederate hands. However, a much later source leaves a nagging suspicion that there could have been more to these stories than bad timing and an errant, unscrupulous employee. In one of his obituaries, it is claimed that Portner sold to both sides during the war. It is a remarkable charge, but one must doubt that such a story could have persisted unless either there were some truth to it or Portner cultivated such a myth to ingratiate himself with his Southern neighbors and customers. (*Manassas Journal* June 1, 1906)

Despite the occasional losses, both the grocery and the brewery thrived. Robert Portner was settling into life in Alexandria. He made many commercial and political contacts through his businesses that led to a certain personal influence and a seat on City Council. His friendships with and interventions on behalf of local political prisoners would undoubtedly stand him in good stead in the postwar era. Indicative of their growing social network, at least among their fellow German immigrants, the Portners and Fred Recker founded a German singing and social club, the Concordia, of which Robert was elected president. Having spent his first days in Alexandria in an army tent then a rented apartment, Robert had come a long way. His reported personal income rose from \$400 in 1862 to around \$1,250 annually in 1864 and 1865. He now owned an expensive carriage and, along with Recker (and shared with both Recker and sister Felixine Portner), one of the finest Federal-period homes in town, at which the Marquis de Lafayette had stayed during his October 1824 visit to Alexandria.¹⁷ (Portner n.d.:8,12; Cox 1976:166; Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book V-3:350; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866)

By early 1865 it seemed that General Grant's strategy of attrition was succeeding, and the war was drawing to a close. Sutlers with the Army of the Potomac, many of whom were customers of the Alexandria breweries, were hedging their bets, renewing their federal and city licenses for shorter

¹⁷ For \$4,250, Portner and Recker acquired the "Lafayette," Smoot, or Cazenove House, 301 South Saint Asaph Street, at a government auction of "abandoned" property formerly owned by Confederate sympathizers who had fled Alexandria. This seizure and sale were later successfully challenged in court by the former owner, W.G. Cazenove, who had served in the Confederate Quartermaster Department in Virginia. In return, Portner and Recker secured compensation from Congress in 1873. (Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book V-3:350; Wickham Family Papers; Virginia District Court of Appeals 1867; *Portner & Recker v. Cazenove*, 59 Va. 100; 1868 Va. Lexis 6; 18 Gratt. 100; Senate Journal 1873:795)

durations. Robert Portner was also looking toward the postbellum period. In 1864 he and Recker bought Edward Abner's share of the brewery for \$1,800. In later life, Abner regretted selling out: "There is where I made a mistake. Had I remained with Mr. Portner I would today be a millionaire. But our *hindsights are better than our foresights.*" His regrets were entirely in hindsight, because when he left he initially intended to make a fortune in brewing himself, but simply was not as successful. Before the end of the war he reinvested in a partnership with Frederick Hugle and Louis Beyer in the short-lived "Metropolitan Brewery" of Washington, D.C.¹⁸ Abner also opened his own restaurant and beer garden and a lunch room, and he later became a successful wine importer and beer distributor. (see Chapter 6; Boyd 1866; Boyd 1867; *Evening Star* n.d. [January 1909]; *Washington Post* January 1, 1878)

Alexandria's beer sales remained fairly steady until July 1865. With soldiers beginning to be mustered out of service, however, Recker was losing interest in the grocery, and Kaercher was beginning to neglect the brewery, having opened a tavern next door. So Portner decided to dissolve his partnerships, intending to retain one of the two enterprises for himself. Initially, neither Kaercher nor Recker was interested, but Portner insisted. Portner and Recker offered to sell the brewery outright to Kaercher, but the latter could not come up with the money within the agreed 30 days. Instead, Portner and Recker bought him out. (Portner n.d.:13; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866)

By May 1865 the partners had begun digging cellars on the northern half of the block bounded by Washington, Saint Asaph, Pendleton and Wythe Streets. Although distant from their King Street locations, this construction was meant to rectify the main deficiency of their brewery, namely the lack of cold cellars for fermentation and storage. The cellars were the first step in plans to build a new brewery at the north end of town. (Portner n.d.:13; *Alexandria Gazette* May 4, 1865; Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book X-3:513)

HUGLE, ABNER & BEYERS,
METROPOLITAN
LAGER BEER BREWERY,
New York Ave. between 1st and 2nd Street.

Saloons. Families and Sutlers will constantly find on hand a good Stock of Choice Lager Beer, served at the shortest Notice

*Metropolitan Brewery advertisement from the 1865 and 1866 Washington city directories.
Its intended audience still included army sutlers as well as bars and "families."*

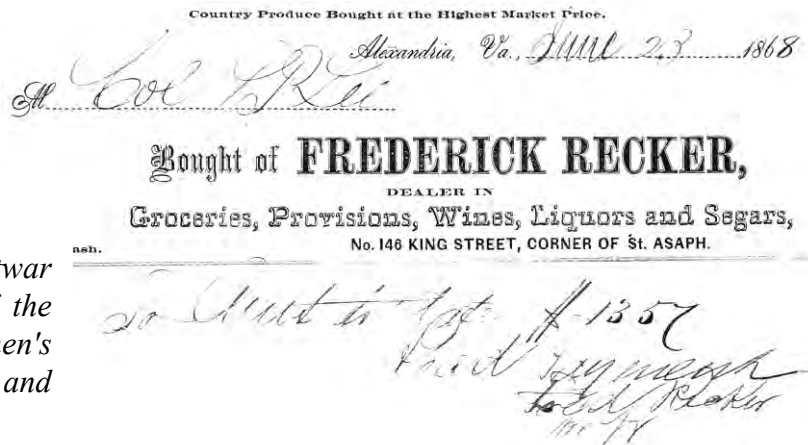
¹⁸ Frederick Hugle was a wine and liquor dealer, and Louis Beyer was the keeper of the Park Hotel in Washington. Abner is not to be confused with Edward F. Abner, his nephew and one of the founders of Washington's later Abner-Drury Brewing Company. (Boyd 1863; Boyd 1865; Boyd 1866; Boyd 1867; United States Census 1900a)

Portner then offered Recker a choice of the businesses.

He first took the brewery, and I really got settled in the grocery business. But a week later, Recker asked me to take over the brewery and leave the grocery store to him. So far we had earned together \$32,000, which was the value of the two enterprises and the house [on Saint Asaph Street]. I paid \$16,000 for the brewery, and he paid \$11,500 for the grocery. (Portner n.d.:13)

So it was largely by chance that Robert Portner would later make a name and a fortune for himself as a major figure in the American brewing industry! Recker, on the other hand, remained in the grocery business until his death in 1872, but there is no evidence that he ever improved upon its wartime success. (Alexandria Library Special Collections; *Alexandria Gazette* July 12, 1872)

Portner's own success would largely depend upon one of the minor consequences of the Civil War: the spread in the popularity of lager beer. Writing in 1910, Herman Schlüter credits the war with establishing lager as a popular drink nationwide. Surely, the authors of *One Hundred Years of Brewing* seriously exaggerate when they say that "To better understand the situation at that time, it should be added that the average Southerner did not even know the taste of beer or ale, and only those saloons throughout the South which had a German patronage handled it at all." In contrast, the *Alexandria Gazette* claimed that lager beer had attained universal popularity before 1862. Nonetheless, until the mid nineteenth century, Americans produced and drank much more spirits than malt liquor. In 1850, the national *per capita* consumption of malt liquors was slightly more than one gallon annually. By 1860 beer and ale had overtaken spirits in quantity consumed,¹⁹ but the amount of lager still constituted less than one quarter of the total malt liquor production in the United States. From the war to the present, lager beer has been the most popular variety. Malt liquor production jumped markedly during the conflict and then tripled between 1865 and 1879, demonstrating the new demand for lager. (Schlüter 1910:58; Clark 1929:481; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:252-253,402,607-609; Heurich n.d.:42; Ronnenberg 1993:12; *Alexandria Gazette* October 17, 1862; Siebel and Schwarz 1933:57; Baron 1962:186)



A bill from Fred Recker's postwar grocery found in accounts of the Alexandria office of the Freedmen's Bureau (National Archives and Records Administration).

¹⁹ Of course, this means that spirits were still *more commonly* consumed, because the average drink of "hard" liquor is smaller by volume than one beer. Furthermore, the figures represent only average consumption. Consumption was not evenly distributed across the nation; there was less beer supply and demand in the Southern states.

**Beer and ale production of Alexandria breweries,
September 1862 to October 1865 (in barrels) ***

**One American beer barrel equals 31 gallons. The figures do not include the output of the small postwar breweries of George Steuernagel and Christian Poggensee, which together totaled slightly more than 41 barrels in September and October 1865. Source: Internal Revenue Assessments, 1862-66, Virginia, National Archives and Records Administration.*

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>MONTH</u>	<u>BREWERY</u>			<u>TOTALS</u>
		Portner & Co.	H.S. Martin	John Klein	
1862	Sep-Dec	120	120	120	360
1863	Jan-Feb	80	80	80	240
	Mar-Apr	66	100	67	233
	May	34	50	33	117
	Jun	98	0	144	242
	Jul	78	0	131	209
	Aug	0	0	105	105
	Sep	0	0	61	61
	Oct	0	0	135	135
	Nov	200	0	163	363
	Dec	109	210	286	605
1863	Totals	665	440	1205	2310
1864	Jan	100	(avg) 69.25	346	446
	Feb	100	(avg) 69.25	368	468
	Mar	100	(avg) 69.25	215	315
	Apr	78	(avg) 69.25	226	581
	May	105	62	163	330
	Jun	63	96	188	347
	Jul	0	0	59.5	59.5
	Aug	0	0	87	87
	Sep	20.25	0	115	135.25
	Oct	42.5	143.5	80	266
	Nov	42.5	121	81	244.5
	Dec	50	115	79.25	244.25
1864	Totals	701.25	814.5	2007.75	3523.5
1865	Jan	43	95	78.25	216.25
	Feb	46	105	96	247
	Mar	63	75	178	316
	Apr	64.5	112	149.5	326
	May	82	177	141	400
	Jun	90	113	140	343
	Jul	75.75	116	7	198.75
	Aug	0	115	0	115
	Sep	0	104	0	104
	Oct	21	51.5	0	73.5
1865	Totals	485.25	1063.5	789.75	2370
1862-65	Totals	1971.5	2438	4122.5	8532

Chapter 5

The Robert Portner Brewery: The first decade, 1865-1875

German-built and German-conducted breweries were springing up all over the country to supply an ever-growing demand for the light, invigorating drink which the Germans alone seemed able to make so as to suit the American palate.

Christian Heurich, I Watched America Grow

With the end of the Civil War and the withdrawal of most federal troops, Alexandria's economic boom met an inevitably quick end. As demand dried up, "carpetbaggers" and returning natives alike picked up the pieces, some re-establishing old firms and others moving on, often to the West. The landscape had changed dramatically, with the army erecting and razing entire blocks of buildings, constructing wharves and fortifications, and wiping out orchards, wood lots and fence lines. The city was filled with formerly enslaved African Americans who had taken refuge and first tasted freedom here behind Union lines. The black population of Alexandria had increased three-fold, with the freedpeople occupying buildings abandoned by Confederate sympathizers and the army, creating schools, churches and shantytowns in the city and stable farming communities in the countryside. The federal and city governments opened soup kitchens each winter to feed indigent residents, both white and black. Although occupied longer than any other Southern city, Alexandria avoided the violent destruction visited upon so many. Nonetheless, all segments of the population must have felt fear and uncertainty: the native and "carpetbagger" Unionists who had established new lives under the umbrella of federal protection and favoritism; the former slaves and free blacks who were mostly poor, illiterate, under-employed and as yet without a political voice; and the long-time residents who had supported the rebellion only to witness the dawning of a new and, to them, very unpleasant day. The great question which underlay the events of the next decade was how would these groups co-exist and reach a new, postbellum, post-slavery *modus vivendi*?

Of course, none of this was lost on Robert Portner, who, by virtue of his emerging leadership in both the local business and political communities, was in a position of both advantage and vulnerability. He could help shape postwar Alexandria but was also at the mercy of arriving hard times. An immigrant, Republican newcomer, installed on City Council under the aegis of the military government and having acquired on the cheap several properties seized from "rebel" Virginians, it would not be surprising if Portner were regarded with suspicion or hostility by Alexandria natives. Yet he became one of Alexandria's most popular figures through a combination of political acumen, philanthropy, public service, personality, and what we might today call "networking." Eventually he would refashion himself as a true Virginian: eschewing Radical Republican politics; buying a large country estate at Manassas; sending his sons to the University of Virginia and Southern military schools (including the Virginia Military Institute, where Stonewall Jackson had been a professor); and possibly cultivating a story of having been sympathetic to the Southern cause. His company later used the Virginia state seal in its advertising, and Portner even made the acquaintance of Jefferson Davis during the 1880s. But ultimately,

“nothing succeeds like success,” and Portner would, in time, be most appreciated for helping to buoy the depressed local economy by employing so many. He had already garnered a great deal of goodwill among natives and wartime arrivals through his interventions on behalf of those imprisoned by the military government. His own imprisonment seemed to demonstrate that he was not a radical, and he had cultivated important friendships among conservative Unionists like Judge Andrew Wylie. Portner managed to be re-elected to Council several times and not just by those who might be expected to be his natural voting base. At times he was supported by Liberals, Conservatives and Radicals alike. (*Alexandria Gazette* May 18, 1872) In his memoirs, he dispenses with discussion of his City Council tenure with this brief account:

As a member of the City Council, I was present at the funeral ceremonies [for President Lincoln] in the Capitol, where I sat in the chair of a Congressman. As representatives of the City of Alexandria, we later on paid our respects to President Johnson. Several times I was elected by the Union party and later by Republicans and, I believe, always rendered good service in the capacity. Later on, I was [not] renominated by the Republicans because I was not radical enough. Thus, for one year [1871-1872], I was not a member of the City Council.¹ The next time I was nominated by the Democrats and later on also by the Republicans, so that I was elected unanimously. I was re-elected several times until I refused to serve any longer. I never [again] joined a party. Although I inclined more to the Republicans, I often voted Democratic. (Portner n.d:12,13)

His words suggest that Robert Portner was a man neither dogmatic nor ideological but willing to change with the times, particularly as Virginia politics grew more conservative and Reconstruction less stringent. If newspaper accounts of Council meetings are representative, he was not very outspoken but undoubtedly active. He voted solidly Republican through at least 1867, but he bristled at being labeled a radical, especially after garnering only six votes that year, his first postwar campaign and first loss. He referred to himself as a “Liberal, or „Greeley’ Republican,” meaning that he was in favor of a magnanimous Reconstruction policy toward the South.² He did support the repeal of harsher criminal punishments for African Americans which, in addition to his hiring practices, suggests a relatively liberal attitude about race, but one short of embracing complete equality. During his first Council term, Portner served on the Committee for the Poor, the

¹ It seems that Portner was a councilman for four terms: 1865-1867 (one two-year term), 1870-1871, 1872-1873 and 1873-1874, serving initially from the city’s Fourth Ward, then the Third. *The Western Brewer* of June 1880, however, surely based on information supplied by Portner, states that he served seven terms. More likely, it should have read (nearly) seven *years*. It is worth noting that fellow brewer Henry S. Martin served three terms on Council at about the same time. (Miller 1992:33-37; *Alexandria Gazette* March 7, 1865)

² He was referring, of course, to *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley, the Liberal candidate who ran against President Grant in 1872. Although long an opponent of slavery, Greeley had led a peace movement during the war, favoring permitting the Confederate states to go their own way unmolested. He later supported universal amnesty and suffrage for former Confederates and increasingly criticized the host of newly freed African Americans. He also backed civil service reform, limited government, and free trade. Portner was later an acquaintance of Theodore Roosevelt but also served on the first Presidential inaugural committee for conservative Democrat Grover Cleveland. (Foner 1988:503; Nash et al. 1986:557; *Washington Post* December 20, 1884)



Above: An image of the old Alexandria city hall during the Civil War, from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper.

Left: A postcard image of the "Lafayette" House, purchased by Portner and Recker after being seized by the federal government during the war. Its former owner, Lewis Cazenove, successfully sued for its return in a landmark Supreme Court Case on the grounds that the U.S. government had not the Constitutional authority to impose a penalty of forfeiture for nonpayment of the punitive 1862 direct tax on land (see Portner & Recker v. Cazenove). Congress compensated Portner and Recker for their loss in 1873.



the Committee on Public Property, and the Committee on Streets. The first committee membership is consistent with his pattern of philanthropy; the latter two may have given him some of his first experience with property and construction management, useful later for the expansion of his own factory and in Washington real estate ventures. In May 1878, nearly four years after he left office for the final time, Portner declined a nomination to Council by the local Workingmen party, a faction of mostly African-American residents. (Alexandria City Election Results and Ballots 1831-1876; *Alexandria Gazette* March 29, 1865, April 26, 1865, November 29, 1865, March 6, 1867, June 11, 1869, June 12, 1869, June 14, 1869, May 17, 1872 and May 18, 1878; *Washington Post* June 28, 1881; Foner 1988:503)

Politics aside, foremost in Robert Portner's mind after the war was the future of his brewery. It proved plenty to occupy his thoughts and labors. As the Alexandria economy collapsed in late 1865 and early 1866, he found himself saddled with thousands of dollars of debt.

Since it was summer [1865, when the partnership with Recker was dissolved, and]... we already owned some cellars in Washington Street; I also rented the other brewery (Klein's). So, when spring came, I had very much beer to sell: but as the soldiers had left, and were gradually discharged, business became worse. One inn after the other was closed, and beer sales decreased. The beer became worse, partly because it was not brewed well, partly because the cellars became too warm, and partly because we could not sell enough. Times became worse and worse, and soon I was in a grave predicament because I owed much money—\$20,000—for malt, hops, and barrels. A terrible time started for me because within a short time I was no longer able to raise enough money to pay my notes. As one of my creditors refused to extend the time, it was protested and thus my credit was gone. (Portner n.d.:13)



An Andrew Russell photograph of the village of West End, on the outskirts of Alexandria, circa 1864. In the background are the Potomac River, the mouth of Great Hunting Creek, and the Union barracks named for General Slough. The black arrow indicates the brewery formerly operated by John Klein, but rented by Robert Portner over the fall and winter of 1865-1866.

By mid 1866, Portner's creditors included New York hops dealers Dutcher & Ellerby (owed perhaps \$4,000), Baltimore maltster Francis Denmead (\$5,050), and Louis Portner, whose \$3,000 was likely a loan used to satisfy other debts. (Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Books W-3:126 and X-3:407; Portner n.d.:13)

How did Portner & Company accrue such debt when its wartime product commanded as much as 60 percent more than beer sold in the immediate pre- and postwar periods? First, with high demands on manpower, shipping, and materials of all kinds, the cost of inputs rose as dramatically as profits. Losses, such as the wagons captured by the Confederate raiders, were uninsured. Rent increased as Alexandria was transformed from a ghost town in mid 1861 to an overcrowded supply base by 1863. Entrepreneurs like Portner rolled profits into further capital investment and operating costs, so it was not unusual to leverage the expansion of the business against a great deal of debt to suppliers. At a small scale, the capital costs, distributed over each barrel or bottle produced, were very high. Portner's investment capital was not only in his equipment, but also tied up in the properties that he and Recker had acquired, including the half block on North Washington Street with the newly constructed lager cellars and the house on South Saint Asaph Street, whose former owner was suing to regain title. In 1867 Portner and Recker lost the Saint Asaph Street property in a court judgment, despite the fact that it was already committed as collateral in other transactions. And Portner's capital investment could not be used to its full capacity; at least as late as 1870, the brewery operated only eight months a year because of the inability to control ambient temperatures. Finally, he was forced to come up with large sums of cash to buy out his former partners in 1864 and 1865. (Virginia District Court of Appeals 1867; United States Census 1870b)

Like most other businesses of the time, Portner's was a proprietorship; it was now the *Robert Portner Brewery*, not yet "company" or "corporation." The firm's indebtedness was not severable from the man's; Portner was liable not only for what he had invested in his business, but to the full extent he could personally pay. In other words, he truly stood to lose all that he owned. His indebtedness exceeded the total assessed value of his real estate holdings, brewing equipment and personal property, assuming that he could even recoup the full value of his assets. For a businessman, the loss of credit would be both a loss of his good name and of the ability to rebound from misfortune. Memories of his father's business failure and the consequent straitened circumstances of his youth undoubtedly preyed upon Robert's thoughts. It is a real measure of his despair that he contemplated walking away from the whole situation. Yet, he had walked away from past ventures, both successes and failures, and had started fresh with nothing.

But great as was his loss and misfortune, equally great was his perseverance and undaunted hope and courage to try again. He was not to be cast down and disheartened even at a second failure; he would try a third time [i.e., after first Portner & Company and then, taking over the brewery on his own], finally believing *still* that "there was money in it." But where was *his* capital to resume operations again? He had none! But he had friends who knew his worth, integrity, and business capacity. It was a venturesome undertaking, but all had the utmost confidence in his judgment, honor and honesty. Friends very readily advanced him the means to commence life anew again, and start with a fuller and better knowledge

of his business and its wants, and the sad experience of... failures. (*The Western Brewer* June 1880:597)

In fact, the brewer's most important friend at this time was the prominent attorney, alderman, and consummate fixer, Samuel Ferguson Beach. Beach advised Robert to send a letter to all his creditors, asking them for the extension of further credit, offering everything he owned as collateral.

Every single one, except one, told me to go ahead with my work and pay when I would be able to do so. The largest creditor, F[rancis] Denmead, offered to assist me further if I would give him a deed of trust of everything I owned. He took security for \$12,000. As I owed him \$5,000, there remained \$7,000 worth of malt and hops to work with. Now I made up my mind. After thinking over carefully whether I should give up the business and start something else, I decided to stay in the business where I had lost my money. (Portner n.d.:13)

Portner would have reason to ask twice more for extensions of credit from Denmead, at the end of 1867 and 1868. His collateral included the half block on Washington Street, purchased in 1865, and the leasehold on and equipment of the brewery. The deeds of trust executed at the time therefore give the first glimpse into the equipment being used in the King Street plant and its Washington Street cellars:

One Engine & Boiler, Belting &c, One Washing Machine, One Mash Tub, Two Copper Kettles, One Copper Pump, One Malt Mill and Elevator, Eight Fermenting Tubs, One Reservoir, Three hundred Kegs, One hundred & fifty half barrels, twenty five whole barrels, Twenty casks, Water and Gas Fixtures, Two horses, harness & wagon, One Dray, Beer Cooler, Hose & Spiggots, Desk, six chairs, stove & pipe.

The lager cellars contained 36 large fermenting casks. There is no evidence that these original cellars were in the same location as the vaults dug for Portner's 1868 plant on the same block. In fact, they were likely nearer to Washington Street, possibly associated with one of the two buildings that were standing on the property by 1867. This possibility is supported by the fact that the 1952 excavations for the foundations of a Woodward & Lothrop department store along Washington Street "disclosed beer vaults at the point where the foundations are to be laid."³ (Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Books X-3:513, Y-3:204 and Z-3:58; Alexandria Real and Personal Property Assessments; *Washington Post* March 2, 1952) Archaeological investigations of 1998-1999 did not discover the remains of any structures of the period near Washington Street, however, because of mid-twentieth-century excavation and re-grading (see Chapters 10, 16 and 17).

The mortgage of a brewery to a maltster was common at the time. As in Portner's case, malt and hops suppliers tended to be a brewer's largest creditor. Brewers often "became mortgaged to malt

³ Of course, the article that supplied this information was incorrect in several other particulars. Nonetheless, although building cellars in two locations would have been unnecessarily costly, there is no reason to believe that Portner would have foreseen in 1865 the exact location, extent and layout of his 1868 brewery, some of which would stand on land that he did not yet own. Thus, later cellars may have replaced or expanded the originals.

manufacturers for malt bills and had to relinquish their plants to them. In this way, several malt manufacturers became brewers, or had brewery workers man foreclosed plants for them.” Robert Portner’s creditor, Francis Denmead, although unknown today, is probably the most important figure in the history of brewing in the Chesapeake region.⁴ Denmead captured most of the barley malt market in eastern Maryland, northern Virginia and the District of Columbia soon after opening his City Malt House on West Falls Avenue in Baltimore in 1857. He acquired at least three Baltimore breweries—George and Christian Rossmarck’s, Schreier’s, and the Albion Brewery—plus Dewitt Ogden’s Washington Brewery in the District of Columbia, and John Klein’s Shooter’s Hill Brewery in West End, just west of Alexandria, through trust sales or defaults on mortgage payments. He held mortgages on several other firms. While foreclosure was one way to make good a debt, Denmead’s business was dependent on keeping breweries operational so that they would continue to buy malt. Thus, it was Denmead who rented Klein’s old brewery to Robert Portner over the winter of 1865-1866, then leased it to John G. Cook before selling to Henry Englehardt. (*Evening Star*, August 5, 1857; Juenemann Collection; Heurich 1873-1874; Kelley 1965:174-175,200,399; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:473; *The Sun*, January 13, 1860; Walker, Dennee and Crane 1996; Fairfax County Deed Book F-4:188-191; District of Columbia Deed Book 755:92; Boyd’s Directory Company 1877; Boyd’s Directory Company 1878)

As Portner re-dedicated himself to brewing, he realized that he had to concentrate on exactly that, *brewing*. “I was a good businessman, but I knew very little about breweries. At that time brewing was regarded as a secret or an art.” It is uncertain who was actually making the beer after Kaercher sold his share of the firm in 1865. Portner says only that it was difficult to get rid of his brewmaster when he endeavored to replace him in the fall of 1866. It is possible that Kaercher had stayed on as an employee, but he was busy running a nearby tavern. (Portner n.d.:13-14)

Although the details of this period are sketchy, it seems that Robert’s brother Otto went into brewing on his own account. The primary evidence is from two stoneware beer bottles of the period, unearthed from archaeological sites in Alexandria in 1978 and 1993. Impressed on their shoulders are the words “OTTO PORTNER.” It is difficult to accept that Otto would have had bottles manufactured for him unless he was producing or bottling beer or soda himself. In fact, the internal revenue assessment for July 1866 credits Otto for the production of four barrels of weiss beer, a wheat-based brew that was always bottled. The entry gives his address as 285 King Street, probably two doors west of the Portner & Company facility, across Fayette Street. This is corroborated by the Washington city directories of 1866 and 1867, which list as Alexandria brewers both “Robert Portner,” at the northeast corner of King and Fayette, and “Portner & Winteroll,” at 285 King. F. August Winteroll is an elusive figure only because for most of his life he instead went by the name August Calmes, having taken the surname of his stepfather,

⁴ Denmead was a native of Baltimore, born in 1829. Until he opened his malt house, he was employed in railroad construction in the South, possibly as an engineer. His City Malt House had an annual capacity of 100,000 bushels, but its capacity was doubled with improvements in 1879. Denmead died in 1891, likely a misfortune for his debtors. His company reorganized with Denmead’s son, Francis Jr., and many of the leading Baltimore brewers as stockholders. When this occurred, it is likely that they called in the longstanding debts of their more marginal customers. (Walker, Dennée and Crane 1996; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903)

Joseph, during his Confederate war service with the “Dominion Rifles,” Company H, 17th Virginia Infantry.⁵ A baker by training, the twenty-year-old Winterroll/Calmes was detached for seven weeks of 1861 to an army bakery at Manassas. His next duty was hotter still; he was wounded at the Battle of Seven Pines on the Peninsula May 31, 1862. Thereafter absent until April 1863, he was finally recorded on the regimental books as a deserter. Perhaps to distance himself from his prior allegiance, he again assumed his original name when he returned to Alexandria, took the oath of allegiance to the United States, and started up his own confectionery on Cameron Street. Business being slack in mid 1864, Winterroll was one of the first to take advantage of the loosening of local restrictions on alcohol sales. He briefly moonlighted at the King Street beer garden of George H. Mellen before applying for a license to sell malt liquors in his own shop. Although born at Zweibrücken, Germany, there is no evidence that Winterroll/Calmes was any more a brewer than were Robert and Otto Portner upon *their* arrival in America. Nonetheless, Otto and August appear to have partnered at least between October 1866 and July 1867, although they cannot be definitively credited for more than about eighteen barrels’ production. Like Otto, Winterroll went on to operate a restaurant (with Louis Krafft on North Royal Street) but was ultimately more successful, later able to support a hobby as Alexandria’s most prominent yachtsman. (Portner n.d.:13-14; Alexandria Archaeology artifact collection, 44AX1 and 44AX35; Wallace 1990:106; Boyd 1866; Boyd 1867; Hopkins 1877; *Washington Post* August 16, 1908, February 13, 1924 and December 28, 1924; Provost Marshal)



The rarest “Portner” bottle of all. This tan stoneware bottle marked “OTTO PORTNER” presumably originated with the 1866-1867 Portner & Winterroll weiss-beer brewery. Given the small output of this firm, there may have been several hundred such bottles—but surely no more than that. This one from the Alexandria Archaeology collection may be the only complete example known, although this type has been recorded in a 2001 book on American stoneware beer and soda bottles.

Deprived of his former brewmaster and even the assistance of Otto temporarily, Robert Portner returned to the big city to hire the talent his enterprise now lacked. “I had made up my mind, I started out with new energy and went straight to New York to look for a master brewer.” And so began a period of experimentation. Portner not only tested batches of beer, but tested himself as he

⁵ The name “August Winterroll” appears, however, in Alexandria’s 1896 real and personal property tax assessments.

gradually learned the brewing trade and honed his ability to work with and supervise sometimes temperamental brewmasters. (Portner n.d.:14)

I finally found a man named Carl Wolters.... Although Wolters's knowledge was merely theoretical rather than practical, I preferred him to other applicants because he was an educated man.... It was in the fall that we neutralized the beer which was left in the cellars as well as possible with bicarbonate of soda. (This method was unknown to the old brewers.) (Portner n.d.:14)

It was perhaps just as well that old-time brewers lacked such knowledge. Needless to say, Portner's unsold beer was not fresh after spending months in the inadequately iced cellars. In fact, it was on its way to becoming vinegar when neutralized by the basic bicarbonate of soda. Although becoming interested in creating a superior product, Portner was not averse to cutting a few corners in the short run to keep his creditors at bay. This attitude was not uncommon among new brewers; Washington's Christian Heurich later wrote that after the establishment of his own small brewery in the 1870s, he "didn't hold it as long as I do now—made it one week, sold it the next." In the long run, such shortcuts could not pay in a competitive environment; by the end of the century, some Washington brewers would trumpet the six-month aging of their products. (Heurich n.d.:41; *Washington Post* March 13, 1898)

We sold part of this beer; but soon it was no longer possible since the other brewers already had fresh beer to sell. So we also started with the brewing. I assisted [Wolters] and had him show me everything. At night he gave me instructions in theory and we often studied until 10 p.m. We brewed together applying several methods; we also made ale. Finally, in November 1866, the beer was ready; but it was not yet good enough. The ale was not right either, but I was glad to sell three or four kegs of ale a day only to get some cash. Gradually the beer and the ale became better. (Portner n.d.:14)

Portner was unusual among his German-American contemporaries in that he was producing ale. He actually made three types, including a lighter "cream" ale and a porter, together constituting about one third of his product. Because ale does not require especially cold temperatures for fermentation, it could be produced during more months of the year than lager. In addition, it could be fermented more rapidly and did not require as much expense for ice. For the same reasons, lager was still not well established in the South. Americans, although greater drinkers of spirits than of malt liquors, had also been accustomed to ale since colonial times. Ale could, however, be more costly in terms of ingredients as it is typically more heavily hopped than lager. (United States Census 1870b; Boyd 1867)

The business doubled; I sold five to six kegs a day and sometimes even eight to ten. I worked eagerly with [Wolters] and I had the opportunity to learn everything completely. I traveled through the state, got some customers, and many a day showed already sales of twelve to sixteen kegs of beer and ale together. On May 1,



A photograph taken shortly after the Civil War showing the saloon of Thomas Anthony Brewis on the 300 block of Cameron Street. The hanging sign reads "PHILADELPHIA ALE / Lager Beer." While Alexandria eventually lost the commercial competition with Baltimore and Washington, until the Civil War the city of Philadelphia was the yardstick by which the town judged itself. There are many newspaper advertisements, for instance, which compared Alexandria manufactures with those of the larger city and former national capital. Even in the mid nineteenth century, Philadelphia was still the source of many competing products such as beer. Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections, William Francis Smith Collection.

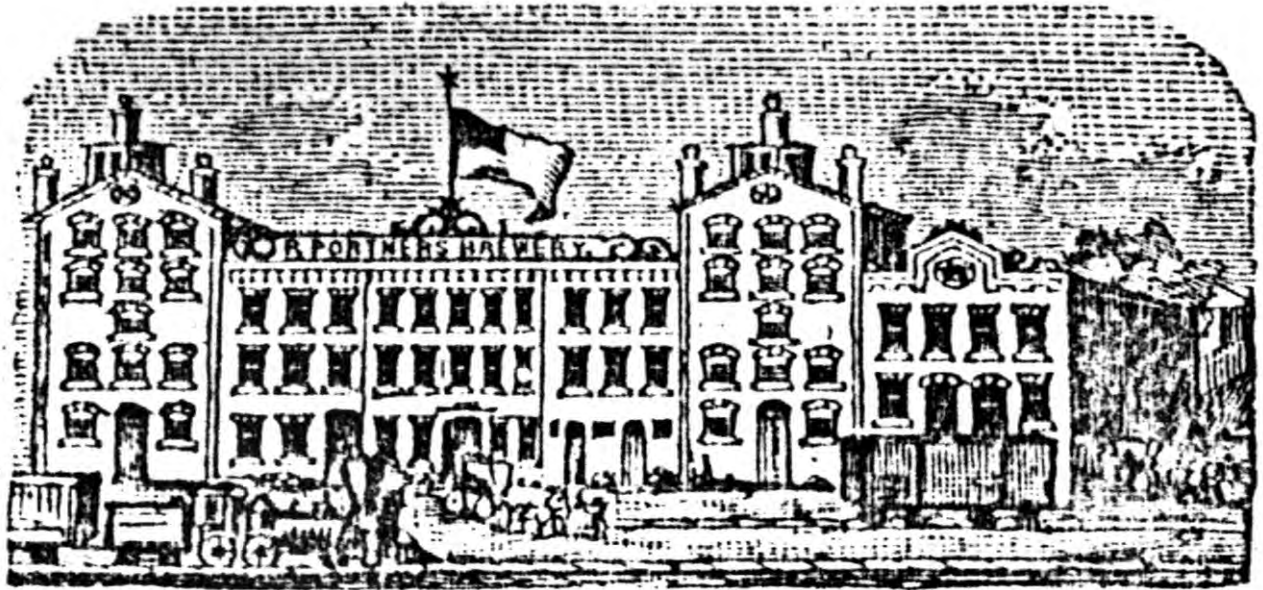
1867, the lager beer which we had stored in the cellars on Washington Street came out for sale. We had pumped out the old sour beer, partly making vinegar of it, partly pouring it away. The new beer was good but the sales were small. I had prepared eight hundred barrels, and sold about three hundred barrels to other brewers, this year showing a loss of \$2,000. But I had a few customers. Since Wolters left me at this time, I hired another brewer named Jacob Biehle from Richmond, where he had been assistant brewer with Yuengling.⁶ But now I was

⁶ Robert Portner later loaned Carl Wolters money to establish a brewery on Mascher Street in Philadelphia during the mid 1870s. Wolters then moved to North 11th Street. The business was re-organized in 1886 as the Prospect

able to supervise the business in every detail, which I did. Every day I went to the cellars and learned more. We brewed the beer the way Wolters had taught me, and the ale was also good. I believe that I sold twelve hundred barrels in 1866-67. By this time I also got some customers in Washington. I went on to work hard, once more sold some beer to other brewers and raised the sales to about seventeen to eighteen hundred barrels. (Portner n.d.:14)

Business looked promising enough and profitable enough that, with loans from his friends and probably brother Louis, Robert decided to finally realize his dream of constructing a new brewery on his property at the north end of town. (*The Western Brewer* June 1880)

In 1867 and 1868 the balance sheet showed no more losses; but the expenditures to transport the beer from the brewery to the cellars and back again were too high. I had to build the brewery on the same site where the cellars were located. Denmead raised my credit to \$16,000 (later to \$20,000), and in the summer of 1868 I started to build the new brewery. I made all the plans and the blue prints myself, moved all the old machines, etc., bought new ones, and when the year 1869 started, I had a very nice brewery. (Portner n.d.:14)



*The earliest known depiction of the Saint Asaph Street brewery, circa 1880.
Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections.*

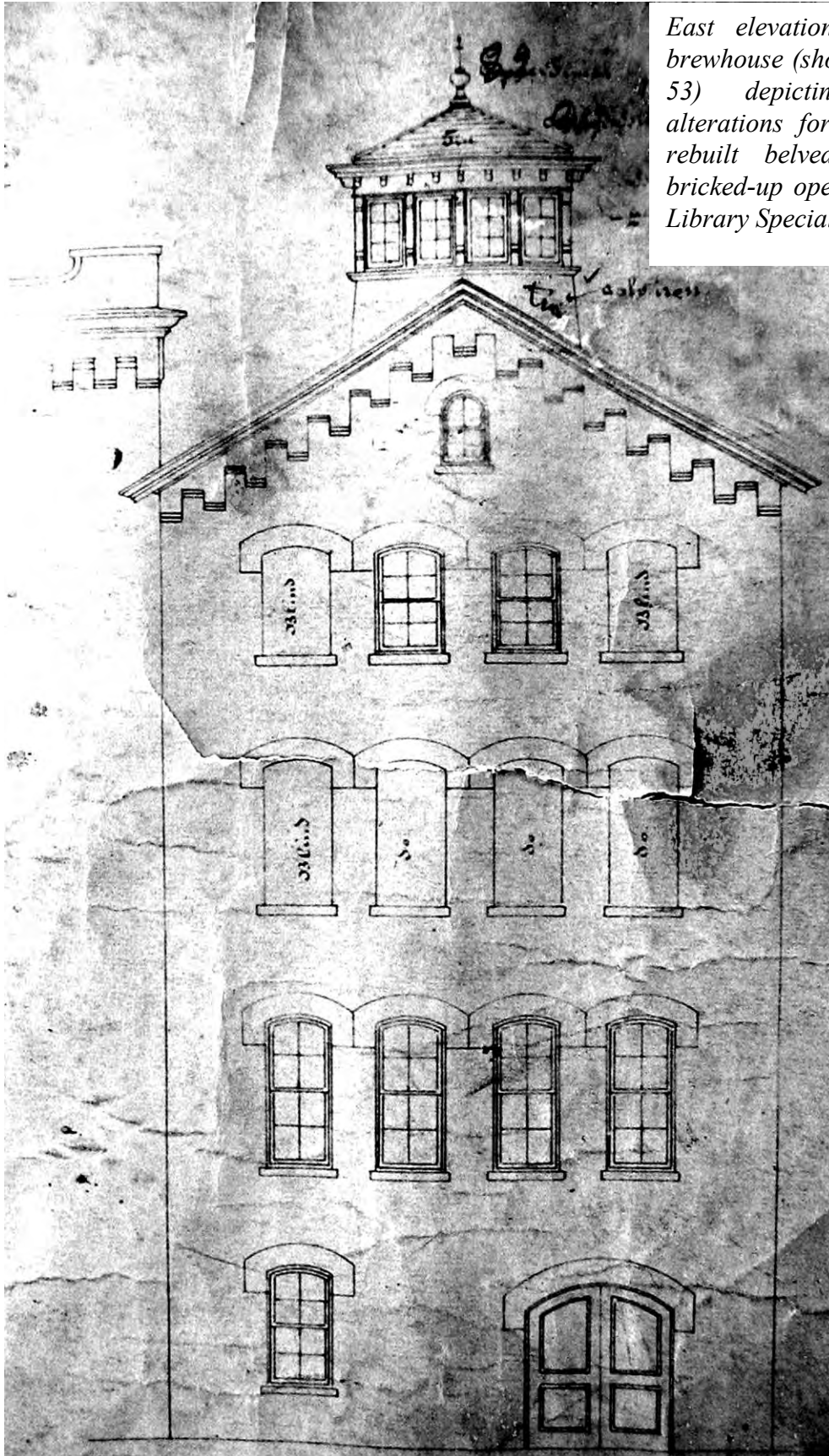
Brewing Company, with Wolters as vice-president and general manager and Karl Hutter as president. Hutter was possibly *the* Karl Hutter, a New York bottle closure manufacturer who supplied Portner with bottles during the 1880s. The Yuengling brewery or “James River Steam Brewery” was founded shortly after the war on the river just below the village of Rocketts, near Richmond. It was organized by three partners, John F. Betz, John Beyer and David G. Yuengling, Jr., son of the famous Pottsville, Pennsylvania brewer. (Van Wieren 1995:325,326; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:402,458; Trow 1875 and 1876; Alexandria Archaeology Collection; Devine & Co. 1866)

Construction was well underway by mid July 1868, but it proceeded not without incident. In August, bricklayers Joseph and Henry Padgett were injured when an arch they were building collapsed. Advertisements make reference to the new brewery as early as October, but Portner retained the old one at least through January 1869. The roughly 60- by 160-foot plant was erected along the west side of what is now the 600 block of North Saint Asaph Street. Its load-bearing brick walls reached thicknesses of two-and-a-half feet. It was clearly Victorian, designed in the “Gothic Italianate” style, popular among German brewers of the period and not dissimilar to the vocabulary of the *circa* 1850 main buildings at the Virginia Theological Seminary a few miles away. The plant was divided into three three-story sections flanked by two four-story front-gabled end pieces, running north and south along the northern half of the block. Each section almost certainly connected to the others at each floor level to expedite the movement of ingredients. Brewing was conducted in the southernmost section, a four-story structure surmounted by a cupola and louvered window openings for cooling and ventilation. Its third story contained hoppers or storage bins for barley malt. The malt was elevated there by mechanical hoists, ready to drop through chutes into the mash tuns on the floor below. The second floor, the center of brewing activity, contained two copper brew kettles and at least one mash tun. The first floor housed the washroom. Attached behind the brewhouse was a structure initially containing an eight-horsepower steam engine and boiler, ventilated by a smokestack. The next section to the north held the coolers used to reduce the temperature of the freshly brewed wort. Because the coolers were located on the third floor (before the advent of artificial refrigeration), the wort had to be pumped upward from the brew kettles. The rest of the floor area was devoted to malt storage. The next, central section also contained hops and malt storage on at least the third floor.⁷ The brewery clearly possessed room for expansion and probably housed some of the functions, like cooperage or bottling, that were later spun off into subsidiary buildings. (*Alexandria Gazette* July 20, 1868, August 21, 1868, October 28, 1868 and January 18, 1869; United States Census 1870b; Sanborn Map Company 1885)

Although Portner does not divulge the cost of his plant, city tax records valued it at twice the worth of the earlier brewery, and this was undoubtedly an understatement. But Portner continued to enlarge and improve his facilities. (Portner n.d.:15; Alexandria Real and Personal Property Assessments) Unfortunately, his beer did not sell itself; there was plenty of competition from other brewers—in Alexandria, Washington, and other cities—and from other alcoholic beverages. At a time when most beer was sold in barrels to taverns, brewers had to market their product aggressively to consumers, and more importantly, to retailers. Like most German-American brewers of the period, Robert Portner decided to sell his own directly to the consumer through his own beer garden and restaurants (see Chapters 6, 8 and 11).

Such an extensive structure as the new brewery probably had an initial annual capacity of 5,000 to 10,000 barrels and required considerable production to pay off the capital investment. In the first full year of operation—or rather the first eight-month “year” of active brewing—the plant produced

⁷ This description of the interior is based mainly upon an 1885 Sanborn insurance map, the first map to clearly suggest an arrangement. By 1885, however, the arrangement would have been modified after Portner added air-conditioning and expanded the plant. Most of the northern sections were then devoted to aboveground cold fermentation and storage.



East elevation of the original brewhouse (shown at left on page 53) depicting circa 1894 alterations for grain storage—a rebuilt belvedere and several bricked-up openings. Alexandria Library Special Collections.

BEST FEED FOR COWS, &c., &c.

FRESH GRAINS,

at the New Brewery, every day.

Price 15c per bushel.

cc 28-1w

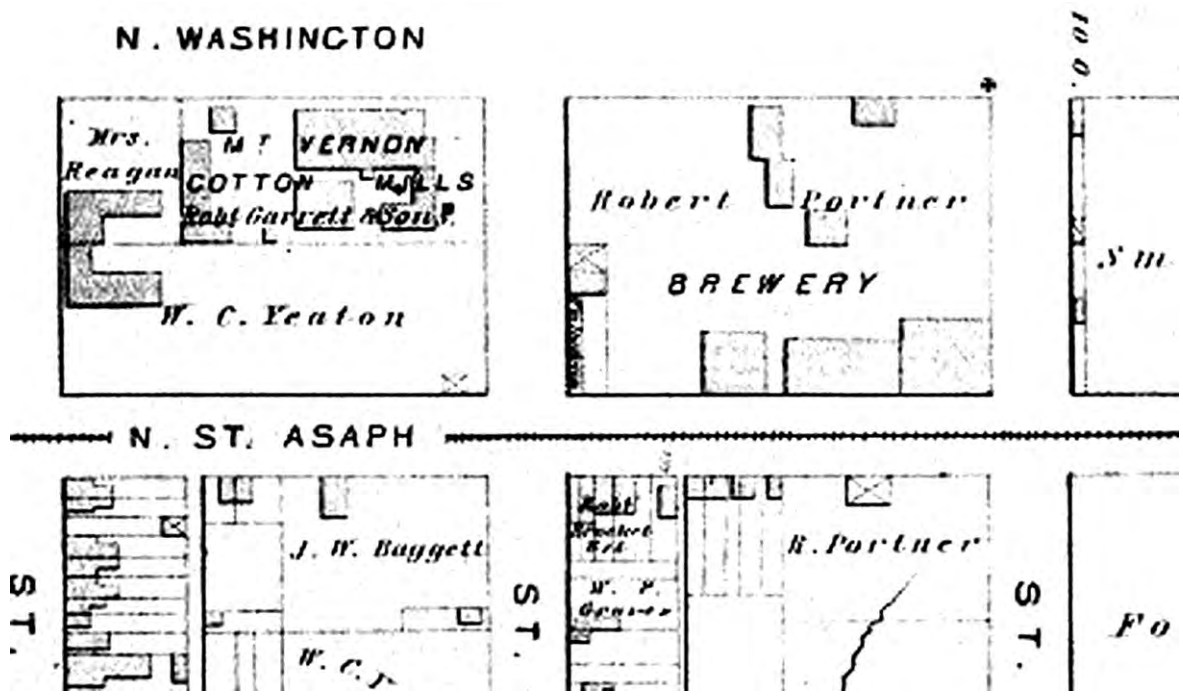
ROBERT PORTNER.

Breweries and distilleries commonly sold and still sell spent and surplus grains for cattle and pig feed. Portner allowed local children to pick up spent barley from the brewery yard for the use of their families.

1,200 barrels of lager and 600 barrels of ale, at a price of \$10 per barrel. Costs included \$2,900 wages for the six employees, \$6,400 for 4,000 bushels of malt, \$1,230 for 3,000 pounds of hops, and \$333 for fuel, that is, coal and wood for the steam engine and brew kettles. The whole represented a net profit of \$7,137 which, of course, was applied to Portner's earnings, his debt payments, and further investment in the business, although not necessarily in that order. (United States Census 1870b)

[Total] sales amounted to about twenty-five hundred barrels [in 1870] and increased to thirty-six hundred barrels the following year. They brought a profit of about five to six thousand dollars. Each year I made a trip to see the progress in other breweries. I started to build an [insulated] ice [storage] house, the first in this part of the country; it was partly finished by spring 1871 and greatly improved the beer sales. In the winter of 1870-71, I had Peter Wolters, Carl's [younger] brother, as a master brewer. He was a good brewer and a hard worker, but had a bad character. The beer he brewed was so good that we became also known in Washington, where I got new customers. I supervised the brewery myself, kept the books, engaged new [customers], and visited old customers. In the office I had the help of a young man. In April 1871, I discharged Wolters and hired a young man named [Edward] Fielmayer, who was a barkeeper in Washington, but he was the son of a brewer from Philadelphia. He stayed with me until the fall of 1871, and then returned to his parents.⁸ On account of the ice house, the business increased enormously. I sold very much, but could not deliver all that was ordered. I made much money, paid off my old debts, and kept on enlarging the ice house. My main helpers in the brewery were some very good and able Negroes, one being an engineer and the other an assistant brewer. (The latter is still with the brewery [i.e., circa 1890].) Even if I had to change master brewers now, it was not so important since the workmen knew

⁸ Fielmeyer (or Fielmayer or Fielemeyer) was the son of Joseph Fielmeyer, who owned a brewery at 2425 North Broad Street in Philadelphia. Edward officially took over management of his father's brewery in the spring of 1880. (Costa 1878; *The Western Brewer* June 1880; Van Wieren 1995:329)



Above: A site plan of the Saint Asaph Street brewery after eight or nine years, plus some of the surrounding blocks into which it would expand. From the G.M. Hopkins map of Alexandria, 1877.

Left: 319 Cameron Street, Alexandria, opposite City Hall and the site of Otto Portner's 1877 saloon, known as the Tivoli Restaurant.

their duties well, and I myself could supervise everything. During the fall of 1871, Paul Muhlhauer came to the brewery as master brewer. He was recommended by Mr. Schwarz, who now owns the brewer school in New York. (Portner n.d.:15)

Muhlhauer would remain as brewmaster for several years, then leave to start his own Baltimore brewery, and return again as brewmaster and plant superintendent until his death in 1890. Next to Portner, he would have the greatest influence on the success of the enterprise until that time. In 1871 he was one of at least eight known regular, full-time employees. It is unfortunate that Portner does not mention the names of his two African-American workers, but he was probably referring to Ben and James (or John) Washington, two native Virginians. Carl Portner had returned to New York, kept a bar, and died in 1873. Louis Portner visited Alexandria for a time in 1869, perhaps to see how his investment—that is, his loan to his younger brother toward the new brewery—was performing. Like father Heinrich Portner, Louis apparently became a court official and election inspector in New York by 1870. Like Robert, he became involved in local Republican politics during the war. But he died shortly before 1880. (*Alexandria Gazette* August 21, 1890; United States Census 1870b; Boyd 1870; United States Census 1900b; Portner n.d.:4; Alexandria Real and Personal Property Assessments; United States Census 1870c; Trow City Directory Co. 1880; Committee of One Hundred on Democratic Re-organization 1881; *New York Times* October 7, 1862 and June 10, 1870; *New York Daily Tribune* November 27, 1869)

Otto Portner remained in Alexandria and maintained his connection with his older brother, although not always as an employee of the brewery. He boarded in the King Street building in which Robert briefly ran a restaurant, and he likely continued to assist Robert, but he also partnered with Henry Herbner running a beer garden next to the brewery in 1867. More important, in 1869 Otto was appointed the local “Internal Revenue Storekeeper,” an agent for the government responsible for examining the books and the premises of breweries, distilleries, tobacco factories, etc. in order to ensure that the proper excise taxes were being paid. In other words, Otto was responsible for auditing Robert’s taxes, an obvious conflict of interest, but not unheard of within a federal bureaucracy still ruled by the spoils system. He was transferred to Staunton, Virginia in 1870, but returned to Robert’s employ as bookkeeper and shipping clerk at the brewery’s first branch depot in Washington from 1876 until 1880 or 1881. At the same time, he and a man named Faber were granted a license to operate a saloon at 71 (now 319) Cameron Street in Alexandria.⁹ This “Tivoli Restaurant” was leased by Robert, an early example of brewery control of a retail outlet. (Boyd 1870; Boyd 1871; United States Census 1870b; Estee 1863; National Archives and Records Administration, *Preliminary Inventory of the Records of the Internal Revenue Service* n.d.:8,25; *Alexandria Gazette* September 9, 1868, June 11, 1869, February 3, 1870 and June 30, 1877; J.H. Chataigne 1876; Boyd’s Directory Co. 1877; Boyd’s Directory Co. 1879; Boyd’s Directory Co. 1880; Alexandria Corporation Court Minute Book 4:15,200,370,417,419)

⁹ Not a great deal is known about Otto’s later life. He apparently remained in Alexandria until at least 1885, when he traveled to Germany. He is known to have been a resident of Strasburg, Virginia by the 1890s. There, he was unemployed and a boarder with the Eberly family in June 1900. A turn-of-the-century book mentions him in passing as “an educated German.” Otto was the only brother to survive Robert, as he was remembered in the latter’s will, but he outlived Robert by only ten weeks. (*Washington Post* May 23, 1885, September 26, 1895 and August 9, 1906; Wayland 1907:100; United States Census 1900b)

By the early 1870s, the prospects for the Robert Portner Brewery had completely reversed from their nadir five years earlier. The property was now worth three times the value of the old King Street brewery and included much of the southern half of the block along Washington and Pendleton Streets, purchased in 1872.¹⁰ The business outdistanced the other two remaining Alexandria breweries. In 1869-1870 Martin's ale brewery, comparable to Portner's in terms of capital investment, was expending proportionately more on inputs but producing much less. And Henry Englehardt, a successor of John Klein and John G. Cook at the Shooter's Hill Brewery in West End, apparently never produced even 500 barrels annually over the period 1872 to 1892. With his own sales way up, Portner invested in a new, more powerful steam engine and in a third delivery wagon, "one of the handsomest vehicles of the kind ever seen." By the end of 1872 he had paid off all his debts and began to build a new house on the brewery property. A boss living so near his industrial plant may seem unusual to us today, but it was common for an era of limited transportation and an indication of Portner's total involvement with the brewery during this period. He could also afford a certain *largesse* toward his growing work force; on Christmas 1874, his men, "who had been presented by the proprietor... with hats and jackets and turkeys, marched in procession through some of the streets..." Having carved out a small beer market in Washington, the brewer now made plans to expand that market by establishing his first rail-accessible distribution depot in that city. He also began diversifying his business interests into other fields (see Chapters 6 and 12). (Alexandria Real and Personal Property Assessments; *Alexandria Gazette* April 26, 1872, March 31, 1873 and December 26, 1874; *Evening Star* May 22, 1873; Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Books 3:65 and 3:175; Portner n.d.:16; United States Census 1870b; Walker, Dennee and Crane 1996)

¹⁰ The parcel had been the site of "Factory Row," worker housing for the nearby 1847 Mount Vernon Cotton Factory. Factory Row burned down in the winter of 1871-1872. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 26, 1872)

**A Partial List of Employees of the Robert Portner Brewery, 1865-1882
(aka Portner's Brewery, the Alexandria Brewery, Vienna Brewery or Tivoli Brewery)**

Sources: United States Census, 1870 and 1880; Robert Portner's memoirs; Alexandria Circuit Court marriage records; city directories; and newspapers

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth
Allen, Thomas	fireman	1881		
Ashby, Carroll	bottling manager	1882-		
Baertsch, John		1880-1904		
Baier [Beyer], George	"brewer"	1880-1881	1852	Bavaria
Beale, Nathaniel	laborer	1880	1851	Virginia
Bealley [Biehle], John		1870	1827	Baden
Bell, Robert Jr.	depot superintendent, Norfolk, VA	1876-1880		
Bernhard, Andrew Jr.		1880-1881		
Bernhardt	driver	-1878		
Biehle, Jacob	brewmaster	1867-1871		
Bontz, George	carpenter and "brewer"	1881	1849	Virginia
Bradley, _____				
Carrington, Henry	laborer	1880	1835	Virginia (a)
Carroll, Francis E.		1880	1860	Virginia (i)
Coles, John		1880-1907?	1843	Virginia
Eils, Bette Edward J.	clerk	1862-1866	1841	Germany
Ewald, Leo J.	watchman	1882-1907	1846	Bavaria
Fielmeyer, Edward	brewmaster	1871		Pennsylvania (g)
Frissius, Christian	clerk; depot manager, Goldsboro, NC	1881-1882; 1882-		
Gaither, Jerry	"hand"	1873	1843	Maryland
Giles, Thomas H.	driver, Lynchburg, VA; depot agent, Lynchburg; collector/driver, Augusta, GA	1879-1881 and 1883-1886; 1881-1883; 1883-1886		
Herbort, Charles Gustave	depot superintendent, Lynchburg, VA; depot superintendent Augusta, GA	1879-1881; 1881-1882	1848	Germany
Jones, Samuel	worker	1880	1846	Virginia
Kell, Arthur	bottler	1880		
Kohout, John	brewmaster/foreman	1878-1882	1845	Bohemia
Lyles, Samuel	cooper	1880-1903	1829	Virginia

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth
Mahler, Wilhelm		1882		
Martin, James	driver	1882		
Mason, James "Sandy"	boiler cleaner	1878-1888	1857	Virginia (a)
Muhlhauser, Paul	brewmaster	1871-1878	1850	Wurtemberg
Oberholzer, Louis	stableman	1880-1882	1836	Switzerland
Padgett, Eugene B.	telegraph operator	1880		
Portner, Otto	clerk; bookkeeper, Washington, DC	1865-1868; 1875-1880	1839	Westphalia
Robertson, Frank	driver	-1881		
Scherr, Louis	summer garden superintendent	1876		
Schwarz, M.	traveling agent	1881		
Smith, Burnett H.	agent	1880	1854	Virginia
Speis, Boniface	"brewer"	1871		
Steiber, Henry	bottling manager, Washington, DC	1880-1883		
Stoecker, Henry	laborer	1875-1905		Germany
Strangmann, Carl	shipping clerk; traveling agent	1875-1882; 1882-	1860	Westphalia
Summers, Bartholomew R.	depot agent, Norfolk, VA	1880-1883		
Telak, Charles		1881		
Valaer, Christian	clerk; bottling manager	1880-1882; 1882-190?	1862	Switzerland
Wallace, Thomas E.	depot manager, Augusta, GA	1882-1884		
Washington, Benjamin	engineer?	1870	1845	Virginia
Washington, J[ames?]	assistant brewer?	1870-1890	1831	Virginia
Weber, Hans		1880-1881		
Weber, John	clerk	1880	1856	Prussia
Welch, John Paul	"brewer"	1880	1829	Bavaria
West, Andrew	"brewer"	1880	1860	Virginia (g)
Wolters, Carl	brewmaster	1866-1867	1830	Prussia
Wolters, Peter	brewmaster	1870-1871	1842	Prussia
Zwirngibel, Joseph	"brewer"	1881		

Chapter 6

Summer gardens and singing clubs: German cultural life in Alexandria and the role of Robert Portner

The story goes that when a German comes to America, he looks for just three things: a saloon, a church, and a singing society.

Chicago saloonkeeper quoted in Perry R. Duis, The Saloon: Public Drinking in Chicago and Boston, 1880-1920

Robert Portner is only the most notable of Alexandria's German immigrants. By the 1870s there was a significant German-American community in the city, albeit small compared to those in the cities of the North and Midwest. Germans provided much of the labor for Portner's brewery and much of the patronage of his many ventures. This chapter will explore Alexandria's early German-American community and how Robert Portner both exemplified and helped shape it.

As is well known, Alexandria was first settled mainly by Scots and Englishmen and their slaves; few others in the early years, except for those newly enslaved, spoke a different tongue. But "from time to time Germans were brought in through Alexandria, and here in this port community lived the only sizable group of Germans in eastern Virginia."¹ Klaus Wust asserts that the first Germans who arrived in Alexandria as a group were "Hessian" prisoners and deserters from the Revolutionary War, but claims of significant numbers of Hessians remaining are surely exaggerated. And they were certainly not the first.² Germans who settled in town early and assumed full rights as citizens included Tobias Zimmerman, John Hess, Michael Stiever, George Christian Otto, and Peter Wagener, who served as county clerk. Native-born families of German descent also began to arrive from Pennsylvania, including the German-American Revolutionary War veteran and potter, Henry Piercy. (Wust 1969:104; Wust 1954; Miller 1992:3,7)

If we look at the list of merchants and tradesmen of Alexandria at the turn of the [nineteenth] century, Germans appear in various fields. There was the well-known vendue master Philip Marsteller, John Richter, a merchant, and Jacob Hoffman, who operated a sugar refinery. Michael Stiever, John Korn, and Jacob Wisemiller were bakers, the latter two having a large bakery which employed four apprentices and six slaves. Germans provided all kinds of services in the community: Thomas Billmeyer was a butcher³; Henry Engle, an ironmonger; Peter Tofler and Peter Hauck, hatters; Andrew Reintzell, a blacksmith, Jacob Ressler, a tallowchandler;

¹ Of course, the Germans were a dominant ethnic group in the rural Shenandoah Valley from the eighteenth century.

² Members of the Zimmerman family, at least, appear as full-fledged Alexandrians in records by the late 1770s, making it pretty certain that they were not Hessian prisoners! The "Hessian" story is likely much exaggerated and romanticized; local lore, for instance, credits Hessian prisoners for laying cobblestone streets in town—streets that were actually laid in the 1790s! Even the term Hessian, of course, was a catch-all for Britain's mercenaries from any of the German states.

³ As were Jacob Heineman and Henry Timmerman. (Moore 1988:106)

John Pfaltz, a clock- and watchmaker; and Henry Harshman, a house painter. There were numerous German carpenters. One of the prominent citizens was Colonel Michael Swope, who had come from York, Pennsylvania, at the close of the Revolutionary War to set up a chandlery business with his son. (Wust 1969:104)

One of the most prominent of the American-born Germans was John Wise (né Johann Weis or Weiss), likely a native of what is now Montgomery County, Maryland and a former Georgetown, Maryland (now Georgetown, District of Columbia) tanner. Wise ran a tavern in Georgetown prior to relocating to Alexandria near the end of the Revolution. In Alexandria he operated a succession of tavern-hotels—including the famous, extant complex now known as “Gadsby’s Tavern”—from the turn of the nineteenth century. (Miller 1981:1,2,4,8,9; Kabler 1952:14,17,19,20)

“Another indication of the continued presence of Germans can be found in the *Alexandria Gazette* in which a local merchant offered German almanacs as late as 1817.” And a couple of Germans were among the earliest members of Alexandria’s first Masonic lodge. (Wust 1969:104; Brockett 1876: 96,107)

Many German immigrants of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had come to America for religious reasons, to establish communities according to their ideals, free from persecution. During the 1830s arrived the first great wave of Germans fleeing instead food shortages and political unrest. The immigrants generally disembarked at northeastern and mid-Atlantic ports and made their way to the Midwest, to farms and to the exploding German-American communities in such towns as Cincinnati and Milwaukee. Many landed at Baltimore, and a number of these made their way to Alexandria and Washington. The two latter cities were also minor ports of entry. Direct commercial contact between the Virginia port and the German states was important enough that Anthony Cazenove, a wealthy Francophone Swiss with business connections to Delaware’s Du Pont family, was appointed trade consul at Alexandria from the Hanseatic League. (Wust 1954; Meier 1965:16-17)



A Prussian four-Pfennige piece dated 1827 and unearthed from a cache of coins at the Gemeny tavern site near Alexandria’s waterfront. Courtesy of Alexandria Archaeology.

“Soon more Germans were attracted by the business opportunities. They were mostly craftsmen and accumulated small fortunes. The Hartbauer, Hohenstein, Grillbortzer, Dietz and Petshold families settled between 1830-1840.” The Hohensteins, Grillbortzers, Dietzes and “Petsholds” (i.e., the Betzolds, who actually arrived in 1816) were actually farmers and/or butchers, agriculturalists typical of the bulk of the immigrants of the 1820s and 1830s, settling, for the most part, in outlying rural areas. As late as the mid 1830s, there were still relatively few in town. The directory for 1834

lists only a handful of German merchants or craftsmen, even in what came to be considered the immigrants' typical or preferred trades. One exception was confectioner David Appich. There were at least two other confectioners, William Zaeb and Charles Frederick Seiz, by 1823. The Zimmermans and Bontzes were also involved in the lumber business and other enterprises in town. (Wust 1954; District of Columbia Circuit Court Register of Aliens; E.A. Cohen & Co. 1834)

Emigration from the German states increased after the failed liberal revolution of 1848, although most still left home for economic reasons. The wave of post-revolution arrivals on American shores peaked in 1853, the year that Robert and Carl Portner landed at New York. Although most were still peasants and craftsmen, the "Forty-Eighters" contained a higher proportion of educated individuals, professionals, and political refugees. The 1860 Alexandria census data, which provide information on occupation and nativity, suggest that they came from all over Germany, about equally from the south German states as from Prussia and the other northern principalities. Alexandria's Forty-Eighters included physician William Klipstein, dentist Julius Dienelt, and music store owner Friedrich Rasche, among others, with more arriving *via* other American cities during the following two decades. (Miller 1986; United States Census 1860a; Wust 1954; Elliott & Nye 1852; Boyd 1860)

One contemporary observer of life in Richmond, Virginia identified two occupations in which Germans dominated: saloons and clothing stores. "The latter were operated mostly by Jews while Gentiles seemed to favor all trades connected with drink and food." Indeed, by 1860 Alexandria was home to many stores specializing in clothing, millinery, shoes and dry goods run by the presumably Jewish entrepreneurs Meyer Kaufman, Samuel Lilienthal, Aaron Seltner, Leopold Genzberger, Henry Blondheim, Isaac Rosenthal, and Henry and Isaac Schwarz, among others. Alexandria's gentile shopkeepers were largely bakers and confectioners, including Louis and David Appich, Christopher Brengle and Christian Schafer; restaurateurs such as John E. Kraus; and grocers like Albert H. Bradt and Joseph Broders. It was also during the immediate antebellum period that Alexandria saw its first lager beer brewery, a type of enterprise that became closely associated with German-Americans. John Klein and Alexander Strausz⁴ rented a property in the adjacent village of West End and began digging a lager cellar in late 1858. (Wust 1969:215; Elliott & Nye 1852; Boyd 1860; Joos n.d.; Fairfax County Deed Book A-4:347; Van Wieren 1995)

Although the general pattern of occupational division between food service and clothing sales and Christian and Jew was observable in many localities, it was not a hard and fast rule, as is attested, for instance, by the Lutheran shoe seller Louis Brill⁵ and the Jewish grocers Seldner & Stein. Germans were also jewelers and watchmakers, butchers, laborers, clerks, gardeners, construction workers, and photographers. And "during the decades between 1850 and 1870 the tobacco trade... was dominated almost completely by Germans," among them, Louis and Robert Portner at the little *circa* 1855 factory in Williamsburg. (Miller 1986; United States Census 1860a; Cunz 1948: 235-236; Portner n.d.:4)

⁴ Klein may not have been a first-generation American, however, and Strausz appears to have been a German-speaking Hungarian. (National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the Supreme Court of the District of Columbia; United States Census 1870g)

⁵ Brill later became a tavernkeeper.

When the Civil War erupted, Alexandria already had a significant German community, but numbering fewer than 200 foreign-born. Most German-Americans were at least nominally anti-slavery, given the fact that their homeland had no such institution but did retain the cultural memory of serfdom. And most German-Americans were free-holding farmers, craftsmen and small entrepreneurs and tended to favor the wage-labor system of the North. They were also all too familiar with the weaknesses of their own politically fractured petty states, and so many supported the preservation of America's federal union.

There were numerous exceptions. Many, particularly farmers, assimilated by accepting the prevailing social and economic relations of their locale and used enslaved labor to get ahead. Throughout the South there were German slaveholders, including the Alexandria sugar refiner, Jacob Hoffman (with thirteen slaves in 1810), grocer Joseph Broders, and confectioner and caterer, Gottlieb Appich.⁶ But on the eve of the Civil War, if the census and personal property tax data is to be trusted, the number of Alexandria Germans who owned slaves or considered them part of the household could be counted on one hand. And probably only about twice as many hired one or two live-in enslaved servants for extended periods of time in the household or as shop employees. The census of 1860 suggests that among the German residents of that year, Appich owned the most slaves, a total of five individuals. It is perhaps no coincidence that he was one of the earlier wave of immigrants that arrived before the revolution of 1848 and had assimilated into the defensively pro-slavery, post-Missouri Compromise, post-Nat Turner Rebellion culture. (Barr, Cressey and Magid 1994:255; United States Census 1860a; United States Census 1860c)

Businesslike Alexandria voted Unionist during the 1860 elections, but then voted for secession once Lincoln called up troops to put down the nascent rebellion.⁷ Germans in the South mostly tried to remain neutral during the crisis, although some fought for the Confederacy. A number of Alexandrians with Teutonic surnames enlisted with the 17th Virginia Infantry, for instance, but most of these were second- or third-generation Americans. But at least a couple of these, August Winterroll (enrolled as August Calmes) and Isaac Schwarz, were recent immigrants. Many Germans instead fled to Union-controlled territory, and in some places they protested or even took up arms against the rebels. A German Union League formed in Alexandria. The war stirred new currents of migration. The city was occupied by the North's Army of the Potomac, some members of which settled in the South after the war. Several regiments were all-German, including the Eighth New York Infantry, the unit in which served the Portners' cousins, the Burbaums. Germans were among the many refugees who flooded into the city during the conflict.⁸ Most numerous, however, were those who came from the North to take advantage of the artificial prosperity in the theater of war, but safely behind the lines. In addition to Portner and Recker, Kaercher and Abner came a large group of young Forty-Eighters looking for business opportunities. Initially, they made their presence felt most in typical roles of grocer, restaurateur or tavernkeeper, catering, sometimes

⁶ Underground Railroad "conductor" William Still tells of runaway Townsend Derrix, who escaped from Appich, and perhaps more important, from the hot-tempered Mrs. Appich, in 1857. According to Derrix, on balance, the couple was harsh with their slaves. (Still 1871:460-461)

⁷ In the election of 1860, Constitutional Union candidate John Bell received 58 percent of the vote in Alexandria, and Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge garnered only 32 percent. Alexandrians also overwhelmingly elected a Unionist delegate to the state convention on the secession question. (Dols 1995:12)

⁸ These included a group of 43 refugees, for instance, who arrived from Richmond at the beginning of March 1864, most of whom were Germans. (*Alexandria Gazette* March 2, 1864)

in spite of legal prohibitions, to the troops and hangers-on. Men like Robert Portner, Friedrich Pfaff, Justus Schneider, Fred Recker, John Eissler and Christian Poggensee would become leaders among the German community and founders and sustainers of its institutions. A rabbi, a chaplain with the Army of the Potomac, gave a brief sketch of the impact of German-Jewish newcomers on Alexandria:

[T]he trades people... consider it quite a piece of good luck to obtain one window in a leading street for the display of their goods. In the principal business street, I could easily identify half the firms as belonging to the well-known Jewish nomenclature; two kosher boarding-houses are already established there, which is not bad for a place where a year ago there was not a single representative of the chosen race... (Jewish-American History on the Web 2001)

This appears to be no exaggeration, as the local newspaper observed the desertion of King Street on the high holy days of 1863, it “had quite a Sunday appearance.” (*Alexandria Gazette* September 16, 1863, September 18, 1863 and September 23, 1863)

“After the war many Germans left Alexandria and headed for the Midwestern states. Those firmly settled in business stayed and became more and more an integral part of the community.” The German-born population of Alexandria and Fairfax County in 1870 was 302. German immigration to America continued after the war, with a postbellum peak in the early 1880s. Most immigrants were still farmers. Throughout the South, states and localities enticed immigrants with cheap land in order to revive depressed local economies. The railroads and shipping companies also had vested interests in attracting European settlers. In 1868, about 10,000 Germans made the Atlantic crossing on the steamships of the Baltimore and Bremen line alone. These “pioneers” passed through Alexandria on trains bound for the Deep South, some headed for abortive experiments in tenant farming meant to replace African-American labor. But Alexandria and environs managed to coax a few of the new arrivals. As early as autumn 1863, Queen Anne County, Maryland owners sent for German immigrants to replace runaway and enlisted slaves. At the end of 1865, Col. John Fairfax of Loudon County, meaning to “thoroughly test this... new species of labor,” offered to pay the newcomers \$60 a year plus one acre for every three years’ service. For a brief time, Alexandria immigration agents Witmer and Washington received numerous orders for help, the *Alexandria Gazette* observing hopefully, that “freedmen here have become so uncertain, it is not improbable that white labor will entirely supplant negro in this section of Virginia.” Ultimately, the most active in the settlement effort was the real estate firm of Green & Wise, trying to stimulate demand for local farmland and town lots. The company organized a system of agents in Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, Canada, and elsewhere in the U.S. to provide potential settlers with inducements and favorable information about northern Virginia. They also assisted emigrants with arrangements for the passage. Green & Wise dispatched August Vogle, a Forty-Eighter resident of Alexandria, to his homeland “to make an effort to turn the tide of emigration from that country, now going to the West, to Virginia, and [they] have furnished him with a large amount of printed matter, cards, circulars, &c., to be used by him, setting forth the advantages of this State.” The state government set up a Board of Immigration and prepared a promotional circular for similar reasons. (Wust 1954; Wust 1969:227; *Alexandria Gazette* November 13, 1863, December 8, 1865,

December 9, 1865, March 25, 1868, September 28, 1869, September 30, 1869, and November 29, 1869, April 14, 1872, April 26, 1872 and April 29, 1872; Walker 1872:838)

Many of the fresh immigrants entered jobs in established German-owned firms. By the late nineteenth century, German-Americans dominated brewing, baking, glassmaking, tobacco wholesale, pottery, lithography, and optics, and they were influential in many other industries. According to the United States Census of 1870, more than half of those identified as brewers and maltsters were German-born. In 1880, the number was 9,925 Germans out of 16,278 total employees. This figure does not take into consideration second- or third-generation Germans, nor those of German origin from outside the German Empire, including such places as Austria, Hungary, Switzerland, France, the Netherlands, Poland and Russia. In the beginning, the United States Brewers Association, the brewing lobby, conducted conferences in German. Later, these were conducted alternately in German and English. One of the primary brewing trade magazines, *American Brewer (Amerikanische Bierbrauer)* was published in German and English. Of the approximately 250 individuals known to have been employed by Robert Portner and his brewery between 1865 and 1916 (see pages 60-61 and Appendix A), about 42 percent were natives of Germany and nearby German-speaking countries and regions or of the second generation from those places. There was a sprinkling of British and Irish and Dutch among them, the immigrant groups next most likely to be involved in brewing. The largest influx of Germans to Alexandria occurred during the Civil War; the presence of the Portner brewery as a large employer may have been a major factor in attracting Germans from other mid-Atlantic cities thereafter. (United States Census Bureau 1883; Schlüter 1910:77-78)

A combination of good-fellowship, insecurity, nostalgia, patriotism, religious devotion, commercial “networking,” and mutual support made German immigrants, the Forty-Eighters in particular, recreate the social, cultural and religious institutions of their homeland. In nearby Washington, D.C., the larger immigrant community had spawned a German-language newspaper and literary magazine, a German Benevolent Society, and a German band by the mid 1840s. Alexandria would follow suit with similar organizations of its own, and in the post-Civil War era, Robert Portner would be involved with most of them. (Bryan 1916:283)

Arguably the most important institutions to any new immigrant group were their religious congregations and houses of worship. Catholic Germans attended St. Mary’s Church, founded by the Irish in the 1790s. The town’s Jewish community was sizable enough after the 1848 revolutions and before the Civil War to establish a burial society in 1857, Virginia’s first Reform congregation in 1859, and a smaller Orthodox congregation the same year.⁹ Lacking a house of worship during the conflict, the Reform Jews nonetheless established a German school. Its rabbis’ lectures were often delivered in “pure German.” In 1871, led by Rabbi Loewensohn, they erected “a beautiful synagogue,” Beth El, on the west side of the 200 block of North Washington Street. A tiny Lutheran congregation also formed in Alexandria in the 1790s and set aside a church lot at the south end of town, but it could not secure a minister. Even during the war, despite the influx of Germans, factionalism between denominations prevented the establishment of any permanent Protestant house of worship. It was not until 1868 that a permanent evangelical Lutheran church

⁹ Naturally, these were German Jews; the first Russian Jews did not arrive in Alexandria until the end of the nineteenth century. (Baker 1983:11)

organization formed under the auspices of the Missouri Synod. “The attempt has been made several times to organize a German Church in this city, but has always failed, there being no minister to take the matter in hand and carry it through energetically. The Rev. John M. Brandt, D.D., of Baltimore, being in the city, an opportunity is offered, such as has not yet been presented...” (Beth El Hebrew Congregation 1984:1; Wust 1954; Wust 1969: 104, 226; *Alexandria Gazette* August 28, 1863, February 6, 1864, February 12, 1868, September 24, 1868, September 22, 1879 and December 22, 1881)

All had to struggle for daily existence and years passed by before confidence in a prosperous future was restored. It was in 1868 when Friedrich Pfaff, Adolf Diedel, W. Bauer, Brill, West, Mumm, Wenzel and others united to build a German-Lutheran church and school and invited Rev. J.R. Bischof to become the pastor, but the permanent organization of the community was not accomplished until 1884, although a church had been built.” (Schuricht 1977:186)

Christian Poggensee—another wartime arrival, innkeeper, restaurateur, cigar maker, and small-time brewer—was among the church’s first trustees, as were E. Piepenbring, G. Allbrand, Mannerhoff, and Niedomanski. Fred Recker, Robert Portner’s old partner, was appointed treasurer of the church council in October 1868. In the early days, the congregation met at First Presbyterian Church. (Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866; Fairfax Deed Book F-4:434; *Alexandria Gazette* September 28, 1868, October 9, 1868 and October 24, 1868; Wust 1969:237)

[The church building, erected in 1879 at the northeast corner of Cameron and Alfred Streets,] was a wooden structure about sixty feet deep and forty feet wide, with a steeple and bell donated by the well known brewer Robert Portner. One day, when the church was in course of erection, Mr. Portner happened to pass by and he asked the architect to show him the plan. He was surprised that no steeple had been projected and inquired for the reason. “The community is small and poor,” explained the architect, “and they have not got the means.” “Well,” argued Mr. Portner, “without a steeple it will be no church. Draw a plan for one, bell included, and I will pay the costs.”¹⁰ (Schuricht 1977:186-187)

For at least twenty years, the Lutheran services were conducted solely in German. The immigrants, particularly the educated Forty-Eighters, were interested in promoting intellectual pursuits as well as perpetuating their mother tongue. As many as three German language schools were established for their young during the Civil War, including that affiliated with the Beth El congregation. The Lutheran pastor, Brandt, “Late Professor of the Hebrew Language, Theology and Moral Philosophy of the Western Maryland College,” established his own German and English school and offered private German and French lessons to adults. Many social events doubled as fundraisers for the schools. To keep the connection with their homeland and culture, and to provide information on politics and current events, the adults of Alexandria also supported German

¹⁰ The architect was John Powell. The newspaper described the church as rather smaller, 24 by 40 feet (the lot was presumably 40 by 60), but “plain, neat and comfortable,” and to cost \$800. The galvanized-steel-clad steeple was lifted into place in October 1879. (Wust 1969:225; *Alexandria Gazette* September 4, 1879, October 16, 1879 and October 18, 1879)

newspapers, in addition to purchasing those available from Washington and other cities. In 1861 the Fifth Pennsylvania Infantry published a bilingual newspaper, setting the type in the offices of the *Alexandria Gazette*, and printing it on the *Alexandria Sentinel*'s press. In mid 1863 a German-language weekly publication, the *Alexandria Beobachter*, was established, but its probable publisher, Philip Schriftgiesser, “was a queer fellow and his paper enjoyed only a short existence.”



*Left: Beth El Synagogue. Washingtoniana Division, District of Columbia Public Library.
Right: The German Lutheran Church, 1920s. From History of Immanuel Lutheran Church.*

Some of the musical and dramatic societies, the *Eintracht* in particular, staged plays, mostly farces, but some dramas and even operettas. One of the Portner brothers was noted as an actor of the German Dramatic Society in 1866.¹¹ (Wust 1954; Wust 1869:224,241; *The Local News* June 5, 1863; *Alexandria Gazette* June 5, 1863, August 28, 1863, October 7, 1863, March 20, 1866, January 31, 1868, October 17, 1868, October 20, 1868, October 26, 1868, December 5, 1868 and February 26, 1869)

The immigrants did not neglect physical fitness either. One of the many clubs and societies popular among the Germans was the *Turnverein*, or “Turners Club.” Men’s clubs devoted to fitness through gymnastics and calisthenics, *Turnvereine* also had political and even military overtones; they were originally founded in Germany during the Napoleonic Wars as nationalistic, anti-French groups. They were later suppressed by German governments as nests of liberal sentiment. Once in the United States, the Forty-Eighters founded *Turnerhalle* (Turner halls) with a liberal-democratic and nationalistic—that is, pro-German unification—bent. The first American Turner hall was dedicated New Year’s Day 1850 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Members were typically required to be of German ancestry and of good moral character. Stressing patriotism, liberal ideas and physical

¹¹ The German Dramatic Society’s first home was then 44 King Street, but it moved to a new hall at King and Washington Streets at King and Washington Streets. (*Alexandria Gazette* March 20, 1866 and April 26, 1866)

training, the Turners stood by as latent militia. Just as many of the *emigré* revolutionaries of 1848 became soldiers and military leaders during the American Civil War, many of the German Civil War regiments formed companies from local Turnvereine. At the beginning of the war, the Turners of Saint Louis forcibly prevented Confederate militia from seizing the local armory and, therefore, the city. Richmond police took the precaution of scattering the Turners there to prevent subversion or rebellion. The Alexandria Turnverein was established only at the end of the war, with 28 young men as its first members. They may have participated in the *Turntag* (“Turners Day”) rally in Baltimore in September 1865 and held a “first annual ball” that November. Likewise, Alexandria periodically hosted Turners from Baltimore, Washington and Georgetown. (Faust 1969:389; Wust 1969:225; Wust 1954; *Alexandria Gazette* November 1, 1865 and June 29, 1868)



“Turnleben in Cincinnati” (*Turner Life in Cincinnati*), a circa 1870 lithographed composite portrait of the leaders of the Turnvereine in the most German of American cities. The image depicts the men with the attributes and equipment of the clubs’ most important pursuits: physical training, sharpshooting, hunting, riding, music and singing, and beer drinking. Many of the leaders and members were, in fact, brewers. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

A significant part of life for the whole German community, women and children included, was the social and cultural club. Although membership was limited to men, the clubs sponsored many family entertainments. These clubs evolved from men’s singing societies, a very popular pursuit among native Germans. Alexandria’s first German singing club, the *Alexandria Sängerbund*, was

established in 1853, directed by music teacher Friedrich Rasche and accompanied by his children. It probably lasted no more than a few years. By the late 1850s, the *Musikverein Alexandria* was founded at the suggestion of Dr. Julius Dienelt. “In 1859 the Alexandria singers participated in the great German-American Music Festival in Baltimore. A[ugustus] Oppermann, A.F. Fischer, A[ugustus] H. Fuechsel, William Meinberg, John Quenzel and Henry Schwarz, all businessmen of Alexandria, were some of the members of the Musikverein.” This club may have dissolved during the war, but the *Alexandria Männerchor* or *Deutscher Männerchor* (“German Men’s Choir”) was founded in 1864, largely comprised of wartime arrivals, and set up rooms on King Street above Water (Lee) Street. A few months later, Robert Portner and his friends formed another society, the *Concordia Gesangverein* (“Concordia Glee Club”). These two later combined, appropriately renamed *Die Eintracht* (“Unity”). Each of these had its own club rooms complete with stage and bar. They diversified from their initial, solely choral performances to staging concerts, plays and dances. The clubs’ rooms were important centers for the German community. They also provided venues for political meetings and for the launching of financial ventures. The wider community enjoyed the entertainments; prominent members of the Anglo-American community attended many of the German-sponsored masquerade balls and prize dances. At the end of 1868 the Eintracht split into two groups, the Eintracht Association and the Harmonie Association. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 24, 1853 and September 5, 1865; Wust 1954; Portner n.d.:12)



The former home of Harmonie Hall, the club room of the Harmonie Association during the 1860s and 1870s. The association met in the upper room, above the Adams Express office. City Council met in the club room in 1871-1873, after City Hall burned. The façade of this building was altered during the twentieth century.

The Harmonie was “to be devoted to the development of the social amenities and singing, dancing and music generally.” The club rented rooms over the Adams Express office on the east side of the 100 block of North Fairfax Street. Its original officers included Abraham Rosenthal, president; Julius Dienelt, vice-president; Justus Schneider, secretary; Lewis Stein, secretary; and directors Ignatz Rammel, Isaac Weinberg, John M. Eissler, Robert Portner and Fred Recker. Otto Portner

later served as vice-president. Offering prize dances and masque balls in addition to its “modestly operatic productions,” the club even had its own signature balls or “Harmonie reels.” (*Alexandria Gazette* December 19, 1868, December 13, 1869 and February 7, 1873; Wust 1969:241)

Many of the Harmonie Association founders had been members of the Eintracht, and one of the Portners had been an Eintracht director. It is unclear why these combinations and splits occurred among the social clubs. Factionalism resulting from generational, personal and political differences and varying attitudes toward assimilation may have been responsible. Many of the Harmonie’s board members were already established in Alexandria before the war, others came during and after, but they all seem to have been Forty-Eighters, so they may have been of roughly the same age and possessive of similar values. The *Alexandria Gazette* suggests that the differences may have included class, the Harmonie perhaps consisting of the most socially ambitious, “some of the most prominent German residents of the city, with a sprinkling of those to the manor born.” It is perhaps worth noting that, given the significance of anti-Semitism to the history of the twentieth century, there is little documentary evidence of it among Alexandria’s Germans. Christians apparently attended the German school sponsored by the Beth El Hebrew Congregation, and Jews were prominent in the singing and social clubs and in the German business and financial organizations. The board of the Harmonie was approximately half Jewish, including dentist Dienelt, founder of the earlier *Musikverein*. German Jews prided themselves on their German-ness, and the liberal Reform Jews assimilated readily to American society. They did, however, establish their own “Mount Vernon Chapter” of B’nai Brith; Justus Schneider was its delegate to the 1879 national conference. It is probably not too risky to assume that there was more anti-Semitism from outside of the German community than within it at that time. (Wust 1954; Baker 1993:13; *Alexandria Gazette* September 14, 1868, December 19, 1868, December 31, 1868 and June 23, 1879)

Singing, dancing, games and social drinking were key components of social life in America’s German enclaves. As in their homeland, “beer drinking was part of the German-American way of life. There was little drunkenness: it was a social phenomenon, part of the cultural scene, on a par with oom-pah-pah brass bands, Strauss music, and choir-singing. Parties, birthdays, and commemorations of all types would have been unthinkable without the natural tonic, the ‘teutonic’ stein of beer.” It was the tavern that served the function of “club” for the average German and the average Anglo-American working man alike. The nineteenth-century working class had little time for recreation. Workers typically put in six-day weeks, with twelve-hour days common, leaving only Sunday afternoons for true leisure. It is possible that Alexandria workers were able to frequent restaurants or saloons for lunch or after work, but this was also subject to their time constraints and financial means to do so. The low-end saloon was one of the few entertainment venues available to the poor. (Behr 1996:65; Roberts 1991:108; Schlüter 1910:54; Heurich n.d.:42)

The immigrants eagerly met a nonetheless substantial demand for eating and drinking establishments. The keeping of inns, restaurants, taverns and summer gardens became one of the most popular occupations among the Germans by the 1870s, and often a stepping-off place for greater things. In that respect, the nineteenth-century Germans were not dissimilar to many first- and second-generation Greek-, Chinese-, Italian-, and Korean-American restaurateurs. In German villages, the occupation of innkeeper was one of the most respectable and profitable occupations for

a commoner. The benefits of running a restaurant or a bar included the fact that the more modest ones required relatively little start-up capital in those days. The skills necessary for the preparation of their native food and drink were already possessed by the proprietor and his family or were readily available among their countrymen. Gregarious German entrepreneurs were undoubtedly also attracted by the idea of being masters of their own “club.” One drawback was the fact that there was so much competition, as each neighborhood had more than one bar. A proprietor could appeal to customers by the quality and price of his services, the ambiance and entertainment, or common national origin (see Chapter 11 for more on Alexandria saloons).

In the late 1860s and early 1870s the *Alexandria Gazette* was filled with advertisements for these little establishments. Justus Schneider, for instance, invited patrons to partake of draft “buck beer”¹² and a free lunch. Similarly, Ignatz Rammel offered free lunch at his Market Alley place, including “Frankfurter” sausage and sauerkraut from Hingen am Rhein, to be washed down with lager beer. The former editor of the *Alexandria Beobachter*, Philip Schriftgieser, had turned to keeping bar by 1866, and later, Jacob Brill, former shoemaker and Lutheran church trustee, opened one of the finest restaurants in town. In addition to the Portner brewery, the Portner & Winteroll brewery, the Martin brewery and the Klein/Cook/Englehardt brewery, postwar Alexandria also had two very small brewing operations with their own restaurants or bar rooms attached. Christian Poggensee and George Steuernagel each opened what we might today call brewpubs shortly after hostilities had ceased, producing perhaps fifteen barrels a month during the brewing season. Poggensee’s was short-lived, but Steuernagel parlayed his business into a larger restaurant and inn on Royal Street. (*Alexandria Gazette* July 8, 1868, May 1, 1872 and February 7, 1873; Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Books X-3:407,430 and 16:128; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866; Fairfax Deed Book F-4:434; Brockett and Rock 1883; Alexandria Archaeology collection; author’s collection)

Like many of his fellow German entrepreneurs, Robert Portner sought to establish his own restaurant. As a brewer, his interest was in creating a market for his product—difficult in yet another crowded and competitive field. He had had some success getting his beer into other Alexandria saloons, attested to by his increasing production and sales figures, but nonetheless opened his own place in the late 1860s, probably prior to March 1868. The restaurant was located at what was then 115 King Street, on the north side between Saint Asaph and Pitt Streets, and it was possibly managed by his brother Otto. Portner does not mention the establishment in his memoirs, perhaps because it did not last long and, in retrospect, was not terribly important to his career. He

¹² Or rather, “bock” beer, a seasonal variety attributed to Munich, but deriving its name from the fact that the Munich brewers were trying to imitate the popular beers of the town of Einbeck (*Ainpoeck* in the Bavarian dialect). Reference to the beer was eventually shortened to “bock.” In a 1932 magazine article, a Saint Louis German-American woman reminisced about the spring bock season in the late nineteenth century: “We knew that while bock beer lasted pretzels would be free at all beer saloon counters, and patrons, moved to song, would grow hoarse in saengerfests. We knew that while bock beer lasted there would be many who would marry, some even for a second time; and second weddings were twice as much fun. We knew that with bock beer and pinochle the grown-ups would let the evenings stretch and give us our fill of games and peanuts.... [A]fter supper until dark we might follow a Little German Band from beer saloon to beer saloon in our neighborhood, listen to the singing, and reap pretzels and soda water.... Then came the day when the bung went out of the last keg of the mellowed brew at Hermann Klein’s saloon. The breweries had sent out warning that bock beer was near the end of its season.” (Daniels 1996:175-178; Kohler 1932:210,213)

probably realized that he would make his fortune in brewing rather than as a restaurateur and may have given up this second business as disproportionately demanding of his time and effort. So in July 1870, the brewer conveyed it, “fixtures, furniture and good will” to fellow Germans Lewis Franke and Christian Behn. It was later operated by Fritz Schneider. This would not be Portner’s last venture into the retail side of the beer business, however. He would, for instance, operate a restaurant in Washington during the mid 1870s (see Chapter 8) and a hotel at Manassas, Virginia just prior to his death. He backed his brother Otto in a Cameron Street saloon (see pages 50, 57 and 58) and would invest in other bars as well. But most important in these early days was his establishment of an example of that quintessentially German institution, the beer garden. (*Alexandria Gazette* March 5, 1868 and May 1, 1872; Portner n.d.:14; Boyd 1870; Boyd 1871; Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book 1:469; Simmons 1986:66; Ratcliffe 1978:103; Alexandria Corporation Court Minute Book 4:15,200,370,417,419)

Most early German-American brewers, including several Alexandrians, established restaurants, saloons, or beer gardens as a subsidiary concern. The beer hall and beer garden were old traditions carried here from the old country and, on a practical level, allowed brewers to introduce and sell more of their product. Beer gardens or summer gardens were usually pleasant, shady, park-like settings, often with “flower terraces, a bandstand, a bowling alley and tavern where, on Sunday afternoons” people could come to relax, listen to music, eat “assorted wurst sandwiches,” sauerkraut, pretzels and sardines, and enjoy beer. They were also often open for dances or other entertainments on pleasant summer evenings. (Kelley 1965:257; Ade 1931:45,47)

No two of them were exactly alike, but most were ornate and attractive as the competition demanded. All had tables and chairs rather than a bar, and the food they served was often as important as beer in attracting trade. Music was essential, but what started as small brass bands eventually evolved into orchestras, famous soloists, and vaudeville-type performances. (Duis 1983:154)

Depending on the location and on the character of the proprietor, beer gardens could be sites for church picnics or for gambling and prostitution. At the very least, the owner ran the risk of occasional besotted unruliness. But generally, the establishments offered wholesome family recreation. The overwhelming number of German restaurants and summer gardens were indeed family places—safe, brightly lit, reputable, honest, and discouraging of drunkenness. (Kelley 1965:407; Duis 1983:154)

Alexandria and Washington had had “pleasure grounds”—privately owned parks where families or groups could picnic or stroll—since the turn of the nineteenth century.¹³ But the German-sponsored summer gardens, with their permanent structures, organized entertainments, food and drink, and sometimes, admission prices, were an innovation. It appears that the first Washington beer gardens were created shortly before the war. They commonly contained ten-pin alleys and dance pavilions. Because of the general prohibition of alcohol sales during the conflict, there were few beer gardens established in Alexandria until hostilities ceased. The first may have been George H. Mellen’s in 1864. Weiss-beer brewer and soda maker Christian Poggensee may have opened his

¹³ Spring Gardens, for instance, opened at the south end of Alexandria by 1804. (*Alexandria Gazette* December 1869)

in the spring of 1866 on King Street near Shuter's Hill, indicated by a large sign marked "Brewery and Garden."¹⁴ The adjoining small plant was producing a dozen or so barrels of weiss beer a month. W.H. Smith operated a summer garden near the southwest corner of King and Washington during 1866 and closed out the year with a Christmas-season turkey raffle. (Provost Marshal; *Evening Star* September 13, 1924 and April 23, 1933; Internal Revenue Assessments 1862-1866; Fairfax County Deed Book F-4:434; *Alexandria Gazette* July 7, 1866 and December 17, 1866)

By the early 1870s there was a proliferation of these poor-man's resorts during the stifling Virginia summers. They generally opened around the beginning of May and closed at the beginning of October, the least active season for formal club entertainments. In May 1868 Engelhardt and Kaercher—presumably Henry Englehardt, the future proprietor of the West End Brewery, and John Kaercher, saloonkeeper and likely relative of the former Portner & Company brewmaster—"handsomely fitted up" an "attractive summer resort" at the western end of King Street. Possibly situated at Poggensee's old place or just west of the former Portner & Co. brewery, the partners offered "pleasant recreation, and quiet and congenial entertainment," in addition to refreshments of all kinds. The local newspaper commented that the grounds were "tastefully laid off; and the place is one where an hour or so can be spent during the summer evenings, very agreeably." The garden re-opened for at least the next two seasons. In May 1872 Fritz Schneider set up his own garden at the site of Robert Portner's former King Street restaurant.¹⁵ In addition to "fine music," he offered the "best wines, liquors, bock beer, segars, &c." that could be obtained. Mary Geizer bought much of the seedy, underdeveloped "Jackson City" parcel near Long Bridge in Alexandria (now Arlington) County with the intention of opening a beer garden. Such resorts persisted in Alexandria until at least 1911. Entertainments at these establishments commonly consisted of concerts and balls. Proprietors booked the area's popular orchestras, such as Frank Kyle's Washington Brass Band, Cook's Cotillion Band, Clarkson's Brass Band, Professor Weber's Germania Band, and the Alexandria Brass and String Band. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 19, 1867, May 16, 1868, May 22, 1868, May 29, 1869, April 27, 1870, April 30, 1872, May 1, 1872, May 2, 1872, June 12, 1878 and June 2, 1911; Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections)

Robert Portner was not to be outdone by his peers. In 1866 he leased much of his Washington Street property—which at that time consisted of a half block with subterranean beer vaults and one or two frame buildings—to Hesse-Cassel native and Forty-Eighter Henry Herbner for a summer garden. First referred to as "Portner's Potomac Garden," the establishment opened May 21, with a "splendid brass band... discours[ing] sweet music upon the occasion." With its weekly balls and occasional prize dances, the place quickly became a popular resort. Another of its attractions was Herbner's growing menagerie of pets, including Dick, "the famous talking crow" (likely a mynah bird), whose unfortunate and "extreme fondness for whiskey and lager beer" caused his death in mid August, and "a curious specimen of Owl, which has occasioned considerable remark." In early 1868, "some evil disposed person" would destroy this mini-zoo by poisoning the animals' feed.

¹⁴ Poggensee arrived during the war and first tried his hand at running a cheap waterfront hotel. He then went into the manufacture of soda water under the prohibitionist regime of the military governor. His postwar brewery probably lasted no more than a year or two. By 1870 Poggensee was selling cigars in a shop on King Street. He then moved to Washington, where he engaged in the retail tobacco business until his death. (Internal Revenue Assessments 1862-1866; Boyd 1870)

¹⁵ Schneider may have had a beer garden as early as 1870. (*Alexandria Gazette* December 22, 1869)

SUTER'S HILL GARDEN,

SITUATED AT THE WESTERN TERMINUS OF KING STREET, ALEXANDRIA, VA.,

Has been handsomely fitted up for the season, and the under signed beg leave to recommend this attractive summer resort to all desiring pleasant recreation, and quiet and congenial entertainment.

Refreshments of all kinds on hand.

ENGELHARDT & KAERCHER,

my 22—1m

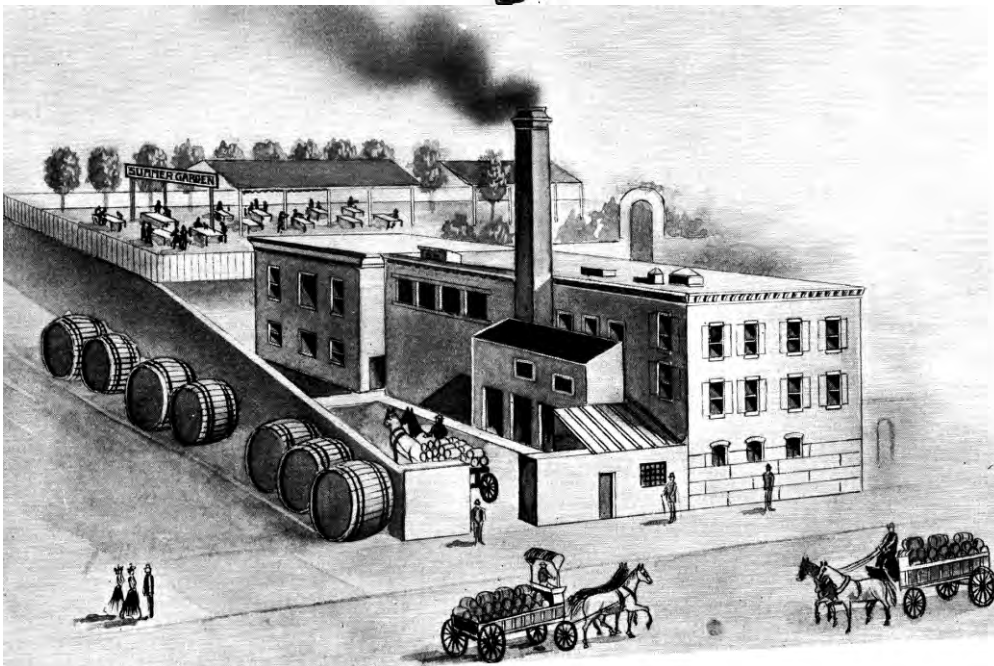
Proprietors.

Left: An 1868 Alexandria Gazette ad for a summer garden. Henry Englehardt, a former employee of brewer John Klein at West End and a future owner of Klein's old brewery, was partner in the venture. The other proprietor was either John or Andrew Kaercher.



Left: A Berlin beer garden, from an 1892 drawing in the Washington Evening Star.

Below: An Ohio brewery with a beer garden in the background. This drawing was republished in One Hundred Years of Brewing. It was very common for breweries to have summer gardens, saloons or Rathskellers attached or associated.



(Alexandria Circuit Court Order Books; *Alexandria Gazette* May 21, 1866, August 17, 1866, June 17, 1867, March 23, 1868 and September 2, 1868)

In 1867 Otto Portner, no longer operating his little weiss beer brewery, partnered with Herbner and added a piano to the house band. Assisted with refreshments by confectioner Christopher Brengle, the men's "most attractive resort in the city for respectable people" boasted an ice cream and soda water bar. They invited guests to a "Grand Concert and Ball" to kick off the season. Admission to evening dances and concerts typically cost 25 cents, with ladies free (when accompanied by a gentleman, of course), but went as high as 50 cents a person for special events, such as pugilism exhibitions. Potomac Garden could also be let to groups for private picnics and balls, as for the Eintracht's May festival of 1867. Herbner prepared a lot across the street "for base ball grounds," to attract the patronage of the local teams, and it became the home field of the Pioneer Base Ball Club. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 19, 1867, May 3, 1867, May 16, 1867, May 17, 1867, September 23, 1867 and October 3, 1867)

Otto Portner apparently dropped out of the partnership after the 1867 season, but Herbner made a go of it for another year. In its third season, the *Alexandria Gazette* commented that the "Potomac Gardens," with their "walks and parterres," "are now much resorted to on Sunday afternoons. It is a pleasant place, well and neatly kept, and if any breezes are blowing, some of them are sure to find their way there." Not only breezes, but many folks from the other side of the river found their way. (*Alexandria Gazette* February 14, 1868, March 23, 1868, May 16, 1868, June 3, 1868 and June 8, 1868)

Yesterday [Sunday] was a delightful Spring day and the streets presented an animated appearance during its continuance. All the Churches were attended by large congregations. Many persons from Washington visited the city, and inspected the various objects of interest within the Corporate limits and in the suburbs. Lines of Omnibuses were running from the steamboat wharves and the depot of the Washington and Alexandria Railroad to the Potomac Gardens, where crowds were collected throughout the entire day... (*Alexandria Gazette* June 1, 1868)

Despite the number of strangers, the garden remained very much a family operation; Herbner once canceled a ball because of his own illness and once again because of his mother's. An outdoor venue, it also closed at the threat of inclement weather. (*Alexandria Gazette* September 17, 1868, September 25, 1868 and September 29, 1868)

Herbner was undoubtedly serving Robert Portner's beer fresh from the adjacent cellars, but Portner probably could not resist cutting out the "middle man" to serve all those visitors himself. He was completing his new, larger brewery and had a particular interest in stimulating a market for his beer in Washington. So, in April 1869 he re-opened the grounds under his own management and the name "Portner's [Summer] Garden."¹⁶ The customers kept coming, and Robert made \$2,000 or

¹⁶ Henry Herbner went on to operate a restaurant on King Street. He ended up with all the garden's bar fixtures, including "Chairs, tables, Lamps, lanterns, glasses, show pictures &c, &c." and put them up as collateral at the end of 1867 to secure a \$700 debt, undoubtedly an investment in this new enterprise. (Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book Z-3:113; Boyd 1870)

\$3,000 that season, reportedly even waiting on patrons himself. Encouraged, he continued to improve and enlarge the site. He was soon hosting the *Sängerbunden* of the region and more daytrippers from Washington. An account of a gentlemen's barge excursion mentioned landing at Alexandria for cigars, ham, and kegs of Portner beer. Shoving off again, those aboard noticed the "singular disappearance" of several of their fellows, and there were "serious hints to the effect that Portner's was too attractive." (Portner n.d.:15; *Alexandria Gazette* May 22, 1869; Valaer 1969; *Critic-Record* September 1, 1875 and June 16, 1877).

The beer garden was responsible for two innovations in local entertainment. In October 1869 the *Gazette* boasted that this virtuous city possessed no public billiard table, keno, faro, roulette games or ten-pin alleys—although there had been a couple of bowling alleys during the war, including one half-owned by Fred Recker, and at least one bowling establishment in the 1850s. But it appears that the summer garden acquired its first lane before the opening of the 1868 season and had several by 1870, much to the pleasure of its German customers, enthusiasts of the sport. This did not signify the degradation of Alexandria society, however; Portner maintained "good order and decorum" and served no hard liquor. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 22, 1867; April 13, 1868, October 13, 1868, October 26, 1869, April 27, 1870; O'Flaherty Papers; Internal Revenue Assessments 1862-1866; Alexandria Circuit Court Order Books)

Only a year after his first bowling alley, the enterprising brewer had made a much more significant innovation—the introduction of the bicycle to Alexandria. As late as February 1869 no velocipedes had yet made an appearance on the bumpy streets of Alexandria. The *Gazette* reported the immensity of the sudden craze on the East Coast and the nuisances it was already creating in New York, New Haven and New Bedford. Taking advantage of curiosity about the fad, Portner invited "Professor" Alfred J. Schultz from Baltimore to open a velocipede riding school at Portner's Garden. The school and "rink" opened on April 26 to immediate success. (*Alexandria Gazette* February 20, 1869, February 25, 1869, April 27, 1869, August 23, 1869)

[T]he pavilion there has since been daily crowded from early in the evening until a late hour at night, and some even practice in the morning. Among the numerous young gentlemen who take lessons several have proved themselves apt scholars, and one has so far progressed in his studies that he astonished the citizens yesterday by appearing on the streets mounted upon one of the new vehicles....¹⁷ (*Alexandria Gazette* April 29, 1869)

Portner operated the summer garden until at least the 1876 season. By that time, Henry Scherr acted as his superintendent, making sure that "the best LAGER [would] always be on draught." Running the enterprise had caused Portner "a lot of trouble," perhaps a less than amicable parting from Henry Herbner and a number of fistfights and other disorderliness among patrons. One of the more notorious incidents occurred on the evening of a challenge dance for best waltz, the

¹⁷ The article proceeds to recount the humorous scenes at the "velocipede rink." And almost immediately, a bill was proposed to the City Council intended to ban the "bone shakers" from the public streets and sidewalks. The federal government also got involved, with the Acting Commissioner of Internal Revenue declaring velocipede rinks subject to a special tax on exhibitions.



Two photographs of the downtown Washington beer gardens (winter and summer) of Portner's former brewery partner, Edward Abner, mid 1880s. Courtesy of Louise Abner Nemeth.



PORTNER'S GARDEN.

GRAND CONCERT

AND

PIC-NIC!

BY THE

ALEXANDRIA

BRASS & STRING BAND,

TO-NIGHT!

THURSDAY, JULY 22, 1875.

ADMISSION--GENTLEMAN & LADY 25C.

COMMENCE AT 8 O'CLOCK.

GAZETTE JOB PRINT.

*A Portner's Garden
handbill from 1875.
Alexandria Library
Local History
Special Collections.*

prize for which was to be “a beautiful and valuable lady’s work box.” Among the otherwise genteel crowd was a handful of canal boatmen, who started “a disturbance.”

Two of them, named Michael and Frank Quigley, were arrested by the night watch, but while being taken to the station house, when on the cotton factory square [a block south of the Gardens], were rescued by their friends. During the attack made on the watch Michael Quigley was shot through the hand by night watchman John Veitch, and night watchman Thomas McMillan was severely injured by blows from a billy. The two Quigleys were re-arrested this morning, tried at the Mayor’s office this evening, at 3 o’clock, and [fined and made to post bond for good behavior for six months.]

Perhaps satisfied that he had succeeded in making his beer known in Washington, Portner closed his garden and established a restaurant and a distribution depot in that city (see Chapter 8). (Portner n.d.:15; *Evening Star* April 10, 1876, April 12, 1876 and May 2, 1876; Boyd’s Directory Company 1876; *Alexandria Gazette* July 6, 1866, August 3, 1866, September 22, 1868 and September 23, 1868)

But Robert could not take for granted his Alexandria market, where his beer was being distributed mainly in quarter kegs to saloons and in bottles through groceries. To keep it flowing, he signed a five-year lease of the “Eldorado House” at 71 (now 319) Cameron Street, “retrofitted [it] in the most splendid style of a modern restaurant,” and turned over the operation to brother Otto and fellow-German Louis Faber. The “Tivoli, [a] First-Class German Restaurant” opened at the beginning of July 1877. (*Alexandria Gazette* June 30, 1877)

The lessee has spared neither pains nor expense in adornments or conveniences of the building. The walls and ceilings have been elegantly and tastefully frescoed, and the rooms wainscoted in dark walnut, and the upper rooms have been put in the finest order for the use of clubs and select parties.... The restaurant is designed to be conducted on the first-class German plan... (*Alexandria Gazette* June 30, 1877)

Portner may have been responsible then for the Gothic makeover of the façade (see photograph on page 57). But for all his efforts, the restaurant was quite short-lived. It does not appear in the city directories of the early 1880s. Nor is there subsequent mention of Faber or a saloon license for the men at the premises.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the German element in Alexandria is the fact that so few people were responsible for so many clubs, societies and commercial enterprises. In addition to bringing their traditions to America, these immigrants were also responding to contradictory forces: isolation as aliens and pressures to assimilate. Among the newer immigrants, Germans were probably among the least discriminated against. They were generally considered hard-working, enterprising, thrifty and honest. Nonetheless, as hundreds of thousands of Germans and Irish arrived during the mid nineteenth century, Nativist anti-immigrant sentiment reached its peak. Like other immigrant groups, Germans cooperated to provide mutual support. Not only did Alexandria’s Germans found German language schools for their children but also financial and charitable institutions for their countrymen. There was a German Relief Society, formed to aid refugees of the Civil War, and a German Benevolent Association, founded 1854, one of whose “vice-secretaries” was Otto Portner.¹⁸ After moving to Washington in the 1880s, Robert and Anna Portner actively supported that city’s German Orphans Asylum. Although many of the Forty-Eighters had no love for the autocratic government of their homeland, they could not resist feelings of pride when Germany defeated France in 1870-1871. A German Patriotic Aid Association was founded to assist those injured or displaced by the conflict. Robert Portner served as its president and his brother Otto as secretary. And the singing and social clubs sponsored benefits for such charities. (*Daily National Republican* October 30, 1862; Wust 1969:227; Turner 1996:269; *Alexandria Gazette* August 22, 1865, April 11, 1868, June 3, 1870, August 31, 1870, September 7, 1870 and February 26, 1879)

Many members of the community realized, however, that their futures in American society depended upon more than their intra-community ties. Their business enterprises had to succeed in

¹⁸ The Benevolent Association folded in the 1880s. Its officers then were Conrad Wahl, Karl Ferdinand Melchor, A. Diedel, John Abendshein, Michael Bossart, Henry Herbner and John Wentzel. (*Alexandria Gazette* June 2, 1881)

the larger society, and these businesses needed access to capital. In 1874 Robert Portner organized the German Banking Company.

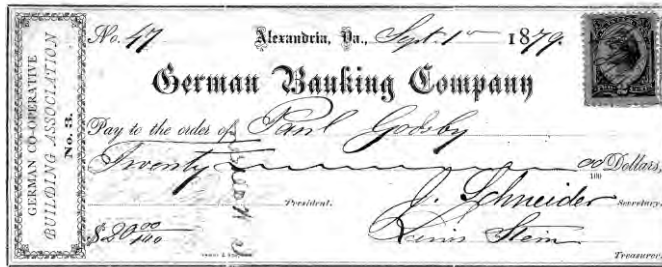
[S]tockholders had to pay one dollar per month per share. There I also became the president; soon the other banks, which had at first smiled at the idea, realized that we would be successful. And that actually happened. We were able to pay a dividend of six percent per year and still had a nice balance left. I had achieved a good thing with this bank. The small businessman who had so far been unable to get money from the big banks could get it from us. (Portner n.d.:16)

Portner served as president until 1880. The bank continued for several more years before closing because of mismanagement. Portner also headed up a more important and long-lasting institution, the German Co-operative Building Association.¹⁹ Founded in 1868 at the Eintracht Hall, the Association was dedicated to buying land, constructing dwellings, and then selling the properties. Stock-holding and dues-paying members were entitled to purchase a home from the Association, paying back the debt at low interest. When there were sufficient cash reserves, the Association also made standard loans. The board of directors included Robert Portner, president; Justus Schneider, secretary; Albert Rosenthal, treasurer; Benjamin Franklin Price; R.W. Falls; Lewis Stein; Isaac Eichberg; George E. French; Emanuel Francis; Louis Appich; Wesley Makeley; James Brodus; and George H. Markell. The non-Germans among them were mostly prominent builders. “With such gentlemen managing the affairs of the Association, it is not to be wondered at that it is in a prosperous condition.” The Association persisted until the early twentieth century, long after Portner had resigned. It underwrote numerous land transactions. For instance, one 1872 newspaper item reported that it had recently sold four two-story brick houses on Columbus Street and three lots on Cameron between Washington and Columbus. (Portner n.d.:16; *Alexandria Gazette* January 18, 1868, February 21, 1868, March 4, 1869 and April 27, 1872; Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book Y-3:329)

As with Robert Portner, the economic success of Alexandria’s Germans largely determined the degree and speed of their assimilation. German business leaders made a seamless transition, for instance, into becoming political leaders. “[S]everal of them have held public offices [including Virginia House of Delegates and state Senate].... Robert Portner, Isaac Eichberg and Louis Krafft were members of the City Council, and the present Mayor of the city is Hon. Henry Strauss.”²⁰ Lewis Stein, Isaac Eichberg, and Joseph Broders served on Council during the 1860s and 1870s. Jacob Hoffman, the sugar refiner, had been mayor during the early nineteenth century, and shoe manufacturer Frederick J. Paff was a very popular mayor for nine years after the turn of the twentieth. The success of German financial institutions attracted Anglo-American investors, and German clubs and restaurants attracted native Alexandrian patrons. The Harmonie Association

¹⁹ There were several other building associations in the city during the late nineteenth century, but this was perhaps only the second and the most successful. These associations generally developed along occupational or ethnic lines and included the Alexandria, Mercantile-Railway, Mt. Vernon, Colored, Old Dominion, Old Dominion Perpetual, Mechanics’, and Endowment Building Associations, among others. (*Alexandria Gazette* February 7, 1868, October 6, 1890 and January 6, 1893)

²⁰ Henry Strauss began his political career as an alderman for the Second Ward, serving in that capacity from 1876 to 1888. He was mayor from 1891 to 1897. (Miller:1992:38-47)



I. EICHBERG, President JAMES H. REID, Cashier.

German Banking Company,

ALEXANDRIA, VA.

Transacts a General Banking Business.

Collections made on all accessible points.



Above left: An 1881 city directory advertisement for Alexandria's German Banking Company and a German Co-operative Building Association check drawn on the German Banking Company. Above right: Isaac Eichberg, a City Council member, a founder of Alexandria's Reform synagogue and of the German Co-Operative Building Company, and the second president of the German Banking Company. Eichberg was born in Wurtemberg in 1830, emigrated in 1849, and in 1852 he moved from New York to Alexandria where he opened a clothing store. Family photo reprinted in Beth El Hebrew Congregation's anniversary booklet.

even donated the use of its hall for Alexandria City Council meetings after City Hall burned in 1871. (Schuricht 1977:187; Miller 1992:35,38,122; Barr, Cressey and Magid 1994:254; *Alexandria Gazette* May 20, 1871)

Concerned about seeming too alien and insular, the Germans made deliberate efforts to fit in, including, of course, striving to learn English as Portner had.²¹ When Robert Portner was on the executive committee planning for a Washington visit of Germany's Prince Heinrich, the membership decided that singing societies who were to attend would only carry the Stars and Stripes and not the imperial flag. Germans often Anglicized their names. Some Schmidts became Smiths. Carl Portner, Robert's brother, and Carl Strangmann, his nephew, were often referred to as "Charles" in English-language legal documents, and Strangmann's friends called

²¹ On the other hand, Robert Portner insisted that his family and servants speak German at home.

him “Charlie.” One of the Portners, Otto or Robert, participated in the Alexandria Literary Association. (*Washington Post* February 20, 1902; *Alexandria Gazette* December 9, 1869 and October 4, 1915; Genealogical Publishing Company 1906:168)

The passage of time was perhaps the greatest factor promoting assimilation. There was no way to prevent U.S.-born children from fully integrating into American society. The German schools were short-lived; dependent on fees and contributions, they were undercut by the “free” public school system formed under the new state constitution of 1870 and did not survive the decade. Portner sent his own children on to established traditional schools such as the Virginia Military Institute. Gradually, even their unique social institutions began to wither away. The Turnverein had likely vanished by 1880 and the Benevolent Association soon after. There was a “Musical Association” into the 1890s, but even its name suggests Americanization. Except for some residual resentment against German-Americans during World War I (see Chapter 15), the former immigrants had fully assimilated by the early twentieth century. (*Alexandria Gazette* June 2, 1881 and August 21, 1890)

Chapter 7

Fire and ice: President Portner and technological innovation in the postwar era

The greatest credit for this development [of air-conditioning in breweries] is due to Robert Portner of Alexandria who was among the first to study the effective utilization of such machines and to evaluate them in practice.

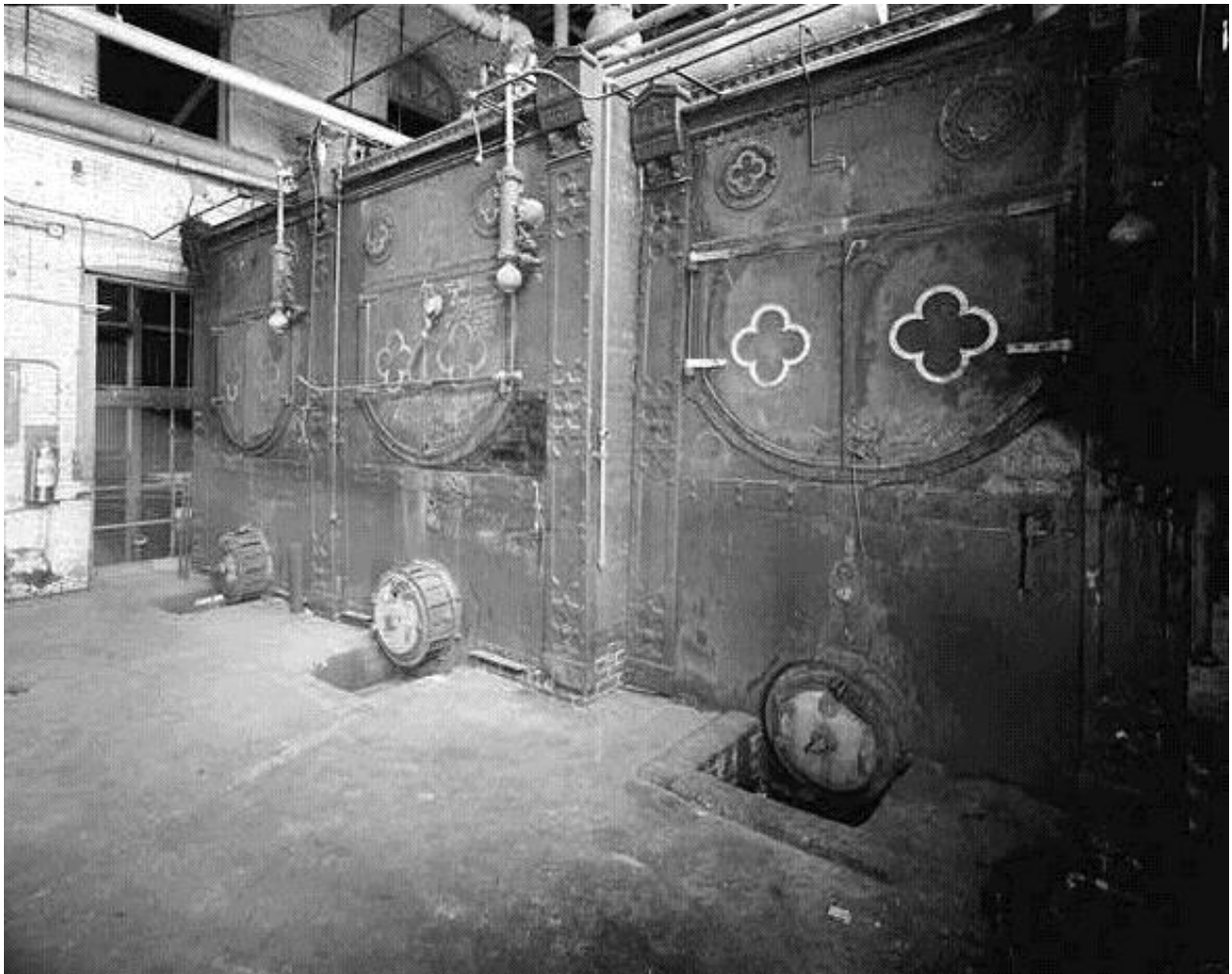
Amerikanische Bierbrauer, May 1885

As for many other industries, the Civil War represented a great divide in the evolution of technology in America's breweries. The war was the impetus for a boom in the rate of innovation. It spurred capital accumulation and improvements in finance, transportation, agriculture, metallurgy, machine tools, and chemistry.

The full range of variations in and improvements of the brewing process in the nineteenth century are too numerous, and often too technical, to fully explore. However, there were several salient inventions and innovations that revolutionized the American brewing industry. It was during the eighteenth century that brewing began to evolve from a mysterious art toward a more scientific enterprise. The thermometer and saccharometer were first put to use to monitor the temperature and specific gravity of the wort through each stage of its processing. The steam engine, useful for a variety of tasks, was introduced to a few of the large British and New England breweries before the turn of the nineteenth century. But major advances in refrigeration, bottle manufacturing, and the preservation of perishables occurred after the Civil War. These encouraged a dramatic growth in the domestic brewing industry. (Baron 1962:157-158)

Among the nineteenth-century "high points" of innovation enumerated by brewing experts Siebel and Schwarz were the isolation of pure yeast; the full application of steam power; mashing by machine; steam boiling; mechanical refrigeration; and bottling on a large scale. The general result was a process and a product more controllable and consistent—and labor costs were much reduced. (Siebel and Schwarz 1933:86)

Applications of steam power ultimately included the operation of grain elevators, hoists, pumps, conveyors, malt mills, mash stirrers, washers, bottling machinery, ice-making and refrigeration machines, and coopers' tools. Steam engines could control the movement of the wort between each stage of production. Steam boilers were far more efficient and controllable than wood fires for boiling mash water or wort in the brewing copper. Alexandria's Irwin's ale brewery possessed a steam engine before the plant was destroyed by fire in 1854, and two later brewers, Henry S. Martin and Robert Portner, each had steam engines by 1866. About 1869 Portner upgraded from an eight-horsepower engine to twelve-horsepower machine. It likely powered at least the brewhouse grain elevator, pumps, and mash agitators by means of a system of overhead belts, gears and pulleys. This engine was less powerful than the average 14.4 total horsepower then in use in American breweries. On the other hand, most firms still had no steam power. Virginia then had at least six



Steam boilers in the vacant John Wiessner/American Brewery of Baltimore, early 1970s. Historic American Engineering Record photograph, Library of Congress.

breweries, with only three engines between them, and those belonging to the other breweries were probably each smaller than Portner's. As production grew, Portner's early engines were replaced by a succession of larger ones.¹ By 1886, four boilers generated 230 horsepower. At the turn of the twentieth century, the plant's boilers were capable of producing up to 1,200 horsepower. (United States Census 1860b; Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Books X-3:513; United States Census 1870b; Wallace 1870:396; Switzler 1886: 109; Wedderburn 1907)

Perhaps the most important use of steam was to power the railroad locomotive. The explosive increase in track-miles after the war revolutionized the ability for manufacturers to reach customers and thus penetrate regional and even national markets. St. Louis' Anheuser-Busch brewery was a pioneer in setting up a large system of trackside ice plants to replenish the ice in the brewery's refrigerated rail cars, making its Budweiser lager available in the mid-Atlantic by the mid 1880s.

¹ Portner sold a used twelve-horsepower engine in 1873, for instance, when he upgraded to a more powerful one. (*Evening Star* May 22, 1873)

As we have seen, Robert Portner would expand his market into Washington in 1875 and into many cities thereafter (see Chapter 8). In early 1880 he “placed upon the Virginia Midland Railroad two handsomely painted refrigerator cars, to be used exclusively in the transportation of beer.” The brewer soon accepted a position on the railroad’s board of directors. By 1896, his own small fleet of cars traveled at least 693 miles over the rails, presumably confined to the state of Virginia and likely the northern part. (Krebs and Orthwein 1953:277; *The News* June 12, 1885; Interstate Commerce Commission 1897:271)

Steam brewing and the use of the steam engine became universal in the industry, but only by the end of the nineteenth century when breweries were bigger and the technology more affordable. By then, electricity began replacing it for many uses. Electric power first came into use for lighting, then for running mash agitators, beer pumps, conveyors and elevators, refrigeration compressors, bottling and bottle washing machines, pasteurizing tanks, and labeling machines. After the turn of the century, some breweries even tried electric trucks for local delivery and for moving barrels and equipment around the grounds. Washington’s first electric truck appeared at the National Capital Brewing Company—an enterprise partly owned by Robert Portner—in 1903, capable of hauling five tons of barrels, the work of at least six draft horses.² Between January and March 1886 the Consolidated Light Company (the predecessor of Consolidated Edison) of New York installed an electric dynamo in the Portner plant. It ultimately powered 100 incandescent lights placed throughout the building, the first use of electric light in Alexandria. By 1897 all of the plant’s lighting was electric. Portner’s dynamos were soon employed in brewing tasks as well. Many brewers preferred the new power source as cleaner and more efficient than steam. By 1907 the Alexandria plant equipment could generate a total of 100 kilowatts of electricity, and the brewery had at least one trained electrician on staff. A section of wooden conduit filled with insulated wires was uncovered during archaeological investigations of the former brewery site in 1998.³ Electricity was also introduced to the depots. The Augusta, Georgia branch, for instance, was lighted with electric by 1904 and had its own 125-horsepower generator. The company installed an electric bottle washing machine at its Frederick, Maryland branch in 1906, suggesting that the other bottling operations were similarly equipped. Robert’s sons took an interest in electric gadgets, and Alvin would even become a member of the board of the Alexandria Electric Company a few years later. (Wallace 1870:396; Baron 1962:160,161; *Western Brewer* December 1904; Miller 1996; Wedderburn 1907; *Washington Post* March 17, 1895, October 8, 1897, March 29, 1903 and February 10, 1910; *The News* September 24, 1906; Sanborn Map Company)

Electricity sparked a communications revolution. Portner’s 1876 Washington depot was connected to the brewery, at least indirectly, by telegraph. In September 1880, Western Union installed a telegraph in the Portner offices, to be operated by a permanent telegrapher, E.B. Padgett, and connecting “to all the world.” But before Christmas, the local Western Union/Bell Telephone

² With its wealth, the Portner family itself owned automobiles quite early. Robert even had a racing car in 1902, although it was actually driven by his African-American chauffeur, Edward Dickerson. Daughter Hilda purchased an electric “Victoria” in 1913. The Portner brewery may have used a gas-powered truck by 1912, but seems to have relied on “hayburners” for local shipping until the company closed, with three to six delivery wagons in Alexandria during the 1912-1916 period, plus at least one buggy and one trap, and possibly some ice wagons. (*Washington Post* January 18, 1903 and August 10, 1913; Summers Company; *Alexandria Gazette* May 8, 1901)

³ A thief stole 400 pounds of copper wire from the brewery in 1913. (*Washington Post* November 19, 1913)

representative, W.T. Gentry, was accepting subscribers for phone service. With the telegraph line in place, Gentry was able to hook up and successfully test telephone receivers in his office and that of the brewery in mid February. The test attracted customers, but first only the large businesses, institutions and affluent individuals who could afford the \$40-per-year service.⁴ With a Southern Bell exchange established in Alexandria, the brewery was among the first 46 properties hooked up. The phone came in handy a few months later to summon medical assistance when one of the plant's engineers was badly scalded. Alexandria's exchange was connected to Washington's in 1882, and by 1892 the Robert Portner Brewing Company was able to take orders and keep tabs on its far-flung distribution system almost instantaneously.⁵ (*Alexandria Gazette* August 12, 1880, September 13, 1880, December 20, 1880, January 8, 1881, February 14, 1881, December 10, 1881, March 4, 1882, July 24, 1882 and July 25, 1896; *Washington Post* February 12, 1881; Emerson 1881; Turner 1892)

Until the late 1870s natural ice, cool cellars and springhouses were the only sources of refrigeration. Brewers could generally produce beer only during the colder months. Alexandria brewers made their first attempts at summer brewing during the Civil War, when demand was high enough to make quality considerations inconsequential and the expense bearable. In August 1868 Alexandria ale brewer Henry Martin advertised the availability of a new batch of his product, qualifying it as some of the finest ale "ever manufactured at this season of the year..." Robert Portner's brewery, however, operated only eight months a year into the 1870s. Local ice was cut from the Potomac or the Alexandria Canal during winter and available in quantity for industrial purposes shipped in schooners from Maine, meaning considerable costs for transport, storage and wastage. The brewery maintained an ice storehouse near the tide lock basin of the Alexandria Canal, cutting five-inch slabs from the canal until the structure burned in 1878. (*Alexandria Gazette* August 18, 1868 and April 30, 1878; United States Census 1870b; *Washington Post* December 27, 1878)

The cost and labor involved with the use of ice cannot be overestimated. Natural ice in the Washington metropolitan area commonly fetched \$8 a ton and 60 cents per 100-pound lot or 40 cents for 50 pounds. Ice was packed in lager cellars, freight cars, and attemperators, and it provided ice water for wort coolers. Its provision and maintenance were probably the most difficult aspects of the brewing process. Ice in cellars required constant packing and repacking—backbreaking work in very damp conditions. Period documents suggest that the packing of the cellars with ice could take a group of men several days. Within the cellars brewers had to deal with excess water, mold and other residue, and stale or unpleasant odors which could only be ameliorated by cleaning, good drainage and ventilation. Under these conditions, cellarmen often complained of respiratory illnesses. (*Alexandria Gazette* March 26, 1880; *Syracuse Weekly Express* March 6, 1890; Beamon and Roaf 1990:126-127; Kelley 1965)

Brewers first used artificial refrigeration to cool the water that ran through the wort cooler ("Baudelot") pipes, then it was gradually adopted for cooling entire rooms, arresting ice melt,

⁴ The town's first use of a telephone was an early 1878 test between two receivers hooked up to the ends of telegraph lines in Alexandria and Charlottesville. The first permanent phone sets connected the depot of the Virginia Midland Railroad with its Alexandria office in 1879. A few months later, city leaders began discussing an exchange that would connect to Washington. (*Alexandria Gazette* January 21, 1878, June 26, 1879 and November 10, 1879)

⁵ The Danville branch had a phone by 1892, suggesting that by that date the brewery's entire distribution system was likely connected. (Turner 1892)



Above: A Great Falls Ice Company wagon at Anacostia, D.C., circa 1905. John D. Bartlett, company superintendent, was one of the original board members of the National Capital Brewing Company. Historical Society of Washington, D.C. photo. Right: An Alexandria Gazette advertisement for Kennebec River, Maine ice, still commonly used in Alexandria in the 1880s, even by the brewery.

ICE. ICE. ICE.

I have received and shall continue to keep on hand a full supply of the

BEST KENNEBEC ICE,

which I am desirous to dispose of in large or small quantities at the

LOWEST POSSIBLE PRICE

Persons in the city can arrange with the drivers, or leave their orders at Brengle's, Appich's or Schafer's confectionery store.

Orders from the country will receive prompt attention.

my 26-tf

JOHN S. BEACH.

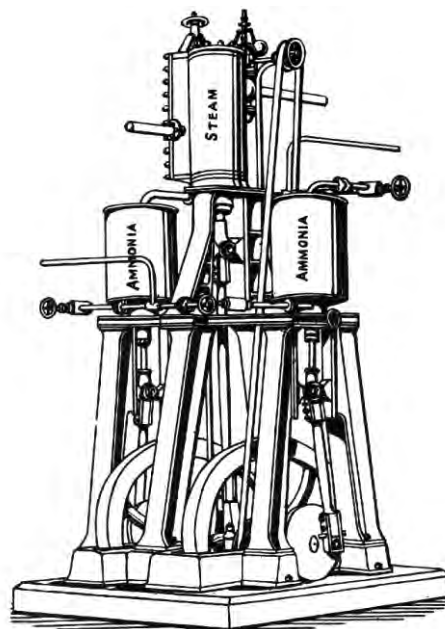
dehumidifying, and actually manufacturing ice. Once they had gained sufficient confidence in new refrigeration devices they were able to cut labor costs and to make more advantageous use of their cellar space. They could also create a better product since temperatures could be controlled more exactly. In fact, artificial refrigeration made possible reliable year-round—and consequently much higher—production. Refrigeration and air-conditioning also altered brewery architecture. Lager fermentation and storage moved above ground into convenient, insulated structures, making natural or man-made cellars obsolete. Wort cooling relied less on convection and exposure to the open air and thus could be conducted in closed containers in lower levels of breweries, reducing reliance on pumps and exposure to wild airborne microbes. Cooling compressors and condensers required their own space, often occupying “whole rooms.” (Kelley 1965:200,317; *Alexandria Gazette* February 1, 1878; Thevenot 1979:76; Anderson 1953:91; Schlüter 1910: 55-56,64; Appel 1998:249).

Refrigeration and air-conditioning were largely responsible for making Robert Portner's national reputation. Ever an innovator, he closely followed the early research in this area and implemented his own adaptations in order to put the technology to practical use in his plant.

All my thoughts were turned to introducing one of these days an ice or air-cooling machine. Whenever I could see anything of this kind I went to investigate. I heard about a man named [Thomas] Cook in Philadelphia who experimented on such a machine. I went to see him [at the Centennial Exposition of 1876] and we became acquainted. I learned about its construction and the principles on which it worked, and I bought a machine built by him. My improvements were completed in the spring of 1878 and [it] was the first machine of its kind which worked well and was of practical value.... (Portner n.d.:16b)

The modified Cook machine was patented in 1880. Portner and his former clerk, Edward Eils, now a 39-year-old patent attorney, were the patentees. Basically, the design called for the cooling of fermentation rooms and storerooms from above by running compressed ammonia, liquefied and in solution with water, through pipes along the ceiling or walls. The rapid phase change of the chemical into an expanding gas drew heat and moisture from the surrounding air just as modern air-conditioning does. (United States Patent Office 1880; Boyd 1885)

Portner's machine was not the first of its kind. Artificial ice-making machines were invented in the 1850s and 1860s and introduced into American breweries by the 1870s. An Australian brewery installed an air-cooling system using ether as a refrigerant in 1860. A similar, but improved version of the same apparatus was purchased by a London brewery in 1868. Portner's air-conditioning machine was ultimately derived from French experiments, particularly by Ferdinand Carré, with anhydrous ammonia as the refrigerant. Machines using ammonia were placed in breweries in New Orleans in 1869, Brooklyn in 1870, and Alexandria, Egypt before 1876. Ferdinand Heim of Kansas City had a David Boyle-made machine by 1878—"one of the first really successful ice machines to be installed in any brewery in the United States"—leading Frederick Pabst to try Boyle machines from 1879 on. But the earliest ammonia machines were too small to be truly effective, and ether, an early alternative, proved too volatile and expensive. For these reasons, Portner received credit from the trade magazines *Ice and Refrigeration* and *Amerikanische Bierbrauer* for creating one of the first practical and successful systems.⁶ As late as 1950, the Journal of the



David Boyle's compressor, from One Hundred Years of Brewing.

⁶ Sometimes he is erroneously given credit for the *invention* of artificial air-conditioning or for its first use in a factory. In addition to the *circa* 1870 installations cited above, it should be pointed out that the firm of David Boyle & Company installed its first refrigerating machine in a Chicago brewery in 1877, and then ones in East Saint Louis, Louisville, and Milwaukee in 1878—the latter year being the same during which Portner's was first up and running.

Patent Office Society called his improvements “one of the basic developments in the air-conditioning art.” Of course, even such “practical” systems could be troublesome. In September 1881, one of the Philadelphia-made pumps attached to the air-conditioning compressor broke, “doing considerable damage to the machinery and scattering the hands at work in the building at the time. The room was immediately filled with ammonia to such an extent that it was impossible for any one to enter it. Large castings were broken and about \$100 worth of ammonia was lost.” (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:122,125,293; Schlüter 1910:56; Gillet 1876:13; Krebs and Orthwein 1953:277; Cochran 1948:108; *Alexandria Gazette* September 6, 1881)

Portner also tinkered with beer coolers, initially coming up with only “impractical” and insufficient solutions, at least one of which he nonetheless patented with the assistance of Edward Eils. He installed ice-making machinery in the plant at an early date to fill the insulated freight cars in which the brewery shipped its product. He was creating his own “ice factory” in February 1878 in order to “make a ton of ice cheaper than it can be bought of any of the ice companies.” His first machine, capable of producing “several tons a day,” arrived from Philadelphia that April. Years later, he would sell his surplus ice for home and business use. With the investments sunk into the facilities and engineers for his main line of business, Portner could easily undercut competitors’ price per ton. His excess capacity presented a barrier to entry of other suppliers in Alexandria’s consumer ice market; the operation was enough, apparently, to scare off an ice factory proposed by New York investors. According to city directories, during the first half of the 1880s there were three ice dealers in Alexandria, each selling natural, Northern ice—and then only two such firms until the turn of the century. These then merged into a new Mutual Ice Company, which manufactured its own product and then also resold Portner’s surplus. (United States Patent Office 1878; *Washington Post* February 19, 1878 and July 6, 1952; *Alexandria Gazette* February 1, 1878 and April 22, 1878; *Syracuse Weekly Express* March 6, 1890; James Boyd Williams, Jr. Papers)

According to Portner, his air-cooling device

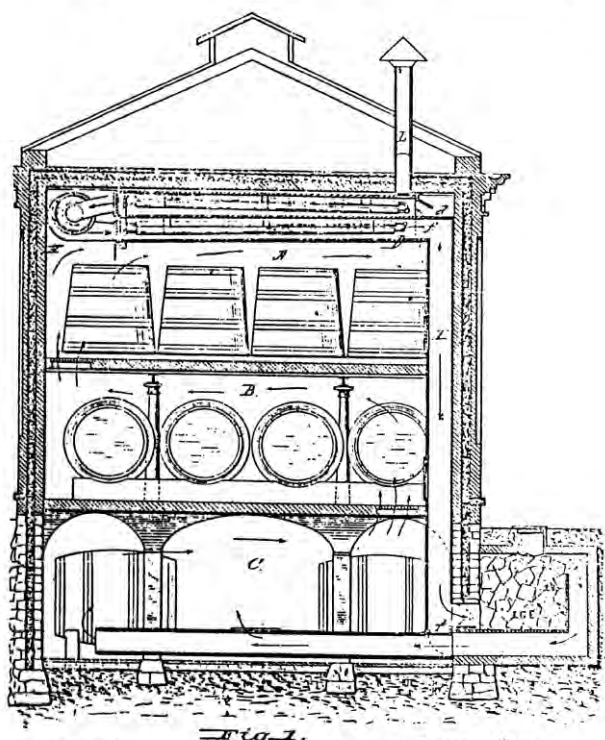
had taken an enormous amount of trouble and work and the constant meditating and brooding over this problem was probably the main reason for my later illness, the excessive irritation of the nerves.

After the machine was being used I went to Germany to regain my health. There I visited many breweries and everybody else who was connected with ice machines, but I did not find anything of practical value. After my return I started all over again, and in the fall I constructed the first beer-cooling apparatus with ammonia which one year later [John C.] De La Vergne got a patent for. I kept working on the idea and took out other patents. (Portner n.d.:16b)

Many of his peers were interested in Portner’s refrigeration innovations. After the United States Brewers Association conventions in Washington and Baltimore in 1878 and 1882, dozens of his colleagues toured his plant “to look at my miracle machine. Although only small, it served its purpose well, and I believe that through it I became the main reason for the further development

Stanley Baron, however, credits Portner’s machine as being the first complete success. (Gordon 1950; Fort 1958:15; Skinkle 1897:7-8; Baron 1962:235; Tyler 1909:353)

(No Model.) 2 Sheets—Sheet 1
R. PORTNER & B. E. J. EILS.
 Process of and Apparatus for Cooling Air.
 No. 229,750. Patented July 6, 1880.

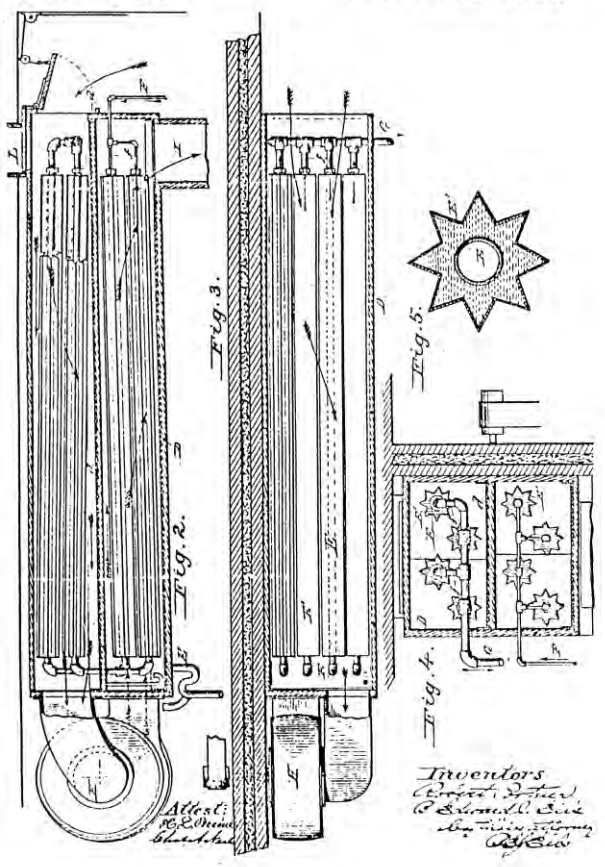


Attest:
 P. E. O'Brien
 Clerk

Inventor
 Robert Portner & B. E. J. Eils
 by their attorneys
 W. B. Swan



(No Model.) 2 Sheets—Sheet 2.
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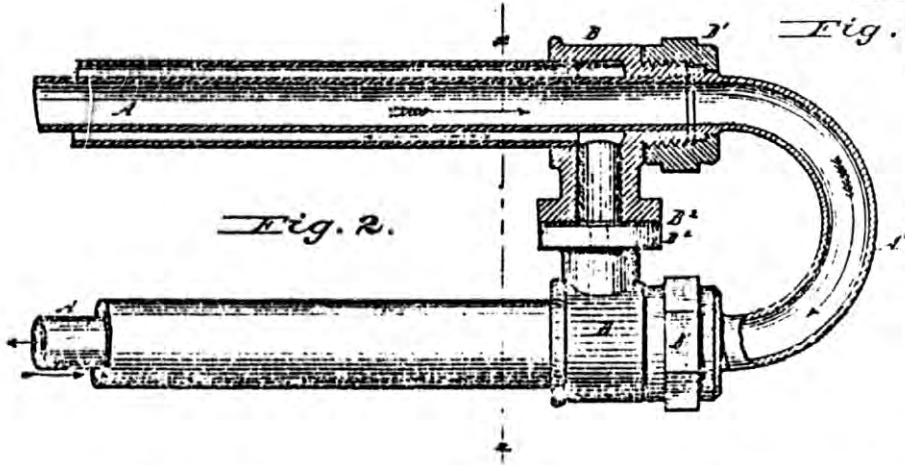
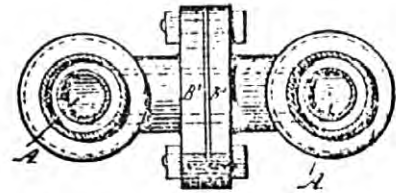
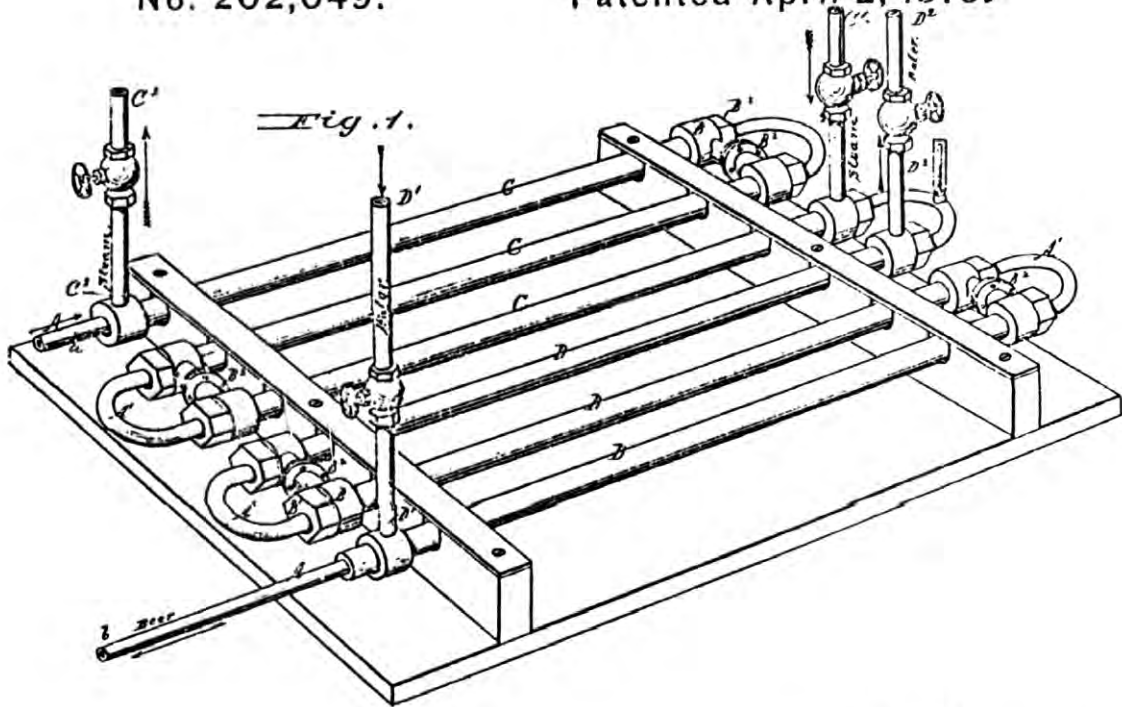
Inventors
 Robert Portner & B. E. J. Eils
 by their attorneys
 W. B. Swan

Above left: A patent drawing for Portner's air-conditioning system.
 Above right: A circa 1970s model of his patent at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.
 Right: A detailed patent drawing of Portner's improvements upon the Cook refrigeration machine.

R. PORTNER.
Beer Cooler.

No. 202,049.

Patented April 2, 1878.



Attest:
H. P. Penning
Charles H. Penning

Rohl. Portner,
Inventor.

By: *[Signature]*
Atty.

of such machines.” The brewers “declared unanimously that although the capacity was not as great as several others, Portner’s was decidedly the most complete and best arranged brewery in the United States.” One of these visitors, Emil Schandein of the Philip Best Brewing Company of Milwaukee, wrote a favorable account to his brother-in-law, Frederick Pabst: “So far the Cook system seems to be the best for it serves its purpose and keeps the cellars as dry as a room. With Portner’s improvements it can’t be surpassed.” There was also interest from those outside the industry. In May 1879 a United States House of Representatives “Committee on Ventilation” visited the brewery to assess the “proposition... to place one in the basement of the House to cool the atmosphere.” But the Capitol would not be air-conditioned until the late 1920s. (Portner n.d.:16b; *Alexandria Gazette* June 8, 1878 and May 13, 1882; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:556; Baron 1962:235; *Washington Post* May 1, 1879)

In demonstrating his invention, Portner was not interested in bragging rights or the dissemination of practical scientific knowledge. Shortly after he completed his first machine—indeed, nearly two years before it was patented—he founded the Brewers’ Refrigerating Machine Company, with an initial capitalization of \$5,000, to take orders from other firms for copies of the apparatus. He had the machines built in New York because there was both a substantial market there and the necessary resources for fabrication. The Alexandria brewery then became a sort of showroom. The company incorporated in the District of Columbia in 1881 with Edward Eils, former clerk and co-patentee, as secretary and George F. Ott, a Philadelphia coppersmith and probable fabricator and supplier of parts, as the third officer. Edward Norris was one of the company’s agents and technicians responsible for installation. The new firm sold and installed at least two machines in the second half of 1878. But it was another unit, sold at the beginning of 1879, that became a real problem for Portner. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 5, 1878; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:124-134; *The Manufacturer and Builder* July 1884; *Alexandria Gazette* September 26, 1878 and October 5, 1878; *Washington Post* June 7, 1880; U.S. Supreme Court Center)

On January 11, 1879, Michael Seitz, owner of the Nicholas Seitz’s Son Brewery of Brooklyn,⁷ signed a contract to take delivery of a “No. 2” refrigerating machine with a down payment of half the \$9,450 purchase price. It seems that Portner or his agents had assured Seitz that the engine would successfully and continuously cool to 40 degrees Seitz’s 150,000 cubic feet of fermenting cellars, obviating further use of ice. Suddenly, with feet colder than he expected his brewery to be, Seitz requested of Edward Eils a written guarantee to that effect. The response was qualified but reassuring:

[T]here are a great many other things entirely beyond the control of the machine which influence this temperature. The mode of working the rooms, the water used for washing, the fermentation, and many other things might be mentioned in this connection... We are confident, from the experience with the Portner machine during last summer and fall, that the machine sold to Mr. Seitz will not only give him the desired low temperature, but will, in addition, give him what he never before had in the warmer months, namely, pure and dry air. The machine we are building for him is in many respects far superior (aside from size) to the Portner

⁷ Nicholas Seitz, Michael’s father, founded the Maujer Street brewery in 1846 but had died about 1871. (Van Wieren 1995:224)

machine, and when he has had it a year we believe he would not part with it for any money, if he could not replace it.

Seitz went ahead with the installation, but found unsatisfactory both the machine's performance and the lack of a guarantee. Resolving not to pay, he forced Portner to sue, a case ultimately settled by the Supreme Court of the United States. The high court ruled in favor of the Brewers' Refrigerating Machine Company because because Seitz had taken delivery without an express warranty.⁸ The Seitz case likely chilled the company's business, but another Brooklyn brewery nonetheless purchased a Portner "ice machine" in 1880. (Van Wieren 1995:224; *Seitz v. Brewers' Refrigerating Machine Company*;⁹ *Washington Post* June 7, 1880)

The Seitz case was not Portner's only difficulty in the refrigeration business. The situation nearly repeated itself when he sold an ice machine to the Enterprise Brewery of Elias Adler and Paul Muhlhauser in Baltimore in 1882. It was apparently Portner's original, now used, which accounts for a reduced price of \$1,200, which was to be paid in full within four months. When eight months had passed, the partners had still not produced the money. As Portner threatened to sue, Adler sought an extension backed by his promissory notes. The issue was still not settled when it finally went to court in 1885-1886. Adler, like Seitz, then claimed that the machinery failed to work as well as promised, and his delay in payment had been simply to have sufficient "time to test the machine." Muhlhauser, who had been Portner's brewmaster and was familiar with the working of the same machine at the Alexandria brewery, tacitly acknowledged his firm's culpability by not answering the complaint and accepting a default judgment. And by the time the matter reached the appeals court, he had had rejoined Portner's firm. Adler lost the suit and an appeal. (*Elias E. Adler v. The Robert Portner Brewing Company*;¹⁰ Van Wieren 1995:130)

Portner and Eils transferred their patents to the Brewers' Refrigerating Machine Company at the time of its incorporation, but manufacturing ceased about the same time. The company's new headquarters—Edward Eils' law office at 703 7th Street, NW, katty-corner across from the U.S. Patent Office—was increasingly focused on legal actions, including the twelve-year-long battle with Seitz and defenses of patent rights. The men dissolved the company in the mid 1880s, partly as a consequence of the settlement of various suits. (Boyd's Directory Company 1882; Boyd's Directory Company 1883; Lain & Co. 1889; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:556)

Like most inventions and innovations, Portner's cooling system was the product of the clever practical application of an accumulation of technical knowledge and experiment, distinct enough to justify a patent but not a wholly novel and fully formed creation sprung from the imagination of a single man. Indeed, as his own account suggests, many other brewers, inventors, engineers and practical scientists were working along the same lines—not only Boyle, but also Theodore Krausch, Edmund Jungfeld, Fred W. Wolf and others. Portner's patents were only two among an avalanche of inventions and improvements beginning in the mid 1850s and were preceded by

⁸ The case has since been frequently cited as a precedent in contract law.

⁹ 141 U.S. 510; 12 S. Ct. 46; 352 Ed. 837; 1891 U.S. Lexis 2540.

¹⁰ 65 Md. 27; 2 A. 918; 1886 Md. Lexis 4.

dozens of U.S. air-conditioning patents and contemporaneous with several ice machines.¹¹ In fact, many were so similar that claims of copying and patent infringement were unavoidable. “There were numerous lawsuits, and finally [Portner] sold his claims for around \$50,000. The outcome was always one of the big disappointments of his life.” His memoirs intimate that his greatest dispute may have been with John C. De La Vergne, a tinkerer who was briefly co-owner of the Hermann Lager Beer Brewery of Manhattan and who, with William M. Mixer, patented an ice-making machine in early 1881. Oddly, Portner claims that his own beer cooler was patented by De La Vergne, but does not clarify whether this was with his knowledge or permission. Although most patents built upon earlier ideas, the “cutting edge” was always a shifting frontier. Of his own experience with technological advance, Washington brewer Christian Heurich would later write, “what came in was going out just as fast, for as time passed I modernized and improved and purchased equipment at every opportunity.” Portner’s innovations, like most others, eventually became obsolete, although he used his first air-conditioning compressor until it was “literally worn out”—which may have been by 1884, when he purchased a Ballantine refrigeration machine from the Cummer Engine Company of Cleveland (although he purchased two four-ton compressors from New York for his ice house in 1882). By 1891, when the Seitz case was finally settled, the brewery was on perhaps its third generation of refrigeration machines, including a 30-ton ice plant and three air-conditioning machines producing cold air equivalent to 150 tons of ice, all equipment presumably manufactured by and purchased from others. The outlying depots had to be equipped as well; in the mid 1890s, the company installed in its Augusta depot a four-ton refrigerator built by the Stilwell-Bierce & Smith-Vaile Co., Dayton, Ohio. (American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers 2004; Portner n.d.:16b; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:124-134 and 556; Van Wieren 1995:245; United States Brewers Association 1905:21-23; Nagengast 2004; Heurich n.d.:43; *Washington Post* March 30, 1891 and August 14, 1937; *Alexandria Gazette* March 24, 1882; *The Manufacturer and Builder* July 1884 and January 1885; *Ice and Refrigeration*, June 1896)

Even if his refrigeration patents added only modestly to Robert Portner’s wealth, they greatly augmented his prestige in the brewing community. A member of the United States Brewers Association (U.S.B.A.), the brewers’ lobby, since before 1871, he was quickly elevated to leadership at the end of the 1870s. He had prepared the way by serving in a number of leadership positions, including as an envoy to Congress and to the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, demanding reductions in excise taxes and duties on foreign and domestic malt and hops;¹² as a member of the Committee on Resolutions, the Finance Committee, the Legislation Committee, the Agitation Committee, and the Washington Committee; and as a vice-president. At the 1877 convention he signed the “Certificate of Incorporation,” the organization’s new constitution, and was named one of several honorary presidents. The following year there was a movement to elect

¹¹ Portner claims to have secured additional patents, and the claim is repeated in Volume 32 of the *Journal of the Patent Office Society* (1950:75), but he is only credited for the two in the United States Brewers’ Association’s *List of Patents Relating to Malting, Brewing, Refrigerating, Bottling and Kindred Subjects*, published in 1905. The Patent and Trademark Office database also does not credit him with more except for shared responsibility for a fire-resistant paper (see page 20).

¹² The government assessed additional taxes on “the quantity of malt consumed over and above two and one-half bushels per barrel...” In other words, taxation not only cost brewers dearly but could affect the quality of their product by influencing the amount and type of ingredients. (United States Brewers’ Association 1896:423)



A circa 1901 Library of Congress photograph of the east side of the 700 block of 7th Street, NW, Washington, D.C. At the center of the image, behind the utility pole and huge awning, is 703 7th Street, the “Tennille Building,” the former office of patent attorney and Portner colleague Edward Eils. In his capacity as secretary of the Brewers’ Refrigerating Machine Company, he ran the short-lived corporation from this headquarters during the early 1880s. Robert Portner bought the building in 1885 for \$16,000.

him to the top post. Finally, in June 1880, “Mr. Portner’s prominence as a brewer was recognized by his election to the presidency...” (United States Brewers Association 1896:276,290,329,353, 386,423-425,428,430,458,468,469; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:556; Alexandria Gazette June 8, 1878; Washington Post April 5, 1879; New York Times June 5, 1874)

Hardly any of the other brewers could claim so many good friends among their members as I had. All my thoughts had always been directed toward the general welfare and the development of the Association. When controversies developed, I was always the one who could mediate them quickly. Already in 1878, the Association wanted to elect me, but I was not nominated at my request because I was just about to leave for Germany. When I was on my way to the [1879] convention in Boston, I heard in New York that I was to be elected president. I remained in New York because I was afraid to accept such a responsible position besides all my other activities and because I wanted to avoid being obtrusive. But a few days later I was notified by telegram... that in spite of everything I had unanimously been elected president. In this way my work increased again—I often



Left: Some attendees of the 1877 convention of the United States Brewers Association. Robert Portner is at the top left. This image, republished in One Hundred Years of Brewing, is not an actual photograph, but a composite picture derived from many individual photos.
Right: Robert Portner, 1885, from that year's souvenir booklet of the United States Brewers Association convention.

had to attend to business for the Association in Washington and to go to New York to preside over the committee sessions... (Portner n.d.:17)

With Boston's Henry H. Reuter declining a sixth term, Portner was elected by his peers despite the fact that his firm was much smaller than those of many of the Northern member-breweries and was located in an industrial backwater. Rare indeed was a U.S.B.A. officer from the South; the 1880 board consisted of Portner, one Pennsylvania brewer, and three New York City brewers. Portner's election can be credited to his demonstrated leadership, his innovation—and his proximity to Capitol Hill. While Prohibition was still many years off, temperance forces were gaining strength, and one of the main issues of the 1880 convention was Congressional consideration of the creation a committee to investigate the “alcoholic liquor traffic.” The U.S.B.A. naturally opposed it, but voiced support for any “honest efforts to check the evils of intemperance.” The Association also narrowly supported a protectionist tariff on imported malt and discussed plans to establish a

brewers' academy. Unfortunately, because of his chronic ill health during this period, Portner did not serve out his term. He resigned and, on the advice of his doctor, took an extended vacation in Germany. He remained modestly active in the U.S.B.A. until after the turn of the century. From at least 1889 he served on the "Vigilance Committee," the successor to the Agitation Committee, responsible for lobbying against threatening federal, state and local legislation. In that capacity, he was part of an 1898 delegation that testified unsuccessfully before Congress in opposition to a beer excise increase to finance the Spanish-American War. Two years later, however, he successfully testified for its repeal. (*Springfield Republican* June 4, 1880; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:554,556; Portner n.d.:17; *New York Times* June 4, 1880 and April 7, 1898; *Buffalo Express* June 7, 1889; *Alexandria Gazette* April 7, 1898; *Niagara Falls Gazette* June 11, 1903)

By the late 1870s Robert Portner's successful brewery was performing a considerable amount of bottling, the containers being popular in bars and beginning to find their way into households. Beer had been imported from Great Britain in bottles since the eighteenth century, but the containers were fragile, expensive, and not entirely airtight. Shortly after America's Civil War, the price and durability of glass bottles became competitive with those of stoneware containers. A lighter material, glass was a cheaper alternative for transportation. Its transparency was a boon to sales of beer and simplified the cleaning and reuse of the containers. Improvements in molding and the invention of automatic bottle-making machines after the turn of the twentieth century quickly made bottled beer a ubiquitous product.

Even in sealed bottles, beer, especially lager beer, always ran the risk of spoiling by becoming flat, stale or bad tasting. Louis Pasteur's work on microbiology taught brewers the reasons for spoilage and suggested remedies. The importance of eliminating "wild" yeasts and other microbes from beer became clear. Most brewers converted to the use of closed brewing vessels and fermenting tuns. From Pasteur they also learned that the application of heat could kill "germs." Brewers and inventors developed various devices to "pasteurize" the beer, rapidly heating to nearly 150 degrees and then cooling bottled beer to destroy any microbes remaining within. Anheuser-Busch's early adoption of pasteurization (1873) gave the company an immediate advantage in the shipping and sale of its beer over a broad area. Robert Portner also tinkered with pasteurizers but unsuccessfully. He undoubtedly purchased pasteurizers during the second half of the 1870s, however, and, like other brewers, employed new, efficient cold filtration systems for racking off pure beer into bottles and kegs. In 1894 the Robert Portner Brewing Company adopted the Pfaudler vacuum fermentation system, employing closed, glass-lined steel tanks that could capture and retain carbonic acid from the fermenting beer, to be reintroduced for more effervescence. (Kelley 1965:445; Lief 1965:1; Portner n.d.:16b; Anderson 1908:187; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:402)

Even with pasteurization, bottled beer could not be preserved with confidence without the development of reliably airtight closures. Hundreds of ideas for new closures were patented after the Civil War in order to replace the inadequate cork. Before the turn of the century the most popular types were the Hutchinson, Lightning, and Baltimore loop closures, invented in the 1870s, and similar porcelain stoppers. These gasketed stoppers effectively sealed glass bottles against and the admission of foreign microbes and allowed them to be closed again. In 1892 an even tighter and cheaper closure, the crown closure or modern "bottle cap," was patented. Despite being good for only one-time use, it eventually replaced other types. Documents and extant examples of

Robert Portner Brewing Company bottles suggest that the brewery had adopted Lightning, Hutchinson, and Baltimore loop closures by the early 1880s and porcelain stoppers by the mid 1890s. The company's Tivoli Hofbrau brand was capped with crown closures by 1895, but bottle caps may not have been used on all its bottles until after the turn of the century. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 27, 1895)

Year-round mass production, pasteurization and filtration, and the availability of bottles and efficient closures all combined with the expansion of rail transport to provide a large supply of beer which could be kept for a long period of time and shipped to distant points. Such advances were responsible for the success of large breweries and the creation of regional and national markets by the 1880s.

Robert Portner Brewing Company technology timeline

- 1865** Lager cellars are excavated on the northern half of the block bounded by Washington, Saint Asaph, Wythe and Pendleton Streets.
- 1866** By this time the Robert Portner Brewery acquires an eight-horsepower steam engine for mashing, running hoists and pumps, etc.
- 1869** Robert Portner Brewery opens on North Saint Asaph Street. The steam power is upgraded to at least twelve horsepower.
- 1871-1878** The brewery maintains an icehouse near the Alexandria Canal. Icehouses were built adjacent to the brewery at about the same time.
- 1875-1876** The brewery begins bottling its product and shipping it by rail, first to Washington, D.C.
- 1878** Robert Portner patents a wort cooler. He also builds and begins to sell his air-cooling machine, a substantial modification of Thomas Cook's refrigeration apparatus.
- 1880** Robert Portner and B.E.J. Eils patent their air-cooling machine. The brewery begins pasteurizing its bottled beer by this time. By about this time, the brewery is equipped with "ice engines" for producing ice for cold storage and shipping.
- 1881-1892** The brewery and its branches receive telephone service during this period.
- 1884** By this date, the plant is equipped with a 150-horsepower steam engine.
- 1886** An electric dynamo is installed in the brewery to power the first electric lights in Alexandria. The plant used a combination of electric and gas light until the mid 1890s.
- 1887** By this time, the brewery drills a 330-foot-deep well to tap the aquifer. By 1902 the brewery had at least three wells about 400 feet deep or more.
- 1890** By the beginning of the year, the brewery is producing surplus ice for sale.
- 1891** The plant's total steam motive capacity exceeds 200 horsepower.
- 1894** A new fireproof brewhouse is erected. Among the innovations in the brewing process are a new rice conversion tub and a Pfaudler vacuum fermentation system for recapturing carbonic acid during fermentation. The refrigeration equipment is also modernized. The bottling operation begins to employ the crown closure and bottle labels.
- 1901** The company erects a larger plant for the production of ice. The ice was principally used to cool insulated railroad cars for the shipment of beer. Additional ice-making facilities were subsequently added at the rear of the brewery.

Chapter 8

Market and production expansion, 1875-1903

*King Gambrinus¹ provided it,
Portner copied it well.
He who wants beer, sweet, light, and pure,
Should take lessons only from Portner.
Advertisement in Treffdusia²*

Alexandria truly began to industrialize only during the 1830s and 1840s. A typical fall-line town, it had served mainly as a transshipment depot at the transportation break between ocean-riverine shipping and overland transport. The town was founded in the eighteenth century to warehouse and ship northern Virginia tobacco. In spite of not being blessed with an abundance of water power, Alexandria then became a large wheat and flour export center. The economy gradually diversified, providing the sorts of crafts and services found in most ports. Nonetheless, commerce mainly consisted of the export of agricultural products, raw materials, and low value-added finished goods in exchange for a whole array of consumer goods from Europe and the northern United States.

Production was gradually moving from a home-shop environment—in which a craftsman would work alongside and supervise paid employees, apprentices, slaves, and family members—to a factory environment of wage-earning workers and managers. In the 1830s the largest manufacturers in Alexandria were C.C. Smoot's tannery, James Green's furniture factory, and the ale brewery of James and William H. Irwin. Brewing at a commercial scale was necessarily removed from the home shop quite early. Because of the space required for the equipment, the need for large sources of water and heat, and the amount of effluent, breweries were among the earliest true factories. Andrew Wales established the town's first commercial brewery in a waterfront warehouse in 1770, and about a half-dozen similar operations in the vicinity followed during the next 60 years (see Chapter 1). The Entwisle-Irwin brewery was a departure, unusual in its scale and in the fact that it was likely Alexandria's first purpose-built brewhouse. By 1843 William H. Irwin's plant was brewing about 3,000 barrels annually, probably ten times the amount produced by each of the earlier breweries. What was not new is the fact that some of this product was shipped to the West Indies. Alexandria manufacturers for years had been sending goods such

¹ King Gambrinus is the "patron saint" of brewers. Many sources have characterized as strictly mythological this legendary innovator of brewing with hops. Many are the tales of his origins, from commoner to king of Flanders and Brabant. The great nineteenth-century New York brewer George Ehret explains his origin, or at least his name, thus: "While some attribute the invention of hopped malt-beer to Jan Primus (John I), a scion of the stock of Burgundy princes, who lived about the year 1251, others ascribe it to Jean Sans Peur (1371-1419), otherwise known as Ganbrivius. A corruption of either name may plausibly be said to have resulted in the present name of the King of Beer, viz., Gambrinus, who we are accustomed to see represented in the habit of a knight of the middle-ages, with the occasional addition of a crown. Popular imagination, it seems, attached such great importance to beer, that in according the honor of its invention, it could not be satisfied with anything less than a king." (Ehret 1891; American Brewery History Home Page)

² *Treffdusia* was a Washington, D.C. German literary periodical. Translation from German by Ann C. Sherwin.

as crackers and distilled and malt liquors as ships' cargoes and, perhaps more commonly, as provisions for ships' crews. (Hurst 1991:2; *Alexandria Gazette* June 14, 1843)

By the 1830s Alexandria had been surpassed in size and economic importance by several other East Coast cities. Its golden age of commerce had passed, but town leaders fervently believed in the need to compete with commercial and industrial rivals such as Baltimore, Maryland. For this reason the town supported transportation links to the hinterlands including turnpikes, canals and railroads—some successful, others not. By the 1850s the waterfront became a major coal depot, fed by the Chesapeake & Ohio and Alexandria Canals that linked the town to mines around Cumberland, Maryland. The railroads revived the flour trade, making possible cheaper transport from far-flung wheat farms and mills. As Alexandria was transformed into a hub for four railroad lines, it also became a logical location for a major railroad car and locomotive factory. But the largest industrial concern in the antebellum era became the 1847 Mount Vernon Cotton Factory on North Washington Street. The huge plant employed more than 150 hands, producing 5,000 yards of cloth daily. By 1854 Alexandria “boasted of a total of seventy-seven manufacturing and processing establishments, eighteen of which [including Irwin’s brewery] were operated by steam power.” The wealthiest man in town was no longer from among the merchant elite but was an industrialist, lumber mill owner and furniture manufacturer James Green.³ The Civil War provided a temporary boost to commercial activity but retarded the town industrially. At the end of the conflict, Alexandria’s productive capacity had only fallen further behind that of the rapidly growing Northern cities. (Hurst 1991:2,10,12,13; Miller 1986; *Evening Star* June 24, 1854)

Prior to the Civil War, brewing in the United States could not have been considered a significant industry. In 1850 the 431 American breweries directly contributed only \$5,728,568 to a gross domestic product of \$2,350,000,000. Thanks primarily to the proliferation of breweries, the total value of the product had almost quadrupled by the eve of the Civil War, but this was but a fraction of what was to come. At only 2,596,803 barrels in 1863, total U.S. production of malt liquors quadrupled over the next fifteen years. Sales reached to more than \$100,000,000, or 12,800,900 barrels, by 1880. By the turn of the century, total U.S. annual production had reached 39,471,593 barrels. While the *per capita* consumption of hard liquors remained flat during this period, beer consumption jumped nearly nine-fold. Beer—lager beer—had become the national beverage. (Johnston and Williamson 2005; Siebel and Schwarz 1933:62; Schlüter 1910:56; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:607-609)

The number of American breweries increased sharply before reaching a peak of 4,131 in 1873. This increase belies the difficulty of successfully running a brewing operation. Firms started up, they failed, they turned over, and partnerships formed and dissolved. Portner’s troubles after the war and similar problems for Henry Englehardt at his West End Brewery⁴ are only two examples of the instability in the industry and the precarious life of such firms. The depression of 1873-1877 was the proximate cause for the failure of many ventures, but micro-economic trends played a greater role thereafter. The two major depressions of the late nineteenth century only temporarily flattened demand and production. Washington brewer Christian Heurich reported weathering well the depression of 1873. The Robert Portner Brewing Company suffered somewhat during the early

³ Green also owned the old Hunter shipyard and the Mansion House Hotel.

⁴ See Chapter 1 and Walker, Dennée and Crane 1996.

1890s, but nonetheless managed to construct a new brewhouse at the time. And Washington's National Capital Brewing Company, founded in 1890 and partly owned by Portner, went unscathed by the depression of the mid 1890s. (Siebel and Schwarz 1933:74; Heurich n.d.:51; Portner n.d.:26)

Only through increased production could brewers reduce marginal costs and realize significant profits. Prior to the employment of artificial refrigeration, volume and profits had been limited by the changes of season and reliance on ice. For innovative firms, refrigeration and mechanization permitted year-round manufacturing and reduced labor costs. The 1880s saw a wave of incorporation among the larger breweries that allowed owners to increase capitalization. Larger scale led to reduced prices and a reduction in the amount of capital investment required per unit produced. Pasteurization and advances in transportation and in bottle and closure manufacturing allowed major breweries to exploit wide market areas. Distant breweries became able to compete with small local firms in price and quality. As a result, larger and better-capitalized firms prospered at the expense of smaller, obsolescent ones. It was primarily the latter type that failed during the 1870s and 1880s. As American breweries realized economies of scale, shaky firms that represented excess supply closed down. Large breweries increasingly came to be in direct and vigorous competition with each other, sometimes engaging in cutthroat price wars. The situation was aggravated in the 1890s by the formation of a number of English investor syndicates that bought and consolidated firms and vertically integrated production and distribution. Intending but failing to dominate the largest American markets, they managed to increase production dramatically and

Annual production in barrels of malt liquors by U.S. firms, 1863-1920

Source: Brewer's Almanac, Beer Institute

1863	1,765,827	1883	17,757,892	1903	46,720,179
1864	3,459,119	1884	18,998,619	1904	48,265,168
1865	3,657,181	1885	19,185,953	1905	49,522,029
1866	6,207,401	1886	20,710,933	1906	54,724,553
1867	6,291,184	1887	23,121,526	1907	58,622,002
1868	6,146,663	1888	24,680,219	1908	58,814,033
1869	6,342,055	1889	25,119,853	1909	56,364,360
1870	6,574,617	1890	27,561,944	1910	59,552,299
1871	7,740,260	1891	30,497,209	1911	63,283,123
1872	8,659,427	1892	31,856,626	1912	62,176,694
1873	9,633,323	1893	34,591,179	1913	65,324,876
1874	9,600,897	1894	33,362,373	1914	66,189,473
1875	9,452,697	1895	33,589,784	1915	59,808,210
1876	9,902,352	1896	35,859,250	1916	58,633,624
1877	9,810,060	1897	34,462,822	1917	60,817,379
1878	10,241,471	1898	37,529,339	1918	50,266,216
1879	11,103,084	1899	36,697,634	1919	27,712,648
1880	13,347,111	1900	39,471,593	1920	9,231,280
1881	14,311,028	1901	40,614,258		
1882	16,952,085	1902	44,550,127		

slashed prices to undercut competitors and gain market share.⁵ Total U.S. production had increased enormously by the turn of the century, with a mere 1,758 plants selling nearly 40,000,000 barrels—an average of 22,453 barrels per brewery. Brewing had become one of the nation's largest industries, spurring the growth of subsidiary businesses like the manufacture of ice, barrels, brewing vessels, boilers, bottles, etc. (Kelley 1965:375; Schlüter 1910:70-71; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:609)

Although not among the nation's largest breweries, Robert Portner's operation was indeed a considerable enterprise—innovative, successful, and illustrative of the growth trend of the industry as a whole. The firm demonstrated the feedback relationship between supply and demand. A brewer could theoretically increase capacity indefinitely, but if there were insufficient numbers of customers, then no amount of investment could make the firm flourish. While beer consumption grew markedly during the late nineteenth century, the market in little Alexandria was quickly saturated. So, in order to sell enough beer to create large profits, Portner realized that he had to establish markets elsewhere. The logical place to start was across the Potomac River in Washington.

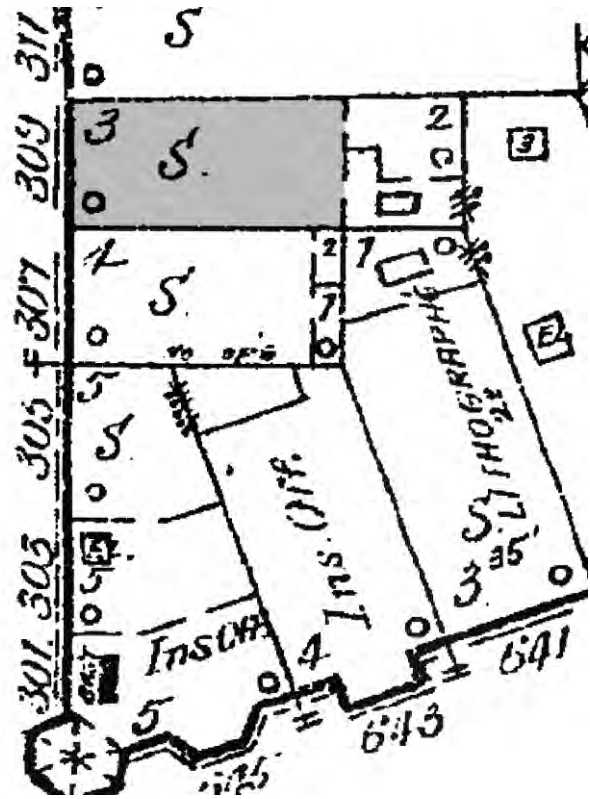
Portner had managed to find some customers among the scores of District of Columbia saloonkeepers by 1867. He further promoted his product to the hundreds of Washingtonians who



The Portner brewery, circa 1882. Brockett & Rock, 1883.

⁵ The English syndicates were encouraged by economic troubles in Britain (Miller 1997) and by the fact that America's sound money policy created a great demand for investment capital. English investors also tried to dominate the German industry at the same time.

patronized his beer garden during the years 1869 to 1876 (see Chapter 6). Not satisfied to gradually build a clientele from a distance, Portner decided to set up his own establishment in downtown Washington. Before 1875 he rented the first floor of 309 7th Street, NW and returned to the familiar business of restaurateur. Like his New York and Alexandria restaurants, this enterprise was short-lived. Although he had operated such a business in the past, the brewer may have again become impatient with the intensive effort and slow gains to be made cultivating repeat business for a single outlet.⁶ So Portner purchased half of the triangular block bounded by Virginia Avenue and 7th and D Streets, SW, a site which had immediate access to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad tracks along Virginia (Potomac) Avenue and which was in direct communication by telegraph to the Alexandria plant. At the end of 1875 he commenced the construction of a two-story \$6000 cold storage warehouse. (Portner n.d.:14; Boyd 1875; Boyd 1876; *Alexandria Gazette* November 6, 1875; Boyd 1877; Sanborn Map Company; *Critic-Record* November 15, 1875)



A detail of an 1888 Sanborn insurance map showing the site of Portner's 7th Street restaurant in Washington.

In spring 1876 the brewer placed in the Washington papers an advertisement for:

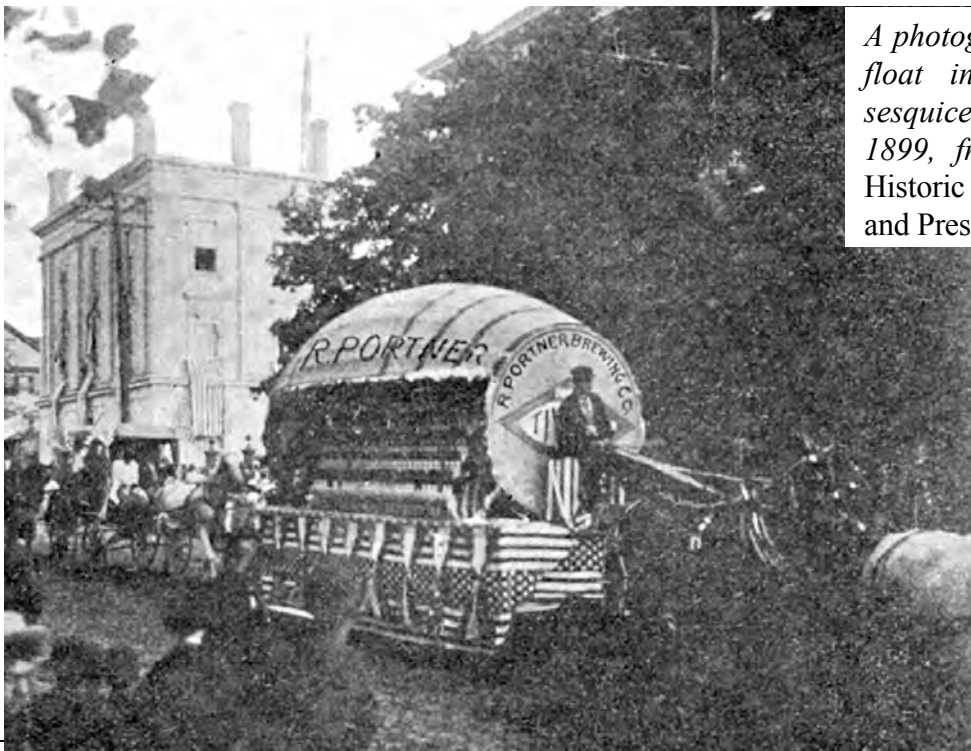
PORTNER'S VIENNA BEER. FOR FAMILY USE. The general demand for BOTTLED BEER has induced me to build a Lager Beer Bottling Establishment... The Beer is especially brewed for that purpose and bottled with the greatest care, for family use and shipping. (*Evening Star* April 4, 1876)

Soon, pint and quart bottles reading "R. PORTNER/ WASHINGTON D.C." were appearing in District saloons (at \$2.50 per dozen quart bottles and \$1.40 per dozen pints, including the deposit on the bottles). In fact, by 1880 most of Portner's product was selling in the national capital. His bottled beer was judged the best at the 1880 National Fair, and his finest brewery wagon was the second "float" in a parade marking the opening of the fair "and Industrial Exposition" a year earlier. From his perch atop a large cask on the bed of the wagon, one of Portner's men,

⁶ The restaurant location appears to have become the company's first beer "depot" prior to the completion of the Virginia Avenue distribution branch in 1876.

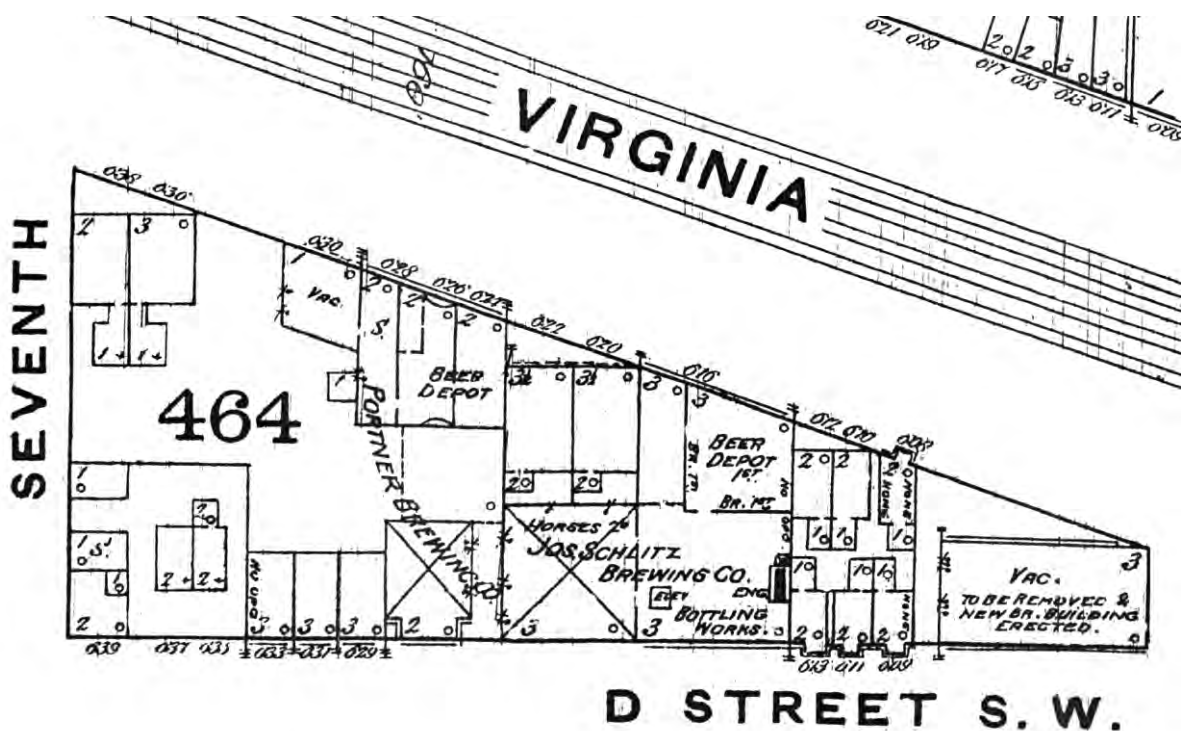
costumed as King Gambrinus, held aloft a glass of beer and repeatedly drank to the health of the crowd assembled along the route. That crowd may have included a handful of Washington saloonkeepers with whom the Portner maintained a particularly close business relationship. The brewery came to sponsor several Alexandria bars in a similar fashion (see Chapter 11). Among Portner's earliest Washington retail customers were saloonkeepers and restaurateurs Michael Becker, Anthony Bregazzi, Louis Faber (possibly Otto Portner's former saloon partner), William Herfurth, John Hancock, C. Edward Kant, August Koch, Patrick T. McMahon, Charles H. Miller, Frederick Moelich, Joseph Platz, W.F. Polton, John Ross, Bennet B. Smith, Ernest Weber, and William Wilkening—the last apparently Robert Portner's brother-in-law and later to be an employee of the brewery. These outlets seem to have run the gamut from upscale, downtown hotels to Georgetown and Southwest corner bars.⁷ (*Western Brewer* June 1880; *Evening Star* March 31, 1946; *Washington Post* June 24, 1879, October 8, 1880 and August 4, 1883; Boyd's Directory Company 1879)

But Portner was not satisfied with tapping only the Washington market. A major reason was the fact that it was already crowded with competing indigenous firms numbering about sixteen, most small and many newly established. One source claims that the brewer also sold his product in



A photograph of a Portner float in the Alexandria sesquicentennial parade, 1899, from Wedderburn's Historic Alexandria Past and Present.

⁷ By 1886, Washington bars serving Portner's Vienna Cabinet and bock beer on tap included the American House, H. Alschwee's, John Baier's, M. Becker's, Charles O. Brill's, Robert Callahan's, L.G. Dakin's, Charles Dietz's, William Dietz's, George W. Driver's, Louis Faber's, Flammer's Sample Room, the Garrick, D. Hagerty's, G.W. Harvey's, William Helmus's, F.W. Heygster's, H. Hodermann's, Charles Karsch's, Edward Kolb's, the Losekam, P.F. McMahon's, J.W. Ohl's, Samuel Orrison's, the Opera House Café, John Ross's, Charles Schnebel's, F. Schneider's, Solari Brothers, L. Stelzle's, A. Supplee's, H. Petersen's, the St. Marc Hotel, J.T. Trego's, the Turf Exchange, Leopold Weiss's, Welcker's Hotel, J.J. White's, Willard's Hotel, and again, William H. Wilkening's—all but one located in the city's northwest quadrant, and mostly in what is today considered to be downtown. (*Washington Post* April 20, 1886)



A detail of an 1888 Sanborn insurance map showing the Portner Brewing Company depot on Virginia Avenue, SW. Note that Milwaukee's Schlitz company was then present in the city with a depot adjacent to Portner's facility. Later, the block was home to branches of the Bergner & Engel Brewery of Philadelphia and the Grassner & Brand Brewing Company of Toledo.

Pittsburgh shortly after the war. The brewer does not mention this in his memoirs, however, nor has any corroborating evidence come to light. The only possible first-hand reference is to Portner selling “to other brewers” in 1866-1867, but he had connections instead to Philadelphia through his wife’s family in the 1870s. Anna’s brothers Peter and Jacob were tavernkeepers, and Jacob was briefly (at least 1869-1870) a partner in a Philadelphia brewery with Henry Lawser, and Peter was its bookkeeper. “It just so happened that Jacob was looking for a partner in his brewery and, hearing of Portner, sent Valaer and Mathis to look into his brewing style and product.... Before he would commit to a partnership, however, Portner wanted to see the brewery first, so he traveled with Valaer to Philadelphia.... [and,] impressed with the brewery,” he apparently invested. (*Western Brewer* June 1880; Van Wieren 1995:328; *Local Courts’ and Municipal Gazette* 1872:115-116; United States Census 1870f; Gaines 2002:32-33)

Pittsburgh would have been an unlikely market for Portner, far from the Alexandria plant and with its own substantial number of German brewers. The remainder of Virginia, however, was wide open. In 1876, there were perhaps only eight other such firms in the state beyond Alexandria: the Spring Park Brewery in Richmond, John Duerringer’s City Spring Brewery of Richmond, Yuengling’s at Varina (near Richmond), Newberry & Raulston’s Cockade City Brewery in Petersburg, plus tiny operations in Charlottesville, Winchester and Wytheville, and the new Virginia Brewing Company in Roanoke. And half of these would soon fail. In 1876

**SOUTHERN DEPOT OF
R. PORTNER'S ALEXANDRIA BREWERY**

83 Main St., Norfolk, Va.

Vienna Lager Beer in kegs, and bottled expressly for family use and shipping.
The trade supplied at lowest rates.

Portner established a branch and bottling plant—his “Southern Depot”—at 83 Main Street in Norfolk, with Robert Bell, Jr. as superintendent. Norfolk was a good choice. A growing railroad hub and naval port at the southeast corner of the state, it was also accessible to the nearby towns of Hampton, Newport News, Portsmouth and to the entire James and York River valleys. As late as the early twentieth century, “the brewery exported a great deal of beer to Norfolk [and Hampton], and when the Norfolk [to Washington packet] boat would come down every evening, it stopped in Alexandria to take on passengers and load beer.” The location of an 1870s ice house near the Alexandria Canal and the 1880 purchase of a lot there suggests that the brewery may also have shipped beer westward along the Chesapeake & Ohio Canal as far as Cumberland, Maryland. Production was increasing enough that the plant had occasional shut-downs for lack of barrels and water. But the demand for materials stimulated other local industry. Not only would it come to support a glass industry, but the Aitcheson & Brother planing mill would manufacture its own “patent beer [shipping] box and crate,” and Brenner & Knight were encouraged to consider a large, new cooerage alongside the canal. (Portner n.d.:14; Bull, Friedrich and Gottschalk 1984:48-49,306-307; Van Wieren 1995:374-376; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:402,477; Sheriff 1877; Boyd’s Directory Company 1879; Robinson 1983:109; Alexandria Circuit Court Deedbook 9:272; Switzler 1886: 109; *Alexandria Gazette* October 4, 1881, October 25, 1882 and August 28, 1902)

By 1880 the brewery had installed its first air-conditioning, ice-making and pasteurizing equipment. With the visionary Robert Portner at the helm, the brewery went from success to success, and it was not long before its market and distribution system expanded. The company had just established new branches at Lynchburg, Virginia, roughly in the center of the state, and at Charlotte and Wilmington, North Carolina. Portner had completed his first two refrigerated rail cars and was placing them on the Virginia Midland Railway to serve his existing Virginia depots and agents. By 1881 the firm opened another branch at Augusta, Georgia—a full 460 miles away from Alexandria as the crow flies, but at least 550 miles by rail. This was a bold move, leapfrogging many of the South’s substantial cities along the railroads between. Many of these towns would later receive depots, but in the meantime the brewery may have reached many of these places through arrangements with small, local bottlers and distributors such as with Christian & White in Richmond. Portner must have had high hopes for his move into Georgia—a state with then perhaps only one brewery of significance—suggested by the fact that he placed the Augusta depot superintendent on the brewery’s board of directors in 1883. At this time Portner also revealed plans for \$25,000 to \$30,000 worth of improvements to the plant. Improvements and further production and market expansion would indeed occur, but in an

unexpected way. (Southern Directory Co. 1881; Sholes & Co. 1882; Van Wieren 1995:62-63; *Alexandria Gazette* December 10, 1881; *Washington Post* April 8, 1880)

Robert Portner had had recurring bouts of illness since the Civil War. The nature of his affliction is unclear, but it seems to have been aggravated by the stress of running his various enterprises. He recuperated during periodic trips to Europe, trips that became longer and more frequent as the brewer aged. These absences, and the men he installed to manage the plant during them, significantly shaped the future of the business. Not long after returning from his latest vacation at the end of 1881 Portner decided to reorganize the brewery into a joint stock company, so “from now on everything became a little easier for me.” (Portner n.d.:19)

The Robert Portner Brewing Company was incorporated in April 1883. Its eponymous chairman and president conveyed some shares to his best employees to create a board of directors yet keep ownership closely held. Brewmaster and superintendent Paul Muhlhauser assumed the position of vice-president. Carl Strangmann, Portner’s nephew who had been with the firm since 1875 as a shipping and receiving clerk, now took the place of secretary and treasurer. The other directors included Edward Eils—patent attorney, former brewery clerk, co-patentee of Portner’s air cooling device and secretary of the Brewers’ Refrigerating Machine Company—and Charles Gustave Herbort, manager of the firm’s Augusta depot and then its Richmond bottling branch. The corporate charter set the total capital stock value at \$1,000,000, divided into 10,000 shares of \$100 par value each.⁸ Portner created the board by giving each of the men one share of stock with the option to buy more. Muhlhauser and Herbort provided for their financial futures by taking \$10,000 and \$5,000 worth of shares, respectively. In the mid 1880s, Portner’s brother-in-law Christian Valaer, the Charlotte depot manager, replaced Herbort, and Frank P. Madigan, the Washington branch manager, replaced Eils. (Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3:27; Portner n.d.:19; Sholes & Co. 1882; Chataigne 1886; *Washington Post* May 17, 1889)



An 1894 engraving of Carl Strangmann, from the Alexandria Gazette.

Incorporation provided an infusion of cash that could be used for further growth, and it limited Portner’s financial liability to the value of his personal investment in the company. He would never again be as vulnerable as when his business almost ruined him in 1866-1867. While the distribution of stock clearly demonstrated that Portner intended to maintain ultimate control over the enterprise, the directorships were not mere sinecures. Muhlhauser was Portner’s key employee and creator of his popular brands, and Strangmann was being groomed to assume the position of chief executive officer. As he wrote, the incorporation lifted some of the responsibility and stress from Portner, who “could not work very much” on account of his illness. Nonetheless, the brewer initially had to “rearrange everything” because “through my absence and my disease, the business had not received the necessary attention.” (Portner n.d.:19)

⁸ In 1904, as a consequence of a new state tax on the capitalization of corporations, the brewing company reduced its outstanding stock value to \$300,000. (*Washington Post* June 17, 1904)

The purchase and construction of distribution branches in the South continued apace. Between about 1885 and 1889, the Robert Portner Brewing Company opened depots at Richmond, at Danville and at Phoebus, Virginia. The advantage of a market in the growing state capital was obvious. Phoebus provided a second location near the mouth of the James River, convenient to Newport News, Hampton, Norfolk and Chesapeake, and Danville was a mere 70 miles by rail from the Lynchburg branch and on the doorstep of North Carolina. Indeed, the Carolinas proved to be the next frontier, with footholds at Charlotte and Raleigh and Goldsboro before 1886. Portner's business had become successful enough that he received buy-out offers from both Washington's Christian Heurich and an English syndicate that may have included the owners of the huge Allsopp brewery of Burton-on-Trent. But he refused to sell for less than "an extravagant price." Perhaps more important than his southern markets and facilities was the fact that he was planning to expand in Washington, and the established D.C. brewers did not need extra competition. (Chataigne 1886c; Chataigne 1887; J.H. Chataigne & Co. 1888c; Sanborn Map Company; *Washington Post* November 17, 1884, November 2, 1888 and May 28, 1889; *New York Times* November 2, 1888)

"[O]ur business had improved very much, and we contemplated building a brewery in Washington. We had already bought the necessary grounds on Maryland Avenue and Thirteenth Street." Indeed, already at the end of 1887 Portner paid more than \$13,000 for two lots and was consulting Northern architects on the design of a plant estimated to cost \$250,000 and to commence construction the following spring. He may have been considering relocating his business entirely from Alexandria to Washington, an action that would have been a severe blow to the former city. (Portner n.d.:24; *Washington Post* December 15, 1887 and December 21, 1889)

[But a]t the same time, another brewer by the name of Albert Carry also wanted to build a brewery in Washington and had already bought a small one. As Carry was a very efficient brewer and businessman, it was my plan to merge our two enterprises, and I was successful. We came to an agreement in October 1890, and merged our Washington business with that of Carry and founded the National Capital Brewing Company. Carry received for his brewery and good will \$140,000 and \$110,000 in shares of our Alexandria brewery.⁹ I bought at first another \$40,000 more stock [in the new enterprise] and later \$25,000 more; Strangmann took \$10,000, [Frank P.] Madigan \$10,000, and Carry another \$85,000. In order to have capital of \$500,000, we sold the rest of our stock to customers. By now (May 31, 1891), the building, which will be very imposing, is almost finished. This has released me of much work and worry, since from now on I will have little to do with the Washington branch. (Portner n.d.:24)

Carry, with the largest ownership share, became chairman and president. Portner served as vice-president and was clearly the junior in authority and responsibility. The board of directors also included John Vogt, three years Portner's senior, a native of Wurtemberg and a very successful

⁹ The new corporation essentially bought out the interests of Carry and Portner in their respective Washington brewery sites.

confectioner and baker; John D. Bartlett, a middle-aged Maine native who parlayed his early involvement in the Kennebec River ice trade into superintendency of the Great Falls Ice Company, perhaps the District's largest ice supplier; Carl Strangmann, the Portner company's secretary-treasurer; and Frank P. Madigan, the former collector for Portner's Washington branch and soon to be the general manager at Alexandria. Charles Carry, Albert's young son, eventually assumed a large interest and role. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:250; United States Census 1910b; Boyd's Directory Company 1890; Boyd's Directory Company 1893)

Albert Carry is a figure as interesting and enterprising as Portner, but different at least in the sense that he was trained as a brewer from a young age. Several years younger than Portner, Carry was born at Hechingen, Hohenzollern, Germany in 1852. He left home at age fourteen and traveled the Continent extensively, apparently employed by a succession of breweries. He emigrated at the age of twenty, and with his considerable training he was able to secure a lucrative position as brewmaster for the Hauck & Windisch Brewery (later known as the John Hauck Brewing Company) in that most German of American cities, Cincinnati, Ohio. Arriving in Washington, D.C. in 1887, he invested his earnings in an interest in the Washington Brewery Company northeast of Capitol Hill. There he remained for less than three years, selling the brewery to an English syndicate and purchasing Henry Rabe's small establishment at 1337 D Street, SE. It was on this site that the brewhouse of the National Capital Brewing Company soon rose. Like Portner, Carry had intended to build his own new brewery, but the men decided it was more prudent to enter into this "combination." Again, like Portner, Carry sat on the boards of several financial institutions; became involved in real estate, construction and property management; he was associated with two German singing clubs; and owned a fine country estate in addition to his downtown Washington home.¹⁰ It was likely through the business institutions or German social clubs that the two men had become acquainted. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:250; Slauson 1903:443; *Evening Star* October 21, 1890; Proctor 1930:82; Van Wieren 1995:60)

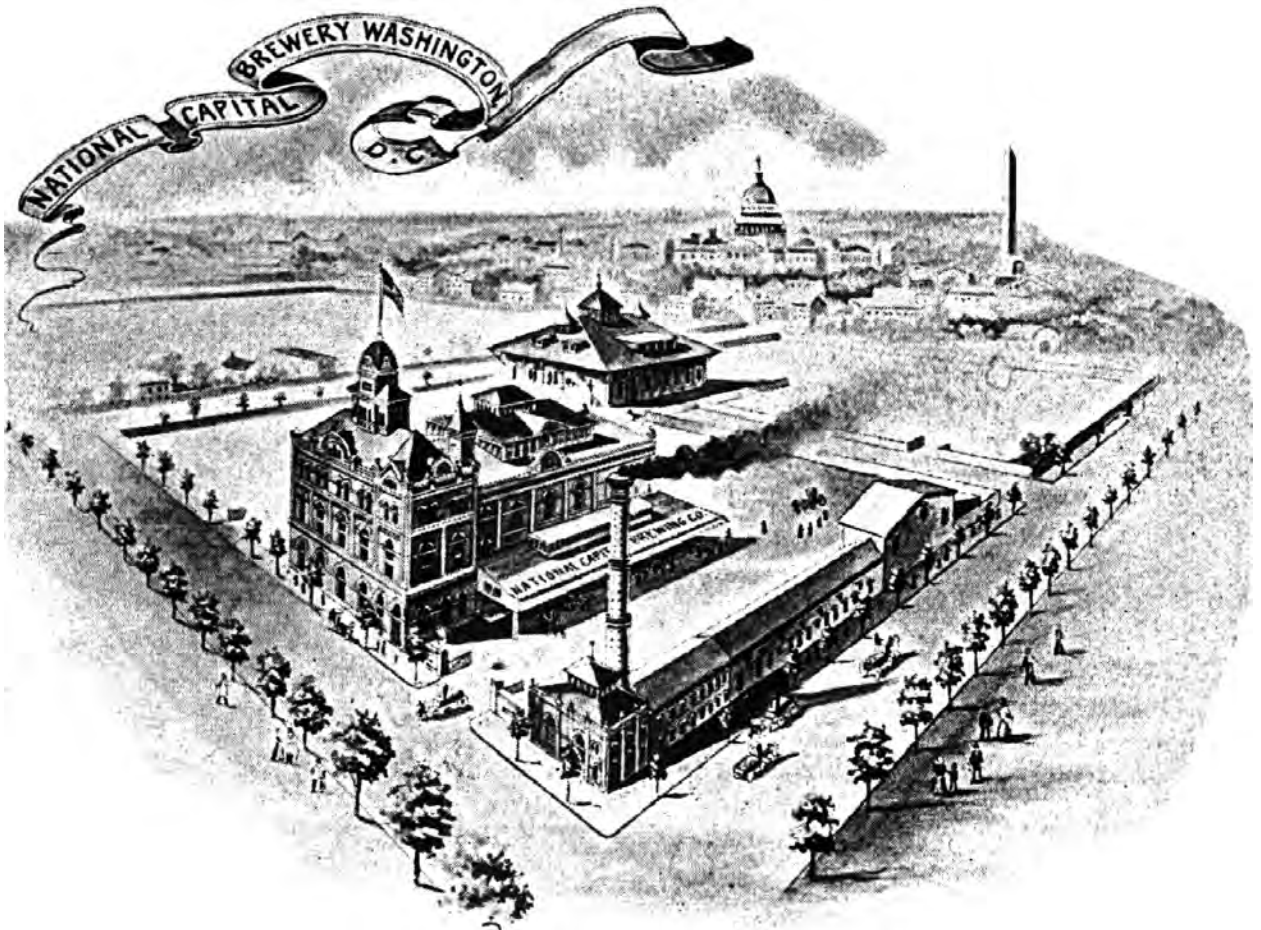
¹⁰ Proctor's short, posthumous biography of Carry in the 1930 *Washington—Past and Present: A History* is effusive in its praise. "He was known well as a constructive force who ever bore in mind the advancement of Washington and the District of Columbia..." (Proctor 1930:82) One of these advancements came from his consistent badgering of the District's Board of Commissioners to show in the vicinity of his brewery some of the attention that they lavished on the affluent Northwest sector of the city, e.g., to commit to paving and maintaining the streets (District of Columbia Engineer Board Correspondence). Proctor continues: "[He] who practiced works of good and varied character, frequently without revelation of his own identity. In the business spheres of the nation's capital he was a leader.... [Carry's] prominence came about naturally, and with the passing of years the regard in which he was held warmed to a degree pleasant for the heart of man to feel.... While his school days ended [early], his studies never ceased. He was of a thoroughgoing nature, and as the years advanced took more and more pleasure in good writings. Of speculative bent, he became something of a philosopher, and his attitude toward mankind and the world was at all times one of broad and sane tolerance.... His was a geniality rarely met with in the present-day hectic and commercialized existence of the average person. Kindness was rich within his heart. For his astuteness in business and for his character he was respected; but it was for these many human qualities that he was beloved.... Years given to Albert Carry were seventy-three, for death came to him February 14, 1925. It can be said truly that no one of them was wasted, but rather, to the contrary, each was so charged with the benefaction of his activity as to spread cumulatively and with augmented goodness through the souls of his fellow-men. Because of one life well lived, the lives of numbers have been brightened." (Proctor 1930:82-83)



Left: Albert Carry, from the Washington Post Company's The City of Washington, Its Men and Institutions.

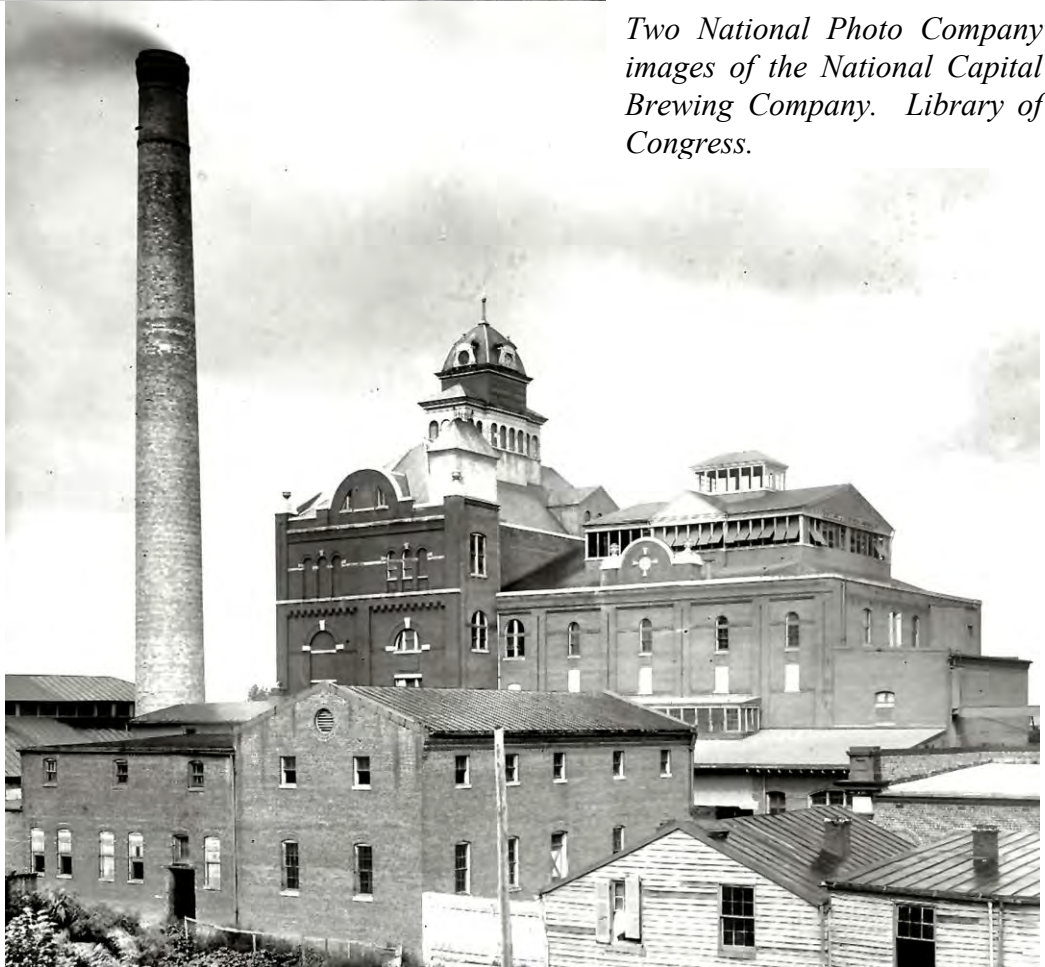
Above: Company letterhead.

Below: A rendering of the National Capital Brewing Company, 1890s.





Two National Photo Company images of the National Capital Brewing Company. Library of Congress.

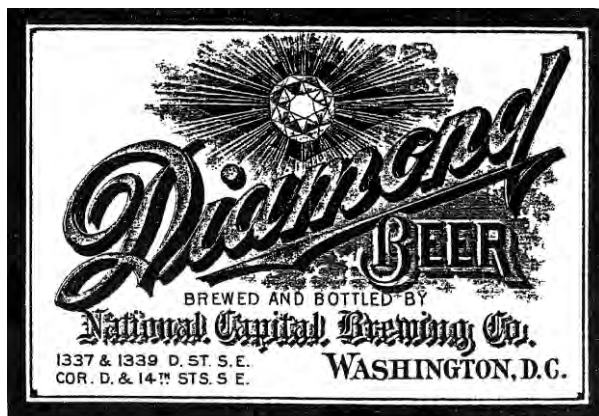




Above: Workers at Albert Carry's first Washington brewery (formerly George Juenemann's) circa 1886-1890. Below: A National Capital Brewing Company wagon at the brewery circa 1900. Photographs courtesy of George A. Didden III.



Commenced at the end of 1890, the National Capital Brewing Company buildings soon occupied most of the block between 13th and 14th, D and E Streets, SW and were served by a track of the Richmond & Danville Railroad. The plant cost approximately \$250,000. Its eight-story, 94- by 136-foot brewhouse was said to be capable of producing 100,000 barrels annually, nearly twice as much as the Alexandria brewhouse at that time. Its principal products were its “Diamond,” “Münchener” (or “Munich”) and “Golden Eagle Lager” beers, typical turn-of-the-century American lagers, later touted for their low alcohol content when Prohibition loomed. The brewery stabled up to 30 horses and accommodated nine wagons for the purpose of delivery to local saloons. (Sanborn Map Company; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:250; Slauson 1903:443; *Alexandria Gazette* September 27, 1890; *Alexandria Gazette* October 1, 1890; Brockett and Rock 1883; *Washington Post* March 8, 1910; Didden 1998)



A National Capital Brewing Company beer label, circa 1910. Courtesy of George A. Didden III

Carry and Portner essentially split the total market area; the National Capital Brewing Company served the Washington market and, initially, points north, while the Robert Portner Brewing Company had free rein south of the Potomac.¹¹ Portner sold both his former D.C. depot and the parcel upon which he had originally planned to build his own Washington brewery. The latter was purchased by the Richmond & Danville Railroad Company for \$60,000—a 67 percent profit for Portner and more capital for expansion elsewhere. The National Capital brewery had the disadvantage of having to fight for market share in over-served Washington, but did so successfully, sometimes outperforming the Alexandria plant in profits. In fact, in 1900, Carry and Portner nearly sold out to another English syndicate, presumably having finally been offered that extravagant price.¹² In contrast, the Alexandria brewery had the disadvantages of having to set up and ship to numerous Southern depots, where the company met first increasing competition and then staunch Prohibition efforts.¹³ (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:402; Portner n.d.:24,26,31,34; *Washington Post* February 8, 1900)

¹¹ There is direct evidence, however, that Portner products were being sold in western Maryland even before Portner’s death and certainly afterwards.

¹² The syndicate was attempting to acquire other local breweries. It may have been a failure to do so rather than the issue of price that made the deal fall through. On the other hand, one of the other local breweries could have been that of the Robert Portner Brewing Company.

¹³ The depots had their own problems. The Goldsboro, North Carolina depot burned in 1884 as did the Richmond branch in 1900, the Charlottesville one in 1904, and a stable of the Frederick, Maryland branch in 1913. Thieves blew open and emptied the safe at the Newport News location in 1899 but gained only \$40. W.W. Manly, the

Although it had lost its largest single market in Washington, the Robert Portner Brewing Company had to continue to step up output to serve other customers and was already looking to increase capacity to 75,000 or 100,000 barrels. By 1895 Portner's products were available throughout Virginia and at least in Charlotte, Wilmington, Goldsboro, Raleigh and Greensboro, North Carolina, and Charleston, Columbia, Florence and Greenville, South Carolina. They were distributed as far as Augusta and Atlanta, Georgia. Portner bottles have been found in archaeological contexts as far north as Gettysburg, Pennsylvania¹⁴ and Queens, New York and as far south as Daytona Beach, Florida.¹⁵ With agents ultimately in Harrisonburg, Virginia, and Hagerstown, Maryland, the beer surely found its way into West Virginia as well. (*Alexandria Gazette* October 1, 1890; *Alexandria Gazette* [1894]; Sanborn Map Company; E.F. Turner & Co. 1889; Bonitz 1892; Southern Directory and Publishing Co. 1892; Magid 1993; McKinney 1996)

Portner often entered a new market by striking an agreement with an established local bottler or liquor dealer to act as an exclusive distributor. In some cases, this relationship continued indefinitely. In fact, so far there is no evidence that the brewery actually owned its own distribution sites in Atlanta, Columbia, Florence and Greenville despite company claims to depots there.¹⁶ In most cases, however, Portner bought out his former agents or simply built his own branches. The early branch at Norfolk was put under the supervision of Robert Bell, Jr., one of the Alexandria plant managers. Charles T. Brown, an independent bottler in Danville before 1888, represented the Continental Brewing Company of Philadelphia (and perhaps Portner) until Portner purchased his facility. Brown remained on the payroll, employing his bottling expertise as manager of the Richmond depot from 1895 to 1902 and the Norfolk depot from 1909 to 1910. Similarly, small-time bottler Charles H. Van Valkenberg superintended his own former Staunton, Virginia works, a new Portner depot before 1902. (J.H. Chataigne & Co. 1895; Hill Directory Company 1902b; Hill Directory Company 1903a; Alexandria Corporation Court Chancery Causes, #1905-015, Richard Murphy vs. Mary Murphy; Sanborn Map Company; Hill Directory Company 1904)

With the exception of the short-lived office in downtown Charleston, South Carolina, all of the known depots shared two characteristics: they were accessible by rail, and they included bottling plants.¹⁷ Usually one- to three-story masonry buildings, many of the depots were purpose-built by the company, at costs up to \$50,000. These branches generally consisted of the bottling facility, office, cold storage, and a stable and wagon shed, and employed up to 20 men. Rail

manager of the Salisbury, North Carolina branch made a much bigger haul, embezzling \$1,700 and absconding when discovered. His successor, Robert R. Taylor, was arrested when he was found to be \$300 short in his accounts the following year. (*New York Times* November 17, 1884; *Washington Times* August 8, 1900; *Alexandria Gazette* November 5, 1904; *The News* April 22, 1913; *Washington Post* May 10, 1899 and December 18, 1906; *The Landmark* December 18, 1908 and August 23, 1907)

¹⁴ This bottle likely dated to the early twentieth century when a new Portner depot was established at Hagerstown, Maryland, 36 miles from Gettysburg.

¹⁵ The most distant find was a *circa* 1880 bottle unearthed in Melbourne, Australia in 2008!

¹⁶ Research into the land records of those cities is required to settle the question finally. A scrap of evidence for the presence of the company in Atlanta is the January 15, 1906 *Atlanta Constitution* mention of an unclaimed letter addressed to it.

¹⁷ The Salisbury, North Carolina branch (*circa* 1902-1907) was a few blocks from a railroad line. It may not be coincidental that this branch and the Charleston one were the shortest-lived. (Sanborn)

access was an obvious requirement in order to receive both beer and empty bottles; the Richmond depot handled 156 cars in 1905. The ever-growing web of rail lines, even through the relatively underdeveloped South, had become the medium of regional and national marketing. Before trains, beer could not easily or affordably be shipped any distance in bulk, especially overland.¹⁸ Beer in barrels could not be pasteurized because rapid, even and thorough heating and cooling of the contents of such large containers was impossible.¹⁹ For this reason, the speed of rail transport made possible the delivery of a fresh product, particularly since it was cheaper to ship a given amount of beer in large casks than in the heavier and more bulky cases of bottles. (Sanborn Map Company; *Western Brewer* June 1880; *Richmond Times-Dispatch* August 19, 1906; *Ice and Refrigeration* 1905:118)

With advances in bottle manufacturing technology, bottled beer was becoming a ubiquitous product, although most of it was still sold through saloons and restaurants. Glass bottles' transparency, single-serving size, and labeling were marketing advantages to brewers and saloonkeepers. Alexandria, Virginia had no glass bottle manufacturers until 1893, however, and until at least 1896, the Robert Portner Brewing Company had to import most of its bottles from glass companies in other cities. Before 1896, therefore, it was just as easy, and only a little more expensive, to have new, empty bottles shipped directly from the manufacturer to the destination city instead of to Alexandria. So before 1908, with the possible exception of the brewery's Tivoli Hofbrau brand, it appears that the beers were shipped in casks to bottling branches in the destination cities. In Richmond, adjacent to some former Norfolk & Western Railroad sidings, Army Corps of Engineers archaeologists unearthed a trash pit consisting largely of broken *circa* 1880 "Portner" bottles that originated at glass factories in Boston and New York.²⁰ "This would require a relatively sophisticated evaluation of market demand to be anticipated at the point of purchasing the containers from different sources, well in advance of sales." In the early 1880s the company was already filling more than 600,000 bottles annually. In 1902 Alexandria's three bottle factories signed contracts to deliver 1,500,000. By 1907 the bottling plant at the brewery was said to have had a capacity of 20,000,000 bottles annually, although the total production of the brewery, put in bottles, would probably have required only about 60 percent of that number.²¹ (Miller 1991b:138; Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897; Thompson 1993; Brockett and Rock 1883:66; *Washington Post* September 13, 1902; Wedderburn 1907)

This system of distribution seems remarkably inefficient when one considers that Portner's brewery was only one of scores of firms setting up parallel networks. Competition was fierce, particularly during the wave of consolidation in the 1890s. It was not unusual for competing brewery branches to be located side by side. Independent distributors were generally small, and their brewery clients tended to insist on them carrying their products exclusively. Breweries

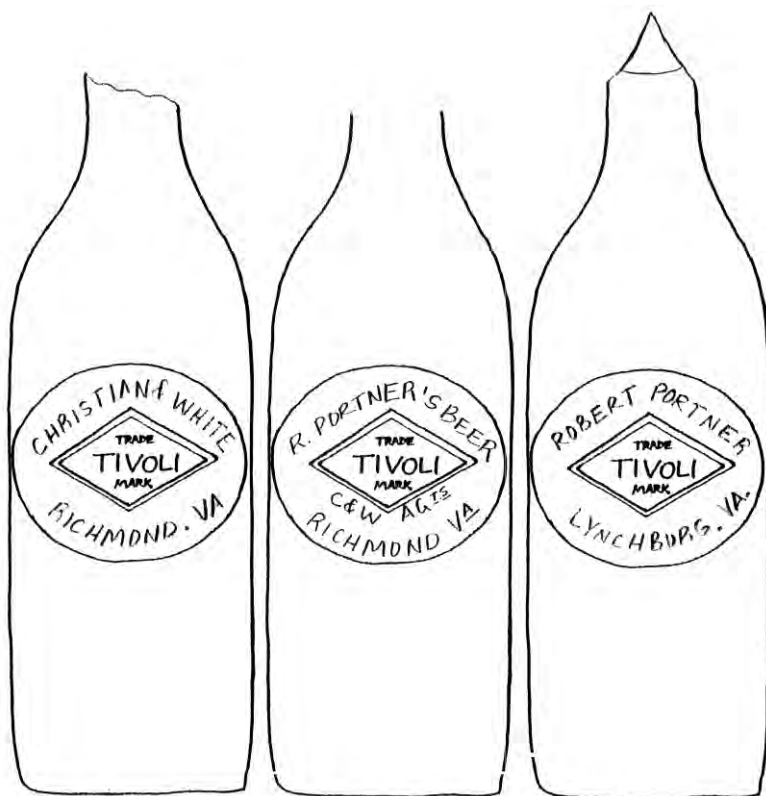
¹⁸ Beer from Great Britain, for instance, was shipped in corked bottles packed in barrels or hampers during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

¹⁹ Draft beer is still not pasteurized today; its freshness is largely attributable to the lack of exposure to the heat of the process.

²⁰ Those factories included those of Karl Hutter, a New York manufacturer of porcelain closures, and Dean Foster and Company, a Boston pharmaceutical glass supplier. The fact that these were not principally bottle makers suggests the relative scarcity of glass bottles at the time.

²¹ The capacity figure seems to have been an exaggeration, because five years later, the company had to construct a new, larger bottling house.

were disinclined to allow a middleman to take a cut of the profits, however; once the demand in a market reached a certain threshold, economies of scale made it more profitable to distribute directly. As distributors, brewers exercised leverage directly against bar owners (see Chapter 11). It was only after the repeal of Prohibition that the federal government required the distribution of alcohol through the system of independent dealers that exists today.²²



Sketches of three broken circa 1885 bottles discovered in a Richmond trash pit by archaeologists from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. They are among the rarer of the brewery's bottles, as each is identified by the name of the city in which the beer was to be sold. Similar bottles are known from several other cities and were probably produced for most of the pre-1900 depots. The bottle at the far left is particularly unusual in that it identifies a private bottler-agent for the beer and not the brewery itself! Drawings courtesy of the Richmond Resident Office, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Advances in transportation and in the preservation of perishable items had benefited not only Portner but also his large competitors. Despite commanding most of the market in its own hometown, the Robert Portner Brewing Company's market area was penetrated by dozens of competitors by the turn of the twentieth century. Archaeological and documentary evidence suggests that in Alexandria, beers from at least the following brewing companies were also available at the end of the nineteenth century: Pabst (Milwaukee), Schlitz (Milwaukee), Ehret's (New York), Christian Heurich (Washington, D.C.), Anheuser-Busch (St. Louis), Bartholomay (Rochester), Continental (Philadelphia), Bergner & Engel (Philadelphia), Washington (Washington, D.C.), National (Baltimore), George Dukeheart (Baltimore), Darley Park (Baltimore), Rost's (Baltimore), Arlington or Consumers' (Alexandria County, Virginia), Cincinnati, Massachusetts Breweries (Boston), Fred Star (Millville, New Jersey), Bass (Burton-on-Trent), and Guinness (Dublin). (Johnson 1983; Alexandria Archaeology collection;

²² This does not mean, of course, that brewers cannot now pressure distributors. They advantageously position their products at the wholesale level through a mixture of inducements and sanctions. The largest brewers generally try to enforce the exclusion of their major competitors from particular distributors.

Known Robert Portner Brewing Company-owned branches in the South

Sources: Sanborn insurance maps, city directories, newspaper advertisements, the Portner memoirs, and American Breweries II. This list is not necessarily exhaustive.

City	Approximate dates of operation	Approximate number of breweries in each city at the time of the company's entry [♦]
Washington, D.C.	1875 to 1890	14
Norfolk, Virginia	1876 to 1916	0
Lynchburg, Virginia*	1879 to 1900	1
Charlotte, North Carolina* [†]	1879 to 1905	0
Wilmington, North Carolina	1879 to 1909	0
Danville, Virginia	1881 to 1916	0
Augusta, Georgia	1881 to 1907	0
Goldsboro, North Carolina	1882 to 1903	0
Roanoke, Virginia	1885 to 1916	0
Richmond, Virginia	1886 to 1916	1
Phoebus, Virginia	pre-1888 to 1916	0
Charleston, South Carolina [‡]	1891 to 1893	1
Newport News, Virginia	1892 to 1916	0
Petersburg, Virginia	pre-1897 to 1916	0
Frederick, Maryland	1897-1916	1
Raleigh, North Carolina	1899 to 1905	0
Greensboro, North Carolina	1900 to 1906	0
Staunton, Virginia	1901 to 1916	0
Salisbury, North Carolina	1902 to 1907	0
Charlottesville, Virginia	1904 to 1907	0
Rocky Mount, North Carolina	1904 to 1908?	0
Fredericksburg, Virginia	1904 to 1907?	0
Winchester, Virginia	1905 to 1908?	0
Hagerstown, Maryland	1907 to 1916	2

[♦]*The sources may have missed some small breweries. Naturally, many of these cities had several depots and agents for out-of-town breweries.*

^{*}*During the earlier part of this period, the beer may have been bottled and/or distributed through a private agent or bottler. It is known that prior to establishing a depot in Richmond in 1886, for instance, Portner's beer was distributed there by Christian & White, bottlers.*

[†]*About 1905, the Charlotte bottling depot was taken over by Robert Portner's brother-in-law, Christian Valaer, who commenced bottling soda and water, too. Portner undoubtedly helped set up Valaer in the business.*

[‡]*The Charleston depot did not include a bottling plant; its beer, in bottles and kegs, was shipped from Charlotte, North Carolina.*

Cities with private agents or distributors for the Robert Portner Brewing Company and unconfirmed locations for possible Robert Portner Brewing Company branches*

Sources: Sanborn insurance maps, city directories, newspaper items and billheads.

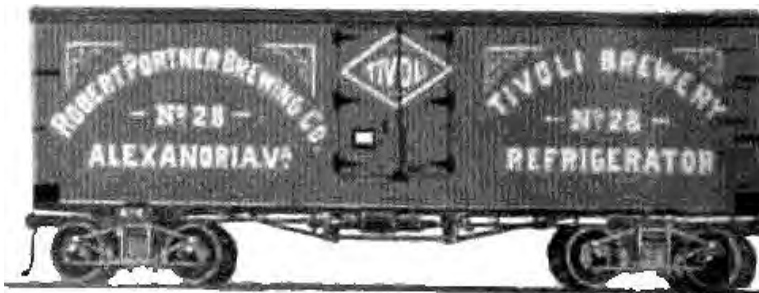
City (agent or bottler)	Approximate dates of operation
Richmond, Virginia (Christian & White)	1878 to 1885
Hagerstown, Maryland (Caleb Forsythe)	ca. 1885
Hampton, Virginia (John F. Cook)	1885 to 1895
Greenville, South Carolina (C.J. Pride/F.M. Simmons)	ca. 1885 to 1897
Greensboro, North Carolina (D.R. Huffines)	1890 to 1903
Charlottesville, Virginia (F.J. Lilienfeld)	1888 to pre-1904
Raleigh, North Carolina (Thomas R. Jones)	ca. 1890 to 1899
Wilson, North Carolina (Edward Sullivan)	ca. 1891
Columbia, South Carolina	ca. 1891
Florence, South Carolina	ca. 1891
Anderson, South Carolina (F.M. Butler)	ca. 1891 to 1897
Fredericksburg, Virginia	post-1892 to 1904
New Berne, North Carolina (Thomas Bowden)	ca. 1893
Havana, Cuba?	ca. 1899
Atlanta, Georgia	ca. 1894 to 1906
Wilson, North Carolina (G.T. Morgan)	ca. 1900
Elizabeth City, North Carolina (John F.T. Steger)	1901 to 1902
Winston, North Carolina	ca. 1902
Baltimore, Maryland?	ca. 1902
Knoxville, Maryland (C.F. Willard)	ca. 1903
Rocky Mount, North Carolina (G.H. Hinken)	pre-1904
Manassas, Virginia (Wade Goodwin)	ca. 1908
Harrisonburg, Virginia	ca. 1912
Pocahontas, Virginia	1915-1916

**These include several of the branches mentioned in the Alexandria Gazette supplement of 1894 and in an 1891 Washington Post article. For these cities, no Portner depots appear in extant period directories or insurance maps. Most of these cities were undoubtedly served by independent agents, and this list is not necessarily exhaustive. Several depots were ultimately parlayed into official company branches. While once considered, depots at Havana and Baltimore almost certainly were never established.*

Richmond & Company 1895; Richmond & Company 1897; Richmond & Company 1900; Alexandria Circuit Court Deedbooks; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3; H.S. Rich & Company 1903:472; Ketz and Reimer 1990; Walker, Dennée and Crane 1996; *Herald and Torch Light* April 27, 1893; *Alexandria Gazette* May 1, 1878, June 27, 1878, May 1, 1880 and August 16, 1881)

Competition depressed both prices and profits. Lower prices were made possible by the larger scale of production. Despite the capital intensity of “modern” brewing, the capital costs, distributed per unit produced, were quickly decreasing. This drop was not entirely automatic or unintentional. Large firms, and especially those owned by the English syndicates, slashed prices to grab market share and drive out competitors. Other breweries responded in self-defense. Although the consumption of beer by Americans had risen dramatically during the second half of the century, much greater production was still chasing a finite number of customers. The regional distribution of Portner’s beer was both the cause and effect of stepped-up production. With a Civil War peak of about 700 barrels annually, Portner’s brewery broke the thousand-barrel mark around 1868. During the Saint Asaph Street brewery’s first decade, annual growth averaged nearly seventeen percent. In 1883, the year the firm was incorporated, 28,533 barrels left the cellars. The figure doubled again by the late 1890s and continued to increase into the first decade of the twentieth century. (Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866; Harris 1992; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:402)

A comparison of data from the U.S. manufacturing censuses of 1870, 1880 and 1890 suggests that profits per unit were decreasing and that, in the latter year, prices were nearing the actual cost of production. The price per barrel dropped considerably between 1870 and 1900, by a third for Portner’s product. It soon became clear that the aggressive marketing practices that were helping drive down prices were also drawing unwanted attention from prohibition forces. (Wallace 1872:396; Government Printing Office 1883:764; Government Printing Office 1895:51)



The company was building its own insulated "refrigerator" cars by 1880, and by the mid 1890s it had built or bought a fleet of 50 to serve its regional distribution system. Portner rolling stock had its own identifying telegraph cipher code by 1906. Courtesy the Lyceum collection.

The Robert Portner Brewing Company was experiencing the negative consequences of competition by the early 1890s. Portner responded by diversifying and redoubling his efforts.

The business in the beer depots in the South decreased on account of low prices and some opposition. Therefore, we decided to combine the beer business with the sale of mineral water. We probably will open about ten branches of this kind this year [1891]. One of them will be in Norfolk; one in Richmond, where we recently purchased a large depot from the Continental Brewery;²³ others in Lynchburg, Petersburg, and several others. (Portner n.d.:24)

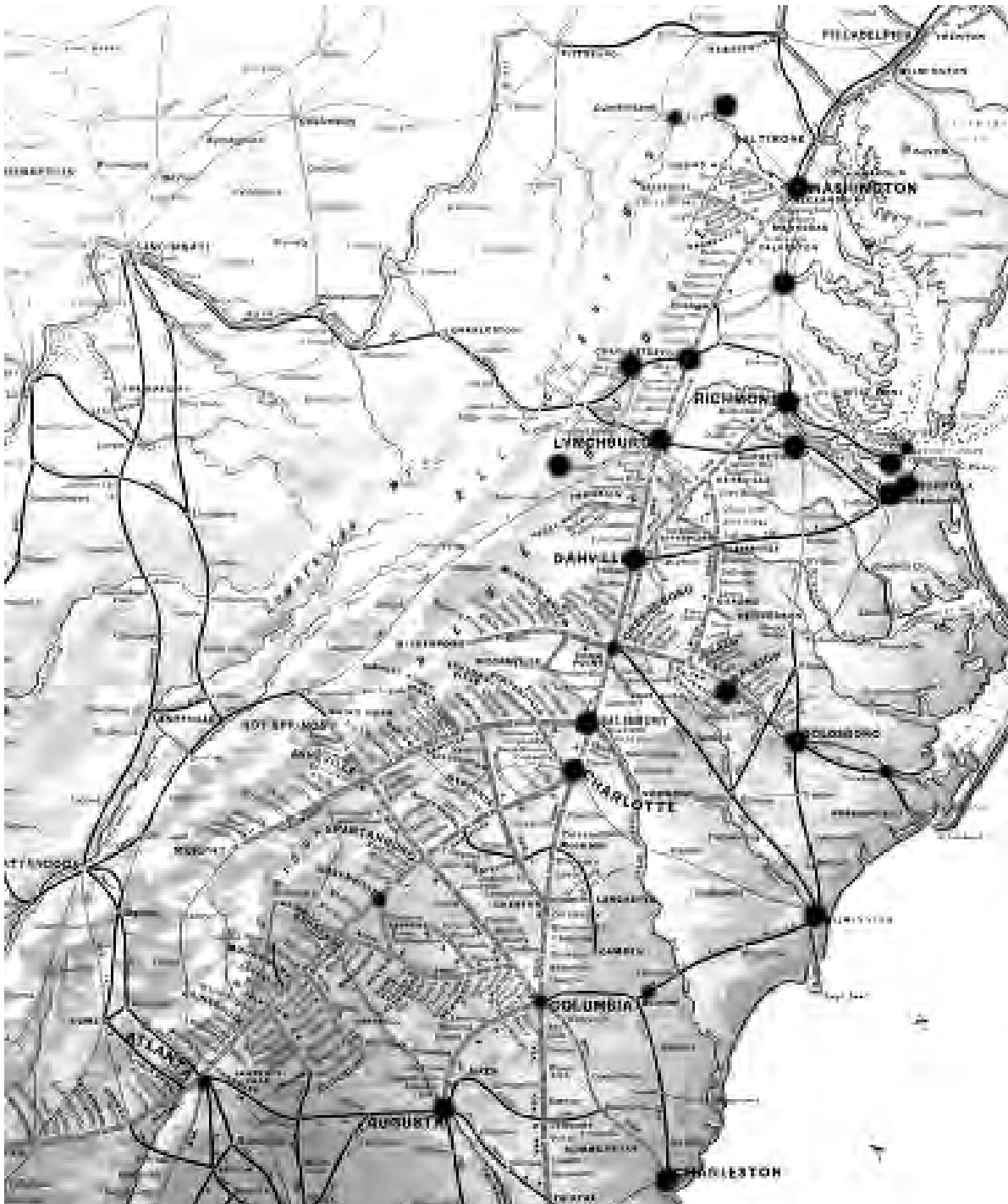
²³ The new Richmond depot was located at 1224 West Broad Street. It was the second time the Richmond branch had moved. (Chataigne 1886c; J.H. Chataigne & Co. 1888c; J.H. Chataigne & Co. 1889a; J.H. Chataigne & Co. 1893)

Thereafter, he also began to distribute malt extract (1898), ginger ale and other sodas (*circa* 1900), and even may have begun bottling for other beverage manufacturers. And, as a consequence of the war with Spain, potential new markets were now open in the deep, *deep* South. Robert Portner revealed his plans to be perhaps the first American beer distributor in Havana, Cuba, with a depot to open in 1899. It is unclear—in fact, doubtful—that he was successful. Nonetheless, a few years later, a wholesale liquor dealer in Kingston, Jamaica would carry his beers. (*Washington Post* September 25, 1899; *The Gleaner* December 14, 1907)

**Available annual production figures (in barrels) for Portner & Company,
the Robert Portner (Alexandria, Vienna or Tivoli) Brewery,
and the Robert Portner Brewing Company, 1862-1903***

**Sources: Portner n.d.; Internal Revenue Assessment Lists 1862-1866; The Western Brewer 1880; Brockett & Rock 1883; Alexandria Gazette; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903; Wedderburn 1907; Salem 1880; Harris 1992; Smith and Miller 1989. Some sources are contradictory, others clearly erroneous. Figures for 1862 and 1865 do not represent complete years. The most wildly inflated numbers have been excluded, and sometimes the more likely of figures has been chosen or interpolated. The figures do not necessarily fit neatly into calendar years; into the 1870s, the brewery was in operation eight or nine months annually, and the brewing season straddled the autumn, winter and spring.*

1862	>120	1877	<11,100
1863	665	1878	10,366
1864	701.25	1879	12,192
1865	>485.25	1883	25,000-28,533
1866	800	1885	40,000
1867	1,062	1890	60,000
1868	1,200	1895	60,000
1869	1,800	1897	50,000
1870	2,500	1902	70,000
1871	3,600	1903	74,800



A nineteenth-century railroad map of the South with Robert Portner Brewing Company depots superimposed. The large dots represent locations of branches known to have been owned by the brewery. The small dots represent locations of private agents known to have acted as official distributors of the company's products.



WHOLESALE



AND RETAIL.

**C. T. BROWN,
ICE DEALER.**

AND BOTTLER OF

Ginger Ale, Soda, Mineral Waters and Beer,

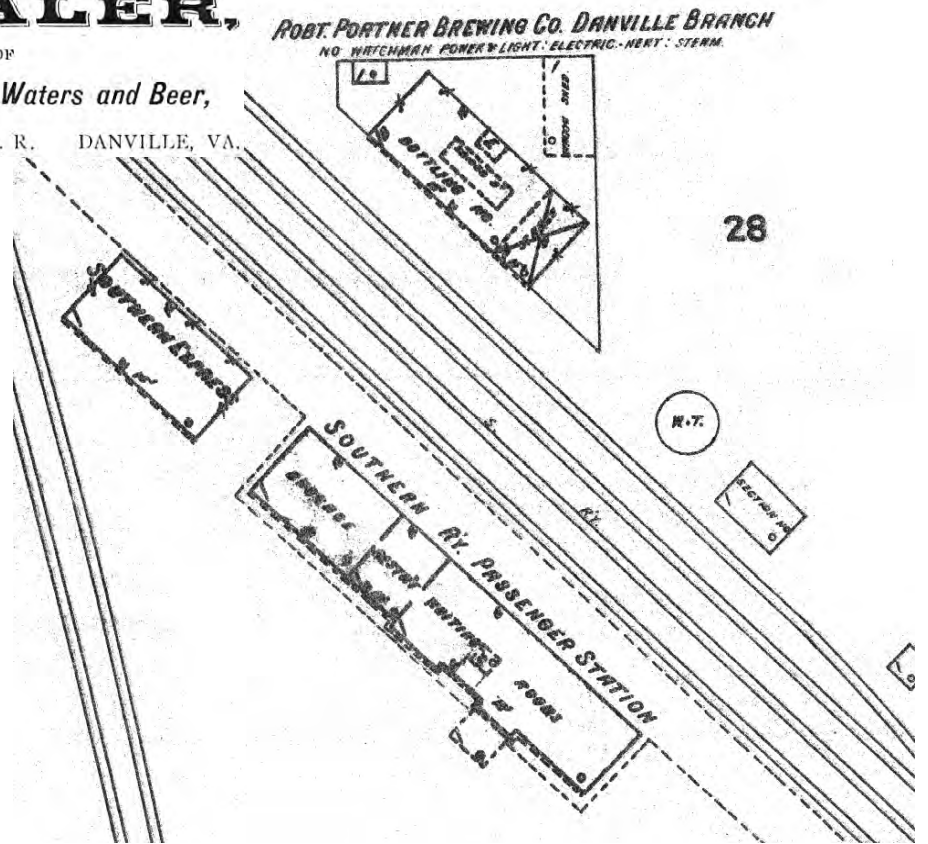
Opposite Passenger Depot of R. & D. R. R. DANVILLE, VA.

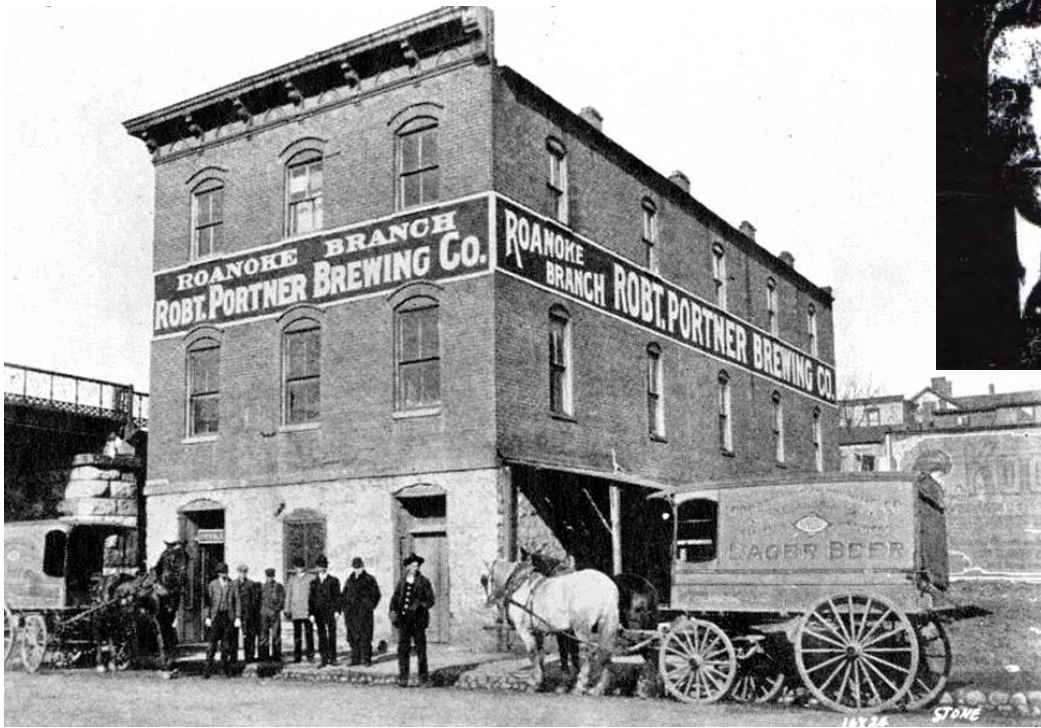
One Portner depot.

Top: The second Portner facility at Danville, Virginia. It was later converted to a Pepsi bottling plant. Courtesy of the Danville Department of Parks and Recreation.

Bottom: Sanborn map of the same building.

Left: Danville directory ad for C.T. Brown, a bottler bought out by Portner and who came to run the Danville depot for the brewery.





The Roanoke, Virginia bottling and distribution branch, circa 1903, courtesy of the Virginia Historical Society, and an inset reproduction of a photograph of its 1900-1916 manager, Charles Sidney Johnson, from Jacobs' History of Roanoke City.

Chapter 9

Expansion of the physical plant, 1875-1906

The lager beer manufactured in Alexandria has a national reputation. One of the largest breweries in the country is situated here, and the fact that it had an insignificant beginning is ample proof that the merits of the product alone have caused it to grow into its present stupendous proportions.

Alexandria Gazette, December 10, 1896

The quantities of beer produced by the Robert Portner Brewing naturally required an increasingly large work force and extensive capital investment. It is difficult to estimate the production capacity of the new brewhouse in 1869 because there is insufficient information about how it was equipped, but its initial capacity may have been as little as 5,000 barrels, with actual production much less. But Robert Portner never permitted grass to grow beneath his feet and continually improved output.

In 1870 Portner may have employed fewer than ten full-time hands, including Jacob Biehle and Peter Wolters, brewmasters; John Bealley, likely a relative of Jacob¹; Ben Washington, engineer; James Washington, assistant brewer; and Boniface Speis. Most were Germans. The Washingtons were African Americans and native Virginians who remained with the brewery for years and were held in high esteem by Portner. The total payroll for the eight-month brewing season of 1869-1870 was \$2900. A decade later, the number of men had grown to perhaps 35, with an annual payroll of more than \$11,000. The workforce of 1880-1881 included at least Thomas Allen (fireman), John Baertsch, George Baier, Nathaniel Beale, Andrew Bernhard, Jr., George Bontz (carpenter), John Coles, Christian Frissius² (clerk), Thomas H. Giles (driver, Lynchburg), Charles G. Herbort (Augusta depot agent), Samuel Jones, Arthur Kell (bottler), John Kohout (brewmaster), Samuel Lyles (cooper), Sandy Mason (boiler cleaner), Louis Oberholzer (stableman), Eugene B. Padgett (telegraph operator), Otto Portner (bookkeeper, Washington), Frank Robertson (driver), M. Schwarz (traveling agent), Henry Steiwer (bottling manager, Washington), Henry Stoecker (laborer), Bartholomew R. Summers (Norfolk depot agent), Charles Telak, Rudolph Thompson, James Washington (assistant brewer), Christian (von) Valaer (clerk), Hans Weber, John Weber (clerk), John Paul Welch, Joseph Zwirngibel, and several others in the plant and at company depots.³ By 1883 the company's expanding distribution network provided jobs for 91 men outside of Alexandria and about 32 at home. The total payroll grew to \$100,000 by 1894, and by 1907 the brewery would employ 109 men, with 168 more at its branches elsewhere in the South. By the latter date, the brewery was by far the largest of

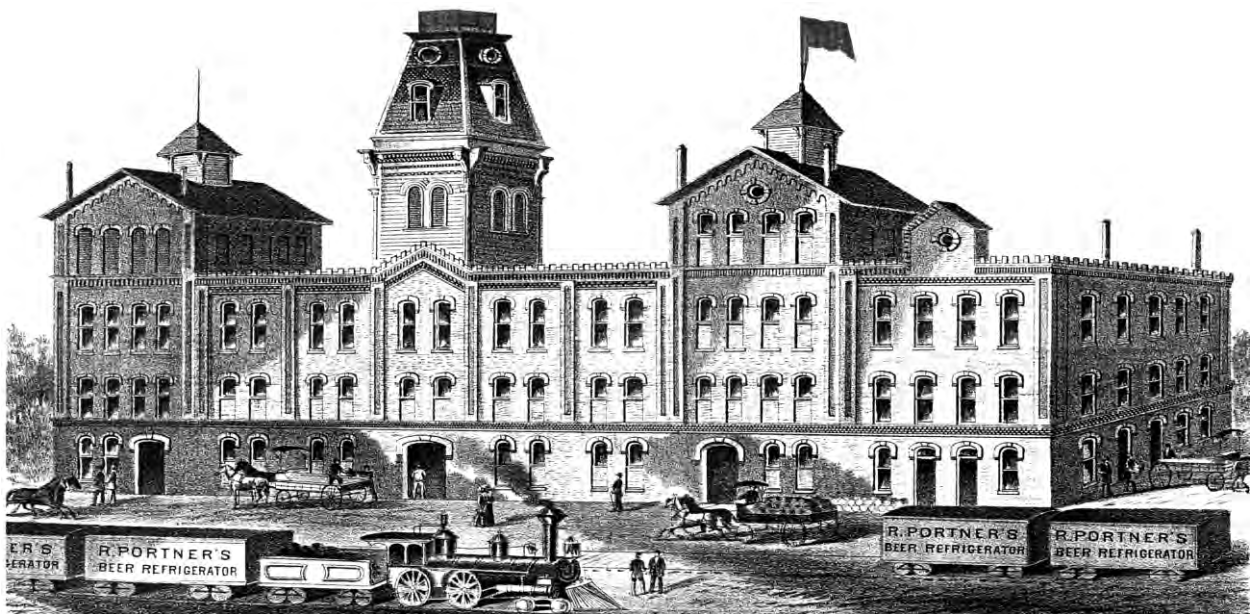
¹ He was a native of Germany, and possibly a relative of Jacob Biehle, so "Bealley" is likely an anglicized (or "Gaelicized") transliteration.

² Within two years, Frissius was the manager of the Portner brewery's Goldsboro, North Carolina depot. A decade later, he was treasurer of the Palmetto Brewing Company of Charleston. (Southern Directory and Publishing Co. 1891)

³ Henry Carrington and Francis E. Carroll may be employees of the same era.

immediately available. Before he installed his air-cooling system, Portner continued to expand and multiply his icehouses, with four by the end of 1877. After, they were devoted to general storage and were finally demolished sometime between 1885 and 1891. The introduction of artificial refrigeration also allowed Portner to ferment his beer above ground, and most of the northern half of the main block of brewery buildings was thereafter devoted to beer fermentation, aging and storage, capable of holding up to 25,000 barrels of beer at a time. As a consequence, the most prominent physical change at this time was a three-story addition at the north end of the plant, internalizing the cold storage. (Portner n.d.:15; *Washington Post* January 12, 1878; Sanborn Map Company; *Alexandria Gazette* March 13, 1879, April 23, 1879 and [1894])

During the period in which he first installed his refrigeration innovations, Portner added \$25,000 to \$30,000 worth of other improvements, including this addition and the replacement of plank sidewalks on Saint Asaph Street with stone pavers. A new, larger steam engine and boilers were installed in late 1878. Prompted by the collapse of the front wall of the icehouse section of the brewery (see page 241), Portner next undertook its reconstruction along with the entire middle of the plant—including a new, central, 56-foot-tall tower capped by a Second Empire mansard roof, probably completed by late 1882. While aesthetically making for a grander edifice, the tower's ostensible purposes were cooling and ventilation, plus accommodating hoists, chutes, and water tanks. By the late 1870s, in addition to the main brewery buildings and the icehouse, Portner had constructed at least one stable and as many as four other accessory structures, including a cooper shop. Concurrent with these improvements, production more than doubled to meet demand, with annual capacity reaching about 40,000 to 50,000 barrels. (*Alexandria Gazette* December 10, 1881; *Alexandria Gazette* [1894]; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:402; Salem 1880; Brockett and Rock 1883:66; Sanborn 1885; Boyd's Directory Company 1886; Hopkins 1887; *Washington Post* October 15, 1878, September 16, 1879, October 5, 1880, February 23, 1881 and March 2, 1882)



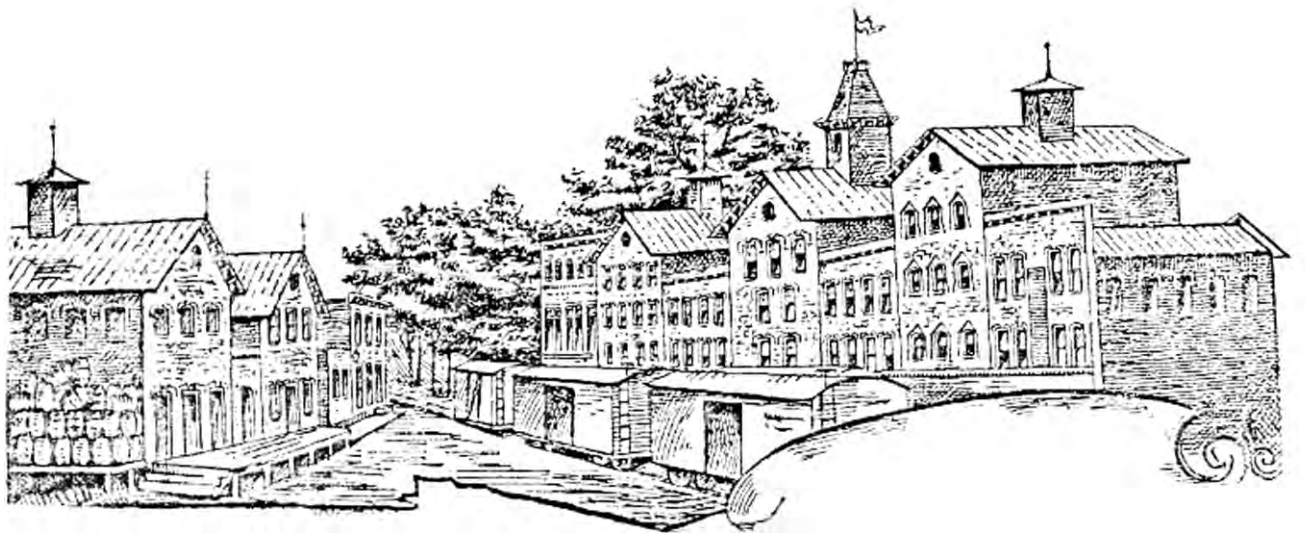
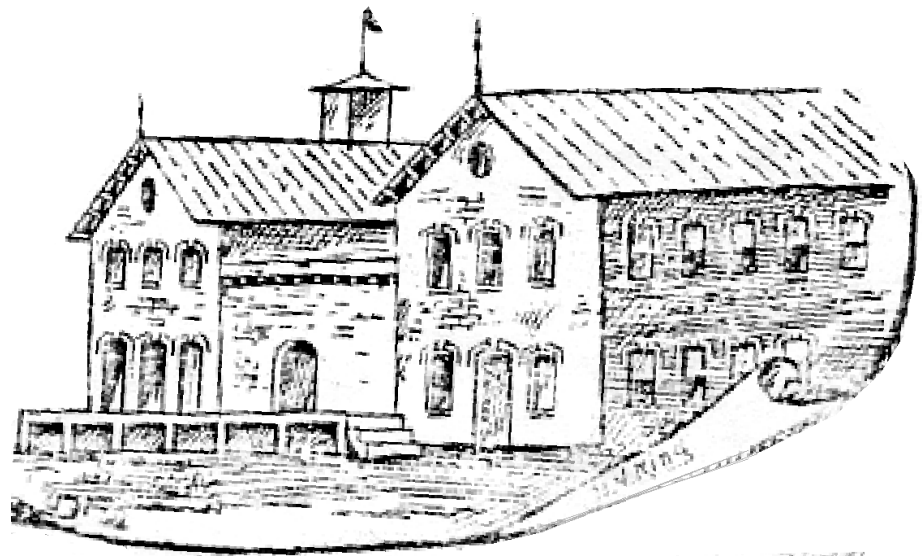
*The Portner brewery as it appeared from 1882 to 1893.
Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections.*

At the time of incorporation, the brewery properties, until then owned personally by Robert Portner, were conveyed to the company. Always expansion minded, Portner had acquired the last piece of the brewery block in 1880 and then immediately began to buy and aggregate lots across Saint Asaph and Wythe Streets. By 1891 the properties included the entire block bounded by Washington, Saint Asaph, Pendleton and Wythe Streets, upon which stood the main plant; the southern half of the block northeast of the intersection of Saint Asaph and Wythe; the block bounded by Saint Asaph, Pitt, Wythe and Pendleton Streets except for three small lots; a lot and improvements at the northwest corner of Wythe and Washington Streets; and a parcel at the north end of town, partly bounded by First Street, the Alexandria Canal and the Washington & Alexandria Turnpike, upon which had stood one of Portner's early icehouses. (Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book 12:583; Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Books 9:9, 11:589, 12:57 and 12:180)

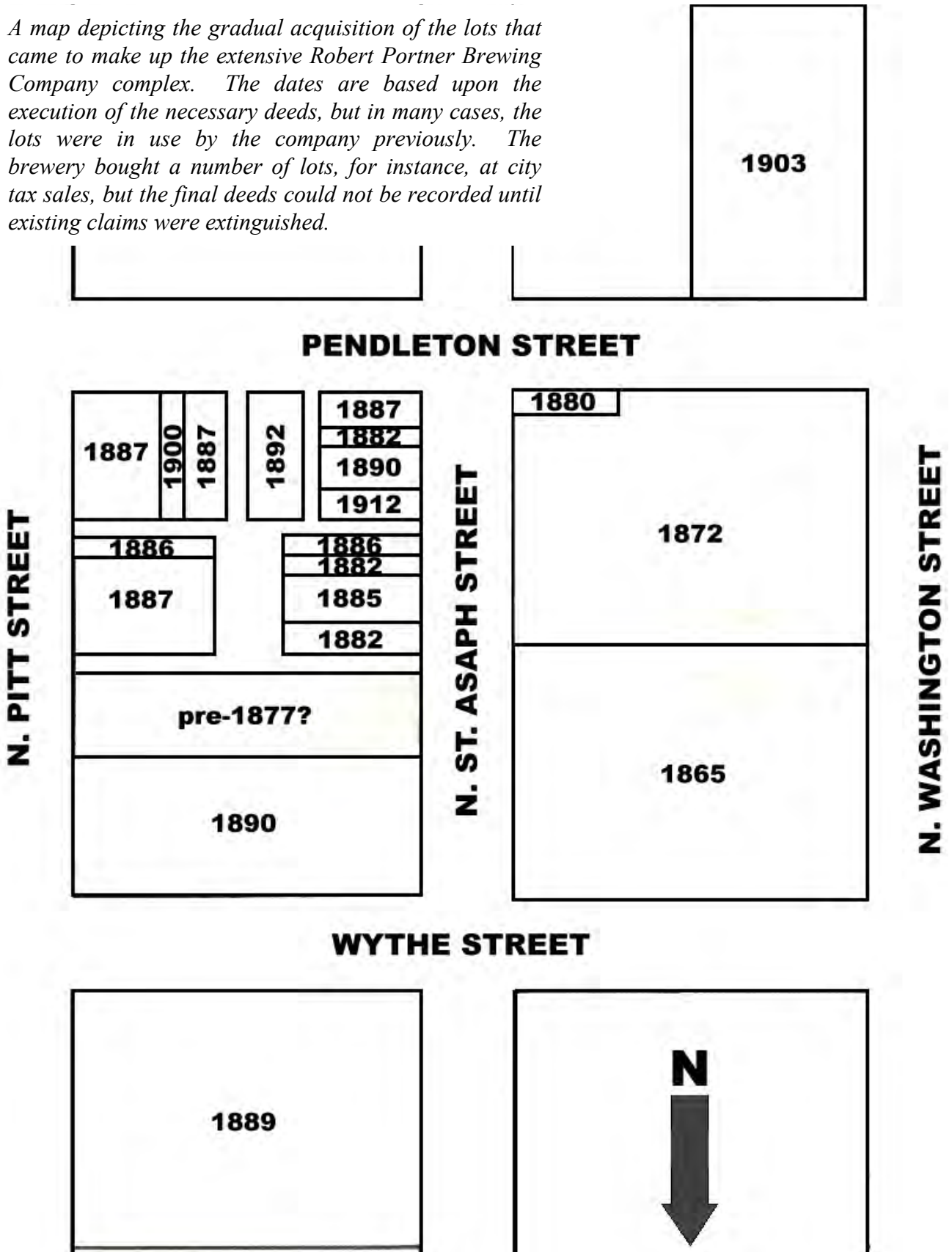
Right: The brewery's second bottling and wash houses, 1894.

Below: A view south along the 600 block of Saint Asaph Street, 1894.

Alexandria Gazette.



A map depicting the gradual acquisition of the lots that came to make up the extensive Robert Portner Brewing Company complex. The dates are based upon the execution of the necessary deeds, but in many cases, the lots were in use by the company previously. The brewery bought a number of lots, for instance, at city tax sales, but the final deeds could not be recorded until existing claims were extinguished.



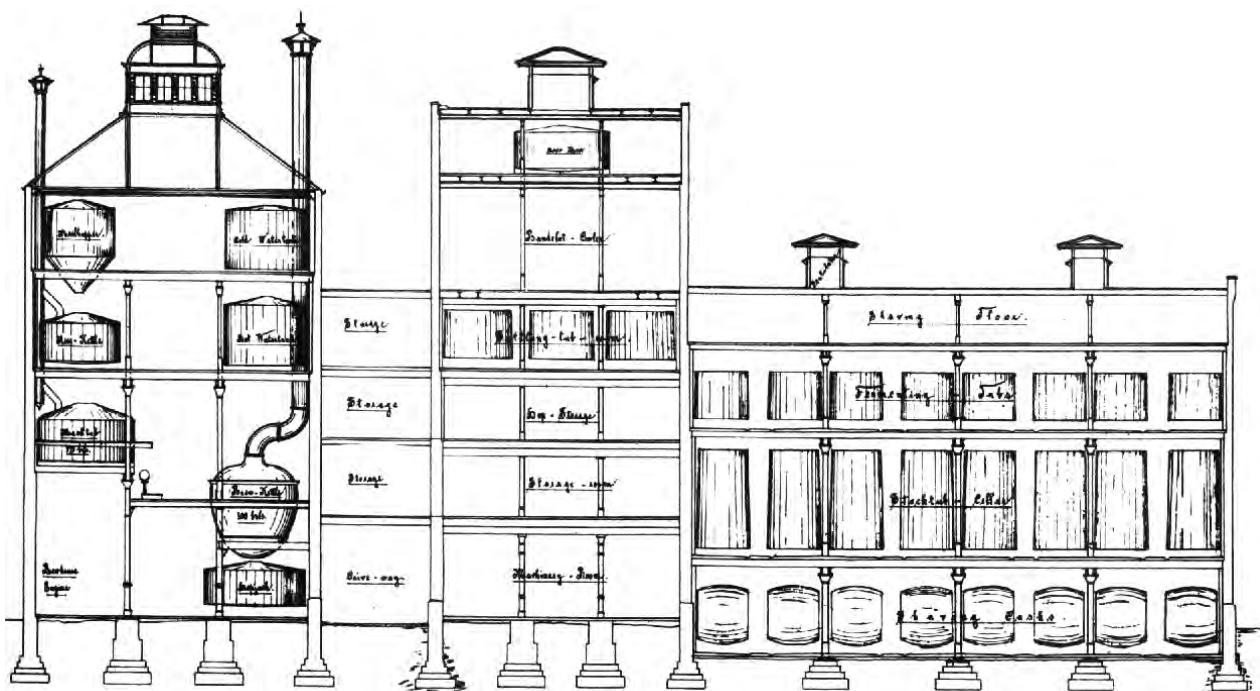
The southeast corner of Saint Asaph and Wythe Streets became the bottling center in 1882, with the first identifiable bottling works built by B.F. Price, a two-story, brick wash house plus associated sheds and loading docks. To the south of these was the brewery's main office, a two-story, three-bay-wide, brick, Italianate-style building. At the rear of the office was a small dwelling, possibly originally occupied by Portner's nephew, Carl Strangmann, or brother-in-law, Christian Valaer, both clerks.⁵ Portner had another office erected for brewmaster John Kohout, immediately behind the brewery and near the former icehouse, and commenced a residence for him across Washington Street. He also acquired some dwellings on the east side of Saint Asaph Street in which a succession of employees lived over the next three decades. The remainder of the outbuildings included sheds and a stable along the 600 block of Pendleton Street. (Sanborn Map Company; Chataigne 1881; *Alexandria Gazette* March 2, 1882 April 27, 1882, June 3, 1882 and [1894])

Brewing obviously required a great deal of water as an ingredient and boiling medium; for ice manufacturing and wort cooling; for creating steam power; for cleaning; for fire protection; and for the draft horses that pulled the delivery wagons. The Potomac River would have been an unhealthy source even if the brewery stood near it, and the public source at Cameron Run was sometimes little better.⁶ In the early days, Portner probably drew his water from a series of underground wells and cisterns, from the city water supply, and perhaps even from rooftop rain cisterns. Archaeologists uncovered a number of relatively shallow, subterranean, brick-lined shafts—wells and cisterns—within or near the original Saint Asaph Street brewhouse foundations in 1998. The company drove its first artesian well in 1879, striking water at 45 feet; at the time, its flow was thought to be “very large, and will amply supply the demands of his large establishment.” But by the end of 1881, production was already constrained by a lack of supply. So, by 1887 at least seven brewery wells had been driven to depths of from 61 to 330 feet, and at least three eight-inch wells neared or exceeded 400 feet by 1902. Four of these were beneath a one-story, frame pumphouse built immediately south of the brewhouse, and two were in the brewhouse itself. The number of wells was reduced to three by the end of the century, but they were deeper still. According to company advertising, “We use no river water, no surface water of any kind, usually contaminated by drainage. Artesian wells... more than supply our needs. Pure, crystal, deep-rock water, from a thousand feet beneath the surface.” So, “the supply of water seem[ed] to be inexhaustible,” and supplied residents during droughts and failures of the Alexandria Water Company system. One native later recalled that “Alexandria did not have very good drinking water in those days so Portner had his own artesian wells to supply water for his beer. Outside one of his buildings he had a water faucet where anyone who wanted could draw pure drinking water free of charge. We had at home a five-gallon glass water bottle. I often went to this place in my wagon for water.” (Sanborn Map Company; *Alexandria Gazette* June 9, 1879, October 4, 1881 and September 30, 1886; Watson 1912:352; *Washington Times* October 11, 1904; Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897; Fawcett 1976:7-8)

⁵ Valaer was later appointed manager of the Charlotte, North Carolina branch, which he acquired and operated as a soda bottling plant after the state enacted prohibition. Strangmann was to serve as the brewery's secretary and treasurer.

⁶ Most of Alexandria's earlier breweries apparently did draw water from the Potomac River or from Hooff's Run.

By the mid 1880s the main block of buildings had also undergone significant changes. The arrangement of the brewing equipment was probably similar to that in 1869 but of greater capacity, with a mash tun and brew kettle—now of perhaps 250-barrel capacity each—on the second floor. Water storage tanks and bins for the more than 100,000 bushels of malt and 80,000 bushels of hops used annually were on the third floor. At the rear of the brewhouse new additions reflected technological advancement. Two attached, one-story structures held a 150-horsepower steam engine (a dozen times the motive power available fifteen years earlier) and its boilers, plus the “engines” or compressors that cooled the wort after brewing and that kept the vaults cold, and possibly manufactured ice. A large smokestack vented coal smoke from the boilers’ fireboxes. In 1886 electric lighting was beginning to replace the gas jets, oil lamps and candles that illuminated the workspace and beer vaults. (Sanborn Map Company; Brockett and Rock 1883:66; Miller 1996)



A circa 1880 section of a model "modern" brewery from One Hundred Years of Brewing.

Five years later, the plant exhibited still more changes: three new refrigeration machines, equivalent in daily cooling capacity to 150 tons of ice; a new pump house and wells; an addition to the bottling house; a relocation of the cooper shop; new bottle and keg storage sheds; and a taller, 50-foot smokestack. Perhaps most important was the 30-ton ice plant, used mainly for packing the company’s freight cars but whose surplus was sold to local businesses and individuals. This may have been the new “ice box” located between the wash house and bottling house. The steam power had been beefed up to a total of 225 horsepower contained in a larger addition. Portner had directed a rearrangement of the brewing fixtures. The brewhouse now contained hop bins on the fourth floor, mash tuns and water tanks on the third, the brew kettles on the second, and the wort coolers on the first, the last reflecting the use of artificial

refrigeration. Malt and additional water could easily be fed from the upper stories of the adjacent section of the plant. This rearrangement rationalized and improved the process; taking better advantage of gravity, it reduced the amount of hoisting and pumping of ingredients and product. (Sanborn Map Company; *Washington Post* March 30, 1891; *Syracuse Weekly Express* March 6, 1890)

In spite of spin-off the Washington, D.C. market to the National Capital Brewing Company, the Portner plant's production was again nearing its capacity by 1892. In fact, even with construction of the Washington brewery in late 1890, Portner and his executives considered another remodeling of the Alexandria brewhouse to bring annual capacity to between 75,000 and 100,000 barrels. Because of space limitations, however, they chose to put off alterations "until the increase in demand should justify a more extensive and complete improvement." Instead, responding to a September 1891 fire that destroyed the pitching and keg sheds, the cooper shop and most of the bottling house,⁷ the company completely rebuilt the bottling house in brick, adding a second story for storage and enlarging it to 40 feet by 60 feet—in all, multiplying its floor space by about five fold. (Miller 1987:364; *Alexandria Gazette* October 1, 1890, September 9, 1891 and April 18, 1894; *Washington Post* September 10, 1891 and March 31, 1892; Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897; Sanborn Map Company)

The cornerstone of the new bottling house... was laid on Thursday afternoon with appropriate ceremonies which were performed by the builder, [the brewery's boss carpenter] Mr. L. Morgan Davis. A number of articles including a copy of the GAZETTE and the different brands of beer manufactured at the brewery were deposited in the stone box; also a check for \$200,000 payable on the morning of the crack of doom to the finder... (*Alexandria Gazette* April 9, 1892)

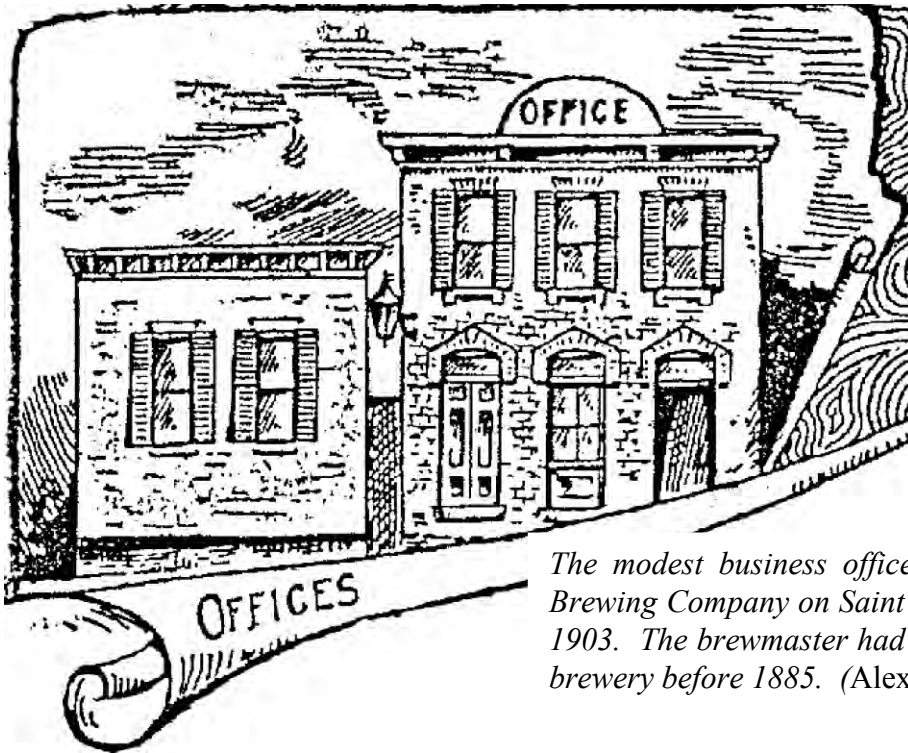
J.A. Cannon designed the building, and Joseph Clarke was the masonry contractor. The next-door offices were also expanded, and the keg storehouse was relocated to Pitt Street, near a new barrel-pitching shed.⁸ (*Washington Post* April 9, 1892; Sanborn Map Company)

In spring 1893 the management decided that it was time to go ahead with the new brewhouse in spite of a depression that had set in after the financial panic of 1892. (Portner n.d.:26)

Plans were prepared and building operations commenced shortly afterwards. The object was to increase the present capacity of the brewery and also simplify and facilitate the different operations by means of constructing a plant which should combine all the best features developed during the last ten years. The architect was directed to use only the best quality of materials and workmanship throughout

⁷ The damages were said to be \$25,000. The fire flared up again while two fire companies disputed ownership of a length of hose. There was another fire in the brewery's keg shed in 1896, apparently one in a string of Alexandria arsons that year. The firebug presumably chose the target because of the flammable pitch lining the oak barrels. (*Washington Post* September 10, 1891 and July 20, 1896)

⁸ Oak beer barrels were made watertight by the application of heated pitch to the interior surface. By this time, machines had been invented to spray the pitch into the barrel. In former days, the hot pitch was manually laid onto the interior, and the coopers rolled the barrels around to spread it evenly. As beer was increasingly bottled, some drinkers found that they actually preferred the slightly pitchy taste from an oak keg.



The modest business offices of the Robert Portner Brewing Company on Saint Asaph Street, circa 1880-1903. The brewmaster had his own office behind the brewery before 1885. (Alexandria Gazette [1894])

but to leave off all unnecessary and expensive embellishments. That these conditions were thoroughly fulfilled and the result sought obtained will be seen by an examination of the buildings now completed and the appointment of their contents.

The new buildings which adjoin the company's old brew house are 40 feet 4 inches in width with a total length of 60 feet. The brew house proper, of 40 feet 4 inches by 44 feet 8 inches, has three main stories with a height of 54 feet from the street level to the top of main cornice, and a total height to apex of ventilator over lantern of main roof of 80 feet. The structures are entirely built of brick, stone, steel and iron, lumber only being used for windows, doors, the purlins and top layers of roofs. All walls are carried up with bricks laid in Portland cement mortar on a concrete footing, the thickness of walls above ground being 21 1/2, 20 and 16 inches respectively. The trimmings to fronts are of brown stone [probably furnished by Portner himself from his Manassas quarry], all other projecting courses, panels in recesses, etc., are of moulded brick. The large windows in the second story have ornamented cast iron mullions and lintels overhead. The entire interior framing for floors, platforms, galleries and other supports, also main roof, is of steel, the floors being filled between beams with concrete arches. There is an unobstructed view from one point to another at all levels, and also light in the remotest nook and corner through the large windows. The rooves are covered with slate, and all guttering is done with copper. Base, pilasters to windows, and cornice are of galvanized iron. Broad flights of iron stairs lead from floor to floor

and a power elevator of two tons' capacity furnishes access to all main levels. All the tanks, tubs and hoppers throughout are built entirely of steel, with the exception of the hot water tank and the brew kettle, which are constructed of copper. On the ground floor of the brew house is the big hop jack and in the rear is the receiving tank holding 350 barrels. On the same floor is the new Corliss steam engine of 65 horsepower, fitted with a pulley weighing four tons, and an eighteen inch wide belt. The whole driving system is arranged so as to transmit the power in the most direct way and at the same time not interfere with the overhead or passage room anywhere. Three steps above is the machine floor for the accommodation of the special driving device to the wash machine overhead. On a floor above, reached by a short flight of stairs, is located the kettle designed to carry the great load of 55 tons when full, its own weight being over 5 tons. It is entirely of copper with a double bottom, and is fifteen feet in diameter with a total height of 14 feet. A flight of stairs leads to a platform where the mashtub is situated. This contrivance is 15 feet 6 inches in diameter by 8 feet high and is provided with a machine with a grain-removing device of the latest pattern. On the floor above is also a water tank, the large hot water tank, the cooler tank, the meal hopper and the rice conversion tub with a double stirring and mashing machine fitted inside. It is entirely built of steel to withstand the high pressure exerted, and weighs about 6 tons. All the service, feed and discharge pipes from one vessel to the other are of copper.

The mill room is also arranged and appointed in the same plan of excellence, all appurtenances throughout being of iron. On the ground floor is the malt mill with the two elevators on either side. In a trench is a conveyor, carrying the malt from the bin to the boot of the elevator. On the second floor is the automatic scale weighing and registering the cleaned malt and discharging it into the receiving hopper, which in turn discharges it through a chute to the malt mill. On the second floor is also the dust bin receiving the chaff and dust from above. On the third floor is the double rolling screen, the dust collector and the exhaust fan. The screen is constructed entirely of iron and provided with the most improved contrivances for cleaning malt. On the top floor is the malt receiving hopper, and attachments: the remainder of the top floor towards the rear is occupied by a big water tank of 350 barrels capacity. Iron stairs lead from floor to floor, the different floors also being reached by the elevator.

The old brew house will be remodelled into a malt storage of 40,000 [or 50,000] bushels capacity, and when completed will enable the handling of the malt in bulk, discharging it from the cars into the bins. Through these extensive improvements, when entirely completed, the capacity of the plant will be at the maximum 250,000 barrels per annum. The cost of the new brew house, mill room and plant will be about \$75,000⁹ and with malt storage included, \$100,000.

⁹ In 1893 Portner had estimated the construction costs at \$60,000 or more. (Portner n.d.:26)

The engineer and architect under whose direction the work was executed is Mr. C.F. Terney of New York and the result fully justified the company's confidence in his taste and ability.

With the additions described above, the brewery is now one of the most imposing and capacious in the country. It is also an ornamental structure, and adds greatly to the beauty of the northern section of Alexandria. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 18, 1894; Miller 1987:364-365)

The refrigeration equipment was also modernized. The improvements were completed in the fall of 1894, but brewing had already commenced in the new building by the end of April. "It is a model plant and cannot be improved upon at the present time." The total value of the plant and the company's branches was now estimated at \$700,000. (Sanborn Map Company; *Washington Post* April 13, 1894; *Alexandria Gazette* [1894])

With the new brewhouse, the company claimed, as late as 1899, to have "the largest, most thoroughly appointed and best equipped brewery in the South." Was this a valid claim? Comparative physical size and modernity of various historic breweries are difficult to assess and not really to the point. Production and revenues are more proper measures of success and have to stand in as measures of "size." The extensive description of the improvements above, although undoubtedly accurate in most respects, greatly overestimated the Portner brewery's annual production capacity. In fact, it was probably less than 110,000 barrels annually,¹⁰ slightly more than that of the National Capital Brewing Company. Unfortunately, actual production statistics at any particular time are difficult to find (see page 126 for production figures), and claims of capacity are not accurate substitutes and often exaggerated.¹¹ The Robert Portner Brewing Company was certainly the largest in Virginia, and few other Southern states had anything comparable. The only likely competition in size would come from industrialized Baltimore, Maryland. There, the Baltimore United Breweries, comprising three smaller plants, sold 85,000 barrels of beer in 1889, and the John F. Wiessner & Sons Brewing Company reached 80,000 barrels just after the turn of the century. These may have been close competitors in the 1890s, but with his single plant making 60,000 to 70,000, it is not unreasonable to take Portner's claim at face value. But such a boast was at least short-lived. (Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections; Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:396,397,473)

In 1872 Christian Heurich and Paul Ritter purchased a small weiss beer brewery in Washington, D.C. Heurich soon bought Ritter's interest and rebuilt the plant, vastly increasing its capacity. By 1878 it was the largest brewing firm in Washington—in fact, said to be "the largest and most complete of any this side of New York," with a capacity of about 30,000 barrels. In 1895 Heurich

¹⁰ Calculated from the supposed daily capacity. Capacity was said to have doubled after the improvements. (*Washington Post* April 13, 1894)

¹¹ The federal government did keep track of production for taxation purposes, and author F.W. Salem once attempted to survey all American breweries in 1878 and 1879. The Alexandria brewery claimed a capacity of 100,000 barrels by 1890—well beyond actual production—but this could not have been accurate, as it was a desire to increase capacity to such a level that led to Portner and Albert Carry founding the National Capital Brewing Company in Washington that same year.

relocated to the Potomac riverfront between 25th and 26th Streets and constructed a modern facility. The huge new plant, put into operation in January 1896, was purportedly capable of making as much as half a million barrels of lager a year, although actual production initially would have been much less. Even a fraction of that amount, however, would have put an end to the Portner company's primacy in the region. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:400,401; *Washington Post* July 12, 1878 and November 9, 1896; *Evening Star* November 10, 1896)

To have been the largest brewery in the South, even briefly, was no insignificant matter and certainly cause for self-congratulation. It must be kept in mind, however, that the Washington-area plants of Heurich, Portner and Carry were all dwarfed by the nation's largest breweries. While the Alexandria plant now possessed more steam power and productive capacity than the average U.S. firm, it lagged far behind the largest Northern and Midwestern companies. In 1877, George Ehret's Hell Gate Brewery of New York, then the largest in the country, produced more than 138,000 barrels, raising that figure to nearly 413,000 in 1890. The Pabst Brewing Company of Milwaukee sold more than a million barrels as early as 1892-1893, and Anheuser-Busch broke the million-barrel mark in 1901.¹² It may be because "bigger is better" that the Portner company's turn-of-the-century advertisements depicted images of the brewery complex deftly manipulated by the artist to appear much grander than it really was. (Government Printing Office 1895:764; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:222,374,349; Baron 1962:258)

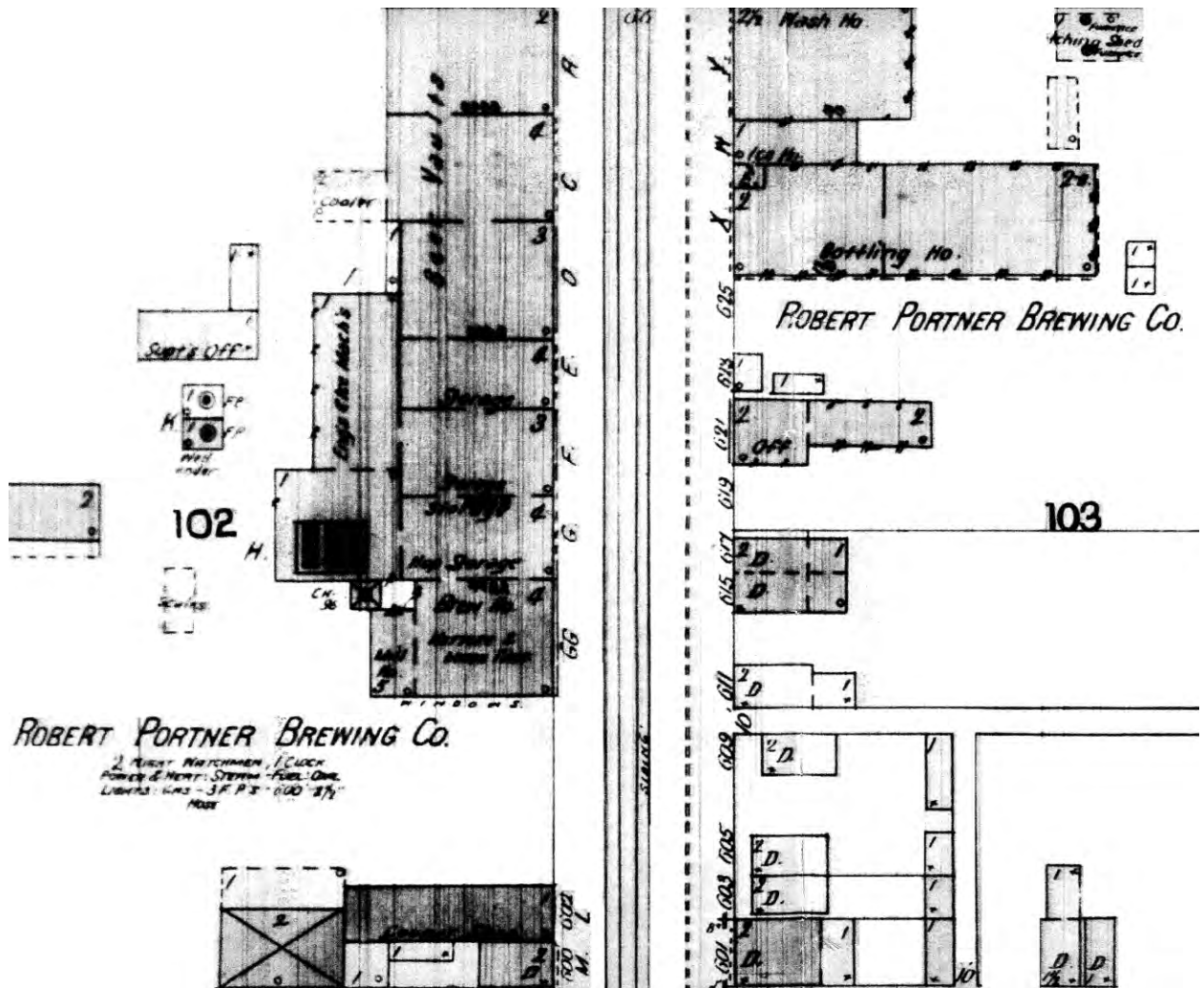
After its new brewhouse was complete, the Robert Portner Brewing Company continued its improvements, spending perhaps \$50,000 in 1895 for such upgrades as new glass-lined steel Pfaudler vacuum fermentation tanks, more boilers, a grain dryer, new ice machines, more storage, a freestanding water tower, and additional cooperage facilities. The company also regraded the square east of Saint Asaph Street in preparation for future construction. Three years later, Portner built another stable large enough for at least ten draft horses.¹³ (*Washington Post* April 3, 1894 and January 28, 1895; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:402; Sanborn Map Company; Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections; Alexandria Building Permits 1896-1928)

Having commenced producing its own ice in 1890, four years later, the brewery's ice plant was capable of turning out 25 tons of ice a day to fill a fleet of 50 refrigerated freight cars used to transport beer to market. Soon, even this amount proved insufficient. Portner more than doubled ice production by ordering the construction of a new plant at the northeast corner of Saint Asaph and Wythe Streets at the beginning of 1901. This, the company's second or third such plant, originally stood one story tall and about 27 by 130 feet. Built of pressed brick and steel I-beams, it was designed by Vilter Manfred and Leo Millmapp and erected under the direction of Littleton Morgan Davis, the brewery's boss carpenter and builder of the 1892 bottling house.¹⁴ It was

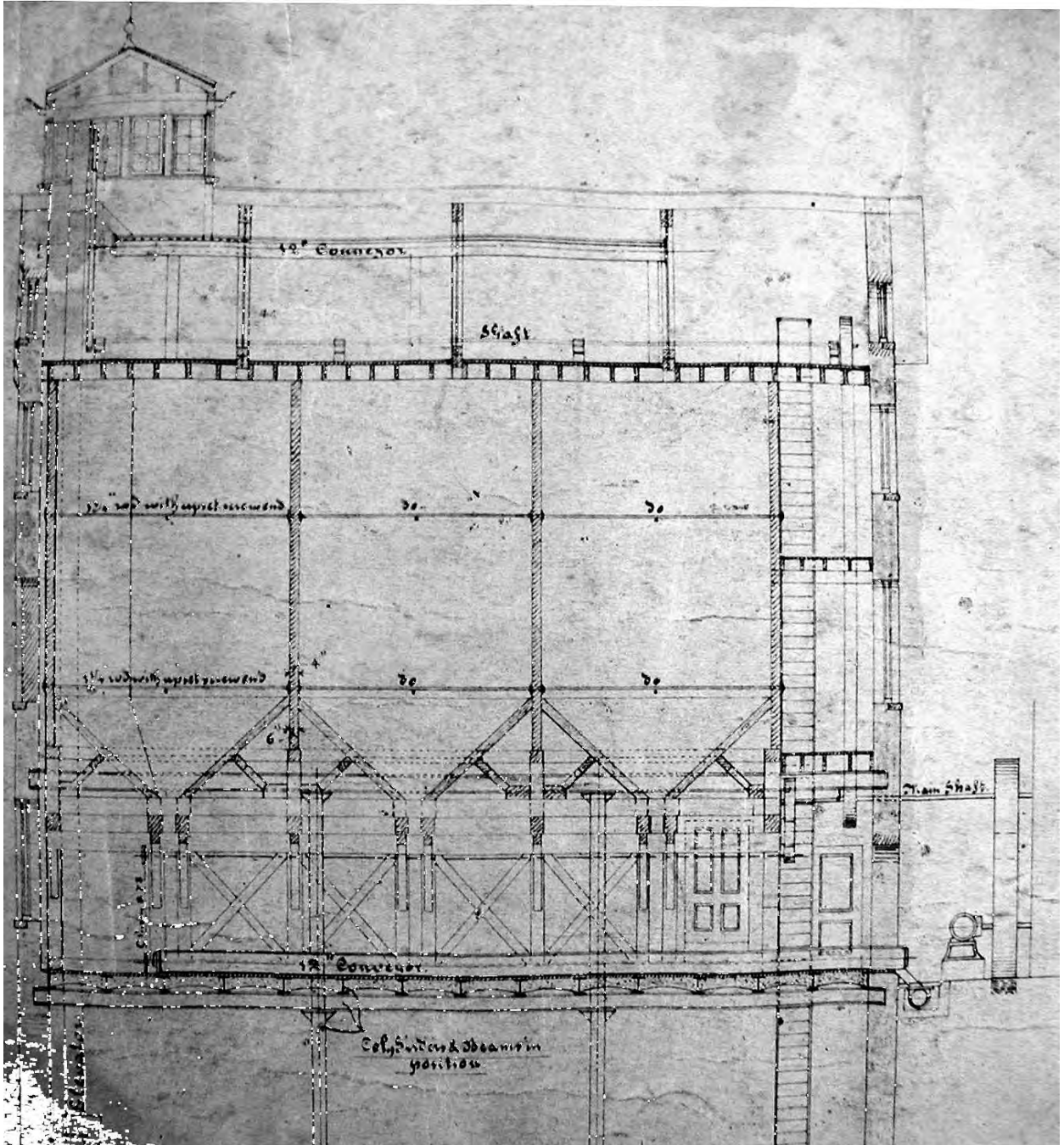
¹² German breweries were still generally small, but British firms led in scale. In 1800, each of the five largest London brewers produced more than 100,000 barrels of ale. One of these, Whitbread, sold an amazing 90,000 barrels in 1769, 143,000 in 1786, and 202,000 in 1796. Barclay, Perkins & Co. was making more than 1,000,000 barrels by 1872. (Richmond and Turton 1990; Barnard 1889:202; *Alexandria Gazette* September 16, 1872)

¹³ The stable was constructed in 1898 by Thomas H. Nelson. Clement A. Didden was architect.

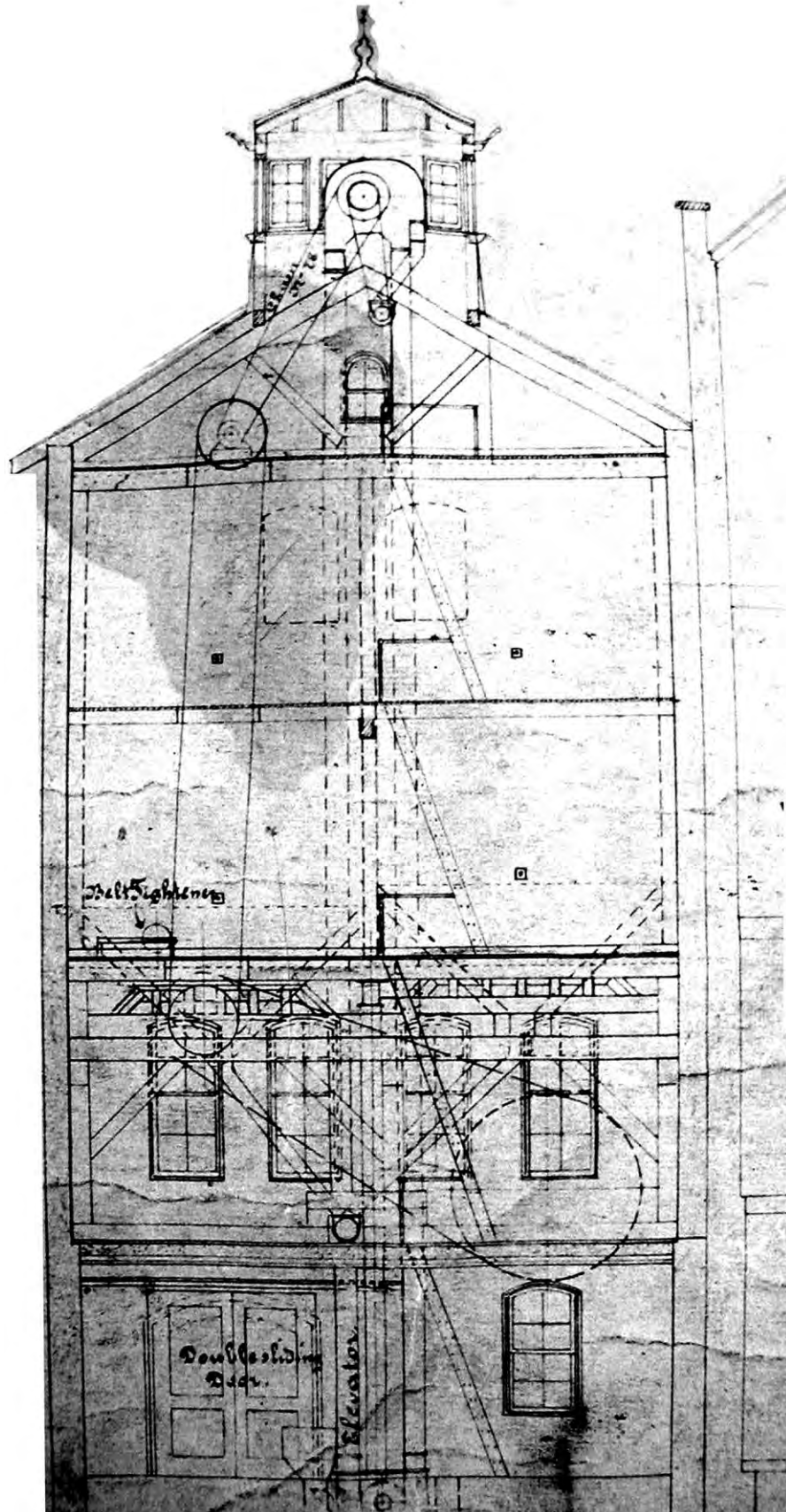
¹⁴ Davis was a Confederate veteran and had served with Mosby's raiders. He worked for the brewery from at least the early 1890s until its 1916 closing. He was an Alexandria alderman for a time and died June 3, 1917. (*Washington Post* August 14, 1895 and June 14, 1917)

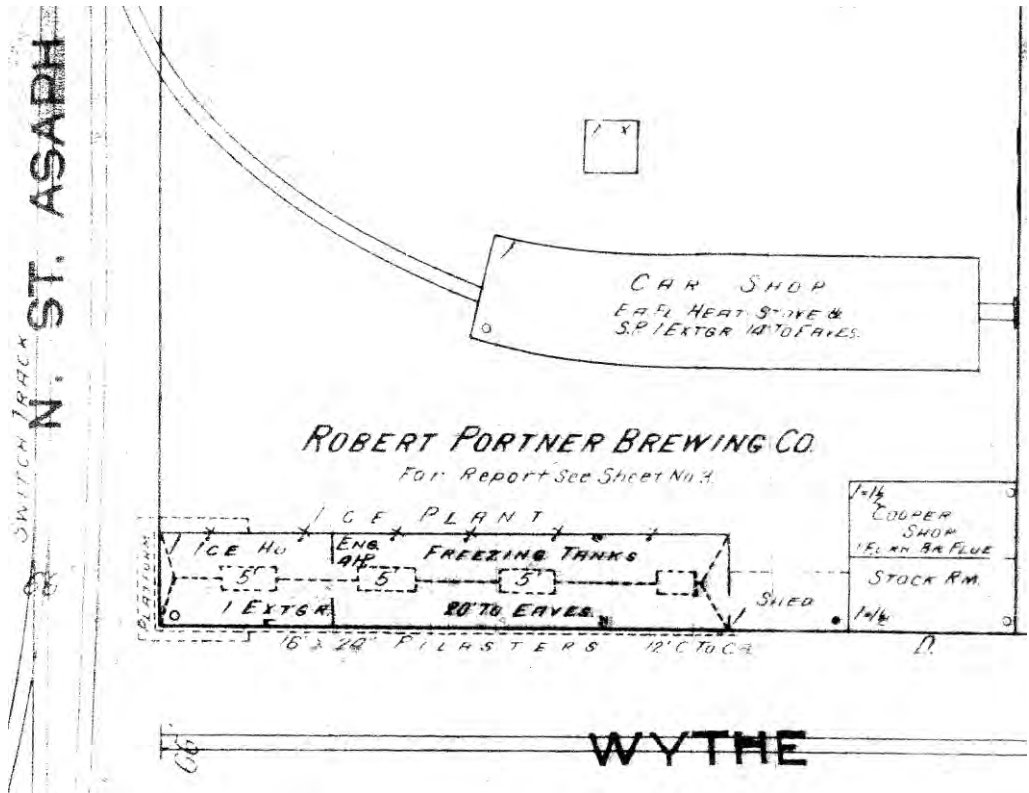


Top: A detail of an 1896 Sanborn insurance map showing the Portner brewery and its new brewhouse (at lower end of the main block). Bottom: Elevation drawing for the 1898 brewery stable (Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections).



The drawings on this page and the next are sections showing the brewery's original brewhouse to be converted to grain storage when the adjacent new brewhouse went into operation in 1894. A series of conveyors, hoists and chutes carried the malt and rice where needed next door. The drawings were probably executed by architect C.A. Didden. Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections.





Above: A detail of a Sanborn insurance map showing the 700 block of North Saint Asaph Street, including the 1901 ice plant and car repair shop.

Left: A 1993 photograph of the 1901 ice plant, one of Robert Portner's final improvements, with its alterations of 1918. It has since been partly demolished and encapsulated within a larger building.

originally covered by a low-pitched tin roof surmounted by ventilators and compressors.¹⁵ This plant proved more than sufficient to provide for the fifteen to twenty cars shipped daily. Surplus ice—up to 900 tons a month—was sold to Alexandria’s Mutual Ice Company at from \$1.75 to \$3.00 a ton for resale to businesses and residences in the city. (*Syracuse Weekly Express* March 6, 1890; *Alexandria Gazette* [1894]; Portner n.d.:33; Wedderburn 1907; Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections; Alexandria Building Permits 1896-1928; James Boyd Williams, Jr. Papers; *Washington Post* January 18, 1901)

Despite considerable opposition, and because it publicly complained that it would otherwise have to contract to out-of-town car builders, the brewery in 1901 obtained permission to erect a one-story, 140-foot-long shed for the construction and repair of its fleet of freight cars. Located near Pitt Street and north of the ice plant, it was reached by a new Washington-Southern Railway siding off the brewery’s Saint Asaph Street spur. Residents’ objections arose from the nuisance of having the spur—which branched off the main line at Saint Asaph Junction, north of the city—“always occupied by freight trains.” (*Alexandria Gazette* October 30, 1900 and May 26, 1904; Sanborn Map Company; *Washington Post* October 31, 1900 and December 12, 1900).

The 1892 bottling house was outgrown within a decade. On January 15, 1903 the company purchased the old Mount Vernon Cotton Factory building on the 500 block of North Washington Street with the intention of converting it to a large bottling works. Once the largest manufacturing concern in town, the cotton factory failed after the Civil War and had generally lain idle since. Four stories tall and 50 feet by 110, it provided plenty of room for cleaning, filling, capping and labeling a purported potential 20,000,000 bottles a year, plus cellar space for storing shipping crates.¹⁶ To accommodate the machinery, the building required a great deal of retrofitting. Portner’s favorite architect and builder, Clement A. Didden and L. Morgan Davis, replaced most of the old plank flooring with concrete and added a boiler room and spreading room/packing house plus an elevator tower at the southeast corner. They landscaped the grounds and surrounded them with a decorative iron fence and topped the belvedere with a powerful arc light. (Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book 49:354; Alexandria Building Permits 1896-1928; Wedderburn 1907; Sanborn Map Company; *Washington Post* April 4, 1903)

As a boy, Clarence Robinson, one of Alexandria’s next generation of businessmen, witnessed the bottling house operations on many occasions.

[B]ottles were put through an antiseptic bath and came out of the machine ready to be filled automatically with beer. The caps were put on, the labels were pasted on and the beer was taken from the machines and loaded into cases and made ready for shipment. It was a very interesting operation and I used to delight in

¹⁵ Portner’s sons lengthened the building and added a second story in 1918 (see page 146). (Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections; Alexandria Building Permits 1896-1928) It has since been partially demolished and encapsulated in a larger office building.

¹⁶ Actual production at the time was probably only a few million bottles but rapidly increasing as more beer was packaged in bottles and less in barrels. The brewery’s total production, put into bottles, would probably only have required about 11,000,000 containers.

taking young visitors to the bottling works to watch this operation in all of its detail. (Robinson 1983:109)

Some of the last improvements undertaken prior to Robert Portner's death included the construction of two huge, freestanding water tanks; centralization and expansion of the offices; and the provision of new metalwork shops, new wells and a pump house. All were in place by 1907. (Sanborn Map Company; *Alexandria Gazette* October 31, 1903)



A post-1902 artist's rendering of the Robert Portner Brewing Company from company letterhead. The image has been manipulated in several ways to give the impression of a grander complex. The artist increased the apparent size of the buildings by the addition of more window openings (compare this image with the view on page 108). Washington Street, behind the plant, is depicted as broader and more heavily trafficked than it was. The Potomac River (or the Alexandria Canal) has been relocated to the northwest and made to look like a "Grand Canal." Unknown buildings have been added, and others have changed orientation for compositional purposes. This image is nearly identical to one first used in advertising about 1894-1895, except that this version depicts the 1903 bottling house at left in the foreground. Located in the former Mount Vernon Cotton Factory, the bottling house has been moved northward one block and turned 90 degrees. In an age that worshipped progress and power, such a large, prosperous brewery surely offered a product worthy of the attention of the retailer and consumer! It would be interesting to know what contemporary Alexandrians thought of such images. The diamond-shaped logo incorporated into the image was a circa 1895 update and revamping of the then nearly twenty-year-old Tivoli diamond trademark.

A 1930s photograph of the again-vacant former Mount Vernon Cotton Factory, the Portner Brewing Company's bottling house from 1903 to 1912. The tower at right is an elevator shaft added by the brewery. The spark plug factory signs date to the early 1920s. Alexandria Library Special Collections, William Francis Smith Collection.



An engraved portrait of Robert Portner published posthumously in Lyon Tyler's Men of Mark in Virginia.

Chapter 10

Company management, 1883-1906

The theoretical education of brewery managers has become an indispensable prerequisite, and the larger establishments even find it useful and necessary to employ zymotechnic specialists or brewing chemists to control the practical operations by an analytical examination of the brewing materials, etc. Science has ceased to be the last resort in cases where practice had failed...

H.S. Rich & Co. One Hundred Years of Brewing (1903)

By the time Robert Portner's brewery was incorporated in 1883, its management was no longer a one-man or two-man job. Its expansion and far-flung distribution system were simply too complex to handle, especially when the owner was ill or absent. Indeed, sharing the burden had been one of the principal reasons to constitute a board of directors. It would be unfair to the men who assisted Portner to pass over them without at least a brief mention of their histories.

Like any boss, Portner relied on his employees. Not formally trained as a brewer, he gradually picked up a practical knowledge from his succession of brewmasters, but never presumed to direct the brewing himself. He was absolutely dependent on the earliest master brewers, Andrew Kaercher and Carl Wolters. His sixth (and eighth) master brewer, Paul W. Mühlhauser, arrived in 1871 recommended by Anton Schwarz, the founder of a New York brewing school. Mühlhauser (sometimes written "Mulhauser") was born at Wurtemberg, Germany in December 1849. Educated at Stuttgart, he immigrated to the United States around his eighteenth birthday. He may have been related to the Baltimore brewing family that included Jacob Mühlhauser, owner of the Civil War-era Albion Brewery.¹ Mühlhauser remained with the Alexandria brewery for more than seven years, near the end of which he developed the "Tivoli Cabinet" beer that would be the company's most popular brand for two decades. He then fulfilled the dream of every brewer, that of opening his own brewery. By the end of 1878 Mühlhauser had joined Franz Thau as junior partner of the Crystal Springs Brewery in Baltimore. In 1881, Elias E. Adler purchased Thau's share and renamed the business the Enterprise Brewery. Compared to Alexandria, Baltimore was a major brewing center, producing more than 200,000 barrels in 1878-1879, but among nearly 40 plants.² While with the firm, brewmaster Mühlhauser patented an "apparatus for observing the quality of liquids in kegging." But the partners were accused of infringement on another company's patent for some improvement in fermentation—one that they claimed to have developed independently. The partnership ended in 1883, possibly brought about by another dispute, that between Adler and Robert Portner over the performance of one of the latter's refrigeration machines. Mühlhauser made a separate peace with his old boss in 1882, but Adler remained in court for several years (see page 97). (Portner n.d.:13-14; *The Sun* April

¹ There were also two Mühlhausers who ran breweries in Cincinnati and Portsmouth, Ohio. (Van Wieren 1995: 271,286)

² The production figures for the Thau and Mühlhauser brewery are not readily available. (Salem 1880:213)

26, 1882, June 5, 1882; *Alexandria Gazette* August 21, 1890; Schenk and Froelke 2002:249; Van Wieren 1995:130,132,286; Salem 1880:212-213; Kelley 1965:173)

Replacing Muhlhauser in Alexandria was John Kohout, a 33-year-old Bohemian who had arrived in the United States a decade earlier and resided in Virginia from at least early 1871. He was Portner's master brewer until 1882, when he was reported to be relocating to one of the large Milwaukee firms. But the often nomadic nature of a brewmaster's life finally deposited him not in that brewing Mecca but in remote South Butte, Montana by 1891, the superintendent of that town's Centennial Brewery. Robert Portner lured back Paul Muhlhauser, tendering the job of vice president and superintendent of operations for the new corporation, complete with a new office directly behind the plant and the use of the recently vacated Portner family house on the property—rather than the more humble dwelling just erected for Kohout. Muhlhauser had maintained an amicable relationship with his former boss, in spite of the dispute between Portner and Adler; his wife, after all, was Portner's niece, Louise Strangmann. Muhlhauser was now present during the company's greatest period of expansion and was handsomely compensated.³ He was undoubtedly responsible for developing some of Portner's principal products, not only including Tivoli lager, but also the company's first bock beer, in 1887, and possibly a dark "Culmbacher" beer (see pages 177-178). But he perished of diphtheria in 1890, his funeral well attended, including by many old colleagues from Baltimore.⁴ (United States Census 1880b; *Alexandria Gazette* December 26, 1882 and August 21, 1890; R.L. Polk & Company 1891b; R.L. Polk & Company 1902; United States Census 1900c; Portner n.d.:19; Kelley 1965:173; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:220; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3; *The Sun* August 23, 1890)

Joseph Schneider succeeded Paul Muhlhauser in 1890. "[H]e proved to be a very efficient man; the beer which he brews is very good." Evidently also a popular man, he nonetheless remained little more than a year before accepting a position as foreman with the Indianapolis Brewing Association. Because the output of the Portner brewery had grown to about twelve times the amount produced when Muhlhauser began, Schneider confined himself to supervising the brewing and was apparently not a company officer. (Portner n.d.:23-24)


In 1886 Portner installed a general manager, 35-year-old Frank P. Madigan, to handle much of the financial and logistical end of the business. Madigan, a Washington native, had been the D.C. agent for New York's "Bradstreet's Improved Mercantile Agency," a commercial credit rating firm and the forerunner of Dun & Bradstreet. He was soon in charge of the Washington segment of Portner's beer market as well as a director of the brewery. Madigan was to head up a new plant to be built on Maryland Avenue in Washington in 1888, but Portner, having partnered with Albert Carry, decided to forgo those plans and instead open the National Capital Brewing Company. Madigan served as one of the new brewery's directors until 1895. Although he was not with the Portner brewery long, Madigan is nonetheless a significant figure, if only because he was the first non-German to serve as an officer with the company. One of his principal duties

³ Muhlhauser held \$10,000 worth of company stock. Later, the *Washington Post* reported that Muhlhauser's annual compensation was \$10,000—a princely sum and likely simply confused with his stock holding. (*Washington Post* August 25, 1890)

⁴ The extant death record indicates that the cause was tuberculosis, perhaps unlikely because of the suddenness of his passing. (Pippenger 1995:228)

was lobbying. He represented breweries and other purveyors of liquor before the Commissioners of the District of Columbia as the latter debated stricter saloon regulation in the early 1890s. Charged with the defense of their licenses, he was one of the founders of Citizens' Committee of the Federation of Retail Liquor Dealers of the District of Columbia. He also spoke for businessmen and residents of those portions of the District served by the Baltimore & Potomac Railroad tracks and depot when the Commissioners proposed to remove the same in 1890. When Portner consolidated his Washington business with that of Albert Carry, Madigan joined the National Capital Brewing Company and remained an officer (with \$10,000 worth of stock) and executive of that firm until his 1916 death by massive stroke. (Portner n.d.:23-24; *Alexandria Gazette* August 22, 1890 and November 29, 1891; *Washington Post* August 9, 1886, December 15, 1887, April 19, 1889, May 17, 1889, August 10, 1890, October 19, 1890, October 23, 1890, April 15, 1891, April 25, 1893, September 12, 1895 and June 22, 1916; *Critic-Record* May 20, 1887; Boyd's Directory Company 1886; Boyd's Directory Company 1890; Boyd's Directory Company 1893; Boyd's Directory Company 1895; *Evening Star* February 28, 1890)

Madigan replaced on the Portner company board one of its original members, Bette Edward Julius Eils, known as "Edward" or "B.E.J.", who had joined the grocery of Portner & Recker at the end of 1861. Born at Tengshausen in the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg in 1840, Eils arrived at New York on Christmas 1859. Joining Portner & Company as a clerk, he became an important figure to the successor brewing corporation. But first, he left Portner's employ by 1867 to become a patent attorney in downtown Washington. Nonetheless, Eils looked after the brewery and his former boss's other interests when Portner departed for Germany in 1881 to recuperate from an illness. Eils assisted Portner with his artificial refrigeration experiments and was co-patentee of Portner's air cooling device. As patent attorney and tinkerer, he also patented a harvester part, an improved boiler-pressure gauge, systems for transmitting simultaneous telegraph messages, and a bottle-cap feeder, and he witnessed dozens more applications. He received some of the profits of the failed refrigeration systems venture (see Chapter 7) and was appointed to the Portner company's board in 1883. In the mid 1880s Eils became secretary of the Hecla Architectural Bronze and Iron Works in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn and fifteen years later was secretary of the executive committee of the New York area's Iron League, the protective "union" of the iron and steel manufacturers. The Hecla foundry may have had a hand in fabricating Portner's early refrigeration machines and, as it specialized in fabricating architectural elements, Eils had the available facilities and skilled labor to patent innovations in the construction of steel columns, steel grilles, and fireproof partition walls. (Portner

B. E. J. EILS,
EXPERT IN PATENT CAUSES,
Solicitor of U. S.  Foreign Patents,
703 Seventh St., opposite United States Patent Office,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

n.d.:7,17,19; Department of State; Boyd 1867; Boyd's Directory Company 1874; Boyd's Directory Company 1885; Chataigne 1886; United States Patent and Trademark Office 2006; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:556; Lain & Co. 1889; Reid Family Papers; Biographical Directory Company 1900:124; *New York Times* November 22, 1895)

Rounding out the original board of directors was Charles Gustave Herbort, the first manager of the brewery's Augusta, Georgia depot (1881) and of the firm's Richmond bottling branch from 1885 to 1888. He owned \$5,000 worth of company stock. (Sholes & Co. 1881; Sholes & Co. 1882; Portner n.d.:19; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3; Chataigne 1885b; J.H. Chataigne & Co. 1888a)

After Joseph Schneider departed for Indiana in 1891, Robert Portner needed a new brewmaster.

My next desire was to find a young efficient brewer for the Alexandria brewery who was engaging and had at the same time some business experience. I found such a person in John M. Leicht, who owned a brewery in Newburg[h], New York. He bought 250 shares for \$250 each, paying \$25,000 in cash and the rest in notes, and became vice-president of the R. Portner Brewing Company with a salary of \$3,000 a year. (Portner n.d.:24)

Leicht was the 35-year-old son of Bavaria native Andrew Leicht, part owner of a New York City brewery from 1856 to 1858 and a prosperous partner in the Hudson City, New Jersey firm of Roemmelt & Leicht from 1857 to 1879. Andrew's three sons, Charles K., William and John, followed their father into the trade. In 1879, John and Charles purchased a two-year-old plant in Newburgh, New York, which Charles retained after John joined the Portner company.⁵ John Leicht was a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania and had done post-graduate work at Columbia University and managed to be associated with breweries in Milwaukee, Cincinnati, St. Louis and Boston, presumably learning the ropes prior to partnering with his brother. Robert Portner thought highly of Leicht, and they grew close; Leicht's wife, Eugenia, even became the godmother of one of the Portner children. Leicht also struck up a fast friendship with fellow board member Carl Strangmann. (Department of State; United States Census 1870d; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:259,282,448; *Alexandria Gazette* [1894]; Van Wieren 1995:49,465)

Carl Augustus Strangmann was born at Rahden, Westphalia in May 1860, the son of Robert Portner's eldest sister, Augusta. He emigrated in 1875, arriving in New York and working for less than a year at a grocery, probably Louis Portner's. He then came south to join the brewery. Familiarly known as "Charlie," he worked in the brewhouse for two years before being appointed office and shipping clerk, probably responsible for filling orders and then perhaps for coordinating the logistics of shipment to the company depots. Portner already trusted his nephew to help Edward Eils run the brewery during his 1881 absence. As most breweries were then still family businesses, there is a sense that Robert was grooming Strangmann to lead the firm—at

⁵ Another source states that John Leicht and his brothers first started a brewery in New York in 1880 and *then* moved to Newburgh. (*Alexandria Gazette* [1894])



Two images of the impressively mustachioed John Leicht from One Hundred Years of Brewing (1903), left, and an 1894 supplement to the Alexandria Gazette, right.

least until Portner's sons were old enough to assume management. When the business incorporated in 1883, Strangmann was appointed to the board and accepted the position of secretary and treasurer and "general business" and "operations" manager. Particularly during Portner's absences, Strangmann served as chief executive officer. He is the signatory, for instance, of many of the company's land records and agreements and, as an important business leader, was one of founders of Alexandria's Board of Trade. Portner again felt that the business was secure enough under Strangmann's supervision to leave for a two-year stay in Europe, September 1888 to August 1890. Until 1894, in fact, the company prospered, permitting its remarkable expansion. But although Portner attributed a downturn of the mid 1890s largely to the economic depression that had seized the country, he had also grown dissatisfied with his nephew's performance. "I myself took over the management of the brewery because it had not been run according to my wishes. Upon my request, Carl Strangmann resigned his position as secretary and treasurer." (*Alexandria Gazette* October 4, 1915; Mueller 1912:12-13; Portner n.d.: 3,17,19,20-23,26,27; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:239; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3:27; Alexandria Board of Trade n.d.)



Photographs of Carl Strangmann circa 1905, left, and circa 1900, while president of the German-American Brewing Company of Buffalo. Images from the Memorial and Family History of Erie County, New York and One Hundred Years of Brewing.



Strangmann's reaction was to associate himself with a new "Norfolk Brewing Company" at the end of 1895. Intending to manage the proposed plant, he spent some time in Norfolk assisting with the filing of incorporation papers and trying to locate a production site with a good water source. Any Norfolk brewery would compete directly with the Portner's, as much of the latter's product was distributed to that area, the location of the company's second depot. For whatever reason, Strangmann did not remain with the new firm—which presumably became the Consumers Brewing Company⁶—and instead, sojourned in Germany. Upon his return, Portner bought out his shares of the Alexandria brewery and those of his sister, Louise Muhlhauser, "of which there were two hundred, paying \$175 each." (*Alexandria Gazette* December 3, 1895; Portner n.d.:27; *Washington Post* January 17, 1896)

⁶ The Consumers Brewing Company, at Church Street and Washington Avenue in Norfolk, was founded by Colonel C.A. Nash and others in 1895. The plant had an initial annual capacity of 40,000 barrels. It closed at the institution of Prohibition in Virginia. A firm by the same name in Rosslyn, Alexandria (now Arlington) County, Virginia was rebranded the Arlington Brewing Company to avoid confusion. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:477; Bull, Friedrich and Gottschalk 1984:306)

Naturally, Strangmann decided to take his money and start again elsewhere. He convinced his friend John Leicht to cash in his own company stock and join him in running their own brewery. Strangmann, his widowed sister, and Leicht all moved to Cleveland, Ohio where they purchased George V. Muth's Star Brewing Company. In 1897-1898 the plant was one of nine in Cleveland and Sandusky purchased and merged into one corporation in the wave of consolidation spurred by the entrance into the industry of English investor syndicates. Leicht was elected "second vice-president" of the new corporation in December 1899. Strangmann went his own way, buying an interest in the fourteen-year-old German-American Brewing Company of Buffalo and becoming its president and "guiding spirit" in 1899. Although a much smaller plant than Portner's, its output increased by about 167 percent during the first three or four years of Strangmann's tenure. He served as an officer of the United States Brewers' Association and a trustee of the New York State Brewers' Association. He died of heart failure at age 55 in 1915, leaving an impressive home and "one of the finest private libraries in Buffalo." Shortly after his departure from the Portner company, Strangmann's younger brother, Robert, joined the brewery as cashier at its new Frederick, Maryland depot and was soon elevated to its manager, remaining in that capacity until the company's demise.⁷ (Portner n.d.:30; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:239,412,484; *Alexandria Gazette* May 27, 1896, December 23, 1899 and November 11, 1915; Mueller 1912:13; *The News* April 16, 1897, February 28, 1898, October 30, 1915 and December 20, 1916)

Portner replaced Carl Strangmann with 35-year-old Percy McKnight Baldwin as secretary-treasurer. As a young man, Baldwin had worked in the Alexandria freight office of the Southern Railway Company. He was later promoted to the railroad's general office in Washington. Portner likely hired him for his expertise with moving rail freight, possibly bringing him on as a shipping clerk as early as 1888. Brewing had long since ceased being a craft; it was now a large capitalist enterprise. Logistical and financial managers like Baldwin, accountants and auditors E. Frank Downham, John T. Sweeney, John T. Johnson and John M. Johnson,⁸ and "general agent" Martin P. Greene became increasingly important figures in the business. Baldwin and Greene remained with the company until statewide Prohibition took effect in Virginia in 1916. (Portner n.d.:27,30; Alexandria Circuit Court Deedbooks; the Lyceum; *Alexandria Gazette* December 20, 1898 and November 22, 1920; W.L. Richmond 1907; Hill Directory Company 1915c)

On the brewing side, John Leicht was replaced with Dutchman Peter von de Westelaken, the second non-German brewmaster.⁹ Demonstrating the primacy of the managers over the

⁷ Robert C. Strangmann was born February 9, 1864 and was likely named for his uncle. He emigrated in 1879 and was living in Alexandria when naturalized in 1891. He was presumably then already associated with the brewery. (Department of State)

⁸ Sweeney was a native of Alexandria, born in 1853, the son of a grocer, and educated at St. John's Academy. Like Baldwin, he became a clerk for the Southern Railway before joining the brewery in 1896. He served on City Council for nearly 25 years and also was a school board member before becoming an alderman. As representative of the brewery, John T. Johnson was the first vice-president of the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce. Born in King George County, Virginia, he came to Alexandria as a youth. For several years, he served as a clerk to the Alexandria Common Council before being elected to Council himself. John M. Johnson also served on the Board of Visitors for the Medical College of Virginia at Richmond. (*Washington Post* April 17, 1907; *Alexandria Gazette* September 7, 1906; *Alexandria Gazette* March 24, 1915)

⁹ His name also appears as van de Westelaken, von de Westerlaken, and simply Westelaken. The "von" may have appeared during his career among German brewers.

craftsmen during this period is the fact that Westelaken never served as a vice-president as had predecessors Leicht and Muhlhauser. Westelaken resigned in 1915 because of ill health. He recovered after a vacation, accepted a position with the American Beverage Company of Canandaigua, New York, and died in 1918 at a new home in Buffalo.¹⁰ (W.L. Richmond 1907; Hill Directory Company 1915c; *Washington Post* September 22, 1905, April 7, 1911, March 16, 1915 and December 15, 1918; *Alexandria Gazette* March 17, 1915, March 30, 1915 and September 15, 1916)

Peter W. von de Westelaken, the Portner Company's penultimate brewmaster, served on Alexandria's George Washington birthday celebration planning committee for a decade and was a prominent member of the Alexandria chapter of the Fraternal Order of Eagles. He was a famously congenial and portly man; the Eagles staged a humorous charity footrace between their heaviest members, and Westelaken was given the longest odds to win—300 to one.



With the shake-up at the top in 1896, Robert Portner again assumed direct control of operations, and “under my management, the business was doing much better, we made \$68,000, and paid a dividend of five percent.” His oldest sons, Alvin, Robert and Edward, now in their early twenties, began to work for the brewery in 1896. Robbie quickly became more involved with his father’s real estate interests, but died suddenly in 1900.¹¹ Eddie was clearly intended to be the brewer. He was appointed a board member in 1896 and took charge of bottling. The following year, he was appointed acting vice president. In 1898 he enrolled at one of the two brewers’ schools in Chicago, the Siebel Institute or the Wahl-Henius Institute.¹² “At present I do not go to Alexandria very often,” Portner wrote in 1897, “I want Eddie to have the opportunity to conduct the business alone.” But, at least initially, he was a source of disappointment to his father. Concerned that he was nearing the end of his life, Robert Portner commented in 1903 that he was not very satisfied with his son’s performance. Nonetheless, Eddie assumed the presidency upon

¹⁰ Westelaken may have been assisted by his son Frank, a 24-year-old graduate of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and of, with a score of 99 percent, “the First Scientific Station [for] the Art of Brewing” in New York. Anton Schwarz was director of this latter academy. Frank von de Westelaken was brought into the brewery as a clerk about 1909, before earning his brewing degree. A top student athlete, he pitched for the baseball team consisting of Portner’s clerks. He left town to look for work in Milwaukee in 1911 and returned the following year. The Portner brewery’s final brewmaster is still unknown. (*Washington Post* August 17, 1909 and July 27, 1912)

¹¹ Robbie began working from the office at the Portner Flats in Washington (see Chapter 12).

¹² Not only did the brewing industry advance scientifically in the nineteenth century, but the dissemination of such knowledge increasingly occurred through professional journals and the several new brewing schools, the Siebel Institute of Technology (founded 1867), the United States Brewers’ Academy (1880), the Wahl-Henius Institute (circa 1890), the American Brewing Academy (1891), and Anton Schwarz’s “First Scientific Station.”

his father's death, and he and brothers Alvin and Paul carried on the business thereafter. (Portner n.d.:30-31,33,34; Richmond & Company 1897; J.H. Chataigne & Co. 1897; W.L. Richmond 1907; Hill Directory Company 1915c; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3)

A portrait of president and chairman Robert Portner, early 1890s, as published in One Hundred Years of Brewing, 1903.



Between 1875 and 1916 the brewery also employed a substantial number of managers in its far-flung depots. While they were not exactly autonomous—close coordination with the Alexandria plant was crucial to balance supply with demand—these agents had to demonstrate leadership and organizational competence. After all, by 1880 most of the market for Portner's beer was beyond Alexandria and, by 1883, most of the brewery's workers were employed out of town as well. The men who managed the crews of bottlers, laborers, drivers, and bill collectors in the Southern depots came from a variety of backgrounds. Some had been independent bottlers bought out by Portner but kept on for their expertise. Charles T. Brown, a Danville, Virginia bottler, may have been a wholesaler for Portner's products before 1888, when the brewer purchased his plant. But Brown remained on the payroll as manager of the Richmond depot from 1895 to 1902 and the Norfolk depot from 1909 to 1910. Irishman Edward Sheehan gave up his Excelsior Bottling Works in Augusta, Georgia to run the Portner branch there, before returning to bottling and saloon-keeping. Other branch chiefs were trusted long-time employees. Robert Bell, Jr. was a brewery foreman sent to establish the Norfolk depot in 1876. After he left the company, the turnover rate for the Norfolk management was among the highest of all the depots. Charles G. Herbort, the first Augusta, Georgia branch superintendent and later Richmond branch manager, was one of the original company board members. Some branch managers had no prior experience with brewing or bottling. Rudolph Gebner, agent for the Washington, D.C. depot from 1883 to 1886, had been a hotel clerk in the early 1870s, then worked his way up as secretary, chancellor, vice consul and acting consul in Washington for the Swiss government. After leaving the employ of the brewery, he returned to the hospitality industry. Another man with a colorful background was Emil Kuhblank. Born at Halle, Westphalia in the mid 1850s, he enlisted in the U.S. Navy as a teenager, before returning to Prussia and purportedly serving in the

imperial bodyguard. After his second arrival on U.S. shores he joined the Portner company to become depot manager at Richmond and at Wilmington. (*Washington Herald* March 11, 1910)

Like Charles Brown and Charles Herbort, several men ran more than one branch in succession or also served the firm in other capacities. Starting as superintendent of the Augusta branch, Otto Banck transferred to Charleston to establish the depot there. Dennis Cowhig worked as clerk at Orange, Virginia, agent at Charlottesville, Virginia, and the sole manager of the Hagerstown, Maryland depot from 1907 to 1916. Tuckerman J. Fuqua served as depot manager at Newport News, Virginia, Raleigh, North Carolina, and finally, Winchester, Virginia. C.F. Joyce was at Greensboro, North Carolina then Danville, Virginia. William H. Shelton clerked at Richmond before a promotion to manage the Phoebus, Virginia branch. Alexandrian John J. Nugent was a branch agent at Augusta, Georgia but returned home to serve as a salesman and collector. Most of these capable men lost their positions as Prohibition rolled through the company's market area in the decade before 1916. One "survivor" was Christian Valaer, Robert Portner's brother-in-law, who took ownership of the Charlotte depot he had managed since 1889 and manufactured only soda pop and distilled water once Prohibition commenced in North Carolina in 1908. He also served as a director on the company's board during the late 1880s. Not all managers were competent or trustworthy men. For whatever reasons, the tenures of some, such as James R. Warfield (Frederick, Maryland, 1897) and George N. Beaton (Norfolk, Virginia, 1903-1904), were very short-lived. The Salisbury, North Carolina branch was perhaps the least well served. Two superintendents in succession, W.W. Manly (1903-1906) and Robert R. Taylor (1906-1907) embezzled hundreds of dollars from the operation. Manly absconded, and Taylor, a twenty-year employee of the company, was jailed. (*Washington Post* December 18, 1906; *The Landmark* August 23, 1907 and August 30, 1907)

An early twentieth-century postcard of Christian Valaer's home in Charlotte, North Carolina. The former Robert Portner Brewing Company depot—which became Valaer's soda bottling company—stood behind the house.



Depot managers, continued	Approximate Tenure
Robert Bell, Jr., Norfolk, Virginia	1876-1880
Bartholomew R. Summers, Norfolk, Virginia	1880-1883
Charles P. Brown, Norfolk, Virginia	1883-1884
Ferdinand Pagenstecher, Norfolk, Virginia	1884-1885
David R. Dunn, Norfolk, Virginia	1885-1891
Henry W. Bissing, Norfolk, Virginia	1891-1892
George O'Neill Palmer, Norfolk, Virginia	1892-1899
George W. Bethell, Norfolk, Virginia	1899-1903
George N. Beaton, Norfolk, Virginia	1903-1904
John Bradbury, Norfolk, Virginia	1904-1905
Charles C. Finch, Norfolk, Virginia	1905-1909
Charles T. Brown, Norfolk, Virginia	1909-1910
Edmond Eugene George, Norfolk, Virginia	1910-1916
Charles Gustave Herbort, Lynchburg, Virginia	1879-1881
Thomas H. Giles, Lynchburg, Virginia	1881-1883
Charles Gustave Herbort, Lynchburg, Virginia	1883-1886
William W. Whyte, Lynchburg, Virginia	1886-1889
James M. McLaughlin, Lynchburg, Virginia	1890-1891
Oden B. Jester, Lynchburg, Virginia	1892-1895
Robert C. Strangmann, Lynchburg, Virginia	1895-1896
Edwin D. Wills, Lynchburg, Virginia	1897-1899
Charles Gustave Herbort, Augusta, Georgia	1881-1882
Thomas E. Wallace, Augusta, Georgia	1882-1884
C. Otto Banck, Augusta, Georgia	1884-1890
John T. Palmer, Augusta, Georgia	1890-1892
Edward Sheehan, Augusta, Georgia	1892-1901
John J. Nugent, Augusta, Georgia	1901-1906
George M. Overton, Augusta, Georgia	1906-1907
C.E. Moss, Danville, Virginia	1881-1882
C.F. Joyce, Danville, Virginia	1888-1890
T.D. Tebbetts, Danville, Virginia	1891-
John W. Gibson, Danville, Virginia	1900-1916
Christian Frissius, Goldsboro, North Carolina	1882-
William I. Wheary, Goldsboro, North Carolina	1902-
Charles Gustave Herbort, Richmond, Virginia	1886-1888
Patrick McDonough, Richmond, Virginia	1888-1892
Emil Kuhblank, Richmond, Virginia	1892-1895
Charles T. Brown, Richmond, Virginia	1895-1902
Edwin C. Payne, Richmond, Virginia	1902-1904
Richard W. Payne, Richmond, Virginia	1904-1916

Depot managers, continued	Approximate Tenure
Emil Kuhblank, Wilmington, North Carolina	1888-1891
C. Otto Banck, Wilmington, North Carolina	1895-1905
John T. Newman, Wilmington, North Carolina	1906-1909
Christian Valaer, Charlotte, North Carolina	1889-1905
William H. Shelton, Phoebus, Virginia	1890-1894
Alexander M. Hanger, Phoebus, Virginia	1896-1916
C. Otto Banck, Charleston, South Carolina	1891-1893
C.F. Joyce, Greensboro, North Carolina	<i>circa</i> 1892
Daniel Huffines, Greensboro, North Carolina	1900-1906
George P. Carr, Roanoke, Virginia	1893-1900
Charles Sidney Johnson, Roanoke, Virginia	1900-1916
William Koenig, Petersburg, Virginia	1896-1916
James R. Warfield, Frederick, Maryland	1897
Robert C. Strangmann, Frederick, Maryland	1898-1905
Thomas R. Jones, Raleigh, North Carolina	1899-1901
Tuckerman John Fuqua, Raleigh, North Carolina	1902-1905
Tuckerman John Fuqua, Newport News, Virginia	1899-1901
George F. Payne, Newport News, Virginia	1901-1916
Charles H. van Valkenberg, Staunton, Virginia	1902-1911
Andrew Bell, Staunton, Virginia	1912-1916
W.W. Manly, Salisbury, North Carolina	1902-1906
Robert R. Taylor, Salisbury, North Carolina	1906-1907
William W. Payne, Charlottesville, Virginia	1904-1905
Dennis G. Cowhig, Charlottesville, Virginia	1906-1907
L. Albert Wooding, Fredericksburg, Virginia	1904-1907
George F. Keegan, Rocky Mount, North Carolina	1904-1908?
W.L. Fultz, Winchester, Virginia	1905?-1908?
Tuckerman John Fuqua, Hagerstown, Maryland	1907-1908
Dennis G. Cowhig, Hagerstown, Maryland	1908-1916

Chapter 11

Point of sale: Product, price, packaging and promotion, saloons and the material culture of the brewery

The brewers will start any one in the saloon business who has from \$100 to \$200. The brewers rent the room and equip it for a saloon, pay for the lease and license, and stock the establishment.... [The saloonkeeper] has to pay back to the brewer the price of the license, lease and other expenses. These amusements are added to the price he has to pay for the beer....

American Brewer, Vol. XXVI, No. 1, January 1893

We have no gold medals for the simple reason we have never entered into a competition for them. We do not consider that they possess any value as awards of merit. There is a story widely told and generally believed, that one brewing firm received a gold medal at a celebrated exposition, although their beers did not arrive in time to be tested by the so-called judges. We do not know if this is true, but the credence given it shows the estimation in which these prizes are held by the public. The Chicago World's Fair judges avoided all difficulty by giving every exhibitor, no matter what his wares or their merits, a medal, or a ribbon, or a certificate of some kind. Thus every one was made happy. The only award we want is the endorsement of the public.

Robert Portner Brewing Company, Art Treasures and Useful Information

Beer and ale were less commonly consumed than spirits in early-nineteenth-century America, particularly in the South. Even by 1860, *per capita* annual beer and ale consumption exceeded spirits only by a little more than a third of a gallon. By 1886, however, the average American consumed 11.18 gallons of malt liquors and only 1.24 gallons of hard liquor. And by the turn of the twentieth century, yearly consumption of malt liquors in America had risen to about sixteen gallons per person, more than ten times the volume of spirits. Free flowing at bars and summer gardens, it was also not uncommon for a keg of beer to be the prize between the contenders in a baseball game. Particularly once it was typically bottled, beer became ubiquitous—stocked in all saloons, most restaurants, and even finding its way into homes. (Einstein Brew House webpage 1998; Miller and Faux 1997:105; *Evening Star* April 20, 1887; *Alexandria Gazette* June 6, 1896)

But “the saloon was, simply stated, the brewer’s lifeblood.” Bars were still overwhelmingly the most common point of sale to the consumer. Only the affluent could afford iceboxes and regular deliveries of ice for the preservation of beer at home. And only the wealthy could afford the money and leisure to belong to most true clubs. The tavern served the function of social club for the average working man—and they were patronized almost exclusively by men¹—who put in six-day

¹ German restaurants and beer gardens, however, generally catered to families.

weeks and often twelve-hour days, leaving little time for recreation. According to one source, to compensate for limited patronage at any hour, saloons commonly opened at least eighteen hours a day, six days a week, and some were open continuously! (Miller 1998; Roberts 1991:108; Schluter 1910:54; Heurich n.d.:42; Ade 1931:100)

The number of men who did not find home any too attractive, or who were in the wrong at their own firesides, and who, therefore, were wont to wander out into the night air, simply couldn't think of any good place to go except one of those places. In the old days pool and billiards were not played except at [the upscale establishments]. Besides, the harness-shop closed soon after sundown—and had nothing on tap while it was open... The average workaday mortal craved, in the evening, a hearty recognition of his merits as a man, lively intercourse with persons of his own social rating, bantering conversation, laughter and song. The saloons naturally attracted a lot of regulars. (Ade 1931:100-101)

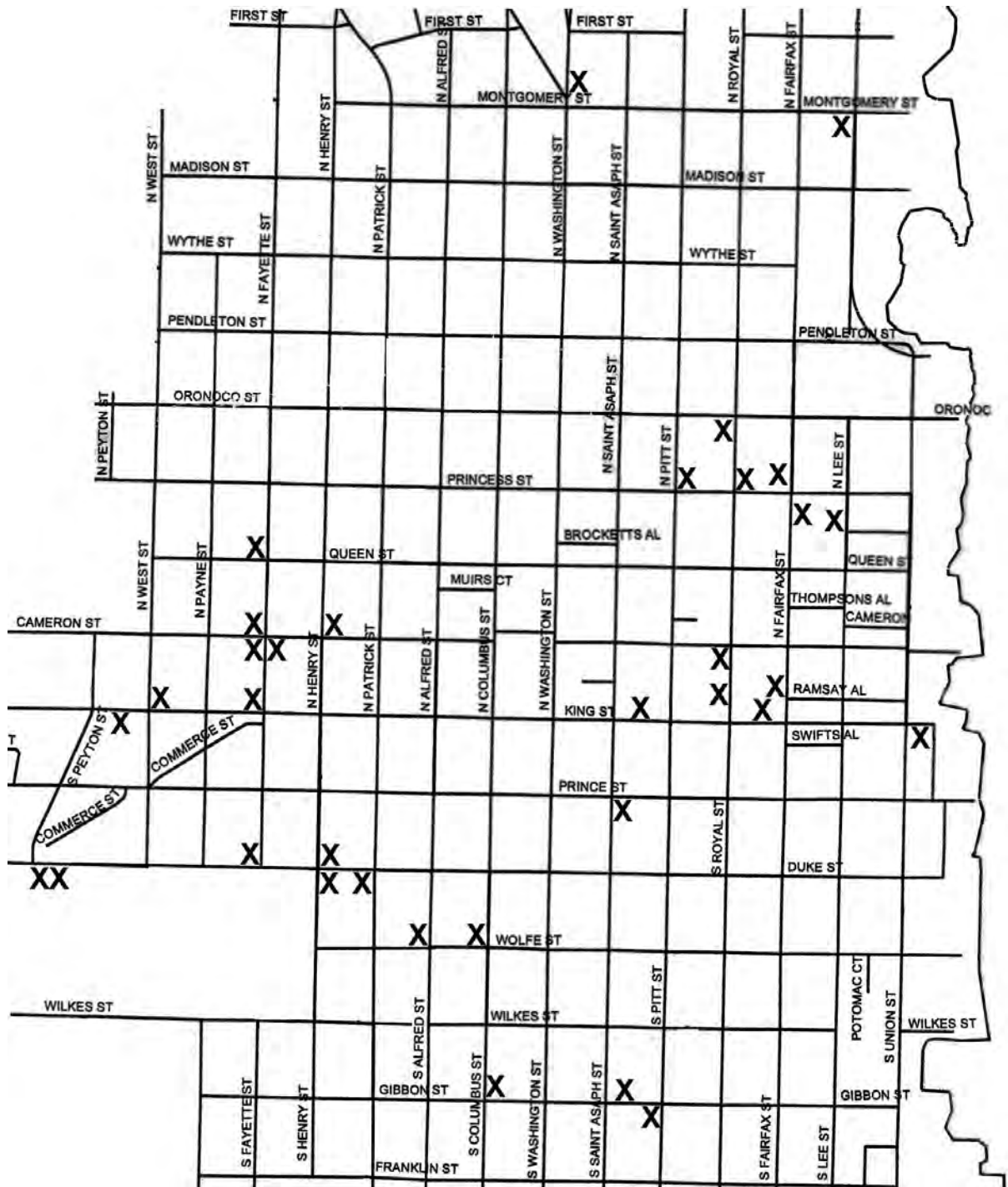
Particularly with the encouragement of the breweries, there were usually several saloons in each urban neighborhood. A year before the institution of state Prohibition, Alexandria had about 35 licensed saloons serving a population of 16,000, or “one saloon for every 36 voters.” (*Alexandria Gazette* September 10, 1914 and October 31, 1916; Gallagher 1978:2) In the early days, the obstacles to entry into the saloon business were few relative to other types of businesses, especially for a small joint with sawdust on the floor, serving cheap whisky from a makeshift bar. A proprietor could try to distinguish his establishment by quality, price, ambiance or entertainments at substantial cost, or appeal to his patrons on the basis of their common ethnicity. With the financial backing of brewers, entry into the business later remained simple, but came with strings attached.

Although there was plenty of demand for it, beer did not sell itself. Brewers were dependent upon the saloons for getting their products to the consumer, but saloons typically carried only one or two brands, and competition for retail outlets was fierce. Purchasing a small Washington brewery in the mid 1870s, Christian Heurich targeted the “little beer taverns and restaurants” of the lower class neighborhoods, but found, as did many beer salesmen, that making his pitch was neither easy nor cheap. (Heurich n.d.:42)

[Salesmanship] was expensive sort of work too, for in those days a beer, whiskey, or wine salesman was looked upon by the customers in a saloon as some sort of Croesus washed up on the rocks of the tavern counter for their especial benefit; if he didn't set up the drinks for the house every five minutes or so, his sales talk to the boss would be interrupted with all styles of jokes, from lewd to unfunny, and his product would come in for a noisy razzing... (Heurich n.d.:46)

With the technology-driven production revolution of the 1880s, however, the brewers turned the tables on the saloonkeepers, seizing the upper hand in the commercial relationship as breweries grew richer and volume sales more important.² (Krebs and Orthwein 1953:29)

² Control would not be complete, of course. Partner's company continued to have problems with some retail outlets. In 1905, for instance, the company received a judgment against B.F. Strickler of Shenandoah County, Virginia for his refusal to pay for shipments of beer. (Alexandria Circuit Court Chancery Cause #1905-001)



Locations of Alexandria's licensed saloons, 1902. As they were regulated by the City Council, their number appears to have remained fairly constant between the Civil War and Prohibition, at about fifty liquor licenses, perhaps 35 for saloons and restaurants and the rest for groceries and pharmacies. Sources: Alexandria Corporation Court Minute Books; 1902 Sanborn Map Company insurance atlas; and 1902 and 1903 city directories.

As competition within the brewing industry intensified during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, overt control of the saloon trade became a powerful weapon in the brewers' arsenal. The strategy was to lock out competitive brands of beer by eliciting exclusivity agreements from saloonkeepers. Whereas in the old days the brewery "collector," as he was known, often did little more than take and fill the saloonkeeper's beer order, there was now in his stead a *bona fide* salesman, pressure tactics and all....

[I]t was usually simple price competition that sealed the deal. The saloonkeeper would be offered a price slightly lower than the going rate in exchange for his promise to sell only the beer of the sponsoring brewery. However, there was no easy recourse for the brewer in the event that the saloonkeeper decided (as many certainly did) to break his commitment and seek a better price from a rival brewery. This inevitably led to bitter price wars, often so damaging that the brewers themselves were forced to call a truce....

A much more effective method of saloon control concerned the buying and selling of saloon fixtures by brewers. The many necessities in setting up a saloon—the bar, the backbar, tables, chairs, beer-tapping apparatus, and a myriad of other utensils—represented a large investment for the prospective saloonkeeper.... This, of course, is where the brewer came in, offering to supply the necessary fixtures on credit, often on an interest-free basis. The brewer required only that the saloonkeeper agree to sell the brewer's beer, and only his beer, throughout the duration of the debt repayment. Naturally, such arrangements could involve a number of years, thereby securing a long-term captive customer for the brewer....

But the ultimate control of a given saloon meant simply owning that saloon. And brewers were large holders of saloon properties. By 1909, the brewing industry as a whole was said to have invested about \$70 million in the purchase of retail drinking establishments. One historian estimated that during the years before Prohibition, brewers controlled as much as eighty-five percent of the saloons in America.³ Even in cases of brewery-ownership, though, the saloon was usually run by an independent entrepreneur. The prices of beer were fixed by agreement with the brewery, and the monthly lease payment was partially worked-off through the saloonkeeper's beer purchases. Naturally, selling competitive brands of beer on the premises was strictly disallowed. (Miller 1998)

Efforts of temperance forces inadvertently encouraged this phenomenon. Securing legislation to raise the cost of tavern licenses, these prohibition advocates made such licenses accessible only to the cash-rich, including brewing companies. Brewers could set up in the business anyone who had a couple hundred dollars to invest. Independent saloonkeepers sometimes had to organize to

³ Carl Miller credits this practice for the fact that many brewers went into real estate during Prohibition, having practical experience in property management, purchase and sale. This is certainly true of the Portner family, but Robert Portner was already used to such transactions from his work with the German Co-Operative Building Company and his own acquisitions of brewery and residential properties.

defend themselves against the glut of neighborhood bars financed by the beer “barons.” (Miller 1998; Duis 1983:27,35; *American Brewer* January 1893:20)

There is sufficient evidence to show that Robert Portner was one of these barons battling for control of retail outlets, in addition to those that he and brother Otto operated directly. As early as 1866, when still heavily in debt himself, Portner acted as trustee to secure a \$400 note owed by Philip Schriftgieser. Schriftgieser had just opened a restaurant near the first Portner brewery on King Street and put up as collateral his furniture and fixtures, including a “counter or bar.” In exchange, Schriftgieser probably agreed to keep Portner’s lager and ales on tap. Similarly, Portner or his brewery later held mortgages on Alexandria restaurants and bars belonging to Justus Schneider, Louis Brill⁴ and Louis Brager, J. Frank Cook, Harris Kaletski, George W. Pettey, Charles H. Zimmerman, Henry and Susan Pulman, Augusta Rammel, George Benson, James Fagan and Milford Self, Owen J. Nugent, and on the Tontine Hotel of James M. Garvey. The amounts owed ranged from \$100 to \$3,000, but were generally in the \$200 to \$300 range—enough to pay for a tavern license and for some rent and fixtures. The deeds of trust often did not mention interest, suggesting that the brewery was otherwise being compensated for the loan. The Portner company was successful enough in its hometown that it was reported, certainly with some exaggeration, that in the early twentieth century “You couldn’t buy nothing here in these bars but Portner’s.”⁵ There is ample evidence that both the Robert Portner Brewing Company and National Capital Brewing Company had similar relationships with saloons and restaurants in Washington.⁶

The latter company probably went farther into direct control by ownership. The National Capital Brewing Company owned at least a couple dozen bars in the District by 1914, under the company name or those of Albert or Charles Carry or both. One year, the brewery’s attorney represented 40 liquor license applicants before Washington’s excise board. (Alexandria Circuit Court Deedbooks X-3:407, 3:61; 16:128; 32:147; 34:114; 31:593; 36:210; 40:296; 42:44; 50:402; 54:476; 56:66; 56:100; Alexandria Corporation Court Chancery Causes, #1907-024, Clinton S. Ballenger vs. James M. Garvey; Johnson 1983; United States Congress n.d.:219,371)

These same deeds of trust give us a glimpse into the variety of Alexandria’s nineteenth-century saloons. Establishments ran the gamut from the undoubtedly aptly named “Hole in the Wall”—the kind of place where straight rot-gut whisky went for three cents a glass—to the Opera House Restaurant, with its matching walnut counter, sideboard, mirror, and sandwich cases. The general

⁴ The brewery applied for a permit to repair Louis Brill’s roof in 1901. (*Alexandria Gazette* December 21, 1901)

⁵ Although the Portner company controlled most of the beer market in Alexandria, other breweries tried to muscle in. For instance, in 1898 William Steuernagel (son of the late Alexandria brewer George Steuernagel) mortgaged his Exchange and Ballard Hotel to secure a \$1,000 debt to the Consumers Brewing Company of Rosslyn. The Portners did a good job of keeping out much of the Washington competition, but beers from that city and from as far away as Milwaukee, St. Louis, Rochester and Boston were still available. (Alexandria Circuit Court Deedbook 42:290; District of Columbia Recorder of Deeds)

⁶ There are plenty of deeds between Portner and D.C. saloonkeepers, and Portner appears in lawsuits with restaurateurs over money owed. It looks like he may have financed Bennet B. Smith’s entry into saloon-keeping. Smith, previously a hotel clerk, was a partner with James Glass in the “New York House” at 337 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW in 1882. Within a year, Portner was foreclosing on the loan and auctioning the restaurant’s effects. The company also bought out a Richmond dealer in liquor and tobacco products. (Boyd’s Directory Company 1882; *Washington Post* August 4, 1883; Richmond Deed Book 143C:474)

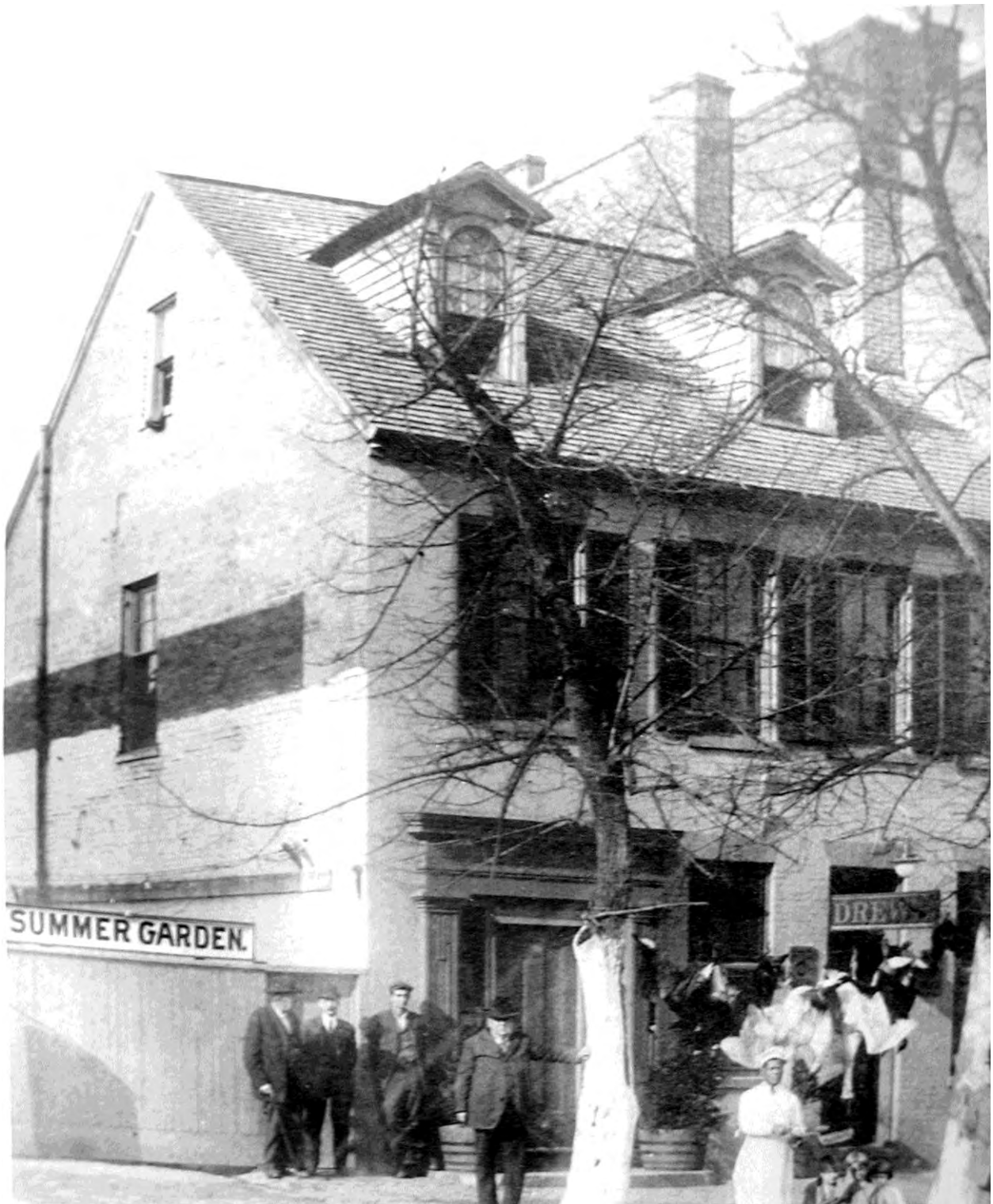


A modern-day photograph of the former saloon of Henry and Susan Pulman. The Pulmans operated their establishment at the northwest corner of Fayette and Queen Streets circa 1895. This is one of the few Alexandria saloon buildings extant upon which the Portner brewery held a mortgage.

appearance of such saloons and restaurants was not unlike those portrayed in motion pictures, including old Westerns. Each of Portner's debtors possessed a bar, mirrors and pictures on the walls, two to eight tables, assorted chairs, perhaps oilcloths or even carpets on the floor, iceboxes and beer pumps, and even spittoons and swinging doors! (Alexandria Circuit Court Deedbooks 3:61; 16:128; 32:147; 34:114; 31:593; 36:210; 40:296; 42:44; 50:402; 54:476; 56:66; 56:100)



The interior of a saloon, 1880s. Although this establishment was located in Colorado, Alexandria's average saloon probably looked similar. Library of Congress photo.



*A Pitt Street restaurant and summer garden shortly before the arrival of Prohibition.
William Francis Smith Collection, Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections.*

When you had visited one of the old-time saloons you had seen a thousand.... The entrance was through swinging doors which were shuttered so that any one standing on the outside could not see what was happening on the inside. The windows were masked by grille work, potted ferns, one-sheet posters and a fly-specked array of fancy-shaped bottles which were merely symbols and not merchandise. The bar counter ran lengthwise at one side of the dim interior and always had a brass foot-rail in front of it. Saw-dust on the floor was supposed to absorb the drippings. Behind the bar was a mirror and below the mirror a tasteful medley of lemons, assorted glasses and containers... We come to mural decorations. One large chromo reproduction of a disrobed siren reclining on a couch. She was over-weight.... Prize fighters were featured in the pictorial adornments. Along about 1890 probably nine-tenths of the thirst parlors advertised John L. Sullivan, of the knobby biceps and curling moustache.... (Ade 1931:28)

As late as 1869, locals could boast that Alexandria had yet no public billiard tables, ten-pin alleys, or keno, faro or roulette games. That may have had more to do with the postwar poverty of the town than with any strict moral code.⁷ But some things changed quickly; by the 1890s even the Young Men's Sodality Lyceum sponsored billiard contests. There were pool tables in the larger and better bars by the early 1870s. The Opera House Restaurant, for example, purchased two rosewood tables from the H.W. Collender Company of New York by 1884.⁸ (*Alexandria Gazette* October 2, 1869, March 2, 1893 and March 9, 1893; Alexandria Circuit Court Deedbook 16:128; East Stroudsburg University 1999)

As illustrated in Carl H. Miller's excellent study of Cleveland breweries, brewers had a great deal to do with the furnishing and decoration of saloons.⁹ The lending of fixtures such as iceboxes and beer pumps is known to have been practiced in the Washington area. (*Washington Post* March 5, 1898) Beer salesmen also dispensed all kinds of small complimentary items to customers and potential customers—nearly anything that could be used in a bar: steins, mugs, glasses, trays, tip trays, signs¹⁰ and mirrors, posters and calendars, and even such personal items as watch fobs and match safes. All were, of course, emblazoned with the name, logo, and perhaps image of the patron brewery. A variety of Robert Portner Brewing Company mugs, glasses, trays, posters, calendars and signs survives.¹¹

⁷ Alexandria had had a bowling alley in the 1850s and a couple during the Civil War. Fred Recker, Portner's old partner, was part owner of one during the war years. (Alexandria Real and Personal Property Tax Assessments; O'Flaherty Papers; Internal Revenue Assessments, 1862-1866)

⁸ The deed of trust from which the information is taken is dated 1885, but Collender was bought out by the Brunswick Company in 1884.

⁹ See also Perry R. Duis, *The Saloon: Public Drinking in Chicago and Boston, 1880-1920*, pp. 25-26.

¹⁰ Such brewery gratuities were again common after Prohibition. Sign painter Abe Aaron, interviewed for the WPA Writers Project in 1939 reported that "What keeps us going now are these beer joints. They fold up so goddamn fast, you wonder why anyone also starts up. The breweries pay for the sign work, so the saloon keepers want a lot of it. They think they're getting something for nothing. There ain't no one harder to work for." (Library of Congress, American Memory webpage)

¹¹ According to the *Alexandria Gazette* of December 28, 1904, the brewery was "famous for its artistic calendars," and that for the year 1905 was representative of the brewery's "usual handsome calendar." The previous year, a small calendar and advertisement was issued on folded cardboard that contained needles and served as a sewing kit—the height of female domesticity! The large, lithographed calendars began at least by 1902. The company also

As competition heated up and breweries marketed their products to ever more remote locations, the companies had to develop an identity recognizable and attractive to consumers. They were realistic enough not to depend on the quality of their beer alone, although they tended to make much of their superior ingredients, gold medals won in competitions, chemists' declarations of purity, and their own subjective claims of excellence. The free promotional items, including colorful lithographs of the breweries themselves, were an effort to keep the name and positive image of the beer forever in front of the consumer.

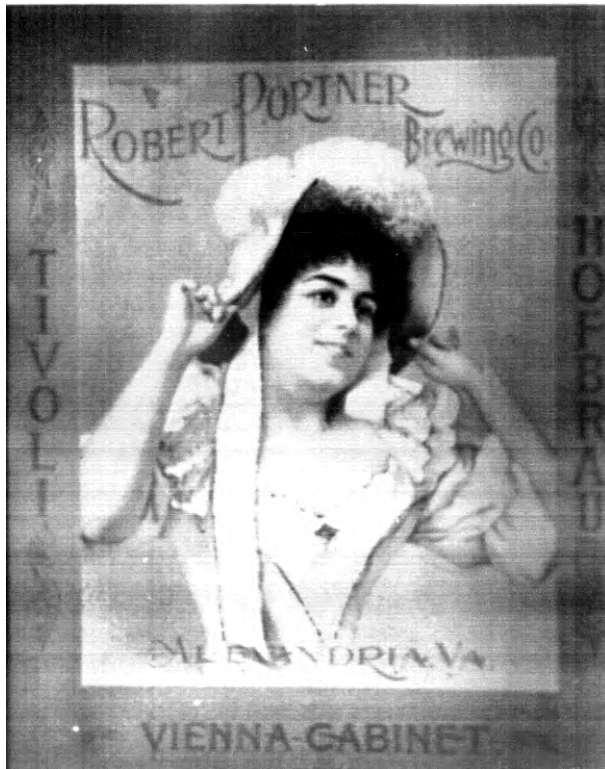


Drinking vessels as promotional items: stoneware mug, left, and glass with enamel lettering, right. Both were produced between 1894 and 1916.

Brand names set breweries apart and distinguished different varieties of beer produced by a single firm—an attempt to satisfy the various tastes of the drinking public. Portner developed several varieties and brand names under which to sell them. In fact, as early as 1873 he named his relatively new plant the “Vienna Brewery” because of the “Vienna Lager” made there. In autumn 1877, soon after expanding his sales into Washington and Norfolk, he began employing a new trademark, “TIVOLI,” reflecting the development of a new lager variety and brand. The plant was thereafter officially, but infrequently, referred to as the Tivoli Brewery, and the diamond-shaped Tivoli mark soon began to appear on all bottles and much of the firm’s advertising. Portner left no

distributed a pamphlet that at once promoted the brewery and its beer, reproduced paintings for the edification of the reader, and included an extensive list of cocktail recipes. At the time of the Spanish-American War, the brewery issued a booklet containing photographs of U.S. Navy ships. In 1903, visiting members of the International Typographical Union departed the brewery with a souvenir mug. (*Alexandria Gazette* of December 28, 1904; *The News* December 21, 1901; *Washington Post* August 12, 1903)

clue as to why he chose the Tivoli name. He undoubtedly appreciated allusions to the Tivoli pleasure gardens of Copenhagen and Paris and to the Roman villas of Tivoli, Italy. But the immediate inspiration was the Tivoli restaurant or saloon on Cameron Street, leased by Robert a few months earlier and operated by his brother, Otto, and Louis Faber. More important for marketing a beer, the name is a clever reversal of “I LOV IT.” It appears that Portner was the first American brewer to adopt the brand, but there were at least four other U.S. firms that also used the Tivoli name before Prohibition.¹² There were German beers with the same name, not to mention a multitude of theaters, opera houses, parks, etc. in the U.S. and elsewhere.¹³ By 1893 one type of “blob top” beer bottle—tapered, with no real shoulder—was referred as having a “Tivoli finish” in some trade publications. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 28, 1873 and June 30, 1877; Crown Cork and Seal Co. 1904:13; Keller 1893:36)



Copies of Portner company posters or calendar images, photographic copies in the Lyceum collection. As now, most beer consumers were men. Brewery posters featured beautiful women, some fully clothed and some less so. The late nineteenth century set patterns for advertising that persist today, including the use of multiple media, logos and slogans, testimonials and premiums. Advertising efforts were aided by color lithography. The Portner company reproduced images by French artist Angelo Asti, the creator of the earliest Romantic, commercial, “girly” pictures.

¹² These “Tivolis” were founded or named in the late nineteenth century and included breweries in Detroit, Michigan; Altes, Colorado; Butte, Montana; Newark, New Jersey; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and on Long Island. There was also a Tivoli brewery in the Berlin suburbs before the American Civil War, in Antwerp by the end of the century, and in Tartu, Estonia by the beginning of the next. (Van Wieren 1995:49,152,192,210; *New York Times* June 16, 1874; Wells et al., 1866:218; Ministère de L’Industrie et Du Travail 1900:274)

¹³ “Tivoli Park” was a *circa* 1880 resort at Giesboro, District of Columbia, a point on the Potomac and a former estate and Civil War cavalry depot. (*Alexandria Gazette* June 3, 1880)

So what exactly was the average working man—sitting in an Alexandria saloon mortgaged to the Portner company, gazing at a Portner company poster, and holding a Portner company mug—drinking?

One can hardly discuss the history of a brewery without discussing its products. The Robert Portner Brewing Company, like most other American breweries of the late nineteenth century, made its fortune on sales of lager beer. Until at least 1870, however, Portner's brewmasters also produced three types of ale, including a lighter "cream" ale and a porter. Cream ale is a uniquely American type that can use ale yeast (*saccharomyces cerevisiae*) or lager yeast (*saccharomyces carlsbergensis*) or a combination of the two for fermentation. Henry S. Martin, an Alexandria ale brewer, also produced a cream ale around 1870. (Boyd 1867; United States Census 1870b; Portner n.d.:14; *Alexandria Gazette* March 15, 1860)

[Cream ale] is usually fermented as an ale followed by a period of cold conditioning. [It] can be hoppier, stronger and fruitier than standard American light lagers... The profile is light to medium body with high effervescence. The color is pale. Some low fruitiness/esters may be detectable. Hop bitterness is low to medium. (Ein Stein Brew House 1998)

Porter, on the other hand, is a robust, dark variety of ale developed in England about 1725. Produced from well-roasted malts, it tends to be dry and moderately hopped, with a sweet finish and a fairly high alcohol content.

The advantages to Portner's brewing of ales were two. First, from colonial times Alexandrians were accustomed to drinking local and imported ales. Second, and perhaps more important, ales are fermented at a higher temperature than lager. In the days before artificial refrigeration, they could be fermented using little or no ice if brewing was confined to the colder months.¹⁴

Another beer variety brewed in Alexandria in the 1860s and 1870s was weiss beer, a sort of wheat ale top fermented between 54 and 58 degrees. It is a Bavarian type and was produced by Alexandria brewers Henry Englehardt, Christian Poggensee, George Steuernagel, and Otto Portner and Augustus Winterroll.¹⁵ Its name, weiss, or "white," refers to its milky, somewhat golden color, imparted by the use of wheat meal as the primary fermentable solid instead of or in addition to barley malt.¹⁶ Also, leftover yeast is present in bottles of weiss beer, a result of its bottle

¹⁴ Northern breweries used cellars just as much to keep ales from being too cold and freezing in winter.

¹⁵ For centuries the right to brew weiss beer had been reserved by the dukes of Bavaria. Once the beer of the aristocracy, its popularity in southern Germany had quickly waxed and waned by the end of America's Civil War era as it became available to the masses. It was largely due to the Bavarian Georg Schneider and through pioneer German-American brewers that the weiss beer brewing tradition was preserved. It is popular again in Germany but was largely forgotten in the U.S. again until the microbrewery revival. (Warner 1992:5,15,16)

¹⁶ Among German brewers a minimum content of 50 percent wheat in the fermentable solids is an unwritten law. Bavarian weiss-beer brewers still commonly use traditional open fermenting tuns. After fermentation, the beer is stored at cooler temperatures—between 39 and 49 degrees—for five days to four weeks to allow settling and clarification. Weiss beer is mostly bottled, and it is in bottles that it undergoes a secondary fermentation or "bottle conditioning" responsible for its carbonation. Most carbon dioxide produced during fermentation escapes from the open tuns. To compensate for this, weiss beer is usually krausened in the bottle with bottom fermenting yeast. The standard modern

conditioning without a “fining” stage. Nowadays weiss beer has twice the carbon dioxide content of lager, more sediment, and slightly more alcohol, but in late nineteenth-century America it may have been a bit less alcoholic. (Internal Revenue Assessments 1862-1866; Warner 1992:21,56, 71,73,74,75,81; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:99,616; Kelley 1965:395).

In 1869 Portner’s new plant produced 1,200 barrels of lager and 600 barrels of ale. He reported using, on average, 2.2 bushels of barley malt and 1.67 pounds of hops per barrel, suggesting that his products were highly hopped compared with the average beer of today, possibly reflecting the substantial amount of ale produced.¹⁷ During the 1880s, the brewery remarkably used an average of two and half bushels of malt and about 2.4 pounds of hops per barrel, suggesting a shift in the type of hops used, and producing beers with still more dryness, bitterness, aroma, and higher specific gravity, body and alcohol content. The numbers for malt usage seem at odds with the trend in the industry—and in Portner’s products—toward lighter beers. (United States Census 1870b; Brockett and Rock 1883; Switzler 1886:109; *Washington Post* March 30, 1891)

During the Civil War, Portner & Company apparently purchased hops from the New York firm of Dutcher & Ellerby. This suggests that they were grown in New York State, then still the primary hop-growing region in the U.S. But hop culture was moving west; the vine was first cultivated in California in 1857 and in the state of Washington in 1866. Oregon hops found their way onto the national market about 1880, and by 1908 the Northwest was producing 88 percent of the American crop. Portner was still purchasing hops from New York in 1880 and, like other brewers, may have shifted his source to the Northwest, but by 1890 he was importing a third of his hops (50,000 of 150,000 pounds) from Bohemia and, in the mid 1890s, was also importing Bavarian hops for his premium “Special Export.” He attempted to grow hops at his Manassas estate—after all, Virginia had been a major hop-growing state around 1800—but he found the climate too moist for the two-row or six-row variety he needed, and the crop succumbed to mold. (Wilson 1862; Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book W-3:126; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:56; *American Brewer*, Vol. XXVI, No. 8:421; Schluter 1910:75; *Alexandria Gazette* June 15, 1880; *Washington Post* July 15, 1880 and March 30, 1891; Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897; *Southern Planter* 1905:203)

The cultivation of barley was also shifting westward with migration and the railroads. At least until the early 1870s Portner obtained his barley malt from the Baltimore malt house of Francis Denmead. In those early days, Denmead’s barley was probably grown in the East or Midwest. But the Great Plains of the U.S. and Canada soon became the main source, and it was from Canada that the Robert Portner Brewing Company purchased most of its malt by 1879, an amount that grew to 150,000 bushels by 1890. For this reason, Portner was among those in the United States Brewers Association who convinced Congress to remove tariffs on imported ingredients. (Portner n.d.:13;

practice is to store the bottles first at about 68 degrees to begin the build up of carbon dioxide, and then at about 77 degrees for a vigorous secondary fermentation. This is followed by cold storage before sale or consumption. Bottling was an expensive proposition for the small Alexandria brewers and suggests a labor-intensive craft-brewing process. There are extant earthenware “Steuernagel,” “Otto Portner,” (see pages 6 and 50) and “H. Englehardt” bottles. (Warner 1992:21,71,73,74,75,81; H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:99; Kelley 1965:395)

¹⁷ The light American pilseners at the turn of the twentieth century were typically brewed with one pound of hops per barrel. (Daniels 1996:248) Part of the disparity may be accounted for by today’s use of stronger, imported hops.

Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book X-3:513; *Alexandria Gazette* [1894]; Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897; *Washington Post* June 13, 1879 and March 30, 1891)

The first branded beer of the Robert Portner Brewery was its “Vienna Lager” or “Vienna Cabinet”—the word “cabinet” then denoted an exhibition room or collection, suggesting that this was a “select” beer. Until the end of 1877 it was probably the firm’s only lager and was also the namesake of the plant, informally referred to as the Vienna Brewery. By that time, it was also commonly bottled. This product was likely developed by brewmaster Carl Wolters during the winter of 1866-1867 and was still made, in some form, into the twentieth century. “Amber in color, [perhaps increasingly] clear and sparkling in appearance. Made from the best of materials and well aged, it is mildly stimulating, highly invigorating, and of delicious flavor.... [I]ts excellent reputation and immense popularity are well attested by the thousands of barrels consumed annually...” Its name and light color suggest that it was similar to the popular lagers developed in Vienna, Austria after 1840.¹⁸ (*Alexandria Gazette* May 10, 1877; Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897; Daniels 1996:322-323; *Washington Post* March 30, 1891)

Portner probably discontinued ale brewing before the mid 1870s. He and Paul Muhlhauser developed a second lager shortly thereafter. It was available by late 1877, when the firm began using the “TIVOLI” trademark, and was referred to as “Tivoli” or “Tivoli Cabinet.” Because the company ultimately offered four brands that used some variation of the Tivoli name, it is not absolutely certain which of these, if any, was a continuation of this earlier product. It seems, however, that this Tivoli Cabinet may have been essentially the same beer as the later “Tivoli Lager.” Made from Canadian malt and New York hops, Tivoli Lager was a heavy, dark brown beer, likely of the *Märzen* (“March”) variety, similar to those brewed in Munich and essentially a stronger version of the Viennese lagers. “Pure, clear of malt and hops, Beats all the drugs and all the drops.” When introduced to the Washington market, the company claimed that it would “have a beneficial tendency to cause a better standard of beers to be manufactured in general, in order to compete with it.” “For its strengthening and stimulating qualities it is preferred by those whose occupation is one of physical toil. Lovers of a heavy malt beer will find our Tivoli well brewed, well fermented and very palatable.” Such dark, heavy beers grew less popular toward the turn of the century, but as late as 1890, the Vienna Cabinet, at least in name the older of the brands, was still—or again—the most popular of the company’s two brews. This led the company’s new brewmasters to reformulate its various “Tivolis” during the 1890s. (National Museum of American History Archives; Alexandria Archaeology collection; *Alexandria Gazette* [1894]; Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897; Daniels 1996:323; Ein Stein Brew House webpage 1998; *Washington Post* June 18, 1879 and June 24, 1879)

For only a matter of months in 1890, Portner’s Washington depot sold a dark “Culmbacher” beer, named for Kulmbach, Bavaria, home of the prominent Kulmbacher Reichelbräuerei, founded in 1849. It is possible that this was a final beer variety developed by Paul Muhlhauser prior to his untimely death. Alternatively, it may be that the company was merely selling the remaining stock of Capitol Hill’s Washington Brewery Company (the former Juenemann brewery) after

¹⁸ These beers were mashed at relatively low temperatures, brewed by the decoction method in three boiling stages, fermented at 41 to 46 degrees Fahrenheit, and lagered four to ten months. Portner probably stored his for four to six months. (Daniels 1996:323-325)

Albert Carry purchased the property, as the relocated Washington Brewery was selling a “Culmbacher” brand at the turn of the century.¹⁹ Carry decided to forgo reconstruction of this plant, anticipating incorporating, with Portner, the National Capital Brewing Company in Washington’s southeastern quadrant (see Chapter 8). So, if Portner’s Culmbacher actually came from Albert Carry, then it indicates that the men had agreed to a partnership several months before the announcement of their new brewery. (*Washington Post* October 10, 1886, January 19, 1890 and July 8, 1898)

In April 1891 the brewery released its “Virginia Extra Pale Export Lager,” a “very pale beer brewed under an entirely new process, which bids fair to rival in delicacy of flavor and sparkling brilliancy in its color anything the country has ever known.” This coincided with the arrival of brewmaster Joseph Schneider, whose beer’s brilliancy may be partly attributable to the addition of rice to the mash. At about the same time, Tivoli Cabinet seems to have been renamed “Tivoli Royal,”²⁰ but neither of these names survived the completion of the new, modern brewhouse in 1894 and the tenure of Schneider’s replacement, John Leicht. (*Washington Post* March 30, 1891 and April 9, 1892; *Charlotte Observer* November 4, 1894)

Shortly after opening the new brewhouse, the company unveiled two varieties, “Tivoli-Select” and “Tivoli-Hofbrau.” Described as “a special brew of pronounced hop flavor,” Tivoli-Select was “[m]ade from the very best selected materials, and well aged.” It may have been derived from the more heavily hopped beers of Bohemia. Tivoli-Hofbrau was Portner’s new premium beer, the company’s “special export,” replacing the Virginia Extra Pale. (Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897)

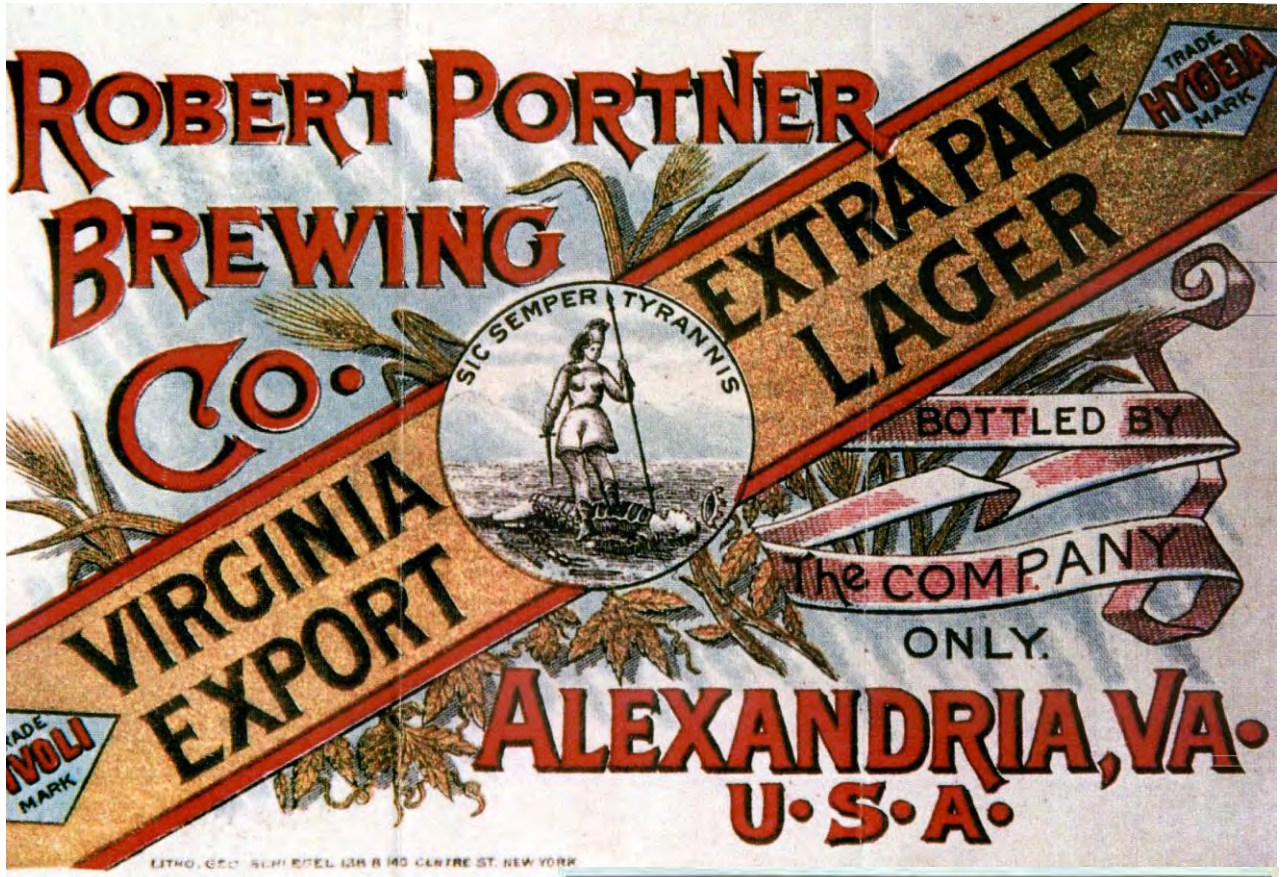
For rare purity and excellence of preparation this beer is superior to all, domestic or imported. Brewed from the finest grade of Bavarian Hops and Canadian Barley Malt, as a beverage it is highly esteemed by connoisseurs for its exquisite hop flavor, and as the best tonics its use is recommended by physicians to all sufferers from nervous and weakening ailments. The remarkable hop strength of this beer is of great medicinal value in its sedative effects upon nervous and excitable temperaments.... Pale amber in color.... (Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897)

With its pale color and low specific gravity (1.0153), Tivoli-Hofbrau was likely a Pilsener, an imitation of the brilliant, hoppy lagers created in Pilsen, Bohemia (now Plzen, Czech Republic) in the early 1840s. But Portner named the brand in honor of the famous Hof Brau Haus beer hall of Munich. Available only in bottles from its beginning—the company’s first beer in crown-finish bottles—nearly 190,000 units of it were purchased in its first year, 601,000 in 1895, between 1,300,000 and 1,500,000 annually in 1896-1898, and nearly 1,800,000 in 1899. The brewery promised to sell more than 3,000,000 bottles of Tivoli-Hofbrau in 1900, perhaps almost a fifth of the plant’s output. A decade later, the familiar brand was usually referred to simply as “Hofbrau.” (Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897; Daniels 1996:243-244; *Washington Post* December 17, 1892; *The News* April 13, 1899 and April 20, 1900; *Alexandria Gazette* December 10, 1910)

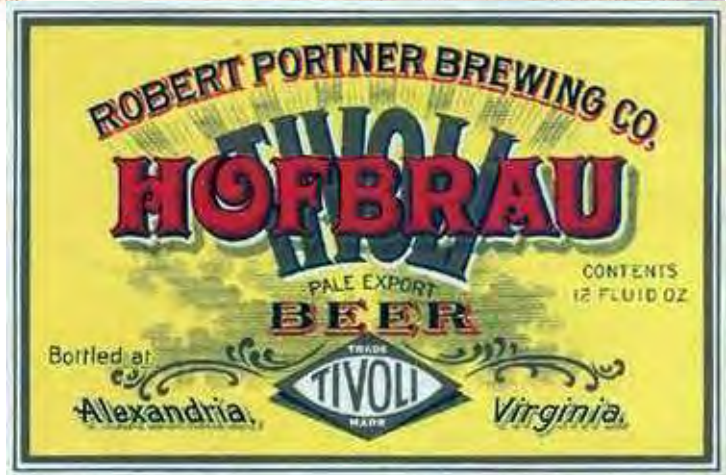
¹⁹ This brand name was also used by a number of post-Prohibition breweries in the U.S.

²⁰ Of course, without additional evidence, it is possible that reference to a Tivoli “Royal” was simply a mistake of the *Washington Post*.

Pilsener may have been the variety most suited to the water available to the brewery. Portner's deep artesian wells produced a soft water, very low in calcium, an element that promotes several of the chemical processes in brewing and helps clarify, lighten and stabilize the finished beer. Tested water samples varied in their content of dissolved magnesium, sodium and carbonates, often containing mere traces of these constituents which, in moderate amounts, improve beer's taste. Compared with the water of the most important Continental brewing centers, Portner's was high in chlorides, which accentuate bitterness and "fullness." His brewers could have remedied softness

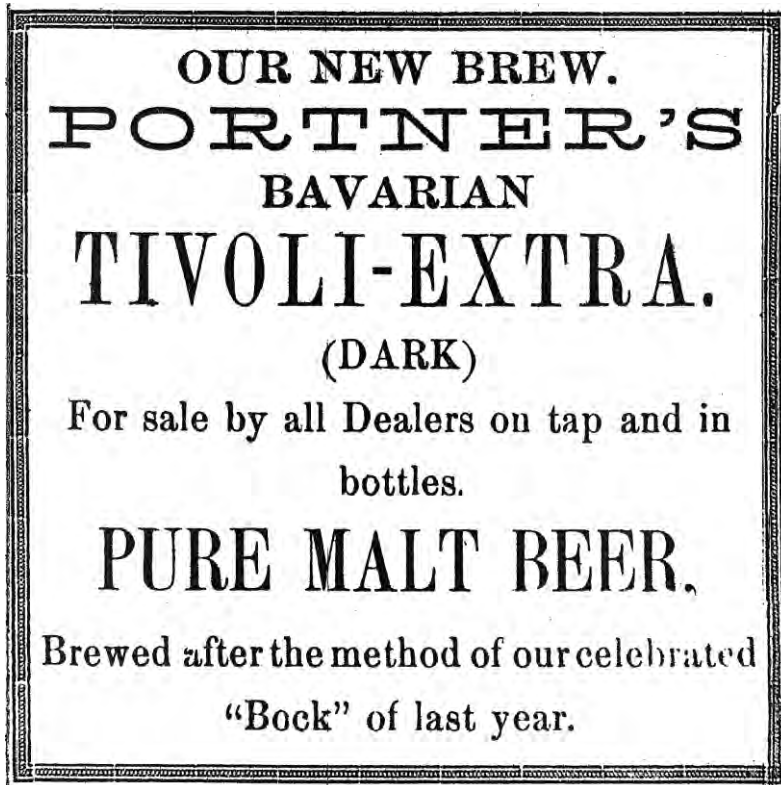


Above: A Robert Portner Brewing Company label for its Virginia Extra Pale Export Lager. It was first sold in April 1891. The brewery introduced Tivoli-Hofbrau (right), its replacement "Pale Export Lager," after the completion of the 1894 brewhouse. John Leicht presumably formulated this, and it was the first Portner beer to be bottled with a crown closure or bottle cap.





Above: A circa 1900 paper Tivoli Cabinet bottle label. Right: The reverse of a circa 1880 Tivoli Cabinet bottle (the embossing has been painted to show the letters). Alexandria Archaeology Museum collection. Below: A late 1890s print advertisement.





Left: A Tivoli Hofbrau ink blotter, post-1894. Private collection.

Below: A Vienna Cabinet bottle label, circa 1895-1903. Courtesy of Al Steidel.



by the addition of Epsom salt, table salt, baking soda, gypsum and calcium chloride. (Watson 1912:138,35-353; Noonan 1995)

The company introduced a bock beer by the spring of 1887. Bocks are hardy lagers, “strong in alcohol with a clean, smooth, malty-sweet character.... They get their color and flavor from dark Munich malts. [Bocks are] traditionally dark amber to dark brown and [with low levels of] “noble-type” hop flavor to balance the malt. Bitterness is low.... [and specific gravity is at least 1.064].” This variety is named for Einbeck (or Ainpöck), Germany, the place of its origin, but the German and American bocks of the nineteenth century actually reflected a recent Munich revival more than the late medieval original. Brought to the United States during the 1850s, bocks were offered

seasonally, most often released in February or March, but as late as May.²¹ In spring 1890, Portner offered for one week only “EXTRA BREWED BOCK BEER, OLD AND MELLOW... a special and extra fine BOCK BEER, brewed during the months of October and November, 1888, hence being one year and six months old.” The brewery charged “[n]o extra price... this being intended as a treat to their patrons and friends.” It was widely advertised in Washington in May 1890 and in Charlotte from 1891 through 1893. Portner’s “pure malt” bock was re-introduced in 1896 and branded “Bavarian Tivoli-Extra (Dark)” when bottled. The re-introduction and new name suggests a reformulation by brewmaster John Leicht after an original Muhlhauser-produced recipe. In 1898 it was again renamed, this time as “Portner’s Old German Bock Beer,” perhaps to avoid confusion with other “Tivolis.” This bock, “heavy in extract, with a delicious hop flavor and full body,” was available annually until at least 1914, with the possible exception of the years 1900 to 1902. In 1899 it was released in *autumn*, as a “winter bock,” contrary to the most common U.S. practice, but not unheard of in Europe or America. After that time, the company shipped it at the end of February or beginning of March. (Ein Stein Brew House 1998; *Alexandria Gazette* April 6, 1887, November 24, 1897, October 26, 1898 and October 27, 1899; *Washington Post* May 1, 1890; *Evening Star* April 30, 1890; *Charlotte Observer* May 25, 1893 and March 15, 1898; Daniels 1996:175-179; *The News* February 28, 1898, February 25, 1905, March 1, 1912; *The Frederick Post* March 6, 1914)

Advertisements, period letterhead, and other sources suggest that the company may have discontinued all but the Vienna Cabinet (“Standard”) and Tivoli-Hofbrau (“Export”) brands and the seasonal bock beer by 1902.²² This certainly would have streamlined production and made distribution much less complicated. But if so, it was short-lived. (Isaacs 1902:115)

As prohibitionist pressures mounted prior to the death of Robert Portner, the company unveiled a “malt beverage” that was equivalent to today’s low- or no-alcohol beers. It was possibly introduced as early as the late 1890s, and the brewers tinkered with it until, by 1908, two similar products were marketed, as “Amberine” of one and a half percent alcohol content, and “Small Brew,”²³ a “non-intoxicating... mild fermented and carbonated infusion of Malt and Hops containing less than two percent of Alcohol.” This was a direct response to Virginia’s new laws, and the products were especially intended for sale in the “dry” counties of the state and its neighbors. Perhaps about as tasty as they sound, these new products demonstrate how American sensibilities had been shaped by the temperance movement and by marketing and technology. By 1909, a third “imitation” beer, “Yellow Ade,” was available at least in North Carolina. Tested at 1.75 percent alcohol, its name was evocative of summer fruit drinks. (Commissioner of Patents 1909; North Carolina Department of Agriculture, January 1908)

Portner’s beers of the 1890s may have differed significantly from his earlier products, and not just for varietal reasons. As mentioned earlier, the ingredients were now purchased from far-

²¹ It was not until after Prohibition that American brewers agreed on a mid-March release date. (Daniels 1996:179)

²² The letterhead of one of Portner’s agents makes reference only to the two brands, as does the Wilmington business directory of 1902. The date roughly coincides with the conversion of the nearby old cotton factory to serve as the brewery’s bottling house, and perhaps indicates a temporary lack of bottling capacity.

²³ During the eighteenth century, “small *beer*” was the term for a lighter, lower-alcohol brew made from later mashes (see Chapter 2). It was considered suitable for women’s or even children’s consumption.

flung locales, even overseas. And when the company’s new brewhouse was completed in 1894, it included storage and a “conversion tub” for rice. By the end of the nineteenth century, rice and corn grits had become typical ingredients or adjuncts in American beer—cheaper sources of quickly fermentable starches to supplement that from the barley malt. According to some industry insiders, “brewers’ rice contributes to the quality of the beer’s foam, its brilliance and its

Robert Portner Brewing Company brands and varieties chronology

- 1862-1865** Portner & Company produces more than 1,700 barrels of lager beer, and perhaps ale, during the Civil War.
- 1866** Robert Portner brewery is known to have begun producing ale and continued to do so until the early 1870s. By 1869-1870, the firm offered an ale, a cream ale, and a porter. Carl Wolters probably develops the lager that came to be known as “Vienna Cabinet” by 1873.
- 1869** The new Robert Portner (“Vienna”) Brewery opens.
- 1877** The Tivoli trademark is first used, and the plant became known as the Tivoli Brewery. The “Tivoli Cabinet” brand is probably developed by brewmaster Paul Muhlhauser at this time.
- 1887** The Robert Portner Brewing Company introduces a bock beer, developed by brewmaster Paul Muhlhauser. The company continued to produce a bock until at least 1914, with the possible exceptions of 1894-1895 and 1900-1902.
- 1890** The Washington depot sold “Culmbacher” dark beer at the beginning of the year.
- 1891** The brewery introduces “Virginia Extra Pale Export Lager,” presumably created by Joseph Schneider, and begins selling mineral and carbonated waters under the “Hygeia” brand.
- 1892** “Tivoli Royal” introduced, possibly a short-lived re-branding of Tivoli Cabinet.
- 1894** “Tivoli-Hofbrau,” the company’s premium “export” lager replaces “Virginia Extra Pale Export Lager,” and “Tivoli-Select” is likely introduced following completion of the new brewhouse. The varieties were presumably created by brewmaster John Leicht. The original 1877 Tivoli diamond logo was modified at this time for print advertisements.
- 1896** A bock is re-introduced or reformulated by John Leicht and renamed “Bavarian Tivoli-Extra (Dark)” in 1897.

1898	The brewery introduces its “Red Cross” brand malt extract. The bock is renamed “Portner’s Old German Bock Beer.”
1899	The company begins producing soda pop by this time and ultimately offered at least seven varieties from its depots.
1902	The number of beer brands may have been reduced to only two at this time, “Tivoli-Hofbrau” and “Vienna Cabinet.”
1906	The company registers a trademark for an “Army and Navy Export Beer,” a belated patriotic response to victory in the Spanish-American War.
1908	Low-alcohol “Small Brew” and “Amberine Malt Beverage” are developed by brewmaster Peter von de Westelaken by this time. During the previous decade, the company’s low- and non-alcoholic products had been consolidated under the “Hygeia” label of a probably unincorporated “Portner Malt Extract Company,” likely to avoid antagonizing prohibitionists. The company presumably sold such beverages until 1916, with an additional “Yellow Ade” by 1909, and the renaming of one type “No Tax” temporarily in 1913 to tweak the Wilmington, North Carolina authorities.

stability.” More expensive than the plentiful corn grits, however, rice was employed because it “contains much less oil than grits and that little oil is so bland as to make rancidity no problem.”

The company’s use of rice made easily attainable the pale, clear and light lagers with which we are familiar today, but represented a break with a German tradition based on centuries-old custom and purity laws. By 1894 the plant was also equipped with carbonating apparatus capable of adding carbonic acid directly into beer to supplement or replace that naturally generated by fermentation, shortening the aging process and removing the need for kräusening.²⁴ Widely adopted before Prohibition, such changes were clear breaks with tradition and put American brewers on a path to creating the visually pleasing, but often bland or weak products associated with the largest post-Prohibition firms. Some consumers resisted the new products, and for these, Portner’s “pure malt” bock and old Vienna Cabinet were still available. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 18, 1894; Miller 1987:364; Krebs and Orthwein 1953:30)

The Portner company also diversified into mineral and soda waters in 1891 and, by 1899, produced various flavored soda pops, including orange, strawberry, vanilla, sarsaparilla, lemon, extra sour lemon, and ginger ale. The water was typically packaged in small bottles with Hutchinson-type closures and embossed with a new “Hygeia” brand. In 1898 the firm also began producing its “Red Cross” malt extract, essentially a thick, unfermented or low-alcohol beer syrup marketed for

²⁴ The source for this information is an 1894 advertisement for Hugo Reisinger’s carbonating apparatus taken from an unnamed trade periodical. It included a testimonial from John Leicht.

medicinal purposes.²⁵ Compared with the narcotic- and alcohol-laden patent medicines of the time, it was probably one of the healthier, or at least harmless, products available. The low-alcohol “Small Brew” business may have spun off from this product. (*Portner Brewing Company v. Cooper*²⁶)

The price of beer—Portner’s, and beer in general—dropped during the third quarter of the nineteenth century because of competition, economies of scale, and technologically driven productivity increases. Selling for \$12 to \$16 a barrel during the Civil War, Portner’s products went for \$10 a barrel during the late 1860s; perhaps \$12 again during the mid 1870s; \$8 and \$10 by 1881; and just under \$10 on average in 1885-1886. The gross profit for the saloonkeeper was still substantial; in 1880, New York bar owners were making as much as \$20 in gross profit per barrel. It was for this reason that brewers rushed to get into the saloon business. By the early 1890s, a barrel of Robert Portner Brewing Company beer cost only about \$7.50, and the brewery slashed prices by 40 cents in 1898, “causing quite a commotion in the... trade.” A dozen bottles could be had for 75 cents in 1879 and only 50 cents by 1895. By 1914, a barrel’s worth, bottled, cost the tavernkeeper or consumer only \$7.50. Competition was even fiercer elsewhere. In the mid 1890s, price slashing and a depression had driven Chicago wholesale prices down to \$3 to \$6 per barrel. (*Washington Post* April 2, 1898; *Alexandria Gazette* July 9, 1879 and January 8, 1881; Switzer 1886:109; Portner n.d.:8; United States Census 1870b; Heurich n.d.:51; Duis 1983:20,26,38; Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections)

Competition’s downward pressure on prices ultimately encouraged Washington’s five large brewers to enter into a combination to fix prices to protect their profits. In early 1903, they formed the Brewers’ Association—a sort of union of their own—to divide most of the 270,000- to 290,000-barrel market among themselves and keep sales in the \$6 to \$8 range, depending on the variety. They colluded not only among themselves. The brewers’, firemen’s and teamsters’ unions tacitly approved the price-fixing in the interest of keeping wages high and avoiding lay-offs. After only a year, Christian Heurich defected from the illegal trust, inconsolable about having lost what he claimed was 10,000 barrels in sales to the Arlington Brewing Company. To make up his lost market share, he lowered his price for “light” beer from \$6 to \$4 and, in an effort to force him to change his mind, the Brotherhood of Fireman employees at his plant walked out. The resulting publicity and an adverse antitrust decision in the District of Columbia Court of Appeals damaged the reputations of all involved: the Heurich, Abner-Drury, Arlington, National Capital, and Washington brewing companies *and* the unions. So the strike was called off despite Heurich

²⁵ The Robert Portner Brewing Company was only one of many businesses that produced malt extract. Anheuser-Busch, for instance, began producing its “Malt-Nutrine” in 1895. According to a history of that firm, malt extract was a Bohemian folk remedy that had been administered to Austrian Empress Maria Theresa after the birth of Marie Antoinette. “It was virtually a standard remedy in childbirth and during breast feeding. Pleased by the results, doctors began prescribing it for convalescents, for sickly children, for the anemic and for the aged.” It was touted “for strength, for appetite stimulation and for an increase in mother’s milk.” (Krebs and Orthwein 1953:434-436) Hop bitters were another patent medicine, and entrepreneurs even found other uses for brewers’ yeast. The yeast-based English breakfast spread “Marmite,” for instance, was developed in the brewing center of Burton-on-Trent in 1902, and the yeast is still sold in health food stores.

²⁶ 120 Ga. 20; 47 S.E. 631; 1904 Ga. Lexis 433 and 113 Ga. 1; 38 S.E. 347; 1901 Ga. Lexis 135 and 112 Ga. 894; 38 S.E. 91; 1901 Ga. Lexis 121. Cooper, a collector for the company’s Augusta, Georgia branch, was delivering beer and soda when involved in a wagon accident in 1899.

cashiering his men. And so prices continued to drop, below the cost of production, according to National Capital's Albert Carry, and this slashing would only have further harmed the bottom line of the Portner brewery across the river. (*Washington Post* April 2, 1898, July 22, 1904 and July 24, 1904; *Leonard v. Abner-Drury Brewing Co.*²⁷; Finch and Lott 1912:1-18)

Oh yeah. Robert Portner Brewing Company. Beer was cheap. You know... you could go to a barroom with a tin bucket... and it wasn't but five cents a quart [...maybe, we could get ten cents worth of beer in a bucket]. That's all it was. Good beer, the best beer! [You could get ten cents worth of beer and make two of you drunk!] (Johnson 1983)

Yes, even during the early twentieth century Portner's beer could be "taken out" in a small tin bucket, known as a "growler." Five cents seemed to be a magic number in marketing. It was a standard price for a glass of beer in saloons everywhere, but the size of the glass could grow or shrink in accordance with the wholesale cost of beer—if the barkeeper could afford new glassware. In the Washington area, *circa* 1880, "Beer held a price—a small glass for a nickel and what we called a „stove pipe,' a long, straight, ugly glass container [presumably a pint], for a dime..." Purchased by the case direct from area breweries, a bottle cost just over a nickel after the turn of the century. Brewers including Portner distributed promotional nickel tokens redeemable for a glass of their own beer at a tavern. (Heurich, n.d.:73; *Washington Post* February 1, 1900 and March 2, 1952)

Most beer was still delivered to saloons in kegs, because it was the cheapest package and produced the freshest taste. "When the consumption of beer is sufficiently rapid, it is best drawn from the keg," stated one of the earliest bartender's guides. "When, however, the keg has to stand in use for some time before it becomes empty, a considerable amount of [carbon dioxide] gas will escape every time the vent is opened, and the beer will soon become „flat, stale and unprofitable' at least for the consumer." For this reason, saloons generally purchased beer not in whole barrels, but in quarter- and eighth-barrel kegs. The management of beer in a saloon, as in brewery cellars, was an art. Bartenders were assisted by advances in counter-pressure beer pumps. (Thomas 1887:15,17-18; Heurich n.d:51)

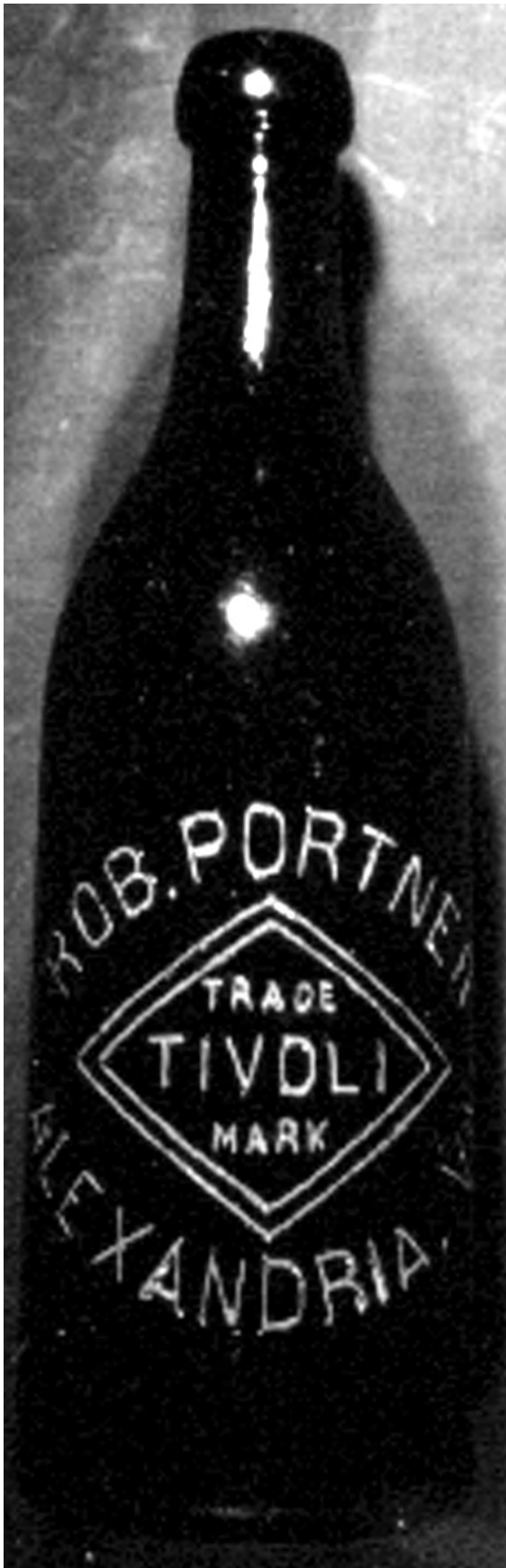
A decrease in the cost of manufacturing glass bottles changed consumption habits significantly. Through glass, the imbiber could actually see the beverage he was to drink—impossible with oaken casks or stoneware bottles. By the end of the nineteenth century, clarity and lack of sediment in their products became objectives of nearly all American brewers. Paleness and a generous foamy "head" also became much sought-after characteristics for aesthetic reasons more than gustatory ones. In addition, although it had been pasteurized—that is, heated and cooled and therefore was not as fresh—bottled beer did not carry the added taste of the pitch used by the brewery coopers to make barrels watertight. By 1886, after bottling for perhaps only a decade, substantially more than one third of the Portner company's product was already shipped in bottles. (Switzler 1886:109)

²⁷ 25 App. D.C. 161.

Bottled beer was both a boon and a curse to the brewer. The brewery's name identified each unit, promoting product recognition and, hopefully, brand loyalty, while also facilitating their return for reuse. The bottles could also be taken home, effectively expanding consumption beyond the confines of the pub. Brewers might entice a saloonkeeper who sold a competitor's product to try out theirs just by mixing a few bottles into his stock. This practice cut two ways, because their competitors were doing the same thing. Bartenders could thus easily switch from or supplement the products of their primary suppliers without a large investment up front. Sherds from Henry Englehardt's late nineteenth-century Alexandria brewery/saloon site suggest that this may have been a common practice, as a variety of brands, in small numbers, have been uncovered, including Portner's from Alexandria; Washington's Schnell's, Bridwell's "Tonic Beer," and the Washington Brewery Company's "Champagne Lager"; and some Baltimore beers.



The Robert Portner Brewing Company's "temperance beverages." Left: Red Cross malt extract, a non-alcoholic medicinal preparation. Photo courtesy of Don J. Williamson. Center: A Hutchinson-type bottle which held the brewery's "Hygeia" mineral water. Upper right: A crown closure or "bottle cap" for one of the company's sodas. Lower right: The embossed "slug plate" on an "Amberine Malt Beverage" bottle.



Considering variations in size, color, labeling, lip finishes, closures, and manufacturers, there were easily 100 types of Portner bottles. They can be dated relatively easily; those that read "R. PORTNER" or "ROB. PORTNER" predate the firm's 1883 incorporation, but are unlikely to be older than the establishment of the brewery's first depots in 1875-1876. A bottle with the "TIVOLI" trademark postdates 1877. The company began using the bottle cap in 1894-1895 but may not have switched to it entirely until 1901-1903, by which time the brewery's depots and bottling operations were modernized and there was a large enough supply of the new crown-finish bottles from Alexandria manufacturers. Most of the company's extant bottles are crown finish and date to the twentieth century, as do dateable, extant "Portner" bottle openers. The "HYGEIA" mineral water bottles appear to date to the 1890s, suggesting that the company may have discontinued such sales shortly after the turn of the century.

The rarest of the Portner "blob top" bottles are those of green color; those which predate incorporation; and those embossed with the names of the other cities to which the brewery distributed its product. The scarcest of the crown finish bottles are those of a yellow color and a few with a manufacturing error, embossed with "ALEXANDRIA, PA." (In order to avoid confusion, the brewery may have sold these close to home.) Portner bottles of the 1880s and 1890s were manufactured by Dean Foster & Co. (Boston), Karl Hutter (New York), the D.O. Cunningham Glass Co. (Pittsburgh) and the Ihmsen Glass Company (Pittsburgh). Later ones were produced by "C.G. Co." (a Midwestern or Southern firm), Edward H. Everett (Newark, Ohio), and, most important, the Virginia Glass Company and Old Dominion Glass Company of Alexandria.

It

It is certainly possible, however, that at least some of these bottles were simply reused, at a significant cost to the brewers who sold them. (Duis 1983:24-25; Walker, Dennée and Crane 1996)

Glass bottles were still relatively expensive and hard to come by at the beginning of Portner's foray into other markets. In 1887, despite the tariff duties, the company ordered 36 tons of bottles from Dresden, Germany. Domestic ones were even purchased from medical glassware manufacturers. This scarcity and consequent cost forced American breweries to claim permanent ownership of their bottles. They were to be returned when empty, usually for a rebate to the consumer, but were instead frequently kept or discarded, to the detriment of the brewer's balance sheet. Many pre-Prohibition bottles are thus embossed with the message "THIS BOTTLE NOT TO BE SOLD" or some variation of the warning, making clear that they remained the property of the brewer. Under pressure from bottlers, some jurisdictions went so far as to punish the collection or reuse of others' bottles. In 1905 the Frederick County, Maryland sheriff arrested two men for hoarding a "car load" of bottles belonging to Portner, the Grasser-Brand Brewing Company of Toledo, and various Baltimore breweries for the purpose of packaging their own root beer.²⁸ A similar case was lodged, but quickly dismissed, in Baltimore against Louis Franc, for the unauthorized refilling of 27 "Robt. Portner" bottles in 1878.²⁹ It was a petty crime, but one that added up. The very cost of manufacture would have made bottling otherwise prohibitive for the light-fingered soda entrepreneurs. In this way and many others, a lot of Portner bottles never found their way back home. They have also been found in archaeological contexts from Pennsylvania to Australia. But Robert Portner Brewing Company bottles manufactured by other glass factories have been found at the sites of Alexandria's Virginia Glass Company and Old Dominion Glass Company, presumably intended to be recycled for the production of new glass. (*The News* July 1, 1905; *Alexandria Gazette* August 28, 1878; *Critic-Record* August 27, 1878 and August 4, 1887; Alexandria Archaeology collection)

Even at \$10 a barrel, a saloonkeeper could gross about 100 percent profit on beer, dispensing it in eight-ounce glasses for five cents each and assuming some loss for spillage, dregs, etc. Even as wholesale prices were dropping as low as about \$7.50 in Alexandria, the saloonkeepers did not reap windfall profits. The lower wholesale prices were reflected at the retail level, and the bar owners' financial obligations to the breweries were increasing. Federal, state and local taxes too, were always on the increase, encouraged by the growing anti-alcohol sentiment. Shortly before nationwide Prohibition, Congress raised excise taxes on bottled beer to constitute fifteen percent of the purchase price.³⁰ (Internal Revenue Service 1919)

Saloonkeepers were also driven to other expenditures. Postwar temperance legislation in many localities required saloons to serve food, a practice considered to make the establishments less

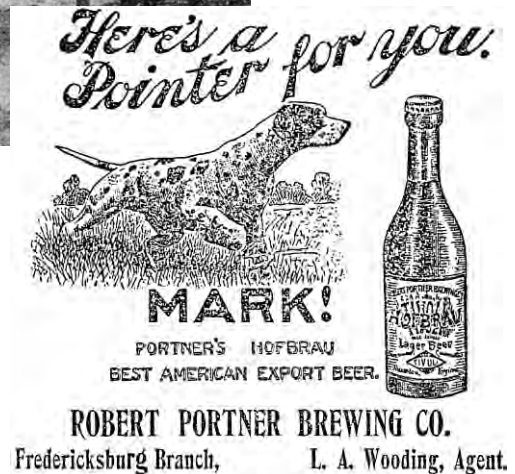
²⁸ This was the first instance of enforcement of a new Bottlers' Act that had been pressed by the Maryland Bottlers' Protective Association. The Association was also responsible for swearing out the arrest warrant. Defendants faced a term of imprisonment for ten days to one year, or a fine of for each bottle found. (*The News* July 1, 1905)

²⁹ Portner and John Guethler both accused a fellow Washington brewer, Jacob Roth of stealing and rebranding some of their oak kegs in 1885. (*Critic-Record* January 13, 1885)

³⁰ This was in addition to the taxes levied on ingredients and taxes per barrel produced paid by the brewers and the federal and local licenses required of brewers and saloonkeepers.



Nineteenth-century advertising took many forms. Top: A Portner wagon as float in Alexandria's 1899 sesquicentennial parade. From Historic Alexandria Past and Present (1907). Right: Fredericksburg, Virginia advertisement, reflecting the Portners' and their rural customers' interest in hunting. Courtesy of the Manassas Museum.



pernicious. Knowing well that alcohol paid the bills, bar owners commonly provided a “free” lunch to lure customers to imbibe freely. The free lunch became common in Alexandria by the early 1870s. (Duis 1983:52-53; *Alexandria Gazette* May 1, 1872) One first-hand observer of big-city saloons offered one of the best accounts of this custom.

It is true that in any of the larger and more popular and prosperous drinking resorts with cathedral architecture and all the mixers wearing lodge emblems, the long table across from the bar showed a tempting variety of good things to eat.... Other bars not so generous would offer free bowls of soup every noon. Many would have free-lunch specialties for every day in the week, as, for instance: Monday, hot frankfurters; Tuesday, roast pork; Wednesday, roast mutton; Thursday, Irish stew; Friday, baked fish and dressing; Saturday, roast beef and mashed potatoes; Sunday, dry crackers.... [Here was a sign that you saw behind many a bar: ‚A fried oyster, a clam or a hard-boiled egg with every drink.’]

Free lunch became an institution because of the well-known zoological fact that certain kinds of food promote thirst and any malt fluid with a sharp tang to it encourages hunger.... The net result was a positive demonstration of the fact that the text-book on physiology, which said that the total capacity of the human stomach

was three pints, was simply groping in the dark. It was offering an obsolete theory instead of recognizing plain facts.

As a matter of cold truth, the average free lunch was... a stingy set-out of a few edibles which were known to give customers an immediate desire for something to drink [including pretzels and the cheap salty relative of the sardine known as the sardel]. Rye bread was always present.... [Y]ou might have found a bowl of baked beans... The thin slices of limber yellow cheese were flanked by a smeary pot of brown mustard with a paddle in it. The common “boloney,” which used to sell by the yard instead of the pound, was over-seasoned with pepper, for a definite reason. There might be spring onions and radishes but only when they were plentiful and cheap. Fortunately there was no closed season for dill pickles. In a German place you might find... blood sausage... or the hard and leathery... summer sausage.... The regulars who went around shopping sometimes discovered pickled pig’s feet, but they were more apt to find sauer kraut....

Gentle methods were not employed in dealing with the drop-ins who moved direct to the food-trough instead of proceeding to the bar and giving the house some trade. Many of the larger places employed special “bouncers”... The Argus-eyed server of drinks could splash out orders to eight customers simultaneously and, at the same time, check up on six free-lunchers and spot a “ringer” with the sureness of a bird-dog flushing a quail.... The bar-tender always acted promptly but he was at a great disadvantage. By the time he had secured the bung starter [a large wooden mallet used to open the beer kegs] and run all the way to the end of the bar and turned the corner, the hobo had made a flying getaway through the swinging doors and was headed toward the setting sun. (Ade 1931:34-47)

For the saloonkeeper, squeezed by both suppliers and customers, there was no “free lunch.”

Robert Portner Brewing Company bottling chronology

- | | |
|------------------|---|
| 1875 | The lightning stopper is patented. Such closures and their porcelain variant, the Hutter stopper, are used by the Portner brewery throughout the 1880s and 1890s. |
| 1875-1883 | The first Portner brewery depots open, and the first identifiable bottles associated with the brewery date to this period. The earliest bottles are probably corked. The brewery’s first bottling house is constructed after 1877 and before 1885, but bottles are in use by 1876-1877. This is also the period during which Portner acquires his first pasteurizing equipment. |
| 1877 | The Tivoli diamond trademark is first used (and registered in 1878). |

1879	The Hutchinson stopper is patented. Portner uses bottles with Hutchinson closures for beer and mineral water during the 1880s and early 1890s.
1883	The Robert Portner Brewing Company is incorporated, and the new firm name soon begins appearing on bottles.
1885-1891	An addition to the bottling house is constructed sometime during this period.
1892	The crown closure (bottle cap) is patented. A new bottling house is constructed.
1893	The Hutter porcelain stopper patented. The Portner brewery purchases bottles from Karl Hutter during the 1880s and 1890s and begins using Hutter-type closures soon after this date. The Virginia Glass Company is established in Alexandria.
1894	The brewery begins using crown closures for bottling its “Tivoli-Hofbrau,” coinciding with its first use of paper labels. Lightning and Hutter porcelain stoppers remain in use as well for several years.
1896	The Robert Portner Brewing Company purchases \$20,000 worth of bottles from the Virginia Glass Company of Alexandria.
1901	The Old Dominion Glass Company is founded in Alexandria. The company produces mainly beer and whisky bottles until Virginia’s Prohibition.
1903-1904	The Mount Vernon Cotton Factory is retrofitted as a brewery bottling house for up to 20,000,000 bottles a year. All brewery bottles in Alexandria would now have crown closures.
1908	Most of the brewery’s remote depots had been closed by this date, but the Hagerstown, Maryland branch is established. Most bottling operations are consolidated at the Alexandria plant.
1912-1913	A new Alexandria bottling house is constructed. This may have been the point at which the brewery or one or more of its depots commences bottling for other beverage makers in addition to its own beer.
1913-1914	The brewery purchases \$123,125.62 worth of bottles in one year.

Chapter 12

Diversification

Brewers who made money almost always diversified into ownership of other real property or other business ventures and assumed community leadership positions as mayors, fire department captains, or lodge officers.

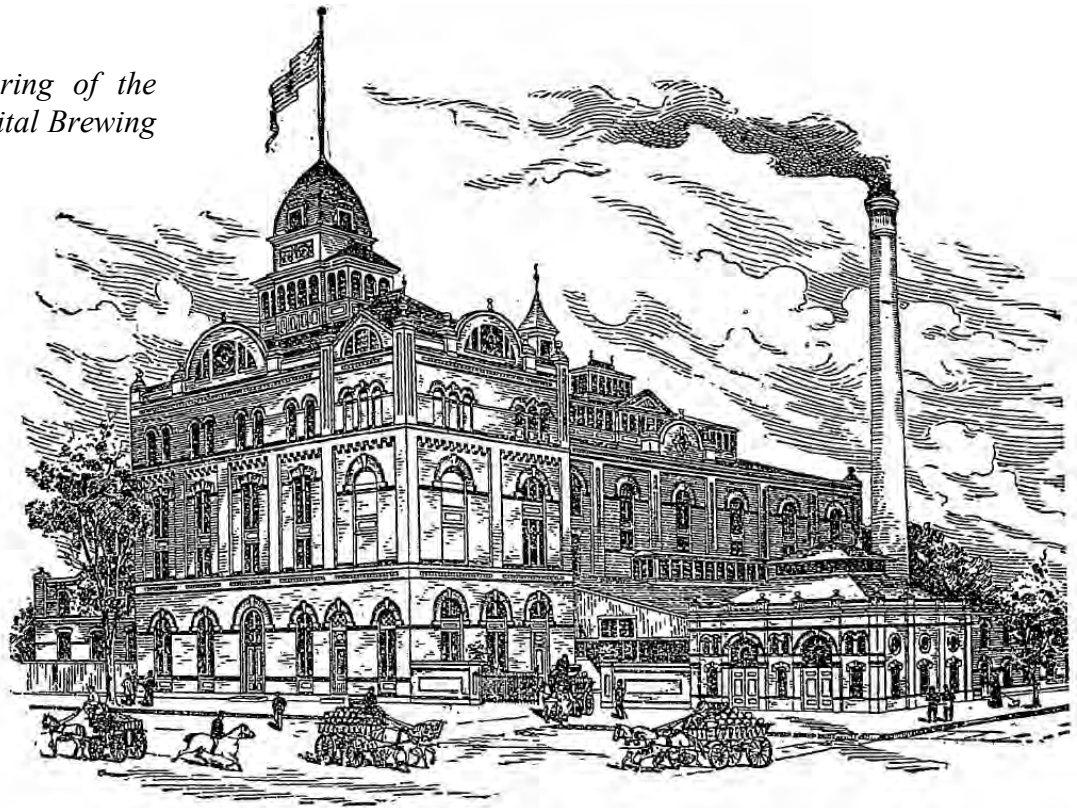
Herman Ronnenburg, Beer and Brewing in the Inland Northwest, 1850 to 1950

Robert Portner was perhaps typical of the wealthy industrialist of the Gilded Age in that he maintained a city home and a country estate, collected art, was known for philanthropy, and diversified his business interests beyond a single enterprise. As Herman Ronnenburg points out, successful brewers often became community and political leaders. Portner served on Alexandria's city council and as the president of the United States Brewers Association. He joined the York Rite Masons in 1869 and rose to the highest rank of 33rd degree. (Portner n.d.:5; Patent Office Society 195:75; Tyler 1909:350)

Not everything Portner touched turned to gold. Consider his early business failures and his disappointment with his refrigeration patents. Nonetheless, most of these events were determined by external factors, including the unreliability of family, friends, customers and competitors. But Portner remained unbowed, turning defeat into victory. The pattern of his brewing career suggests the kind of growth and vertical integration that characterized much of big business during the late nineteenth century, as well as horizontal integration through the acquisition of additional production facilities. The Alexandria brewery and the National Capital Brewing Company controlled their entire brewing processes, packaging, and some of the transportation and distribution of their products. There is no evidence yet that Portner owned sources of his raw materials or any interest in barley malting facilities. Some of his ventures, such as the National Capital Brewing Company, malt extract production, soda manufacture, general bottling, ice sales, and the manufacture of refrigerating equipment, were direct outgrowths of the Alexandria brewing business.

Robert Portner had an eye for seeing profit elsewhere. He entered businesses that initially seem unrelated but upon which he depended, including railroads, real estate, banking and finance. Once he had studied the workings of a particular industry, the student became a master. The sixteen-year-old scholar turned prospective pie baker who disembarked at New York in 1853 learned the ins and outs of brewing within fifteen years and was on a path to become one of the South's greatest industrialists. Experienced with land and construction transactions by the late 1860s, he went on to make a second fortune in real estate speculation, construction and property management. Thus accustomed to leveraging capital, he also delved into banking. Depending on rail to transport his products, he naturally gravitated toward partial ownership of rail lines, and even of the hotels that served rail passengers. Initially dependent on Northern ice, he revitalized a dying Alexandria shipyard to repair the vessels that brought it, before tinkering with machines that replaced it. And he turned a rural brownstone quarry into a significant supplier of building materials for his Washington-area projects. Taking what was at hand, he made it grander and more profitable.

An ad rendering of the National Capital Brewing Company.



After his chain of small businesses led to the establishment of his Alexandria brewery, Portner's first sideline enterprise was part ownership of the German Co-operative Building Association. Already the most prominent German resident of Alexandria, Portner was elected president of the new organization in 1868. The Association was chartered to buy land, construct dwellings upon it, and then to sell the properties. Stockholding and dues-paying members were entitled to purchase a home from the Association, paying back the debt at low interest. When there were sufficient cash reserves, the Association also made standard loans. The organization was a natural outgrowth of the German-American community's self-help efforts; it gave families of limited resources the means to buy a home.¹ But the Association was principally a moneymaking operation. The stockholders subscribed to shares at \$200 each, initially totaling \$200,000 in capital. An 1889 charter amendment permitted an increase in capitalization to \$1,000,000. Although there were many building associations in Alexandria, this was perhaps only the second established, likely the most successful, and was emulated with varying success. (*Alexandria Gazette* January 18, 1868 and February 21, 1868; Alexandria Circuit Court Deed Book Y-3:329; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3; Potomac Press 1908:376)

In 1874 Portner organized the German Banking Company, "The Little Bank Around the Corner," another experiment in German self-help. "There I also became the president; soon the other banks,

¹ Buyers, borrowers, and stockholders were not exclusively German. In fact, land records suggest that house buyers were more often of non-German ancestry and increasingly so as the Association persisted into the twentieth century. Instead of a single entity, it was actually a series of successive stock subscriptions: German Co-operative Building Association No. 1, No. 2, etc. Thus was Robert Portner was later credited for having founded three such building and loan organizations. (Potomac Press 1908:376)

which had at first smiled at the idea, realized that we would be successful.... The small businessman who had so far been unable to get money from the big banks could get it from us.” In 1881 Portner had too many other responsibilities and resigned as president of both the building association and the bank. He may have foreseen troubles for the latter institution because of the misconduct of its staff. Cashier G.H. Reid, who began drinking heavily even before Portner’s departure, neglected his duties and even embezzled sums of money. Reid was ultimately fired by the new president, Isaac Eichberg, but the bank was forced to close, able to compensate its stockholders for only 70 percent of their investments.² (Portner n.d.:16; *Alexandria Gazette* June 18, 1878, *Washington Post* April 8, 1881 and April 13, 1881)



A German Banking Company check. The bank was located in the former office of the Provost Marshal who arrested Robert Portner during the Civil War.

At about the same time, Portner broadened his interests into the more exotic field of shipping, shipbuilding and repair. He and a number of investors predicted a postwar revival of shipping on the Potomac. Indeed, there was a demand for the repair of the freight longboats that plied the river and of the schooners that carried Cumberland, Maryland coal to all points of the compass. Portner may have smelled profit particularly in refitting the schooners that still supplied his brewery with ice from Maine’s Kennebec River and returned North with coal. “For many years... Alexandria yards had furnished builders in Maine with framing timbers cut to size,” a fact that attracted a combination of Mainers and local investors to provide Portner with the remainder of the capital necessary to purchase a site and fit it out.³ The “Alexandria Marine Railway and Shipbuilding Company” facility was constructed at the south end of town, near the foot of Franklin Street, taking in a portion of the old Hunter shipyard.⁴ Initial investment probably totaled about \$50,000. (*Alexandria Gazette* March 18, 1874; Tilp 1978:83-84; Shomette 1985:256,257)

² The bank was also indirectly involved in a celebrated theft from the U.S. Treasury. Billy Ottman, receiver of the stolen bank notes, conspicuously deposited 29 \$500 notes at the little bank. (*Alexandria Gazette* August 19, 1879)

³ Along the Potomac below Alexandria, quality oak construction timber was available. Ship’s knees were still brought from Maine. But the shipbuilding industry was retarded by relatively high labor costs in the mid Atlantic. (*Alexandria Gazette* September 2, 1879; *Washington Post* June 21, 1891)

⁴ A marine railway is an inclined track with an engine for hauling vessels from the water for the purpose of repair. It is an alternative to a dry dock for medium-size craft.

Their prime concern was the maintenance and repair of the many large coal, stone, fertilizer and ice schooners working out of Alexandria and Georgetown. Though shipbuilding was only a secondary function, by the end of the first year they had three railways filled, and sailmaker J.W. Padgett was working seven days a week.... Repair and fitting-out work occupied the three railways continuously. (Tilp 1978:84)

In January 1875, the *Alexandria Gazette* reported that:

the steamer *Keyport* is on the new ways, and the steamer *Virginia* on old ones; a new steam tug is being built for Capt. Matt Kersey; the tug *Susie Moleynaux* is being rebuilt, and the tug *Gov. Curtin* is being repaired and having a new pilot house put on her. Work upon these steamers is in active progress, large numbers of caulkers and carpenters finding employment there, and, in addition, numerous machinists, who are engaged in overhauling and repairing the old, and adjusting the new machinery of the tugs and steamers mentioned. As soon as the *Keyport* is launched, the coaster *S.S. Tyler* will take her place on the ways. (*Alexandria Gazette* January 27, 1875; Engineering-Science, Inc. 1991:51)

Just as the local newspapers had once carried the shipping news, now self-conscious of the city's relative industrial decline, they daily covered ongoing work at the shipyard. Thus, it was big news when began the construction of the first large ship, a 631.51-ton, sloop-rigged, three-master, in 1875. With thousands looking on and pennants flying, she was launched October 30, 1876 and christened the *Robert Portner*, "one of the finest vessels afloat." Construction cost \$35,000. Her owners included the shipyard itself, with the schooner's namesake as primary investor, plus Edward Stabler Leadbeater, Griffith Anderson, A.H. Smith, John Perry, Joseph Broders, Benoni Wheat, George E. French and William Cogan, all of Alexandria, and a group of Taunton, Massachusetts investors that included her master, Captain T.V. Strange. As the *Portner's* home port was to be New York, on December 5, the ship made its maiden voyage to Hoboken, New Jersey with a load of coal. Then a bit more coastal trade, to New Haven, for instance, before setting sail for Livorno, Italy laden with tobacco products. (Portner n.d.:16; Engineering-Science, Inc. 1991:51; Bureau of Statistics 1877; *Alexandria Gazette* August 7, 1878, September 2, 1879 and September 21, 1880; *New York Times* September 6, 1877; German American Heritage Society of Greater Washington, D.C. 1999:11)

[F]rom there [it was on] to Rangoon [Burma, casting off April 24, 1878]. On her way back to England, she was grounded near the Hawaiian Islands. She was abandoned by her crew and sold for a trifle. The king of the islands had it repaired and used it. [The wreck] was probably the captain's fault, as a sailor who later returned told me. The captain's name was Strange, and I was told that he had taken out a high insurance to cover his share. He brought the flags which he had saved back to Alexandria and gave them to me, since I had presented them to the ship.... (Portner n.d:16)

The shipwreck is another instance in which Portner's memory—or transcribed memoirs at least—failed. The schooner with its load of rice *could* have visited Hawaii to feed the first Chinese sugar plantation workers there, but Hawaii is obviously not “on the way” from Burma to England. No, the Channel port Falmouth was the intended destination, and period sources are clear that the schooner instead ran aground in the middle of the Indian Ocean! (*Alexandria Gazette* April 29, 1878; *Washington Post* May 1, 1878; *The Sailors' Magazine and Seamen's Friend*)

In 2003, within the only shipping harbor in the tiny Cocos-Keeling Islands, a Parks Australia archaeologist discovered the keel, capstan and anchor chain of a ship consistent with the dimensions of the *Portner*. Remote as they were, the Cocos offered little to a nineteenth-century merchant but dried coconut flesh (copra) and coconut oil, but to his ship and crew they provided provisions, fresh water and temporary shelter—and for steamers, coal. The islands were ruled by the autocratic Scottish trader and sea captain John Clunies-Ross, who ran an extensive ship-breaking, repair and building facility and was essentially “king” of his domain. (McCarthy 2005a; McCarthy 2005b; Gibson-Hill 1947:183)

Completing a 2,000-mile leg of its journey and bravely weathering a “typhoon” with only a slight leak, the *Portner* anchored at Port Refuge for some days. It was then that events turned peculiar—at least if one credits the testimony of the ship's mate, Hopkins, as Robert Portner apparently did.

The captain... called the crew together and asked them if they were willing to proceed further... to which they all responded that they were, and expressed astonishment at the question as there was nothing the matter with the vessel... [except that it was anchored at] a dangerous place.... [T]he crew were surprised to receive orders from the captain to prepare to move; and still further astonished, after sailing for a short distance, by being ordered again to anchor near a most dangerous coral reef, notwithstanding... [the mate protesting] against anchoring at a place where the vessel would be broken to pieces the first good “blow.” [Around midnight, Hopkins] heard the anchor chain paying out... and arose to find that the hand spike had been removed from the windlass and the vessel upon the rocks. He succeeded in getting her clear of the reefs, and found that she was leaking badly. The men were put to work at the pumps, and after three days work the pumps “sucked,” and the men shouted, “You can't sink the Robert Portner.” The captain, then with a hand spike broke the anchor chain loose from the windlass, and allowed the vessel to drift upon the reefs where she was abandoned in good condition. The mate spoke in enthusiastic terms of the *Portner* and said there was not the slightest necessity for the loss of the vessel. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 1, 1880)

The press alternatively attributed the sinking to overloading, to the general carelessness of the crew who abandoned her, and to the treachery of her captain. If Hopkins' account of Captain Strange's behavior is true, abandonment would have been little wonder, but was it merely a yarn to cover his own dereliction? Captain Strange was said to have tried to refloat the vessel, but

sold her for a token amount to Clunies-Ross once much of the cargo was loaded onto a Dutch brig. Robert Portner believed that Strange had had a substantial insurance policy covering his own interest in the schooner. So, is it possible that the captain colluded with Clunies-Ross, or made his own calculation to wreck her and sell her and thus be paid twice? (McCarthy 2005a; McCarthy 2005b; Gibson-Hill 1947:183; *Washington Post* August 31, 1878 and November 28, 1878; *Alexandria Gazette* August 23, 1878, August 30, 1878, October 5, 1878, February 8, 1879 and July 3, 1882)

The *Portner's* call at the island occasioned another tale of misfortune, just as difficult to substantiate. “[Such] visits did not always have happy consequences... One of these boats, an American schooner the Robert Portner... became a total wreck through mishandling by her crew. The men and the ship’s rats got ashore. Clunies-Ross was able to get rid of the men, but the rats remained and now infest every island.” Later reports are skeptical on this point, but visiting the atoll the following year, English scientist H.O. Forbes observed a large number of rats whose presence he attributed to the wreck. (McCarthy 2005a; McCarthy 2005b; Gibson-Hill 1947:183; *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* January 1909)

“Though struggling in adversity,” began a toast to the Alexandria shipyard at a mid-1878 reception for Robert Portner, “her offspring has no superiors... We hope ere long to add to the number.” The workers built a bigger schooner in 1880, the 168-foot, 678-ton *James B. Ogden*, whose home port also became New York City. Shortly after its completion, Portner sold his interest in the company. The prevailing view was that it had lost money on ship construction, but it had nonetheless received buyout offers as early as 1878. The purchaser was an investment group led by coal dealer John Parke Custis Agnew, already a major local shareholder. The Alexandria Marine

The capstan (below) and copper alloy bolts protruding from the keel (right) of what is likely the schooner Robert Portner, now lying in the South Keeling lagoon, about 650 miles south of Sumatra. Photographs courtesy of the Western Australian Maritime Museum.





Above: *The Alexandria Marine Railway and Shipbuilding Corporation yard, 1880s.* Photo courtesy of the Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections. Below: A newspaper advertisement for the Potomac steam packet operated by the Pioneer Steamboat Company of which Robert Portner was co-owner and president.

Railway and Shipbuilding Company went on to construct still larger ships, including the 179-foot *Elwood Harlow* and the 176-foot *James Boyce Jr.*, under the direction of Northeastern lessees. (*Washington Post* November 28, 1878 and October 7, 1880; Bureau of Statistics 1886; Shomette 1985:259-261; Tilp 1978:84; Birmingham 2005; Portner n.d.:16; Engineering-Science, Inc. 1991:50-52; *Alexandria Gazette* June 18, 1878, November 22, 1878, July 3, 1882 and December 4, 1882)

FAMILY EXCURSIONS.

The Fine Steamer,
CHARLOTTE VANDERBILT,
 Captain Charles Entwisle, will, until further notice, make tri-weekly trips down the Potomac, leaving Seventh street wharf **MONDAYS** and **FRIDAYS**, at 6.30 o'clock p. m., returning about 10.30 o'clock p. m. Tickets 60 cents; children half price. Saturdays the steamer will go to **PINEY POINT AND POINT LOOKOUT,** leaving Seventh-street wharf at 8:30 p. m., returning Monday about 8 o'clock a. m. Tickets, \$1.50 round trip. For staterooms and berths inquire on board. The steamer can be chartered for excursions.

ROBERT PORTNER,
 President Pioneer Steamboat Company.
 ju251f

The shipyard had provided one more diversification opportunity for Robert Portner. In the spring of 1877, he purchased and overhauled the twenty-year-old, 207-foot, 586-ton, side-wheel steamboat *Charlotte Vanderbilt*, whose original home port had been New York, but which had been employed by the Quartermaster Department as a transport on the Chesapeake during the Civil War.⁵ Near the end of June, Portner personally

⁵ By the end of its career, the *Charlotte Vanderbilt* had had eleven owners, at least nine home ports, and had been a packet and passenger steamer, a troop transport and mail steamer, an excursion boat, and a freighter. Originally to be named *Eureka*, she was christened the *Charlotte Vanderbilt* before the completion of construction at Keyport, New Jersey. Off the stocks, she was 352 tons, a fast and considerably lighter boat than she would become with subsequent reconstructions. She was rebuilt in 1861 at West Point, with new wheels and an engine taken from the

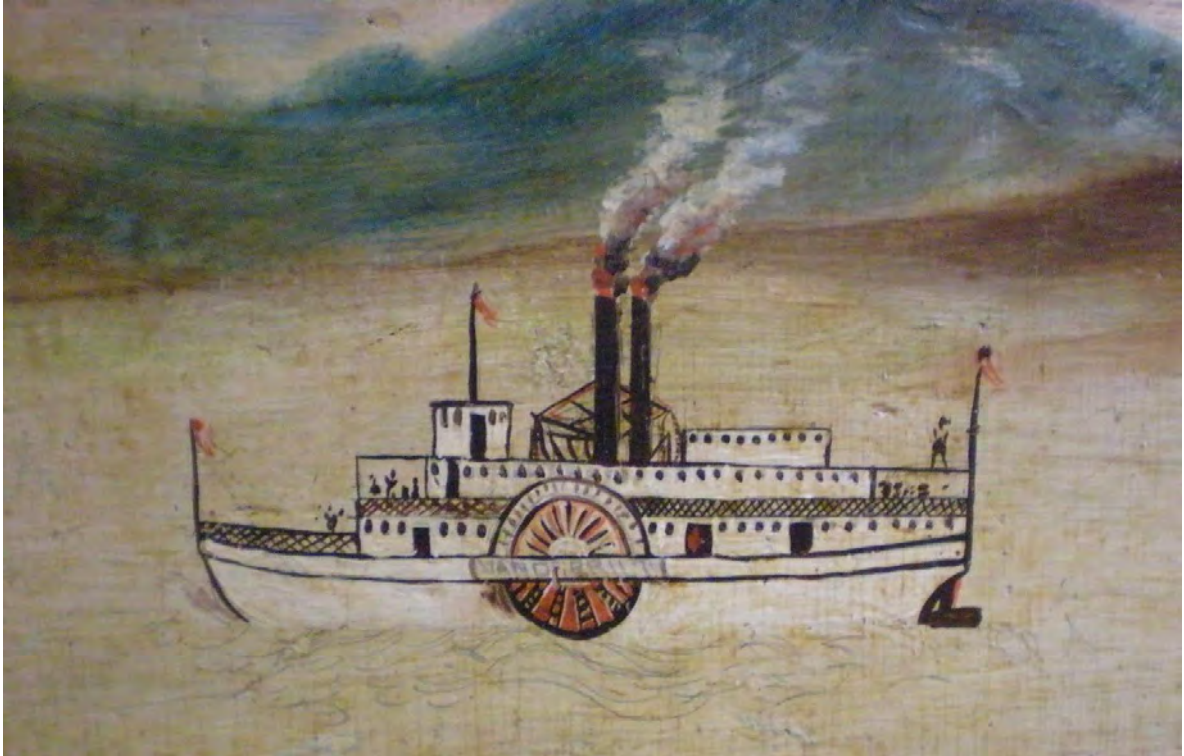
advertised evening excursions downriver Mondays and Fridays from Washington's Seventh Street Wharf and Alexandria's Hooe's Wharf. Wednesday evenings, the *Charlotte Vanderbilt* would sail exclusively from Alexandria. Weekend-long excursions to Piney Point commenced at the Seventh Street Wharf on Saturday mornings and then continued from Alexandria a half-hour later. The *Alexandria Gazette* recounted the inaugural Piney Point trip. (*Alexandria Gazette* June 21, 1877 and June 25, 1877; *Critic-Record* June 26, 1877; Lytle et al. 1975:34; Heyl Collection)

The steamer arrived promptly at nine o'clock and started off on her journey to the inspiring strains of music from the Alexandria Band. Although there was a large crowd on board and state rooms could not be provided, yet the polite and accommodating officers labored indefatigably to provide for the comfort of their guests and all were provided for. The trip down the river was made in quick time and after steaming abreast of Point Lookout, the unfinished condition of the wharf there preventing a landing, she returned to Piney Pint, where the day was spent in boating, fishing, bathing, &c. The Vanderbilt started on her homeward trip shortly after eight o'clock [Sunday night], arriving here about four this [Monday] morning. All who went express themselves highly pleased with the trip and their many obligations to Captain [Charles] Entwisle, Purser [John B.] Waller and the other officers of the boat for their exertions to make the time pass pleasantly. (*Alexandria Gazette* June 25, 1877)

The steamboat was also available for pleasure charters and added excursions to Marshall Hall after a successful charter there by the Relief Hook and Ladder Company, accompanied personally and musically by the Orpheus Octette Club of Washington.

The Pioneer Company faced stiff competition from other boats. Portner had lured Captain Entwisle away from the Potomac Ferry Company simultaneously with his purchase from them of the *Charlotte Vanderbilt*. He also undercut the prices charged for the established evening and weekend cruises of the *Jane Moseley*. And he found himself slashing prices again on his evening trips in mid and late July. Maintaining the comfortable accommodations while decreasing admission charges may have squeezed the bottom line too much, especially on a line with a single boat and no additional source of revenue. Portner last advertised in late July for an August 4 weekend excursion, and the Pioneer Steamboat Company dissolved shortly after that. In October, the company sold its sole vessel to a Hudson River line. (*Alexandria Gazette* June 1, 1876, June 16, 1877, June 21, 1877, July 6, 1877, July 12, 1877, July 17, 1877 and July 27, 1877; Heyl Collection)

dismantled *Robert L. Stevens*, and for about a year, she sailed as the *W.F. Russell*. But with the outbreak of the Civil War and her sale to Delaware City's Anthony Reybold, she regained her old name. Reybold made good money leasing the boat to the United States Army Quartermaster Department from June 1862 to May 1865. She ferried units to City Point during the Petersburg campaign, and carried renowned nurse Clara Barton to Bermuda Hundred at the same time. Reybold sold the *Charlotte Vanderbilt* to a Philadelphia partnership about a year after the war. In 1870, Alexandria's Potomac Steamboat Company bought her, one of perhaps a half-dozen boats the company operated in these years. She served as a passenger or excursion boat plying the Hudson and Delaware Rivers in 1880, when sold to William Donahue of Catskill, New York, who had her carrying freight on the Hudson. It was in this last capacity that she met her abrupt end. (Heyl Papers; Oates 1994:244; Brown et al. 1976:39; *Nautical Gazette* May 22, 1880; *New York Times* July 16, 1882)



This detail of a folk-art painting on panel found in a Greene County, New York tavern depicts the steamer Charlotte Vanderbilt approaching her demise. The Catskill-based boat was headed downriver for New York on a dark night in July 1882, when the huge, private steam yacht Yosemite approached at full steam. The captain of the freighter mistook the yacht's ocean-going running lights for a steamer hauling barges and misjudged its speed and course. In spite of last-second evasive actions, the Yosemite struck the Vanderbilt amidships, "cutting her in two as with a knife." The Vanderbilt sank in shallow water off the Esopus lighthouse without loss of life. Her hull was salvaged. Photograph courtesy of Paul D'Ambrosio and the Fenimore Art Museum.

With a fleet of brewery freight cars exceeding his number of ships, Robert Portner also dabbled in railroad transport. The late nineteenth century was characterized by explosive expansion in rail lines and rail shipment. Large industrial customers often received preferential pricing or rebates from the railways. Big firms also often had interlocking ownership; it was not unusual for owners of one company to sit on the boards of others with which they did business. In December 1891 Portner was elected a member of the board of directors of the Virginia Midland Railroad and the Washington, Ohio and Western. Three months later, however, he was forced to resign from the latter because it was bought out by the Richmond Terminal Railroad Company, already operator of nearly 8,000 miles of track in the South. (Interstate Commerce Commission 1897:271; Portner n.d.:25; *Washington Post* December 20, 1894)

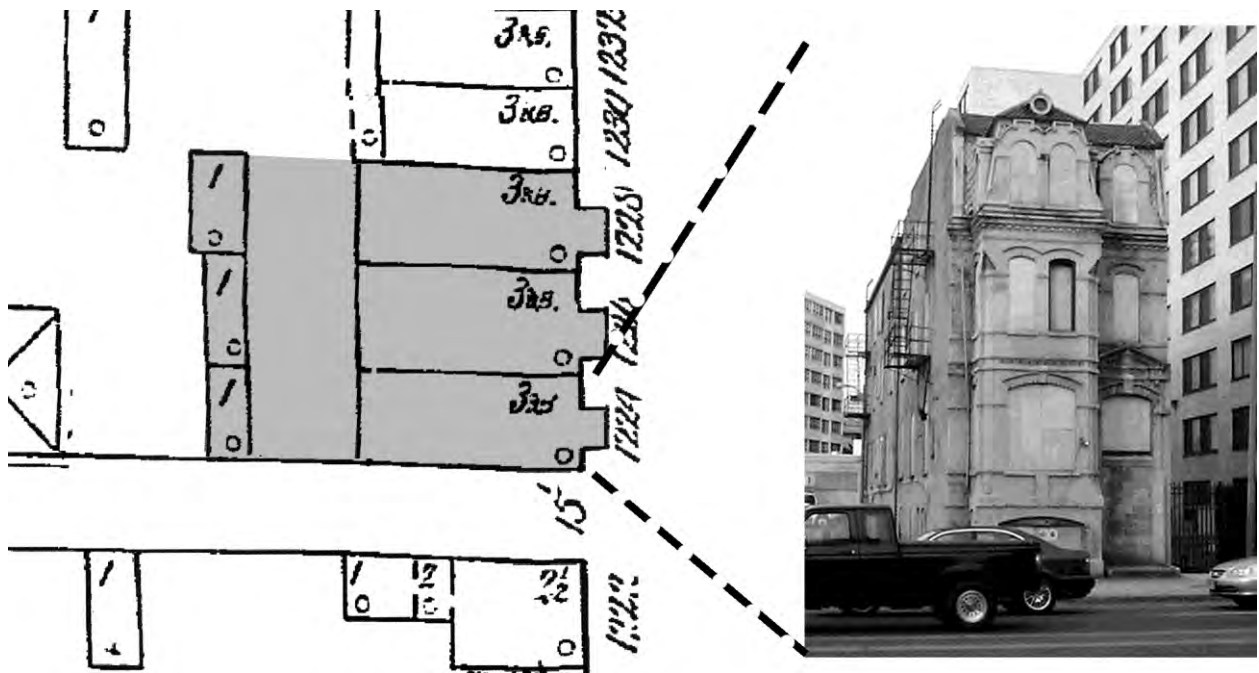
Having moved to Washington in 1883 and established commercial interests there, by the 1890s Robert Portner was among the most prominent businessmen of the nation's capital. He served on the Board of Trade, including on a special committee to consider building a convention center. His

reputation for sound and successful business practices earned him invitations to still more directorships, especially of banks. Between 1894 and his death, he was appointed to the boards of the American Security and Trust Company, the National Bank of Washington, the Riggs Fire Insurance Company and the Alexandria National Bank—all institutions with which he may have had business dealings. At some point he also joined the National Bank of Manassas in his adopted hometown. Each position meant ownership of several shares of stock and perhaps an annual stipend, not to mention other potential rewards for his firms, including those resulting from close relationships with other capitalists. (Portner n.d.:26; *Washington Post* January 22, 1895, January 15, 1896, January 20, 1903, April 21, 1904, April 27, 1905 and February 27, 1907; *Washington Times* April 26, 1905; Potomac Press 1980:376)

Farther afield from Portner's main business interests was his part ownership of the Lula Manufacturing Company at Kings Mountain, North Carolina. A cotton mill with 10,000 spindles located near Charlotte, the firm was probably looked after by his brother-in-law, Christian Valaer, who became its vice president after Portner's death. Robert Portner remained a booster of Alexandria commerce and manufacturing even after moving to Washington. He was involved in the incorporation of the Alexandria Mining, Manufacturing and Warehouse Company; sat on an exploratory committee to set up a bolt factory in town; lobbied Pennsylvania Railway officials to relocate their shops and freight yards to what would eventually become Alexandria's Potomac Yards; and served on the Ways and Means Committee to create an avenue from Washington to the Mount Vernon estate.⁶ Robert Portner even made his Manassas country estate pay, shipping grapes to Washington, making wine (see pages 218-219), and raising dairy cattle. (Potomac Press 1908:376; Tyler 1909:353; *Charlotte Daily Observer* October 22, 1907 and August 9, 1910; *Alexandria Gazette* September 15, 1890; *Washington Post* March 25, 1882, October 5, 1887, November 29, 1889, August 25, 1895 and February 17, 1901; Portner n.d.:30)

Real estate soon became the source of much of Robert Portner's wealth. In addition to his gradual purchase of nearly four blocks of Alexandria property for his brewery's use, he also speculated in residential lots, including his own homes and those controlled by the German Co-operative Building Association. As early as the late 1860s he was purchasing Alexandria property for which he had no immediate or personal use. And soon he was buying lots and building bottling branches in Washington and all over the South. Having built a Virginia Avenue depot (1875), a Vermont Avenue home (1882-1883), and acquired a potential site for a new brewery (1887), the Washington real estate game became second nature to Portner. Between 1877 and 1897 he bought about 35 properties in Washington, sold some and leased others. In 1884 alone he purchased the Woodmont Flats at 13th Street and Logan Circle, NW; three lots on 13th Street, NW; and half a block along 15th Street between U and V Streets, NW. The latter parcel was first carved into sixteen small lots accessed by "Portner Place." Most of these were developed by Jacob Jones and Theodore Friebus,

⁶ The Mount Vernon Avenue Association formed in 1887 in order to survey and support the construction of this new road. Its ostensible purpose was the encouragement of tourism, but its commercial value of a fine new avenue was not lost on Alexandria boosters, local businessmen and adjacent landowners. Although a "Mount Vernon Avenue" was laid out in northwest Alexandria in the 1890s, it was not the boulevard that had been imagined. It was not until the 1920s that the present George Washington Parkway/Mount Vernon Parkway—running north from Mount Vernon and through Alexandria at Washington Street—was created by the federal government.

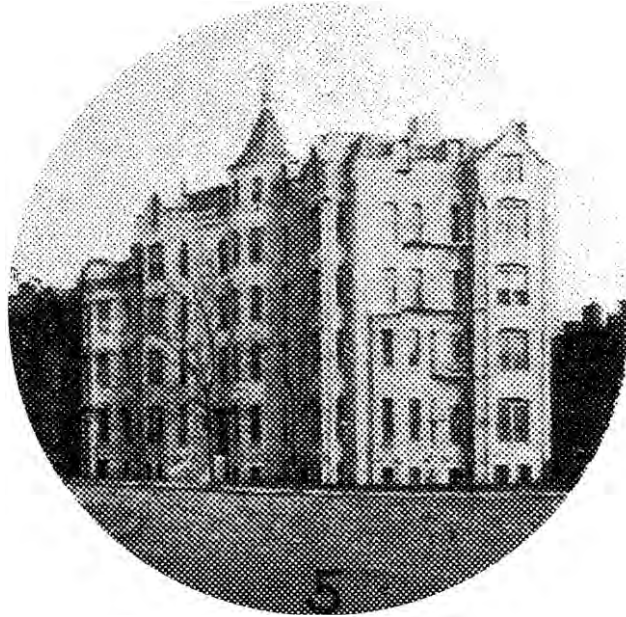


A detail of a Sanborn insurance map showing 1224-1228 13th Street, NW, designed by Clement Didden and built for Robert Portner in 1885, and a 2002 photograph of the sole house remaining of the original three. It has since been renovated.

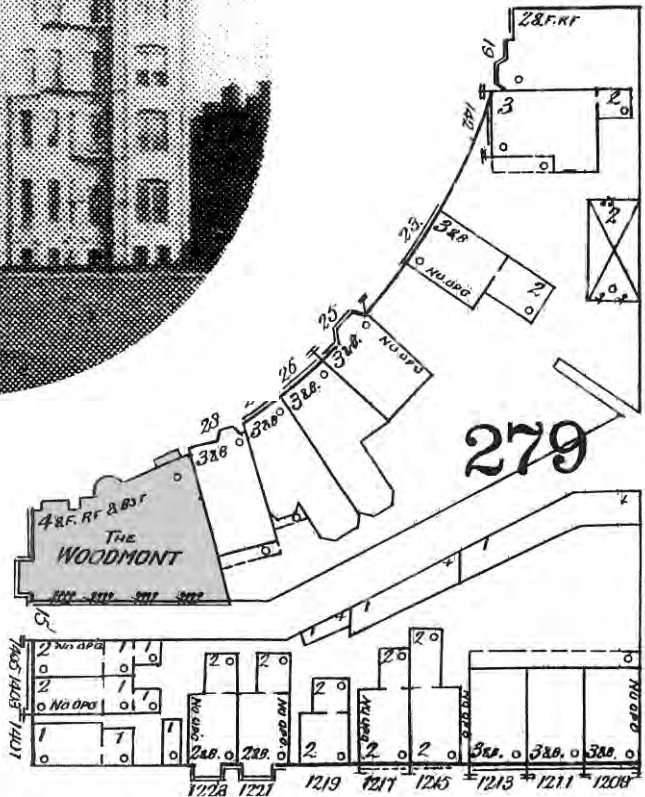
but Portner and his Capital Construction Company had possession of them after the turn of the century. One lot was sold to his sister, Felixine Wilkening, and one of the houses was later described as of “6 rooms, bath, cellar, nicely papered, crystal chandeliers...” Most of the land later became the site of the Portner Flats apartments. In 1885 Portner built three rowhouses at 1224-1228 13th Street, which he and his heirs rented to tenants until the mid 1930s. The four-story Woodmont Flats at Iowa Circle, erected as townhouses sometime between 1874 and 1877, was purchased by Portner in 1884 and remodeled and expanded a decade later. It was among the first true apartment buildings in Washington. In 1900, after Iowa Circle had been renamed Logan Circle, the building became known as the Logan or the Hotel Logan.⁷ Portner, his heirs, and their business associates managed the building until 1921. (Portner n.d.:19; District of Columbia General Assessments; District of Columbia Building Permits; Sanborn Map Company; R.L. Polk & Co. 1936; *Evening Star* October 11, 1890; Baist; Boyd’s Directory Company 1900; Boyd’s Directory Company 1901; Historical Society of Washington, D.C. photograph collections)

I made quite a bit of money by watching the real estate market in Washington.... [I] started to build myself. The value of real estate was increasing very rapidly; after two years, this property had doubled and after three years tripled its value. From now on, I invested all the money I made in this way, and the value of my

⁷ The Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division possesses a *circa* 1910 photograph of the Logan (National Photo Company Collection), and the Historical Society of Washington, D.C. has a 1949 photo (Wymer Collection).



The Woodmont (aka the Logan) at the corner of 13th Street, NW and Logan (Iowa) Circle, 1888. The four-story apartment building was erected as rowhouses in the mid 1870s. Robert Portner bought the property in 1884 for more than \$30,000 and largely rebuilt it ten years later. After his death, it became a holding of his Capital Construction Company and remained so until 1937.

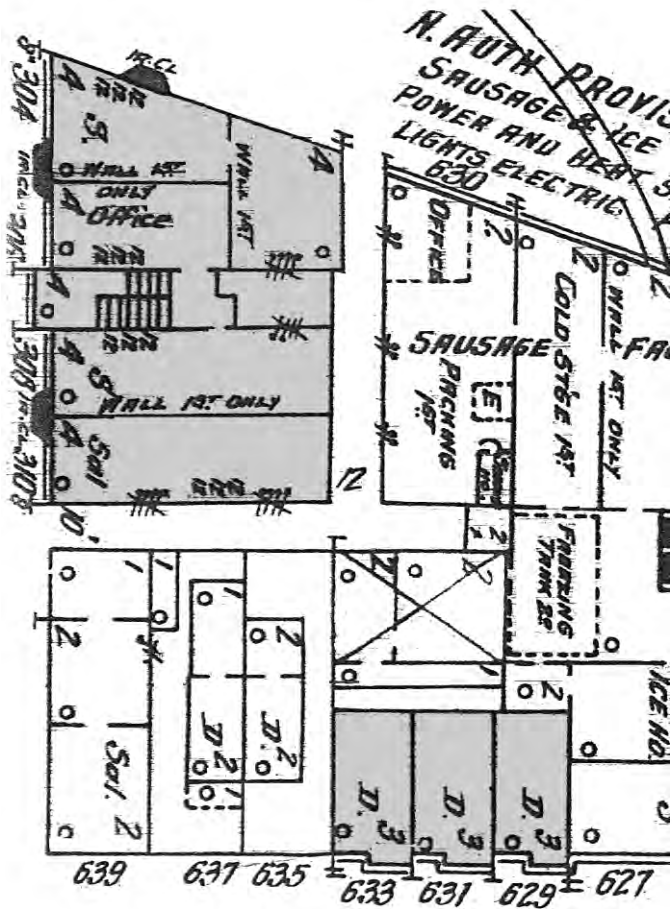


real estate amounts to two hundred and fifty to three hundred thousand dollars by now [1890].⁸ Its value is increasingly daily. (Portner n.d.:19)

In 1894 Portner commenced a four-story apartment building at the corner of 7th Street and Virginia Avenue, SW, next to his old depot site and costing perhaps \$28,000 to \$30,000.⁹ Consisting of twelve flats and ground-floor shops, the turreted brick building was designed by Clement A. Didden and constructed by Francis A. Blundon, with iron work by Curtis & Butts. Called the Virginia Flats, it was also known as “Portner Flats,” a name that would soon be applied to a much

⁸ In 1894, during a depression, the *Washington Post* set the assessed value of his personal real estate in the District of Columbia at about \$215,000. (*Washington Post* March 28, 1894)

⁹ The Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress possesses a half-tone photograph clipped from a 1910s or 1920s guidebook and cataloged as the “Portner Hotel.” While intriguing, this is probably a mistake. The building appears to be the Hotel Gordon, once located on the west side of 16th Street, NW, between I and K Streets. The Gordon actually began as the “Arno,” an apartment house or hotel formed in the 1870s or 1880s from a series of rowhouses on the block, not unlike the Woodmont/Logan.



Left: Part of Square 464 depicted in a 1904 Sanborn map. Virginia Flats is shaded at the top left, at the corner of Virginia Avenue and 7th Street, SW. The apartment building was erected by Robert Portner, in the guise of the Capital Construction Company, adjacent to the former site of his brewery's Washington depot. In fact, Portner once owned more than half the block. The three rowhouses shown at 629-633 D Street (bottom, shaded) were built for Portner circa 1886-1887. Below: A circa 1900 Library of Congress photograph of Portner's Virginia Flats.



larger 15th Street project. Robert Portner also held mortgages on a number of District saloons and rented a portion of the ground floor of this apartment to William T. Whelan's restaurant. (District of Columbia Building Permits; District of Columbia Recorder of Deeds; Portner n.d.:26; *Washington Post* November 13, 1894, January 2, 1895, September 6, 1895 and September 19, 1895)

Despite a hot market, real estate was not without its headaches. Portner had union troubles. A large stable he owned at 14th and V Streets, NW burned in 1902. (*Washington Post* March 20, 1902) And in 1886 he filed suit against a builder for nonperformance.

Mr. Portner claims \$2,000 for violation of the contract. The declaration filed states that Portner entered into a contract with [William E.] Clayton in December, 1885, to erect for him three houses in square 464, and the same to be completed by April 1, 1886. Mr. Clayton was to furnish all the labor and material, for which Portner was to pay \$7,857.50 in installments. The time has passed in which the houses were to be completed, and they still remain unfinished, and hence the suit for damages. (*Alexandria Gazette* May 25, 1886)

These three brick, three-story, bay-fronted rowhouses at 629-633 D Street, SW, designed by Clement Didden,¹⁰ were completed shortly thereafter. After this, Portner acted as his own general contractor including for his brewery buildings, employing such Washington architects as Didden and builders as L. Morgan Davis, August P. Getz, and Francis Blundon. A Manassas quarry he purchased to supply brownstone for the construction of his summer home was soon incorporated as the Portner Brownstone Company and began providing the material for his new Alexandria brewhouse and some of his Washington residential projects. At the beginning of 1897 the Capital Construction Company was chartered to buy, sell, lease and improve real estate in Virginia and the District of Columbia. Portner served as chairman, of course, and the board initially included Park Agnew, a real estate and insurance broker and chairman of the Alexandria Marine Railway and Shipbuilding Company; William H. Saunders, a Washington real estate and insurance broker; and Portner brewery employees P. McKnight Baldwin, John T. Johnson, and John M. Johnson. "I founded [the] stock company... but own all the shares. I only did this in order not to get into conflict with the unions," an action that would prove not wholly successful. (District of Columbia Building Permits; Conner 1977; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 4:11-12; Portner n.d.:30)

The immediate purpose of the new corporation was the construction of a series of apartments on upper 15th Street, NW in Washington, on property that Portner had purchased in 1884. Design of the "Portner Flats" began in 1896. "Mr. Didden and I are just making the blue prints for the

¹⁰ Clement August Didden began his architectural career in the early 1870s. He was responsible for a number of important commercial and residential projects in Washington, not the least of which were Portner's Vermont Avenue home, the Portner Flats, and the Alexandria brewery's 1898 stable. He also retrofitted the Mount Vernon Cotton Factory in 1902-1903 to serve as the brewery's bottling house. Portner introduced him to Albert Carry, and Didden carried out a number of commissions for the Washington brewer and speculator. Didden's son George married one of Carry's daughters and joined his father's office at the turn of the century. The elder Didden died about 1923. (Scott 2001:75; see pages 144, 147 and 216)



Portner's favorite architect, Clement A. Didden, and family circa 1890. Library of Congress.

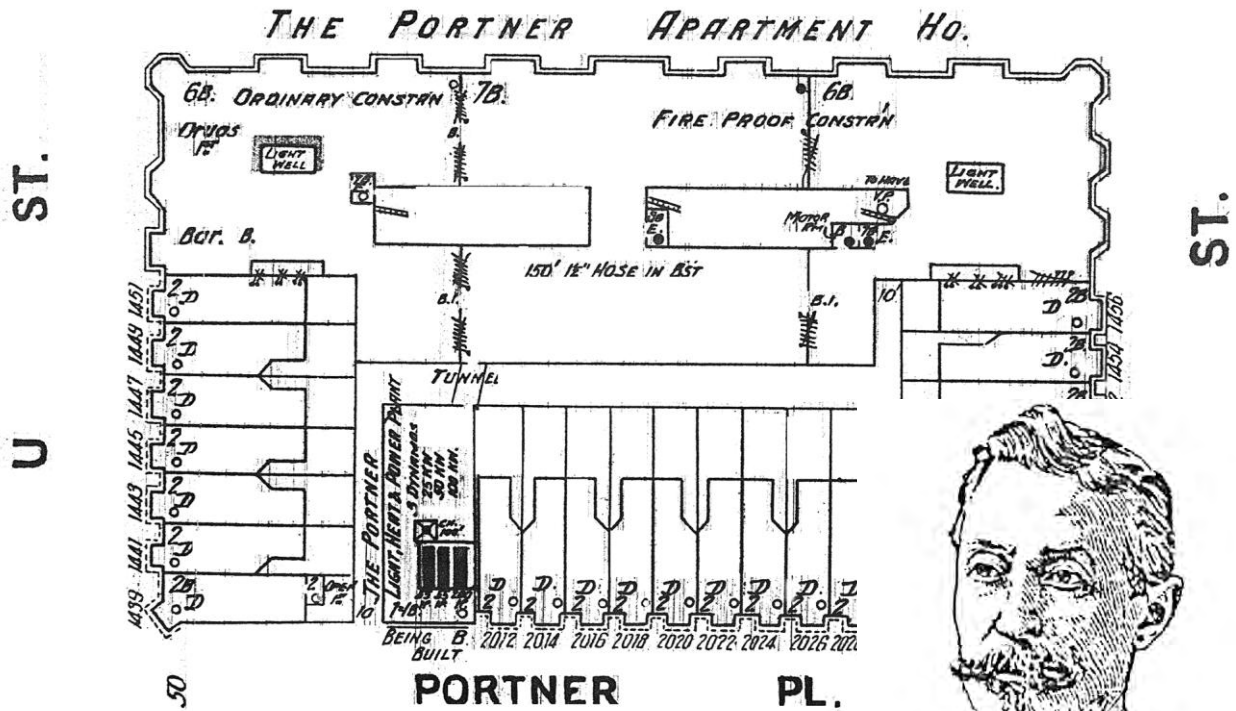
construction of a large flat to be erected at Fifteenth and U Streets. Although we intend to build only one third right now, the blue prints are made for the whole building at 320 feet [frontage]..." The first section of the building, completed in 1897, was expected to cost \$100,000, the amount of the Capital Construction Company's initial capitalization. The rest was "to be six times as large as the present structure and is to occupy the entire city square extending all the way from U to V street north [and south], and from Sixteenth to Portner Place east and west... the most tremendous building ever even contemplated in Washington except by the government..." The projected total cost was \$350,000. Construction of the fireproof second portion, at the corner of 15th and V Streets, commenced in early 1899 and was completed before the end of 1900. The third, seven-story, central section was finished around the end of 1902. When complete the Portner contained 123 apartments (primarily three-bedroom units); 30 transient "hotel" suites in the central section, "each with a bedroom, sitting room and bath"; and in-house amenities such as "large halls and offices, cafes and stores" and electric lights. The brick and stone *fin-de-siècle* Portner Flats was largely Victorian in massing, with a rhythm of undulating bays and turreted corners, and in its red brick and brownstone construction. But the architects incorporated classical elements too, which were experiencing a resurgence of popularity after the success of the 1893 Columbian Exposition's "White City." Notable was the entrance to the Portner Pharmacy at the corner of 15th and U Streets, supported by cast metal caryatids painted to resemble stone. (*Alexandria Gazette* December 21, 1898; Portner n.d.:30,32-34; Goode 1988:34-35; Sanborn Map Company; *Washington Post* August 27, 1916 and August 19, 1917)

[T]he Portner Flats was one of the city's most fashionable apartment houses... [T]he Portner was briefly the city's largest apartment house until Stoneleigh Court opened on Connecticut Avenue [in 1903]. The public referred to the original Portner Flats in 1897 as Portner's Folly because of its then-remote location from downtown. It was an immediate success, however, because of its location one block from the 14th Street streetcar line, which had been extended from Florida Avenue to Park Road in 1892. (Goode 1988:34)



Above: A rendering of the Portner Flats published in the Washington Post's The City of Washington, Its Men and Institutions of 1903. Right and below: Mid-twentieth-century photographs of the pharmacy entrance and the building's street facades. Library of Congress.





Above: A detail of a 1903 Sanborn insurance map depicting the Portner Flats just before completion.
 Right: An engraved portrait of Robert Portner from the Alexandria Gazette, 1894.



Nearly all of the apartments were soon rented. Many tenants were undoubtedly attracted by the building's swimming pool and tennis courts, the first such amenities ever to be installed at a Washington apartment. These recreational facilities had to be removed, however, when the final section of the Flats was constructed. Portner compensated by providing a large public dining room and four public parlors, a smoking room, three passenger elevators and bellboy service. Portner's sons Alvin and Oscar were later residents of the Portner, as was Congressman Harry Flood, who wrote the United States' declaration of war against Germany in 1917 and who became father-in-law to Robert Portner's daughter Anna. Sons Robbie and Alvin began working at the Portner daily, learning the building and property management business from their father's Capital Construction Company officers and employees, Volney Eaton, Robert Hates, Mr. Heath, and John H. Stokes. Indeed, the company soon existed solely to manage the Portner, the Logan and a handful of smaller residential properties. (Goode 1988:34-35; *Washington Post* August 27, 1916, August 19, 1917 and August 14, 1937; *Richmond Times Dispatch* June 8, 1914; Portner n.d.:33-34; Virginia Military Institute Archives; Boyd's Directory Company 1905; *Washington Times* August 4, 1900)

In 1903-1904 the Capital Construction Company completed the complex with a rear "annex," a large mechanical building containing three boilers and dynamos capable of producing nearly 200 kilowatts to provide heat and light. This section provoked trouble with noise-averse neighbors as

the last phase of the main building had with the unions. The company had agreed with contractor August Getz to employ only American Federation of Labor workers finishing the interior. Getz brought in a subcontractor, however, whose workers were Knights of Labor men. In response, the crew of A.F.L. lathers walked off the job. The situation had to be resolved by the District Supreme Court, which ruled in favor of the preceding A.F.L. agreement. (*Washington Post* March 10, 1903, March 18, 1903, March 20, 1903, June 6, 1903 and June 7, 1903)

One of Robert Portner's last projects was the construction of the finest hotel in his adopted home of Manassas, Virginia. "The magnificent hotel here, The Prince William, is an illustration of his kind interest in the town and the people of this section." The sprawling, 50-room, Colonial Revival edifice was built near the town's railroad depot in 1904, reportedly at a cost of \$30,000. Unfortunately, it was destroyed by fire only six years after completion. (*Manassas Journal* June 1, 1906; Simmons 1986:66; Byrd; Ratcliffe 1978:103)

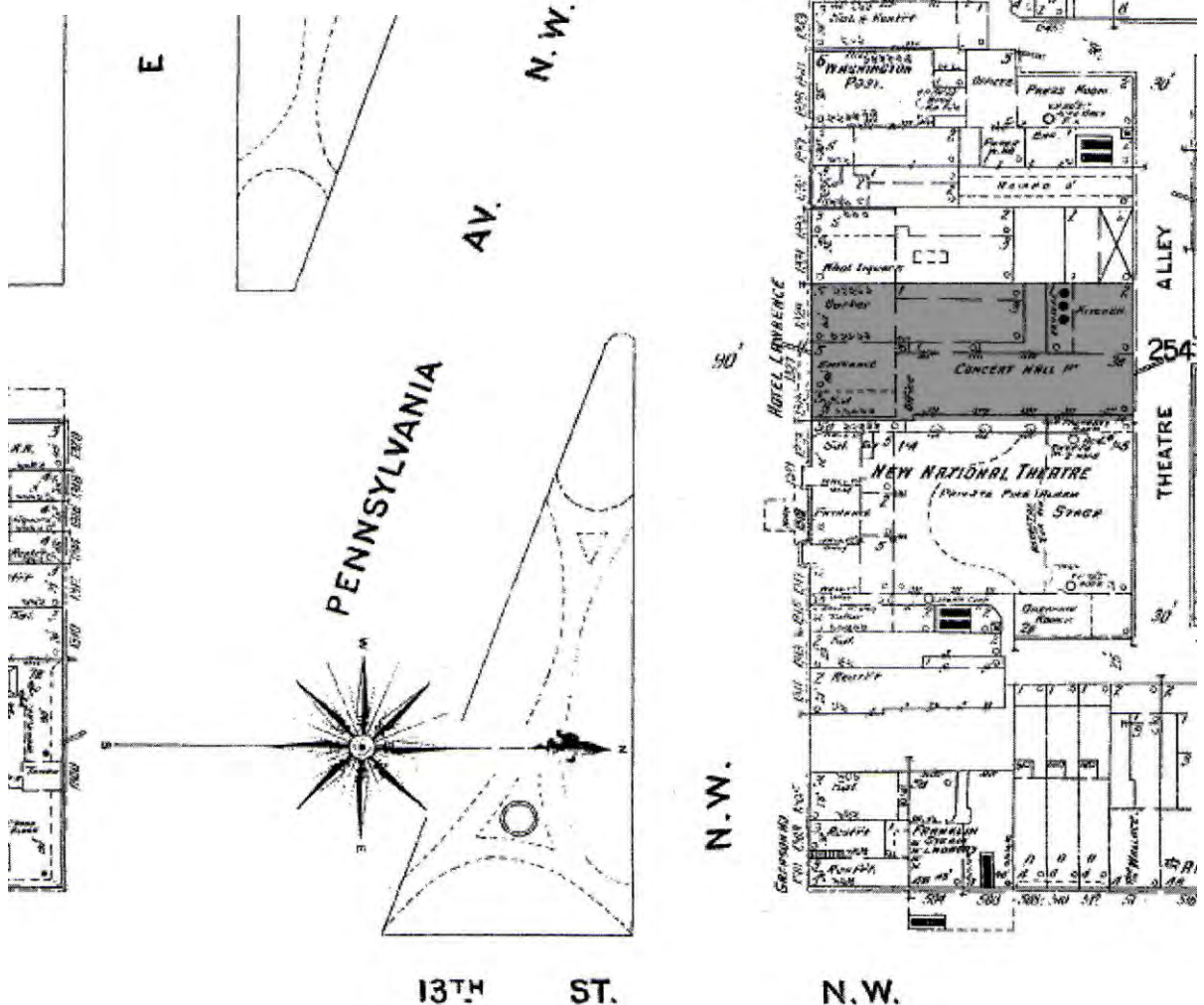
A postcard view of the Prince William Hotel, Manassas, Virginia, 1904 or 1905.



Robert Portner's grandest project may have been the one never built. In March 1902 he and Albert Carry purchased the old Hotel Lawrence at 1329 E Street, NW with the intention of razing the building and erecting a "mammoth new hotel." The partners spent \$8.09 per square foot for the lot, an impressive sum for a property that they intended to clear. It quickly became clear that their profit would hinge upon the size of the building they would be allowed to erect. Less than three years earlier, Congress had passed a law limiting the heights of Washington buildings relative to the widths of the streets they abutted. Commercial buildings were permitted to rise twenty feet higher than the adjacent street width, to a maximum of 130 feet. Portner and Carry wanted every foot of that, despite the fact that their lot fronted 90-foot-wide E Street. Fortunately for them, the property also faced broad Pennsylvania Avenue, but across one of the city's triangular government reservation parks. Not unlike some of his modern counterparts, the developers' zealous land-use attorney crafted a far-fetched argument, namely that the 1790s plat book for the city depicted the south side of the E Street extending well into the block south of the hotel and across Pennsylvania,

making the original, paper street a full 375 feet wide by his reckoning. So settling for a mere 130-foot height was generous! Unconvinced by the argument and concerned about precedent, but nonetheless sympathetic to both the project and the need to clarify the height issue at intersections, the District Commissioners petitioned and received from Congress an amendment to the Height of Buildings Act to disregard intervening public reservations when calculating the maximum adjacent street widths. Although C.A. Didden & Son were said to be ready to design the hotel, no plans were drawn. Portner and Carry, having captured through their legal maneuver a substantial increase in the property's value, instead flipped the lot to Frank A. Munsey. The "Munsey Building," designed by the famous New York architects McKim, Mead and White, quickly rose on E Street and housed offices, including the headquarters of Munsey's *Washington Times* newspaper. (*Washington Post* March 22, October 24, December 24, December 27 and December 28, 1902 and January 7, 1903; District of Columbia Building Permits; Sanborn Map Company)

A Sanborn insurance map detail of the Hotel Lawrence vicinity in 1903, including the intersection of E Street and Pennsylvania Avenue, NW and the federal park reservations.



Chapter 13

Robert Portner, solid citizen: Home, family, travel and philanthropy

[My] efforts were recognized by the whole community, and I soon became the most popular personality in town.

Robert Portner's memoirs

Now my beloved children... [i]t may be that some of you will make mistakes in life and others should guide them back to the right path with love and understanding, if necessary, by every means.... All of you come with the same prospects in life... use your knowledge and wealth in the right way, but: Behave well and stick together."

An 1890 letter from Robert Portner to his children

The early family life of Robert Portner has been described in a previous chapter. Portner himself described the benefits and the frustrations of the close professional and personal cooperation between him and his brothers and business partners. This pattern was a microcosm of the immigrant experience and of German-American efforts at self-help through entrepreneurialism in particular. Even as a small businessman in New York, Robert often lived with his siblings and partners to save money. Having relocated to wartime Alexandria, he first rented an apartment,¹ then a house, which he shared with his newly arrived brother Otto and sister Felixine and with partner Fred Recker. Portner's grocery and brewery were truly family operations; from their home, the extended family provided meals, likely cooked by Felixine, for their handful of employees. (Portner n.d.:7-9)

Portner and Recker purchased the seized "Lafayette House" at 301 South Saint Asaph Street from the government in 1864, and Robert, Felixine, and Fred Recker and his wife all moved there. After the war, when the Cazenove family successfully sued for the return of the property, the residents were forced to find new quarters again. This time, they set up housekeeping in two frame cottages on the site of the new brewery, Felixine Portner and niece Paula Strangmann in one, and Robert and Otto Portner sharing the other. (Portner n.d.:12,15)

During this period, the shrewd and gregarious Robert was transforming himself from a cash-strapped "carpetbagger" into one of the wealthiest pillars of the community—an interlocutor with the government on behalf of wartime political prisoners, a vastly popular City Council member, and most important, someone who could put Alexandria's underemployed labor force to work. An energetic leader, Portner bestrode the fault lines of postwar society, an outsider neither dogmatically Republican nor Democrat; a Unionist, but moderate Reconstructionist; not eschewing the trappings of wealth, but also providing charity to the less fortunate and offering more opportunity than was common to the clearly disadvantaged African Americans in town. On the latter count, it must be pointed out that most of Alexandria's black residents were only recently emancipated from slavery

¹ From Mrs. Price, later the mother-in-law of Mayor (and whisky distiller) E.E. Downham. (Portner n.d.:7)

and were increasingly discriminated against by law and custom. Portner was among the Councilmen who voted to discontinue unequal punishments for black and white convicts. He also hired African Americans for a range of positions—including common laborers, but in skilled jobs such as accountant, engineer, and assistant brewmaster as well—although there is evidence to suggest that, like many of his contemporaries, his treatment of black and white workers was not entirely equal (see page 246).

It was also during this period that Portner took a leading role in German-American community institutions, aiding German refugees of the American Civil War and the Franco-Prussian War, paying for Alexandria's Lutheran church steeple, founding the Harmonie Association, the German Co-operative Building Association, and the German Banking Company, and serving on the reception committee for Washington's German Day celebration. A naturalized U.S. citizen, Portner, like many other "Forty-Eighters," may have distrusted the authoritarian Prussian government, which attempted to draft him years after he left home and became a U.S. citizen. Nonetheless, he always retained a fondness for his homeland, traveling there often, and even exulting in the Prussian victory over the French in 1871. He insisted that only German be spoken in his household, including by servants, as a way of educating the children. The entire family spent two years in Germany, mainly so that the children could attend the schools there. But he was obviously true to his adopted land, quickly becoming a citizen, political party member and politician. Portner served on the board of the Alexandria Agricultural Society; in the Alexandria Businessmen's League; on a committee to create a "Mount Vernon Avenue"; on the Committee on Finance for the centennial celebration of the establishment of the District of Columbia; on the D.C. Board of Trade; on Washington's Liquor Dealers' Association; on the finance committee for the establishment of a permanent national exposition; on a commission to study the prospect of creating Washington's first convention center; on the reception committee for the National Drill, a meeting of militias from all over the country; on a committee to provide a memorial to former District of Columbia Governor Alexander Shepherd; and on inaugural committees for Presidents Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt. (Portner n.d.:15,20; Johnson 1983; Manassas Museum; Killmer 1984:1; Bull Run Regional Library; Cox et al. 1901:212; *Washington Post* March 1, 1878, December 20, 1884, June 5, 1886, May 19, 1887, October 5, 1887; October 5, 1890, March 30, 1893, February 9, 1896, February 18, 1896, September 27, 1902, January 26, 1904 and April 27, 1905; *Critic-Record* January 7, 1885)

It was not until 1871, after the new brewery had been in operation for two years and after most of his City Council career was behind him, that Robert Portner decided to end his bachelor life. "Up to now I had been too busy: the business required all my time. Among all the girls I knew, there was only one whose charming character pleased me so well that I wished her to be my wife." He met Anna von Valaer in 1869, while they were both guests of Christian Mathis at his Manassas, Virginia home. Anna was then just 21 years old. Born April 16, 1848 at Jenaz, Canton Graubünden, Switzerland, she was the daughter of Margaret Donau and Johann Jacob von Valär, scion of an old Swiss noble family. After arriving in America, she assisted her brother Peter at his Philadelphia tavern. Perhaps it was love at first sight, but the courtship was not necessarily of the whirlwind variety.² They were married three years later, on April 4, 1872 at Manassas, which was

² The pages of Portner's memoirs referring to his courtship and marriage are missing, reportedly torn out because a grandchild considered them too personal to become public. (Portner 1992)

to become the beloved country home to the Portners. Returning to Alexandria, friends threw them a lavish second reception. (Portner n.d.:15; Byrd; Turner 1996:269; Virginia Military Institute Archives)

Mr. Robert Portner, the prosperous and enterprising brewer of this city, and his charming bride entertained their numerous friends at Harmonie Hall last night, and no more agreeable evening was ever spent in Alexandria. Every arrangement had been made by which the pleasure of the guests could be secured and they were carried out to perfection. Dancing continued until a late hour, and was only interrupted at intervals in order that those engaged in it might partake of the most delicious refreshments. During the evening Mr. Justus Schneider on behalf of the friends of the host and hostess, presented them, in a neat and appropriate address, a handsome and valuable clock which was received by Mr. Portner in a happy response. The evening was one of unalloyed enjoyment, but

“Of all that did chance, ’twere a long tale to tell,
Of the dances and dresses, and who was the belle;
But each was so happy, and all were so fair,
That night stole away and dawn caught them there.”

(Alexandria Gazette April 12, 1872)

The tenderness and devotion with which Robert regarded Anna is palpable in his writings. In his memoirs, written for his children, he seldom refers to her as anything other than “your dear Mamma.” He would name one of their daughters and the family’s country estate in her honor. Robert clearly appreciated Anna’s great fortitude and kindness; she bore not only many children, but also the pain of losing so many of them at young ages. (Portner n.d.; Turner 1996:269)

Anna was with child almost immediately after the wedding. During the fall of 1872 Robert, having paid off his debts, began building a larger home to accommodate a big family. It was erected at mid-block on the east side of Washington Street between Pendleton and Wythe Streets, just behind the brewery buildings. The brick dwelling was done up in the fashionable Second Empire style. The main block stood three stories tall, including a mansard-roofed attic story, and had a large, two-story kitchen wing. “We enjoyed very much to own such a beautiful home and felt very happy,” recalled the brewer, “I arranged the garden myself, planted all the trees and shrubs...” It may seem odd today for a factory boss to live so near his plant. But it was not at all unusual during the nineteenth century and was a testament to Portner’s close involvement in operations. As rail transportation improved at the end of the nineteenth century, Portner, like many owners and employees, did move his family away from the business and commuted as necessary. (Sanborn Map Company; Boyd’s Directory Company 1886; Portner n.d.:16)

Robert and Anna moved into the new house soon after their first child, Edwin, was born. The happy event turned very solemn, however, when Edwin died July 6, 1873, at less than five months old. Like most Victorians, the Portners were well acquainted with death. But more children came in rapid succession, leaving little time to grieve. Robert Francis (“Robbie”) arrived on April 8, 1874; followed by Edward George (“Eddie”), November 14, 1875; Alvin Otto, June 12, 1877; Alma, July 10, 1879; Henrietta (“Etta”), November 5, 1880; Paul Valaer, January 22, 1882; Oscar

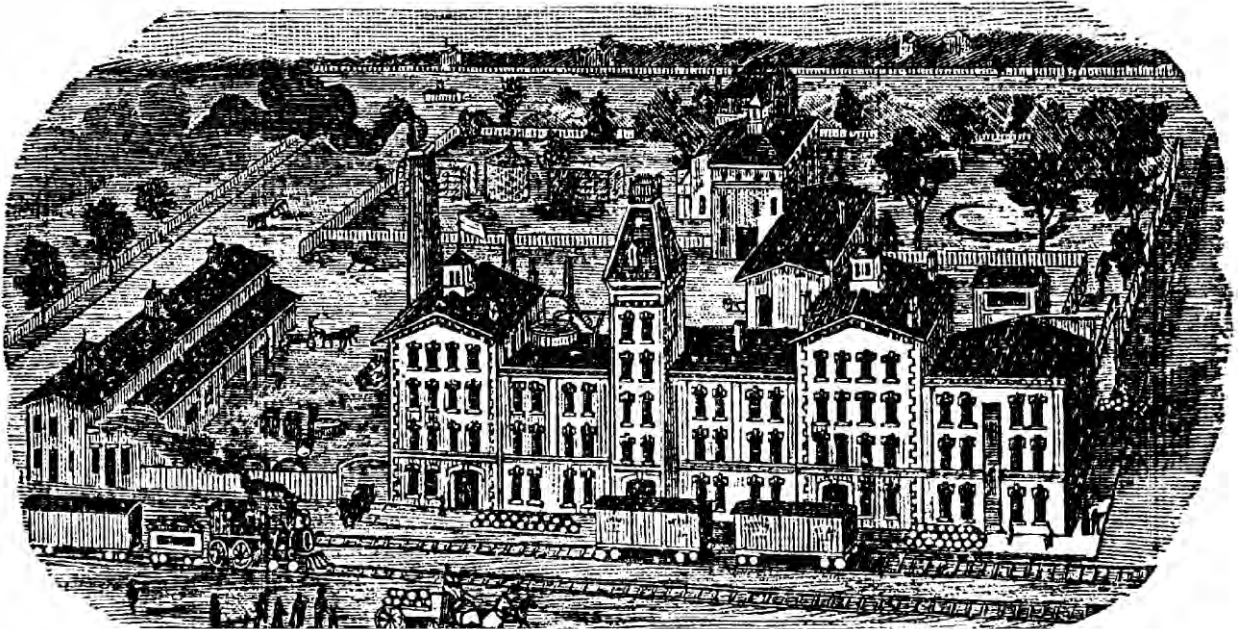
Charles, November 11, 1884; Herman Henry, October 4, 1886; twins Clara Louise and Anna, May 23, 1888; Hildegard Rose (“Hilda”), December 19, 1889; and Elsa Eugenia, March 5, 1893.³ Perhaps it need not be pointed out, as did one observer, that Mrs. Portner “was a busy person.... She didn’t get out much; she had a large family [but she] had her servants.” Further demonstrating her overflowing love of children, Anna later donated time and money to support Garfield Hospital, the George Washington University Hospital, the Washington Home for Foundlings, and the German Orphans’ Asylum, and served on the boards of lady managers of the last three. Robert cemented his relationships with friends, family and business associates by naming them godparents to his children. Godparents included brother-in-law and former associate Peter von Valaer; Rochester brewer Henry Batholomay; Wisconsin Congressman Richard Guenther and his wife; the wife of Emil Schandain, vice president of the Philip Best Brewing Company of Milwaukee; Carl Strangmann; B.E.J. Eils; Paul and Louise Muhlluaser; John Leicht’s wife Eugenia; and Alexandria builder Emanuel Francis, one of the principals of the German Co-operative Building Association. (Portner n.d.:16,20,22,25; Manassas City Cemetery; Virginia Military Institute Archives; Manassas Museum; Bull Run Regional Library; Mills 1988; *Washington Post* March 6, 1904 and November 21, 1905; Gaines 2002:216)

Although none passed away as young as Edwin, many of the Portner children who survived infancy passed away at unnaturally young ages even for that era, considering the resources available to a family of such wealth. Clara died at age ten in early 1899, after suffering seven weeks with an intermittent fever. Robbie perished only a year later “of exhaustion as a consequence of hemorrhages, after an illness of seven weeks.” On February 9, 1916, Herman succumbed to pneumonia, a complication of injuries sustained in a New York auto accident. Eddie died the next year, and Paul passed on Halloween 1919 after an extended illness. Oscar suffered a fatal heart attack exactly five years after Eddie’s death. Alvin was the longest-lived son, reaching the age of 54 in 1931. His sister Alma passed away the same year. The younger Portner girls lived the longest, some until the mid 1960s. (Portner n.d.:32; *Alexandria Gazette*, January 17, 1899; Virginia Military Institute Archives; Manassas Museum; Bull Run Regional Library)

Despite the frightful mortality, when this playful and sometimes mischievous tribe of children was young, life was all bustle and movement. By 1882 Robert had decided to build larger quarters for his expanding family nearer to his Washington business interests. He bought a lot at 1104 Vermont Avenue for \$2 per square foot the following spring and commenced to build a house. Four stories tall, 35 feet wide and 40 feet deep, its fourteen-inch-thick brick and stone walls were erected by the crew of builder Alex Lyles according to plans drawn by C.A. Didden.⁴ At the same time, Robert also purchased a parcel in Manassas, an estate off Main Street that he christened “Annaburg.” The name honored both his *alma mater*, the Saxon military academy, and his wife. Annaburg steadily grew as Portner purchased adjacent farms, homesteads and woodlots: “At the same time I kept on buying real estate adjoining Annaburg, especially when it was very cheap. This will also be a good investment for you, children, and I like to do it.” Most of the land was assembled in the 1880s, but additions continued until the estate encompassed about 2,500 acres near the turn of the century. One of the core parcels was the property of Christian Mathis, whom Mr. and Mrs. Portner owed for

³ In the choice of names, particularly middle names, the Portners honored both Anna’s family and Robert’s father, mother and brothers.

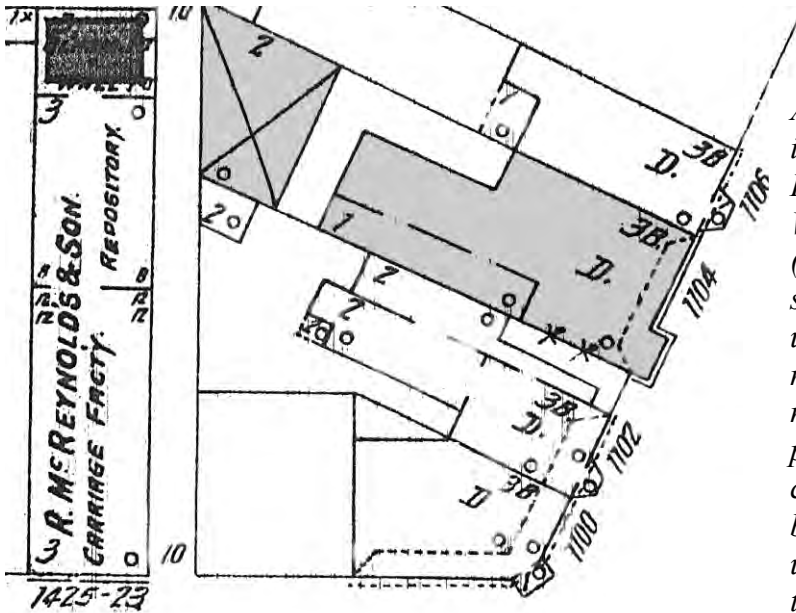
⁴ The Portners added a wing to the already large home in 1897.



A bird's-eye view of the Portner brewery from the 1886 Washington city directory. The Portner house stands behind the brewery. Portner's summer garden was on that side of the block as well, in what became the Portner family's garden. Among features of the garden was a cast-iron fountain shipped from New York.



A Portner family portrait circa 1895. Courtesy of the Manassas Museum.



A detail of a 1903 Sanborn insurance map showing Robert Portner's 1883 home at 1104 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington (shaded). When it was erected, that side of the block was relatively undeveloped. Indicative of the mixed uses found together in the nineteenth-century city is the proximity of the house to a carriage factory and livery stables behind on Vermont Court. Such uses may have driven the Portners to relocate to 16th Street.

their introduction. It was apparently the location of their wedding as well. The land ultimately included parts of the “lower Bull Run Tract,” patented by Robert “King” Carter in 1724; the McLeans’ “Yorkshire” tract upon which the First Battle of Bull Run was fought; and the Liberia estate, headquarters of Confederate General P.G.T. Beauregard at First Bull Run and of Union General Irwin McDowell in 1862 at the second battle. The Portners spent pleasant summers in the old Mathis house before moving it to use its site for a new home. (Portner n.d.:18-19,25,27,37; District of Columbia Building Permits; Killmer 1984:2; *Evening Star* April 25, 1883; Bushong 1965; Tyler 1909: 353; Potomac Press 1908:376; *Manassas Journal* June 1, 1906)

Plans for the Annaburg mansion, drafted by Oscar Vogt, were ready at the beginning of 1892. Preparations included the purchase of the quarry of the Mayfield Brown Stone Company a half-mile east of town. With the brownstone and brick and oak lumber that had seasoned on the site for a few years, the crews of local builder John Cannon, mason David Muddiman, and metalworker Edgar J. Hulse erected a three-story, 35-room, Colonial Revival mansion with servants’ quarters,⁵ “deep and extensive” wine and beer cellars, a game room, electric lights, indoor plumbing, and a coal-fired heating system—in all, said to be worth \$100,000. Perhaps not surprising, an air-conditioning system, consisting of iced water circulating in through-wall pipes, was installed to fend off the stifling Virginia summer heat. “You noticed it as soon as you stepped in the front door; it was like an ice box.” The family moved into the completed house on June 9, 1894. (Killmer 1984:2; Muse 1975; Portner n.d.:24,25,26; *Washington Post* April 12, 1892 and February 7, 1935; Mercantile Illustrating Co. 1894:164; Conner 1977)

Robert also oversaw the design of a 250-acre forested deer park; three artificial ponds stocked with tropical fish and bass, swans and ducks, the largest of which was used for boating; barns and stables; a carriage house; a dairy and a small winery; a gate house; a swimming pool; a bath house;

⁵ Some servants were housed in dwellings built by Portner along Main Street. (Mills 1988)

a windmill; a greenhouse; flower and vegetable gardens; and more than 40 acres of vineyards. Perhaps the most unusual structure was a medieval stone folly or ruin, purportedly a replica of an old tower Mrs. Portner admired on her many trips to Europe with her husband. Thirty feet tall and completed even before the mansion, the tower was a Manassas landmark until its demolition in the late 1970s. It served “mostly as a museum,” housing “bits of cannons and cannon balls and other residue of the battlefield near-by which had been dug up by farm machinery,” but its top was “sought as an elevated beer garden” during the summer. (Killmer 1984:2; *Washington Post* December 3, 1895 and February 7, 1935; Bushong 1965; Byrd n.d.; Mills 1988; Valaer 1969)

Mr. Portner must have been a man of unusual mental capacity to plan and carry forward all the beauties of this estate. The Park was a retreat for the Town’s people winter and summer. There was little for entertainment compared to this day and time so the Park was Utopia. There were no automobiles, people walked, this was a diversion, a mile or so was not a hardship but a pleasure. Boy and girl would stroll through the Park and maybe hide away in the summer house for a little romance. In winter a great sport was ice skating on the pond in the Park. (Byrd n.d.)

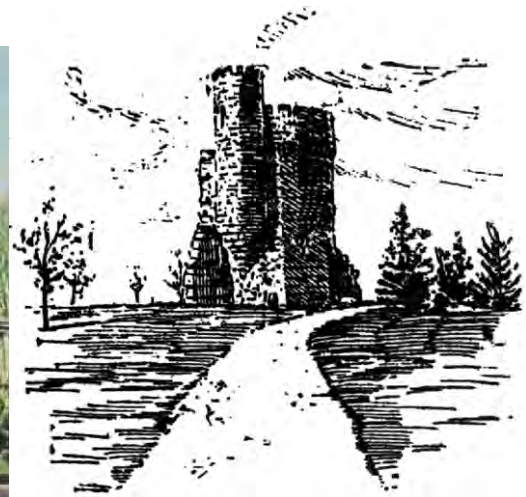
At least one local African-American church used the ponds for baptisms. And,

[a] very tall boy from from Manassas used to come to swim at Annaburg; he was over seven feet tall. Also a Manassas policeman came to swim. He was Manassas’ only cop and he never made an arrest. He was known as the “bull” [and] was one of Portner’s best friends in Manassas. Will Meredith, the Virginia Congressman’s son, came also to swim but mainly to see Etta whom he married. He became very important to the Portner family, especially after Mr. Portner died, and... [Mrs. Portner] depended on him very much. (Valaer 1969)

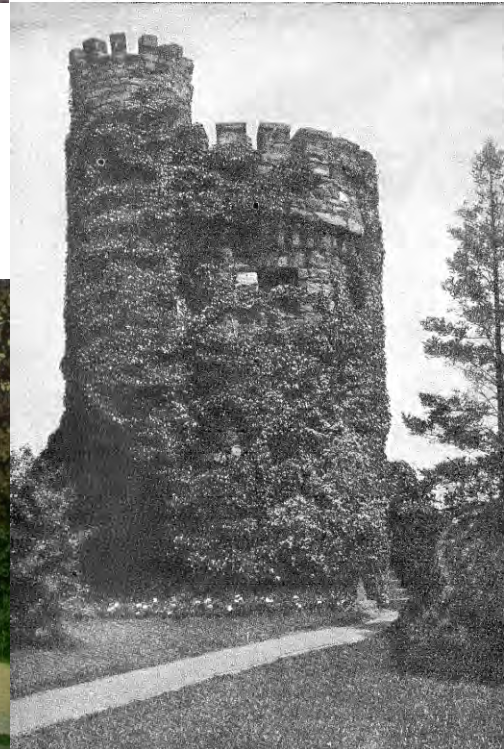
After a 1902 hunting excursion near Manassas, President Theodore Roosevelt returned to Washington after a tour through the Annaburg grounds. And a 1911 Civil War reunion at the battlefield took place partly on the Portner estate, the occasion for President Taft and Virginia Governor Mann to lunch with the widowed Mrs. Portner. (*Washington Post* November 2, 1902; Work Projects Administration 1941:121)

Manassas residents were undoubtedly grateful for such access to the grounds, but there was liable to be some friction attributable to differences in economic class and to the fact that Mr. Portner created from beer profits such a large estate in the increasingly prohibition-minded Virginia countryside. “One thing I remember about the Portner boys was that they were kind of wild,” remembered one native. “The Portner boys had a club house [on the estate]. All of the folks looked askance because they knew that they drank and they knew that they gambled [there].” (Mills 1988; Valaer 1969)

For several years Portner shipped many of the Ives, Norton, Martha and other varieties of grapes grown at Annaburg to Washington wine merchant Christian Xander, who pressed from them clarets and port. One of his ports, probably made from Annaburg-raised grapes, won a medal at the Paris



Clockwise from upper left: postcard image of the Annaburg house; a rendering of the tower from the Manassas Journal (1905); and postcards of the tower and the estate entrance gate.



Exposition of 1900.⁶ The brewer also raised dairy cattle on the estate and tried in vain growing hops for his beer, but its main purpose was as a retreat. The family was very fond of riding and had a number of show, hunting, racing (harness and steeplechase) and draft horses in the stables as well as Shetland ponies. The carriage house contained beautiful carriages and a pony cart for the kids. Entertainments included the occasional hayride. The Portners enjoyed hunting and kept hounds for the purpose. Robert imported German deer and purchased “local” and Western deer as game to

⁶ Christian Xander’s award-winning port was probably of the 1893 vintage, a period during which Portner was known to be selling him grapes. Portner shipped ten tons to Washington in early September 1890, for instance. The Manassas Museum collection includes a stencil used to mark crates shipped from Annaburg. (*Alexandria Gazette* September 15, 1890; *Washington Post* July 23, 1893)

supplement the native turkeys and quail. A number of the boys were later members of hunt and country clubs. (*Alexandria Gazette* September 15, 1890; Portner n.d.:30; Muse 1975; Byrd n.d.; Mills 1988; Valaer 1969; *Fairfax Herald* December 18, 1903; *Washington Post* July 23, 1893, December 3, 1895, April 24, 1898, August 21, 1901 and November 3, 1901; Southern Planter 1905:203; Virginia Military Institute Archives).

More than Germany or America as wholes, Annaburg became Robert Portner's true *Heimat* or homeland. While working on his memoirs, Robert addressed a letter to his children, as a sort of preface, in which he expressed his dream for the estate.

I've taken my beloved Annaburg and improved it and I will continue to do this to give you there a pleasant childhood and to have a real home which brings you all together and reminds you of your childhood. This home I wish to reserve for you all. Those of you who feel tired or sick can return to this place and reminisce on a beautiful childhood, to regain health and refresh the spirit, and those who have had a hard time in life should regain their strength for a new beginning. You all must meet there once a year and take care that the PORTNER family maintains a good name in America.⁷ (Bull Run Regional Library)

The family often returned directly to Manassas after trips abroad and generally retreated there for the summer in April or May. Indeed, the Portners lived a peripatetic life, moving between Washington, Alexandria and Manassas, and even Europe. The children were certainly fortunate to be exposed to the beauty and educational opportunities of other climes. The whole family departed for Germany and Switzerland in April 1881 and visited the hometowns of both Mr. and Mrs. Portner. The return voyage on the steamer *Necker* was remarkable in two respects: the family had cause to fear for their lives, and they made the acquaintance of the former president of the Confederate States of America. After leaving Southampton, England for the Atlantic crossing, the ship entered a terrible late November gale.

For seven days the storm was stronger than any that the captain had ever encountered before. While we were sitting at table, a huge wave tore away the bridge, several life boats, and the navigation house. One man had both legs broken. [A]nother was thrown overboard, and when he had somehow got hold of a rope, was thrown back by the next wave. Another one was lost and never seen again. The nose of the first officer was fractured when he was thrown off the bridge. [One of our companions was Jefferson Davis⁸ with his wife and his daughter, a nice girl of 18, who had been in Germany for six years (at school in Karlsruhe). We became good friends with the family, mainly on account of the terrible storm...] Another wave swept across the ship and brought so much water into the smoking lounge that all of us, including Jefferson Davis, had to climb on the tables. Eddie, who was with me at the time, became so afraid that he kneeled down on a bench and prayed:

⁷ This is excerpted from a translation of the introduction to Portner's memoirs. The entire introduction is reproduced in the preface of the present work.

⁸ Soon after this return to the United States, former Confederate General Joseph Johnston accused Davis of having stolen the Confederate treasury at the end of the war. (Strode 1966:515)

“Dear God, please let the waves go down so that the ship won’t go down with Mamma and Papa.” He prayed so fervently that everyone present, including Jefferson Davis, was really touched. Davis said if God would not listen to such a fervent prayer, praying could not help at all.... It looked terrible when the water, which was two feet deep, was moving back and forth. The steerage passengers were also several feet deep in the water. (On this occasion, Alvin said that now he really needed boots.) All the exits to the decks were nailed down... We made little progress; one day we merely covered 60 miles. After a week, when we approached Newfoundland, it became better. After seventeen days we reached New York. Here I was welcomed by a delegation of the brewers of New York and invited generously to the Hotel Rush. Jefferson Davis joined us there in a glass of champagne. (Portner n.d.:17-18)

When they finally arrived at Alexandria, Portner’s friends and employees threw a large reception. “There were wreaths everywhere, and thousands of people had gathered.” “The grounds surrounding the brewery were illuminated and gaily decorated. A bon-fire was lighted, and a large number of fireworks were displayed.” (Portner n.d.:18; *Alexandria Gazette* December 10, 1881)

The Portners spent the winter of 1881-1882 in Atlantic City, New Jersey and the summer at Annaburg. Members of the family traveled to Bermuda at the end of 1886, to Germany and Switzerland again in the spring of 1887, and to Cuba and the Bahamas in early 1888. In the fall of 1889 the Portners decided to return to Germany and remain there for two years. They rented a home at “Schiffgraben 42” in Hanover. One reason for the trip had been to select good German schools for the education of the children. The older ones were sent away to academies in Osnabrück, Pyrmont, and Ostrau, but the parents were not always satisfied with the quality of the instruction. Daughter Hilda was born during this Hanover sojourn. The parents also took trips within Germany and to Italy, Denmark, France and Austria. On his way to Vienna, Robert made the acquaintance of the Prince of Lichtenstein. (Portner n.d.:18-23)

[He] had stayed at the same hotel in Venice as I, and he had sat opposite me at the *table d’hôte*, so that I suspected him to be an officer in civilian clothes, or some high official. He was very tall and had such a beautiful waistline that the American lady next to me asked me if he were not laced⁹.... Afterwards, I saw the gentleman and his valet looking for [a private train compartment]. As he could not find one which suited him, I offered him a seat in mine, which he accepted gratefully.... He said at once, “You are an American. At the table, I often heard you talk with the ladies about America.” He told me that his brother had also been there once and that he was very enthusiastic about this country.... [W]e had a nice conversation and became very friendly with each other. As it became very cold, he offered to share his fur coat with me, which I gratefully accepted. We talked about our families and other personal problems, but he did not tell me his name.... [W]hen we arrived [at the border], the highest officials received him at the door of the train, and the conductor said, “Your Highness, the sleeper is ready.” They bowed so much that I

⁹ That is to say, corseted.

thought to myself that the people in Austria must be very friendly because they even addressed me as “Highness.” My companion answered the conductor, “All right, but I also want a compartment in the sleeper for this gentleman.” My trunk passed the customs officials unopened, and I was told that everything was all right—Highness. We had dinner together and then went into the sleeper which we and the valet had all for ourselves. I realized from all the compliments which were paid him by the officials that he was some high person. When I asked the conductor, he told me that he was the richest man in Vienna, the Prince of Lichtenstein. We kept on conversing for a long time and then went to bed. But I did not hand him my card, since I did not feel like addressing him as your Highness. The next morning, I awoke so late that the train had already entered Vienna. He came into my room when I was not quite dressed and bid me good-bye. I hurried as much as I could, but I only saw him leave in a beautiful coach, from where he nodded to me. (Portner n.d.:22-23)

The family also had friends in the U.S. legations from Germany, Switzerland, Russia, Belgium and France, and socialized and even traveled with some of the diplomats. (*Washington Post* January 27, 1901 and December 18, 1901)

In January 1895 Robert took Eddie on a trip to “the Orient,” stopping at the Azores, Madeira, Gibraltar, Algiers, Genoa, Nice, Monte Carlo, Malta, Alexandria, Cairo, Jaffa, Jerusalem, Smyrna, Athens, Constantinople, Messina, Palermo, Naples, and Pompeii. Robert and Anna and some of the children returned to Germany in 1896, 1897, 1898, 1900, 1901 and 1902, with side journeys to France, Switzerland, Austria, Bohemia, Holland, Belgium and England. And Robert, Alma, Etta and Paul shared a Caribbean cruise in early 1901. (Portner n.d.:27-34; *New York Times* April 9, 1896; *New York Daily Tribune* June 13, 1901)

The family also vacationed closer to home in California, at Niagara Falls, Palm Beach, and at Hot Springs and Old Point, Virginia. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 25, 1880; *Washington Post* December 7, 1900, January 12, 1902, March 5, 1902 and May 8, 1904)

Many of the trips and family retreats to Annaburg were undertaken for the express purpose of allowing Robert Portner the time and relaxation to recuperate from his recurring illness. He had chronic, unnamed problems related to “mental stress,” overwork, and “over-reaction of nerves.” As early as 1863, Robert left for Germany to visit his mother and to recover from what he thought was malaria. He was already overworked when cajoled into accepting the presidency of the United States Brewers Association in 1880, and he resigned after less than a year and left “on doctor’s advice” for Germany. “I intended to stay away for one year. When I left Washington, I weighed only 131 pounds. When I arrived fifteen to twenty days later in Rahden, my weight had already increased by fifteen pounds, and I felt much better.” After his return to the U.S., Robert soon “became nervous again and was not able to work.” He reported that by the mid 1880s, “my health was not improving, [and] I could not very well look after my business and only attended to the most necessary affairs.” The stay in Hanover was meant “partly to recover my health, partly to send the children to school there.” While in Germany, Robert practiced “Swedish gymnastics” and rode horses for exercise. He also “took the waters” at the hot mineral baths of Bad Kissingen and visited

a number of doctors. Professor Ebstein once performed a four-day check-up, pronouncing him basically healthy but overworked. The good doctor prescribed a diet consisting of a quarter-pound of butter a day, “little bread, and otherwise meat, fresh vegetables and fruit.” By 1892, at the age of 55, he felt “better and healthier than I have in years.” The years had taken their toll, however. Robert began to have bouts of rheumatism. It did not slow him down much, but he spent less time at his Alexandria brewery. By early 1902, however, he recognized that “My state of health is not very good. I feel that I am getting old and shall not hold out much longer.” In fact, now “he was very sick nearly all the time.” (Portner n.d.:8,17-22,27,30,33,34; *Alexandria Gazette* February 22, 1881; Valaer 1969; *Washington Post* August 9, 1887)

Robert did his best to prepare his children for a future without him. In his memoirs, he refers frequently to their education. He does not seem to fit the stereotype of the stern German father, perhaps because his children were allowed to run “wild.” He apparently allowed them to choose their own universities, and he was not too strict when they changed their minds or were even expelled. Like a good Victorian father, he doted on all of them, but because they were expected to carry on his various enterprises, he discussed the activities of the boys almost to the exclusion of the girls. Son Herman receives little mention. Still a teenager at the close of his father’s memoirs, he was the one son who did not carry on with one of the family businesses. He may have been the “black sheep” of the family.¹⁰ Each of the other boys, it seemed, followed a particular pursuit that fit well into the constellation of Portner family interests. Robbie shared his father’s inventiveness. After having demonstrated an aptitude for taking apart the family’s electrical gadgets, building microphones, etc., he attended the Virginia Military Institute, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and finally, Washington’s Columbian College (now the George Washington University) for electrical engineering. It is said that he installed the light fixtures in the Alexandria brewery and the electrical and heating systems for the Portner Flats. Robbie and his brothers were characterized as “expert pyrotechnists” for their 1897 Independence Day fireworks display at Annaburg. By 1898 Robbie began working at both the Alexandria brewery and for the Capital Construction Company. The eldest surviving son, he seems to have been his father’s pride and joy—able, “active and energetic,” he would likely have been heir to many of his father’s interests. Robbie’s early death, however, crushed Robert: “He was a good and noble boy, and I do miss him very much.” (Portner n.d.:26, 31,32; Conner 1977; Virginia Military Institute Archives; Valaer 1969; Boyd’s Directory Company 1900; *Alexandria Gazette* January 23, 1900; *Washington Post* July 7, 1897)

Eddie, only nineteen months younger than Robbie, was like his brother’s twin. He shared a curiosity about electronics and went with Robbie to M.I.T. He then attended either the Siebel Institute or the Wahl-Henius Institute for brewing in Chicago, before leaving when taken ill with an ear infection. He finally earned a degree in chemistry from Columbian College in 1897. The same year, his father appointed Eddie vice-president of the brewery and generally left him alone to have the opportunity to conduct much of the firm’s business. Eddie was then placed on the board of the Capital Construction Company and was manager of the Portner Flats from at least 1902.¹¹ In spite of his many duties, he pursued his doctoral degree in chemistry from M.I.T., performing laboratory

¹⁰ In Portner’s will, one of the sons was threatened with losing his inheritance if he married the “wrong” girl.

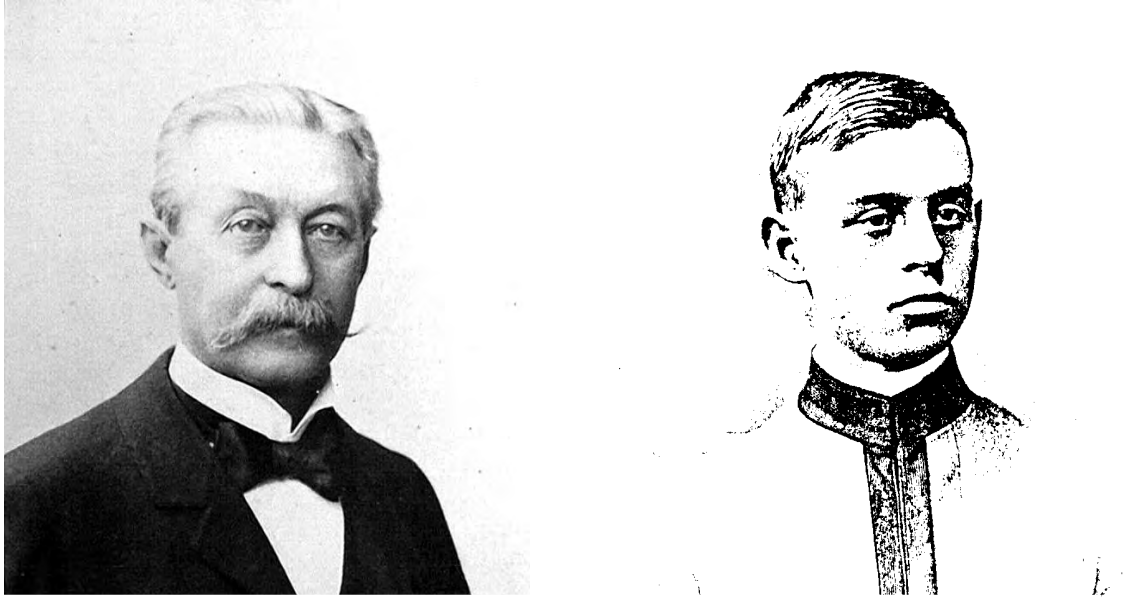
¹¹ The *Journal of the Society of Chemical Industry* indicates that Eddie was still principally employed with the brewery when he joined the Society in 1904.

research at the brewery while preparing his dissertation. He became “a chemist of standing” in Washington, presenting with P. Froman before the chemical society, for instance, a paper upon “The Action of Ammonium Chloride upon Tetra and Penta-Chlorides...” After the death of his father, Eddie assumed the presidency of the brewery and held that position until about 1910. He left to become president of the Capital Construction Company in which capacity he served until his 1917 death. (Portner n.d.:26,33; Virginia Military Institute Archives; *Washington Post* June 10, 1897, November 10, 1899, June 5, 1915 and December 16, 1917; J.H. Chataigne & Co. 1897; Valaer 1969; Boyd’s Directory Company 1901; Boyd’s Directory Company 1910; W.L. Richmond 1903; W.L. Richmond 1907; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3:27)

Oscar Portner apparently worked on and off in the brewery for a few years after his father’s death. He would then serve as president of the Prohibition-era family feed business. Cousin Peter Valaer, Jr., nearly the same age, held him in high regard. “He was the nicest and kindest person I ever knew (like a brother). His sisters always said he was the sweetest of all their brothers and always so kind to them.” Oscar pursued a career in real estate and left a \$150,000 estate. He lived in Washington’s tony Sheridan-Kalorama neighborhood and, like many of his brothers, was well known as a horseman. (Valaer 1969; *Washington Post* December 6, 1924)

Alvin may have been the superior businessman and, at least in that way, more like his father. He was educated at the Danville Military College, M.I.T., and the University of Virginia, studying science, liberal arts and law, and earning a Bachelor of Law degree. He began practicing as an attorney in Washington in 1899 and partnered with Lee Trinkle, a former governor of Virginia, for a period. For a brief time his father secured a position for him at the American Security and Trust Company. In 1901 he was “elected” president of the Portner Brown Stone Company and vice-president of the Capital Construction Company. He became vice-president of the Robert Portner Brewing Company under Eddie, before replacing his elder brother around 1910 and serving as president of the brewery and its successor corporation. With the deaths of his older brothers, most of the family’s primary interests were united under Alvin’s control. President of the Capital Construction Company and Robert Portner Corporation, he was also vice-president of the Portner Realty Company. He became a partner in Washington’s Bellevue Hotel as well. At the time of his father’s death, Alvin was a Manassas town councilman and served on the Council’s construction committee. Raised in the South, he became a staunch Democrat, unlike his father. He was a director of the Alexandria Electric Company around 1910-1911. His family resided at the Portner Flats and at a summer home on South River near Annapolis. An avid sportsman, he was prominent in yachting circles and maintained a large horse stable in Virginia and a membership in the Racquet Club. Alvin died in 1931, leaving a \$140,000 estate. (Virginia Military Institute Archives; Portner n.d.:34; Boyd’s Directory Company 1910; Hill Directory Company 1915; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3; *Manassas Journal* August 10, 1906; *Washington Post* June 5, 1905, February 17, 1910, June 29, 1911, October 18, 1912, November 2, 1920, January 21, 1926 and December 20, 1931)

During the first years of the twentieth century, the other boys were still in school, too young to follow in their father’s footsteps, but old enough to be fully sensible of the loss of their father. Robert Porter had been ill during much of 1905. For the winter, the family rented out the Vermont Avenue house and moved to a quieter and now more fashionable address at 1410 16th Street, NW.



*Left: One of the last photographs of Robert Portner, from The City of Washington, Its Men and Institutions, published in 1903.
Right: Robbie Portner as a V.M.I. cadet, 1893. Courtesy of the Virginia Military Institute Archives.*

Robert's sickness worsened and prevented the family from visiting during the social season. In May 1906, he contracted a bronchial ailment. As was his habit, he left for Manassas to recuperate. While at his beloved Annaburg on May 28, the 69-year-old, self-made millionaire departed this life. Robert Portner was buried with Masonic honors in the Manassas Cemetery, where much of the family now lies in the shadow of a massive rose-granite obelisk. He left an estate of \$1,900,000, mostly in the form of stocks and bonds, principally in his two brewery properties, the Capital Construction Company, and various financial institutions.¹² He had divested himself of direct ownership of most of his real estate, except for the Vermont Avenue house and Annaburg, the former now valued at \$40,000 and the latter at \$100,000. He owed \$40,000. Robert bequeathed most of this estate, including the use of the residences, to his devoted wife, Anna, in trust for the remainder of her life. The children received one-tenth shares of the remainder of the estate, valued at about \$46,000 each in 1916. He also left annuities for his only surviving brother, Otto, and for his sisters, Augusta and Felixine. (*Washington Post* November 7, 1905, January 10, 1906, June 21, 1906 and March 11, 1916; *The Brewers' Journal* July 1, 1906; *Manassas Journal* June 1, 1906; Conner 1977)

Ever the civic-minded philanthropist, Robert provided \$5,000 for the paving of Manassas streets and \$5,000 worth of National Bank of Manassas stock for the support the town's poor, with a third of the proceeds of its investment to go to impoverished African Americans. Another \$5,000 went to the erection of a new Masonic hall for the town, the old one having been destroyed by fire the

¹² Another article, with information drawn from legal documents, set the Portner estate's net worth at \$1,035,000. (*Washington Post* March 11, 1916)

year before. “Those who knew Mr. Portner best know that his recent bequests were not the only generous and liberal deeds done at this place. His unassuming manner made no parade when he was living. Respect for his memory should tell it modestly now.” (*Washington Post* January 10, 1906 and June 8, 1906; *Manassas Journal* June 1, 1906)

Indeed, perhaps the best memorial of his life was Robert Portner’s generosity. In life, he and Anna made substantial contributions to the Alexandria Infirmiry, the Washington Hebrew Fair and other Jewish causes, the Washington Symphony, the Alexandria Light Infantry, the Washington Light Infantry, the National Educational Association Convention, the District of Columbia Citizens Relief Association, the Washington Home for Foundlings, the German Orphans’ Asylum, and the Associated Charities of Washington. Portner paid for the steeple of Alexandria’s German Lutheran church and supported relief funds for the victims of the Civil War, the Johnstown flood and the Franco-Prussian War. He also supported the institutions at which his children were educated. He and Anna bestowed gifts on the George Washington University (Columbian College) and its hospital. A science laboratory at the Holton-Arms School—*alma mater* of some of his daughters, granddaughters, great-granddaughters and great-great-granddaughters—is named for Robert. His sportive side was responsible for donations to the Regatta Association of Fredericksburg, and an interest in exotica resulted in a posthumous gift of an alligator to the Smithsonian’s National Zoo.¹³ (*Washington Post* January 17, 1886, June 11, 1889, March 30, 1893, January 11, 1898, February 21, 1900, December 7, 1901, May 20, 1902, April 5, 1903 and July 13, 1912; *Critic-Record* March 4, 1882 and November 21, 1885, *Washington Times* February 8, 1904; *Alexandria Gazette* June 15, 1880 and January 18, 1902; Smithsonian Institution 1917:84)

¹³ The alligator was likely a souvenir of a trip to Florida and perhaps kept at Annaburg well after Robert’s death.

Chapter 14

The next generation: Growing pains, labor pains

The condition of the brewery workmen in America before their organization was as bad as can be imagined. It was not only that the wages paid were the smallest possible and that the working time was confined only by the natural limits of human endurance, but besides this the treatment of the workmen was of such a kind that it seems impossible today to understand how they could submit to it.

Herman Schlüter, The Brewing Industry and the Brewery Workers' Movement in America (1910)

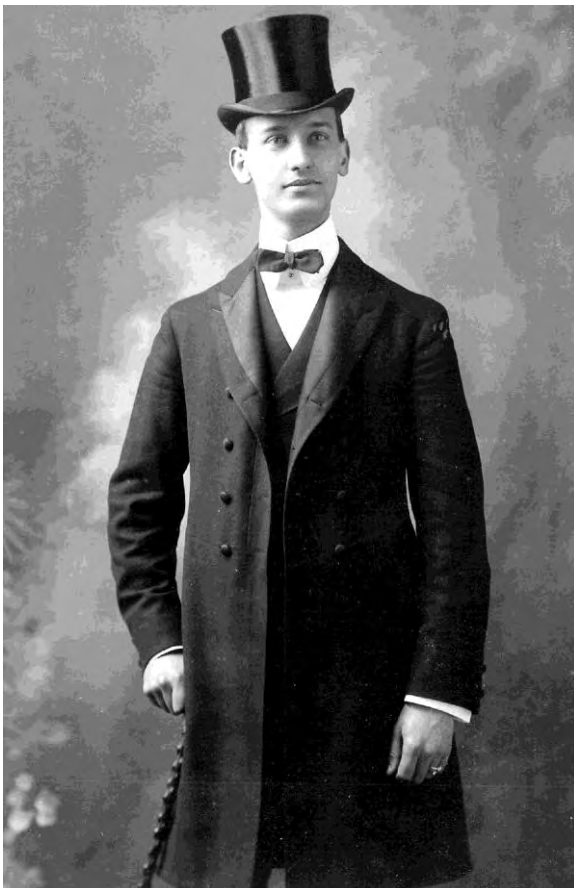
After 1906 Robert Portner's family and employees had to make due without the strong leadership of the man who built much of the environment they had come to know. The sons inherited control of his remaining enterprises, with the exception of his shares of the National Capital Brewing Company, which were probably traded back to Albert Carry in return for *his* shares in the Alexandria brewery. Eddie Portner was appointed acting president of the brewery. He stepped down by 1910, likely because of the demands of leadership of the Capital Construction Company.¹ Alvin succeeded him, with Paul as vice-president. But at first the boys were like princes regent; still young, they undoubtedly leaned heavily on the more seasoned executives hired by their father. At the Alexandria brewery, secretary-treasurer P. McKnight Baldwin and assistant secretary George Beuchert held down the fort, handling much of the business end of the firm until Prohibition, while the "boys" commuted as necessary from their Washington homes. (Richmond & Company 1897; J.H. Chataigne & Co. 1897; Hill Directory Company 1910c; Boyd's Directory Company 1910; Hill Directory Company 1915c; *Washington Post* February 21, 1912)

Beer production figures are not readily available for the period 1904 through 1916. A rising Alexandria workforce and other evidence suggest that output may have leveled off near 80,000 barrels, with a higher proportion of bottling. But between the time of Robert Portner's death and the institution of Prohibition in Virginia ten and a half years later, the brewery saw few large alterations. The plant's boilers, steam engines, and refrigeration compressors remained essentially the same in location, size and capacity. A couple of sheds were constructed and a water tank demolished, but little changed initially. (Wedderburn 1907; *Alexandria Gazette* September 14, 1914; Sanborn Map Company)

After Robert Portner's death, the brewing company retrenched and reorganized its distribution system. Its broad market area and more than a dozen depots required great outlays for transportation, for redundant bottling and refrigeration equipment, and for a workforce of bottlers,

¹ Alvin is known to have been president of the brewery before 1915. Eddie's resignation about 1910 is suggested by Washington, D.C. directories that list him until 1910 as a "chemist," reflecting either his chemistry degree or his involvement with the ink business, and describe him as in the real estate business thereafter. Eddie also became a director of the Alexandria National Bank after his father's death. (*Washington Post* September 8, 1906)

salesmen, drivers, stablemen, and laborers larger than that on the payroll in Alexandria. Under Robert's leadership this expansive strategy had been successful, but even he had complained about increasing competition from indigenous breweries and Northern ones making inroads. More important, a religiously fueled prohibition movement was beginning to prevail in the South. In several states, proponents gave up on local efforts and launched drives to establish prohibition regimes by statewide referenda. In 1907 three states, including Georgia, voted to go dry. In 1908 North Carolina and Mississippi followed. As a consequence, by the end of 1908 the Robert Portner Brewing Company had pulled out of Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina entirely, perhaps leaving only an independent distributor of its sodas in Charlotte, North Carolina under the ownership of Christian Valaer, Robert Portner's brother-in-law. There was a simultaneous retreat from Virginia depots at Charlottesville, Fredericksburg, and Lynchburg. The remaining branches, nearer the brewery, nearly all ceased bottling, most serving thereafter only as cold storage. The reduced market area permitted the shipment of bottled beer directly from the plant. When Albert Carry and his fellow directors repurchased his stock in the Washington brewery after Portner's death, it freed the Robert Portner Brewing Company to compete again in its former market area north of the Potomac. But the brewery was already sending beer all over central and western Maryland during the first decade of the new century. The company established its final beer depot at Hagerstown, Maryland in 1906 or 1907, despite the fact that that city had its own indigenous brewery and plenty of access to Maryland and Pennsylvania beers. While the Alexandria brewery's workforce increased from 109 to 200 men from 1907 to 1914, mainly reflecting a larger bottling



A boyish George H. Beuchert, probably on the occasion of his 1912 wedding. A native of Washington, Beuchert was the son of a Baden-born restaurateur. Engaged by the Portner brewery as a stenographer about 1899, Beuchert was elevated to "traveling agent" within a few years, before returning from the road to serve as the company's assistant secretary. He moved back to Washington in 1912 and three years later became the company's third and final secretary-treasurer, continuing in that capacity for the "Robert Portner Corporation" during Prohibition.

William Walters Ballenger, a Virginia native and former bookkeeper, succeeded Beuchert as assistant treasurer and remained until Prohibition. At the same time, Ballenger served as an Alexandria alderman.

Photograph courtesy of George H. Beuchert III.

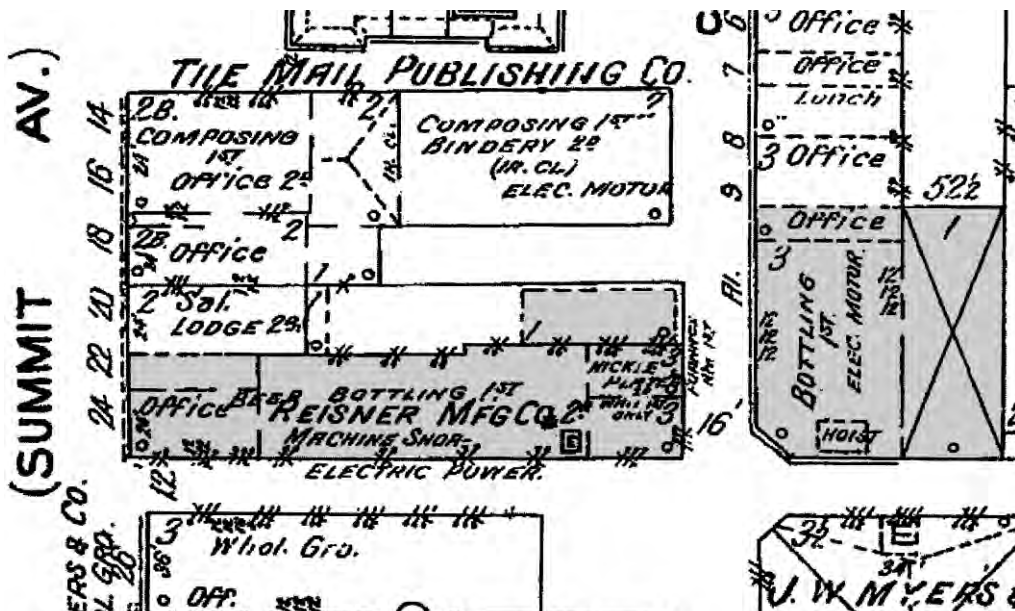
staff, the labor force on the road decreased from 168 to perhaps thirty. (Brick-Turin 1996:8; Sanborn Map Company; Hill Directory Company 1908a; Van Wieren 1995:138)

Pressed on all sides, the management fought to exclude competition on the company's home turf, continuing to control the supply to many Alexandria saloons. The brewery may have even manipulated the new alcohol restrictions to trigger a complaint and prosecution of the Arlington Brewing Company for the manner in which it shipped its products into town. The Commonwealth Attorney maintained that state law required that beer brought from a territory outside the city be conveyed by common carrier, that is, by train or commercial boat. This would, of course, make the Arlington company's product less competitive because of the added shipping costs. The presiding judge ultimately ruled in favor of the defendant, however, permitting shipment from next-door Arlington (then known as Alexandria County) in the company's own wagons. (*Evening Star* July 11, 1911 and September 22, 1911)

Like their father, the Portner sons reacted to adverse market conditions by expanding their product line. They likely continued to offer malt extract and perhaps mineral water but also maintained and expanded the range of soda pops and seltzer. Just after the turn of the century, the company was selling ginger ale, sarsaparilla, and orange, strawberry and lemon sodas. These fizzy beverages were produced from concentrated syrups and bottled at several of the company's depots, including those at Roanoke and Hagerstown. The company opened at least one soda-only depot, at Winchester, Virginia, in response to prohibitionist pressure. (Winchester Star May 18, 1908)

Soda was no unusual sideline for brewers. Manufacture and packaging of the two beverages required much of the same equipment, and some mid nineteenth-century "sodas" were even fermented. Alexandria ale brewer Henry S. Martin derived ten percent of his 1859-1860 gross income from soda sales. West End brewer Henry Englehardt started out in the soda water industry in Baltimore, and Alexandria's Christian Poggensee briefly partnered in such a firm after ceasing brewing. By the late nineteenth century, flavored extracts were available in bulk for those who wished to manufacture their own "pop." Many brewers resorted to the soda business during Prohibition. The best evidence that Portner's sodas were not wildly successful is the fact that the company did not continue to produce them during Prohibition, as many other breweries did. Nonetheless, it was a significant portion of the company's trade for nearly two decades. Nearer to the core of the business, brewmaster Peter von de Westelaken probably developed the company's low-alcohol "Small Brew" and "Amberine" "near-beers" in or before 1908. (Lyceum; Johnson 1983; United States Census 1860b; *Alexandria Gazette* August 23, 1898; Alexandria Archaeology collection; Keller 1884:22,62; Commissioner of Patents 1909:630,1030)

Again, like their father, the younger Portners diversified their interests beyond producing beverages and carrying on the real estate management business through the Capital Construction Company. With his father's support, Eddie Portner partnered with his former Columbian College chemistry professor, Dr. Peter Fireman to establish a research lab to perfect and manufacture a new sort of black printing ink. Fireman had developed and patented a process to produce a "black magnetic ferro-ferric oxide" pigment to replace the unstable, carbon-based "lamp black" inks. Eddie provided financial backing and a manufacturing facility for Fireman, its "proprietor," as well as the



A Sanborn insurance map and photographic postcard depicting what was probably the last-established, brewery-owned bottling and distribution depot, located on the ground floor of 24 South Jonathan Street, Hagerstown, Maryland from about 1907 to 1916. It appears to have been the only official depot opened after Robert Portner's death. The upper story of the building housed the machine shop of the Reisner Manufacturing Company. The facility apparently included the three-story bottling plant and a one-story stable behind. Bottle caps from a couple of the sodas packaged here are pictured next page.

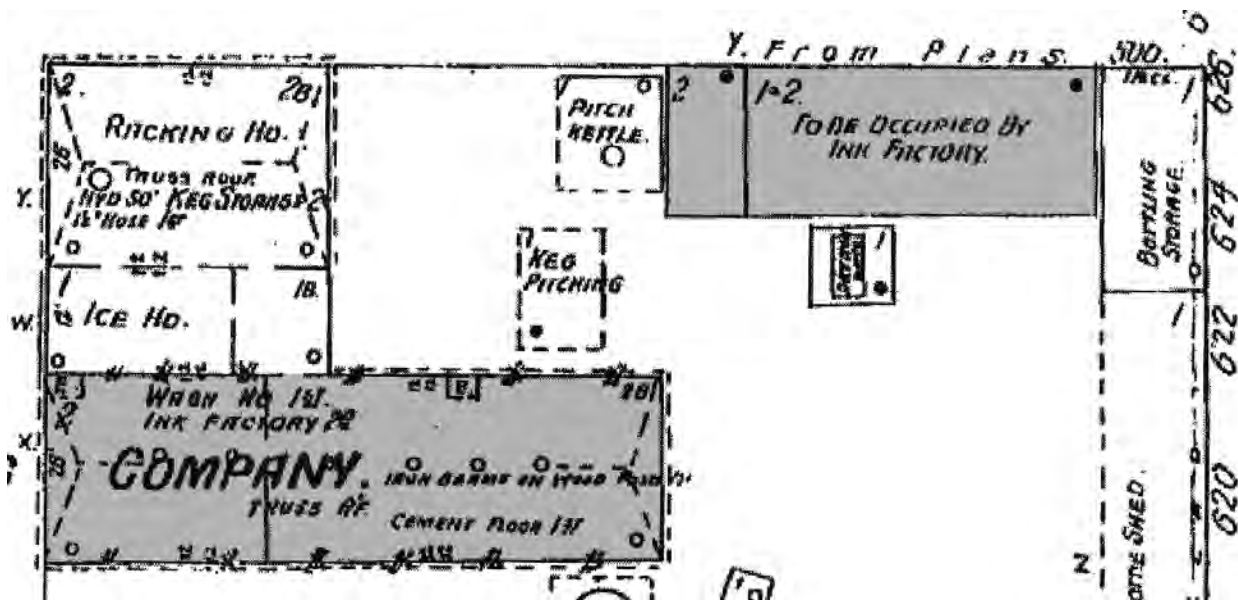


technical assistance of his cousin, Peter Valaer,² and himself. Doing business as the Magnetic Pigment Company, they sold ink to various government and industrial clients and expanded the product line to include colored pigments.³ (Haynes 1954; Richmond 1907; United States Patent and Trademark Office 1905; Valaer 1969; Hill Directory Company 1911c) According to Valaer,

[Eddie] was also very interested in the manufacturing of the black pigment which was made in a loft over the Keg House of the brewery. I was the chemist and hard labor man. We sold the pigment to the U.S. Bureau of Engraving as one of the ingredients in printing paper money, and to Bausch & Lomb Optical Company in [Rochester] New York. Trying to do so much working nights, Saturdays and Sundays. I made two bad “goofs” once. I allowed the distilled water to overflow and it ran on some of the brewery office books and, trying to do too many things, I let a batch of boiling pigment run over. It ran down to the Keg Room so I was in the dog house for a while. (Valaer 1969)

² Peter Valaer was the son of Anna Portner’s brother Peter, a brewer and tavernkeeper, and first cousin to the Portner boys and nephew of Christian Valaer. Peter Jr. grew up in North Carolina, and only in 1902, when a high school student, did he meet his cousins. He spent time at Annaburg and the Portner Flats. He graduated from North Carolina State University in 1906 with a degree in chemistry. After graduation, he came to Alexandria to assist Eddie, another chemist, in his lab work for the latter’s M.I.T. doctoral dissertation. It was at that time that Valaer took a lead role in the ink manufacturing business, an enterprise that, along with the brewery duties, occupied most of Eddie’s time. After the ink business was sold, Valaer went to work for the federal government, first for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (Bureau of Soils and the Bureau of Animal Husbandry), then the Treasury Department (Internal Revenue Service). As a chemist with agencies involved in both the production and taxation of commodities, Valaer spent much of his life studying legal and illegal intoxicants. He was the first IRS chemist to test seized opiates after the passage of the Harrison Narcotics Act of 1914. And as chemist in the Alcohol Tax Unit Laboratory he appeared at numerous conferences and authored articles on opiates and narcotics enforcement. In 1950 Abelard Press published his book about a more personal interest, *Wines of the World*, albeit a work written more from a chemical analytical perspective than the average enophile’s overview. As an 83-year-old man, Valaer penned a few pages as a memoir of his time at Robert Portner’s Annaburg estate and in Alexandria. Fellow Magnetic Pigment Company employees included traveling salesman William P. O’Connor. (*Alexandria Gazette* March 17, 1915; Hill Directory Company 1910d)

³ There is no entry for the firm in Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Books. Other sources refer to it as the Magnetic Printing Ink Company or Magnetic Pigment Printing Ink Company.



A detail of a 1907 Sanborn insurance map depicting the north end of the block bounded by Wythe, Pendleton, Saint Asaph and Pitt Streets. The two shaded structures are the keg wash house—whose second floor was then being used as the Magnetic Printing Ink Company’s factory—and a new ink factory building on Wythe Street, under construction at the time.

The success of the business, and the desire to avoid such mishaps, encouraged Eddie to construct a separate building for the pigment manufacture. Plans for a two-story, frame ink factory were drawn up by 1907, but the building was not complete until the following year. It was erected along Wythe Street, near the southwest corner with Pitt, behind its former location in the keg house and shoe-horned between the keg pitching shed and bottle storage sheds. While it appears that the facility was in operation through 1912, Eddie then sold his half-interest to Fireman, and the plant relocated first to Baltimore and then, following a devastating fire, to Trenton, New Jersey. The former ink factory building in Alexandria was converted to storage use in 1913. Brief archaeological investigations in the area in 1994 turned up brick rubble and purple-stained clumps of clay and refuse. (Valaer 1969; Sanborn Map Co. 1907; Sanborn Map Co. 1912; Sanborn Map Co. 1921; Hill Directory Company 1912a; *Washington Post* May 12, 1913; *Trenton Evening Times* March 27, 1914; Alexandria Archaeology site files)

The refashioning of the Portner company’s core beer and soda business influenced the further development of the brewery. Most notable was the concentration of nearly all beer bottling operations in Alexandria, requiring additional capacity and equipment. The company had been aggregating pieces of the east side of the 600 block of North Saint Asaph Street since before 1882. In 1912 it secured the last privately owned lot on the block. This cleared the way for construction of a new bottling plant, which commenced around the beginning of September. Designed by E.R. Weller and erected by the Boyle-Robertson Construction Company of Washington, the brick, steel and concrete structure cost between \$30,000 and \$40,000. The building was the most modern structure in the complex, and not just because of its late date. The architect and his clients had learned from advances in industrial facility design. In addition to employing modern materials such

as reinforced concrete floors, steel beams, and a glass-filled roof monitor for natural light, the building was given a much larger footprint than any of the earlier brewery structures. All operations took place on a single, 93-foot by 180-foot floor, increasing efficiency by allowing flexibility and rationalization of equipment placement, reducing costs and time spent in moving materials. There was also a basement story, accessible from grade on the east side, which was likely used for the storage of wooden cases. The large bottling house was testament both to the shift in consumer preference toward bottled beer and to the reorganization and geographical concentration of the company's marketing. It may also have been both the reason and opportunity for the company to expand into general bottling, that is, bottling beverages produced by other firms (an enterprise attested to only by the labeling on a single "Portner" seltzer bottle in a private collection). (Alexandria Circuit Court Deedbook 11:589 and 62:40,177,215,223; Alexandria Building Permits 1896-1928; Sanborn Map Company; *Alexandria Gazette* August 22, 1912; *Washington Post* July 28, 1912 and August 18, 1912)

There may have been a tunnel excavated across Saint Asaph Street from the brewhouse to the new building to hold pipes to convey beer directly to the bottling department. Before the turn of the century, the federal government required that beer be kegged and then transported across a public road before it could be bottled. The law's purpose was to ensure that the federal excise tax stamps were paid and affixed to all of a company's products prior to sale. Under pressure from the United States Brewers Association, however, the government finally relented and revoked this inconvenient and costly rule. But Portner employees continued to haul barrels across the street until the new bottling house was finished in 1913. After that date the beer was pumped, presumably below the surface, to large holding tanks in the bottling house. No physical evidence of such a tunnel was uncovered in recent excavations, but they may have existed nonetheless.⁴ (*Amerikanische Bierbrauer* February 1893:63; Fawcett 1976; Portner 1992; *Alexandria Gazette* August 22, 1912)

From at least the early 1870s the brewery had been served by a track running down Wythe and Saint Asaph Streets. In June 1913 the Southern Railway agreed to lay a third siding, at the brewery's expense, from the Wythe Street track through the former ink factory lot to provide direct rail access to the bottling house. In addition to reflecting the concentration of the brewery's bottling operations, the new facility, rail spur, and ever more extensive bottle storage sheds suggest a continuing shift in retailer and consumer preference for bottled beer. The evidence from archaeological sites, and even antique shops and online auctions, supports the contention that there were more Portner bottles manufactured after the turn of the century than before.⁵ (Sanborn Map Company; Alexandria Archaeology collection)

The brewery's final decade was perhaps most notable for its labor difficulties. For many years, Robert Portner had run his brewery almost as a family—with him as father, of course. The employees respected a boss who, as Portner did, shared the labor and understood the nature of the craft. And workers were often literally related. Established firms were commonly passed from

⁴ Laurence Fawcett claimed that there was such a tunnel to the 1903 bottling house, but this is contradicted by contemporary records.

⁵ Most of these twentieth-century, "crown-finish" bottles were manufactured by Alexandria's Old Dominion Glass Company and Virginia Glass Company.



Top: The east end of the 1912 bottling house as it appeared in 1992.

Right: A 1907 advertisement from the Petersburg, Virginia city directory. Notice the now familiar slogan, "The King of Beers." While the Portner brewery was much smaller than that of Anheuser-Busch, it made its regal claim years earlier.



PORTNER'S HOFBRAU

"The King of Beers"

ROBERT PORTNER BREWING CO.

PETERSBURG,
PHONE 162

VIRGINIA
W. KOENIG, Agt.

fathers to sons, as did the majority ownership of the Alexandria firm. Brothers Otto and Carl both once worked for Robert Portner, as did nephews Carl and Robert Strangmann and brothers-in-law William Wilkening and Christian Valaer. So did sons Robbie, Eddie and Alvin. The Strangmanns' sister Louise married brewmaster Paul Muhlhauser.⁶ But even unrelated workers were treated decently. During the late 1860s, while Robert, Otto and Felixine Portner lived in small cottages on

⁶ Alma Portner married into another brewing family, wedding and then divorcing the son of St. Louis brewer Casper Koehler. Their son was the mystery writer Robert Portner Koehler.

the brewery property, they served meals to the workers. For Christmas 1874, Robert presented his employees with turkeys and new jackets, and the men paraded through town. The brewery ultimately fielded three baseball teams at Alexandria—one of brewers, one of bottlers, one of clerks—and others at its branches, including at Richmond and Frederick. (*Alexandria Gazette* December 26, 1874, August 16, 1909, August 21, 1909 and May 5, 1910; *Washington Post* July 20, 1902, December 7, 1902, July 12, 1903 and August 2, 1915; *The News* May 11, 1897)

Skilled brewery workers easily moved from city to city, German enclave to German enclave, seeking the most favorable terms for their labor, but like the guild members of the Middle Ages, master brewers sought to ultimately establish their own shop. Portner helped former employees get new jobs or even start their own breweries in other cities. As the business grew to be the largest in Alexandria, it was not uncommon for brothers or fathers and sons to work at the plant; period records include multiple Alexanders, Ballengers, Bernhardtts, Biehles, Browns, Davises, Diedrichs, Ewalds, Fischers, Gibsons, Glabischwigs, Greens, Kauses, Milsteads, Mullers, Nugents, Paynes, Penns, Reifs, Roysters, Schafes, Schlags, Schneiders, Schoellhorns, Sorrells, Strangmanns, Washingtons, Webers, Weingarts, Welches, Westelakens and Wolterses.⁷

But the business grew too big to remain a family. By the time of incorporation, the Robert Portner Brewing Company employed about 130 men, most stationed in distant cities. The industry was also being transformed by technology and becoming increasingly competitive, with a greater emphasis on the bottom line. Having been completely absorbed with the brewery until the early 1880s, Robert Portner then decided to take more vacation time and to move his family away from their home on the brewery block. The legal and physical separation of Portner from his business was more than symbolic. It meant that he would spend less time supervising operations, and that the workers would be dealing with a board of directors and middle management instead of a single boss. (Brockett and Rock 1883)

Portner employees earned an average of \$483 per man in 1869-1870, although this figure is inflated by the fact that the salaries of the owner and skilled workers would have been disproportionately represented within the payroll of this still tiny firm. At the same time, the reported Virginia average for brewery employees was only \$342 annually. By 1883, Alexandria brewery workers earned only about \$321 per man, about the same as their counterparts in Germany. This was weighted toward the now larger number of less-skilled men, but also suggests that brewing was still seasonal, as the annualized weekly rate of each position would have been much higher. In 1885-1886, the “regular” brewers earned \$14 to \$18 a week; the chief engineer \$25; the two assistant engineers \$12 each; the two firemen \$14 each; the carpenter \$15; and the laborers \$10-\$12 weekly. Other skilled positions, such as cooper and driver/collector, paid as much as \$2 a day in the Washington area. (United States Census 1870b; United States Census 1880c; Walker 1872:396; United States Census Bureau 1883:53; Switzler 1886:109)

Generally, workmen were paid weekly, entirely in cash. The average workday for employees in the industry, including brewers, cellarmen, washhousemen, maltsters, drivers, etc., had been a grueling twelve to sixteen hours—with no overtime. And they could “not be wholly exempted from Sunday

⁷ To mention only the surnames of likely relatives, and not the still more common names, such as Johnson, or in-laws.

or holiday work,” often putting in six or eight hours on these “days off.” Milwaukee brewer Fred Pabst related that “there are many of our old timers who remember very well when the men started at four o’clock in the morning and worked until half past six, when they stopped for breakfast. At seven o’clock they went back to work and worked until twelve and then worked in the afternoon from one to six.” Even with the long hours required, brewery work could be insecure. Before the advent of artificial refrigeration, it was seasonal work, with plants in operation anywhere from four to ten months a year. And there were certainly no guarantee of a job at all. (United States Census Bureau 1883:53; Montague 1899:166-168; *Evening Star* December 17, 1892; Weeks 1886:23; Schlüter 1910:93; Miller 1999).

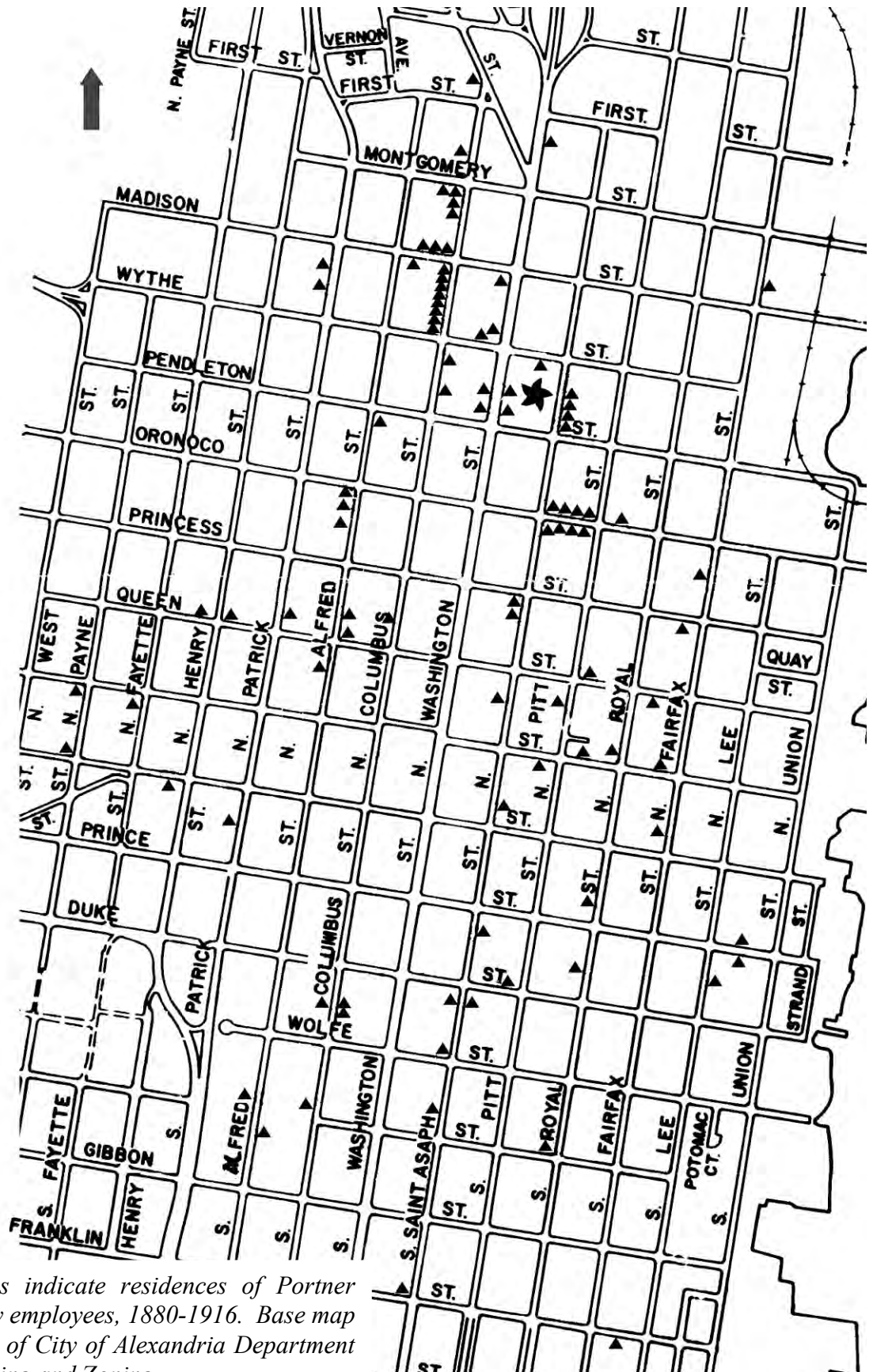
The wages of all but the Portner company’s management and most skilled workers were insufficient to purchase a home. A sample of census entries suggests that during the first decade of the twentieth century, about 70 percent of Alexandria’s brewery workers were renters or boarders. The rest were part of home-owning families, but frequently drawing upon several incomes for household expenses. Many brewers required employees to rent company-owned housing, or put them up in overpriced boarding houses operated by cronies. With the exception of a few dwellings on the brewery property that the Portners reserved for some of the skilled workers or family members, there is no evidence that Robert Portner or his sons engaged in these practices. He did contemplate erecting on the 600 block of Saint Asaph Street “a hotel large enough to accommodate most of his employees... [so] that his workmen can, at a moderate cost, have a good dwelling place and be near the works.” This would have allowed Portner to recoup some of the wages expended and would serve as a measure of social control conducive to worker productivity. But nothing came of the boarding house plan except for a few apartments for brewery clerks, as evidenced by the dispersed pattern of employee dwellings (see next page). The expansion of the workforce meant that the laborers had to fend for themselves. They did tend to concentrate near the plant for convenience, and because an industrial zone likely offered lower rents. The brewery neighborhood was said to be “inhabited principally by employes of that concern, most of whom are German,” and North Columbus Street was thus known as “Dutch Row.” (Miller 1999; *Alexandria Gazette* March 2, 1882; *Washington Post* March 3, 1882, July 31, 1902 and March 19, 1906 and March 2, 1952; United States Census 1900b; United States Census 1910a)

One of the few perks of a brewery job was the availability of daily liquid refreshment.

Beer was given freely to employees throughout their workday. Some historians [such as socialist Hermann Schlüter] interpret this practice as being a means of keeping the workers subdued, thus being less likely to rebel against their working conditions. Others point out that beer was simply a daily staple for Germans, who were far away the largest nationality employed... (Miller 1999)

In fact, free beer was a benefit insisted upon by workers, and the custom persisted well after the repeal of Prohibition.⁸ Undoubtedly, alcohol did dull the ache of a long day’s labor, but it probably cost the company in terms of decreased productivity and accidents. In one series of early twentieth-

⁸ Within the author’s lifetime, free beer was still consumed by workers in the brewery at which his father was employed.



Triangles indicate residences of Portner company employees, 1880-1916. Base map courtesy of City of Alexandria Department of Planning and Zoning.

century labor negotiations, the workers accepted limitations on the availability of beer in return for company concessions on wages and hours.

Whether or not alcohol consumption was a factor contributing to accidents, nineteenth-century brewing was as dangerous as most industries of the period. Workers were subject to scalding, falls, injuries from moving machinery, cuts from broken glass, wagon and train accidents, etc. Prior to the widespread adoption of refrigeration, the cellarmen, charged with the complicated management of fermentation and aging, often fell ill with respiratory illnesses from the cellars' cold, dampness, mold and mildew. Over the years, a number of Alexandria brewery and distillery workers were killed or injured on the job, as were construction workers.⁹ Indeed, on at least one occasion, Portner's cellarmen had a more immediate worry than sickness. After the second-story ice room had been filled with 400 tons of ice from the Alexandria Canal, a foreman ordered fourteen African-American laborers to clear the ice, as he was concerned about stress on the structure below. While they worked, they suddenly heard the floor cracking and escaped unhurt only by jumping fifteen feet from the windows.¹⁰ The floor collapsed, crushing the tanks in the beer room and cellar below—\$3,000 damage in all. James "Sandy" Mason, a cleaner of the plant's boiler flues, was not so fortunate. In the spring of 1888 he was at work within the middle boiler when unwitting fireman John H. Johnson let water and steam into it from the other two, scalding Mason to death. A 1901 boiler explosion hurled engineer Lewis Hart into the next room, burning his arms and face. John Holland narrowly averted death in the same incident as, a few minutes earlier, he had been lying atop the boiler. Spontaneously combusting malt dust exploded in the mill room in 1886, burning watchman Leo Ewald. Charles Koch's face was mashed by the kick of a horse at the Washington depot a year earlier. Cooper Samuel Lyles was nearly suffocated from the lack of oxygen within a beer cask he was repairing in 1880. Lewis Hart, J.W. Griffin, and John and Willie Cogan sustained injuries in falls. A bursting bottle severed the artery in John Schafe's left wrist in 1912. The starting lever of one of the refrigeration machines hurt engineer Samuel E. Jackson's arm in 1901.

⁹ One of Alexandria's first serious brewing accidents was the scalding death of a slave at the Wales brewery in the mid 1780s. Two of Portner's former employees died in falls while employed at other breweries in Arlington and Baltimore. The open plan of modern breweries, with their multiple cast iron decks and stairways, made falls a real danger. And while there were a number of wagon accidents and runaway horses, the company's drivers were not the only ones hurt by vehicles. A locomotive on the company's rail siding hurt nine-year-old Duncan Peverill. One of the company's wagons ran over a boy named Samuel Gary and another, Charles Zimmerman's pet dog, "Sportie." Some injuries at the Portner plant were no accidents. Joseph Weingart, foreman of the bottle wash house, hanged himself there in 1912. In 1896 engineer George Lamb shot his brother Sam with the brewery watchman's gun defending himself from a sudden knife attack. Employees Martin Kessler and Otto Erler fought with brass knuckles and a pocket knife, and Joseph Steuernagel and Fritz Himmelman, in a dispute over union matters, got into a fight involving a knife. Driver James Martin severely beat stableman Louis Oberholzer in 1882. Over the years, there were also a number of accidents and injuries involving workers constructing portions of the expanding brewery. The National Capital Brewing Company had its own wagon, horse and car accidents, an accidental shooting, and a murder. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 23, 1786, May 24, 1869, August 1, 1874, June 29, 1878, March 26, 1879, November 14, 1879, March 6 1882, January 13, 1893, December 15, 1896 and October 7, 1897; *Baltimore Sun* July 20, 1902; *Washington Post* March 3, 1882, June 11, 1896, November 22, 1898, August 6, 1899, October 4, 1899, August 4, 1901, January 12, 1902, July 24, 1904, August 26, 1904 and November 15, 1915; *The News* August 16, 1897 and January 14, 1899)

¹⁰ The newspaper account says that the "ice house" was on the third floor, but the height suggests that the cellar had been included in that number. This portion of the building may have been constructed as recently as 1878-1879, about two years before the incident. The placement of the ice room above ground points to a rearrangement of the building in the post-1878 period.

James Washington was struck by three falling kegs of beer in 1894. Harvey O. Daniels cut his hand on a nail while lifting a barrel in the labeling department in 1908, and Arthur Kell lost a thumb in a bottling machine in 1880. Former driver Bernhardt succumbed to complications a year after mashing his hand while loading beer kegs, and 21-year-old Louis Schoellhorn was crushed between a moving freight elevator car and a steel beam. (*Alexandria Gazette* March 26, 1879, January 7, 1880, January 23, 1880, September 14, 1881; October 3, 1908 and May 21, 1915; *Washington Post* March 19, 1880, January 7, 1881, February 16, 1886, May 14, 1888, May 6, 1894, July 23, 1895, January 22, 1901, July 29, 1901, January 25, 1906 and August 3, 1912; *Critic-Record* April 25, 1885)

There were few market-oriented solutions to workers' concerns about pay, hours and safety. Only the better-off could afford private insurance. When scalded by a steam pump vent, engineer William Mahler's burns were treated courtesy of the Travelers Accident Company of Hartford. But when brewer William Kitts's hand was broken at work, he was not hospitalized but simply wrapped up at the old Leadbeater pharmacy. William Connell, a Norfolk employee, was more fortunate in that, after a fall from a second-story window, his injuries were dressed by a doctor before he was taken to a hospital. He died nonetheless, at age 25. An African-American helper on one of the wagons was similarly hospitalized after a fall in 1909. In the 1890s a mostly German group of Washingtonians received a charter to establish in Alexandria the Brewers' and Distillers' Life Association of America.¹¹ With the payment of premiums, employees of alcoholic beverage manufacturers would receive life insurance. Available, too, were weekly or monthly benefits in case of disability or sickness. Some Portner employees had cause to draw such benefits; on January 12, 1893, Martin Leese "fell down a flight of stairs... and broke his collar bone and two of his ribs. He was taken to Providence Hospital, Washington, by members of the Brewers' Association." (*Alexandria Gazette* March 3, 1882, March 4, 1882 and March 6, 1882, January 13, 1893 and May 25, 1909; *Washington Post* July 23, 1895; *American Beacon* September 9, 1890; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3:322-323)

Only in cases of demonstrable negligence by an employer did workers have legal recourse for injuries, assuming a fair-minded or sympathetic judge. The only known instance of a Portner employee suing the firm occurred at the Augusta branch at the turn of the century, and the case went all the way to the Georgia Supreme Court. In September 1899, twenty-year-old James J. Cooper, a salesman, had a serious wagon accident. Unskilled with horses, Cooper had hired a driver out of his commission money and apparently requested the more "spirited" of the available draft horses, perhaps to complete his calls faster. Previously driven as teams, the company's horses had been separated into morning and afternoon shifts, because their skittishness made them hard to control together. Later characterizing the chosen horse as of "vicious disposition" and "wild and difficult to handle," Cooper had asked for reassurance that the harness was "strong and sound," but as would luck would have it, the stableman had been ordered to have the better of the harnesses repaired first, leaving available only the most worn and "broken up" set. As the men drove along, the horse suddenly shied, breaking a harness strap. "This frightened the animal, and without warning he lurched forward and commenced to kick," violently striking Cooper in the right shin, causing multiple breaks including a compound fracture. A surgeon set the limb, but it showed no

¹¹ The Association's board consisted of five Washington businessmen, including two insurance men, a hotelier, and a butcher.

signs of knitting after three weeks, so he opened it up again and sawed off each end of the bone at the major break. Cooper spent months in the hospital, experienced continual pain for which he took morphine, and was left with a permanent limp. He sued the brewery and its depot manager, Edward Sheehan, asking for \$10,000. He was initially awarded only \$1,500, but after a series of appeals, and considering the years the young man would have to live with his injury, the Georgia Supreme Court awarded \$5,000 damages. It was an impressive sum for the time—enough for the company to pursue three unsuccessful appeals over three years, maintaining that the harness had been sound and that Cooper’s own carelessness with the horse was responsible. The case became a landmark in employer negligence law. (*Cooper v. Portner Brewing Company et al.* and *Portner Brewing Company v. Cooper*¹²; *Atlanta Constitution* April 5, 1900 and January 18, 1903)

Brewing was not an industry notorious for abuse of the labor of children or women. Census figures for 1880, although undoubtedly incomplete, show only 94 women and 190 children employed in breweries nationwide.¹³ A sphere dominated by men and generally requiring considerable strength and fortitude, most brewery tasks were considered impossible or unsuitable for women and children. Those who were employed were most often family members of owners of small operations. But with increasing mechanization, boys were put to work, sometimes off the books, particularly as helpers and in bottling departments. By 1910 the Portner brewery employed a number of teenage boys, certainly children by contemporary standards, but of an age to have completed the basic education of the day. The youngest was James A. Corbin, a “helper” only thirteen years old. John J. Sorrell, fourteen, was a helper on the brewery wagons, possibly assisting his father, another employee. Lewis Chesshire, fifteen, worked in the bottling house, and Owen J. Nugent Jr. was a clerk by age seventeen. There were several others who are known to have been working in the plant by the time they turned eighteen. In 1915, the brewery was cited for employing in the bottling house several young men under the age of 21, contrary to a new state law forbidding the hiring of minors at establishments engaged in the manufacture, bottling or sale of alcohol. In the early twentieth century, the Portner company began hiring some female office staff, including Georgia-born, 42-year-old “spinster” stenographer Mattie Williams. (Kelley 1965:564; United States Census 1900b and 1910)

The earliest efforts at the unionization of U.S. breweries were set back by the depression of the mid 1870s. Demands were moot as the unemployment rate skyrocketed, and hourly pay consequently fell. The first brewery workers union was founded in 1879, but early organizations existed only in large brewing towns such as Cincinnati and New York. The first national union, the United Brewery Workmen of America, grew out of Brewers’ Union No. 1, a chapter of the Knights of Labor founded in 1884. There was already a National Coopers Union, but it was weak, and brewmasters’ unions, such as the National Union of the Brewers of the United States and the Master Brewers’ Association, were hamstrung by their members’ intermediate position between workers and management; consequently they concentrated on the propagation of technical information. Unions would gradually progress, but the progress was not linear. Employers

¹² 120 Ga. 20; 47 S.E. 631; 1904 Ga. Lexis 433 and 116 Ga. 171; 42 S.E. 408; 1902 Ga. Lexis 48 and 113 Ga. 1; 38 S.E. 347; 1901 Ga. Lexis 135 and 112 Ga. 894; 38 S.E. 91; 1901 Ga. Lexis 121.

¹³ In 1870 there were reported only 29 females over fifteen years of age employed nationwide and 94 children of fifteen or younger. Of course, the number may have been significantly larger, as many breweries were still family owned and operated. (Walker 1872:396)

triumphed in many early battles but often granted concessions later. Owners crushed an 1881 New York strike, for instance, and the striking workers were blackballed, forced to leave town if they still wanted jobs in the trade. Five years later, much of the industry was convulsed with strikes. The New York breweries again organized, as did the city's drivers and maltsters. Workers also walked out in Chicago, Newark and Philadelphia and, in 1887, in Baltimore. Everywhere were demands for higher wages and ten- or even eight-hour days. But most strikes failed or saw only temporary gains. In Philadelphia in 1886, for instance, the breweries successfully *reduced* their workers' wages.¹⁴



Unidentified workers, left, and coopers, right, of the George Juenemann brewery in Washington, circa 1870s. Juenemann Collection, Historical Society of Washington, D.C. Of the 16,278 brewers and maltsters counted in the U.S. census of 1880, 9,925 were born in Germany; many of the rest were German-American.

The low point of the movement was the period 1888 to 1890, another period of retrenchment after the so-called Haymarket Riot. New York brewery owners in particular committed to battling to the bitter end. Then, maintaining a (nearly) united front and establishing their own national newspaper, the *Brauer Zeitung*, the Brewery Workmen began to wear down the bosses. Even New York's intransigent owners were brought to the bargaining table in 1901-1902. They ultimately realized that collective bargaining offered at least two benefits to both sides: immediately, cessation of the disruptive strikes and lock-outs; and long-term, the stability that arose from both parties being able to plan for the future—the worker to anticipate his earnings and the employer his labor costs.¹⁵ (Schlüter 1910: 66, 82, 100, 101, 105, 106, 115, 117, 119, 124, 129, 132, 133, 135, 170-177, 196; Miller 1999)

¹⁴ On the other hand, Newark brewery employees received a large raise and an end to Sunday labor at this time.

¹⁵ Nationally in 1890, labor costs averaged less than sixteen percent of the unit price of packaged beer. (Government Printing Office 1895:51)

By the early 1890s, Washington, D.C. brewery employees were taking home an average of almost \$690 a year. This reflected as much the expansion of work throughout the year as it did better wages per hour. Alexandrians lagged somewhat behind. Most Virginia workers were on the job ten to twelve hours, with some skilled shift workers as few as eight. The brewmasters and foremen, salesmen, and office staff were the best compensated, followed by engineers, brewers, coopers, firemen, brewers' helpers, drivers, bottlers and laborers, in decreasing order of average pay. Laborers could earn as little as \$9 a week, and the top brewers up to \$50. In 1910 annual pay for employees of the Portner firm ranged between \$624 and \$988, far above the average \$415 for all manufacturing workers in Alexandria.¹⁶ The national average for brewery workers was then nearly \$720, more than pay in the steel industry, meatpacking, textiles or flour milling. It was the second highest compensation of all large industries, again partly because technological developments had



Portner employees pose for a picture, summer 1896. Most of the men are unidentifiable but are probably from among the management and skilled workers of the firm. John Leicht, vice-president, board member and brewmaster, is seated to the left of the beer keg above the brewery poster. P. McKnight Baldwin, Carl Strangmann's successor as secretary and treasurer, is likely pictured as well. Photo by D.H. Naramore and courtesy of Al Steidel.

¹⁶ The position of driver/salesman/collector was one of the most lucrative, although it undoubtedly paid less in the deep South. About 1900, one of the Augusta, Georgia salesmen was making twelve to fifteen dollars a week, that is, base pay of two dollars plus commissions of ten and fifteen cents on each case of pints and quarts sold, respectively. (*Cooper v. Portner Brewing Company et al.*, 112 Ga. 894; 38 S.E. 91; 1901 Ga. Lexis 121)

eliminated the seasonality of work. Many workmen had realized their dream of an eight-hour day, but were now often working in multiple shifts. (*Washington Post* December 27, 1886; Montague 1899:166-168; Miller 1999; Webb and Woolridge 1892:439; Monahan 1911:76; *Alexandria Gazette* May 2, 1910; *New York Times* February 1, 1912)

Despite the fact that the conservative South was more anti-union than any other region of the U.S., Robert Portner was not unacquainted with organized labor. As early as 1874 he was having difficulty with the employees of his new shipyard. That dispute was settled in the firm's favor, with all but a few men accepting the company's demand for a full ten-hour work day—considered relatively short hours for the era. Portner attributed his 1897 incorporation of the Capital Construction Company to a desire to avoid dealing directly with the building trade unions on his Portner Flats project, and he garnered bad publicity for hiring non-union men at his own home. But it was in the building trades that the Washington-area brewers first accepted full unionization, both for the construction of their manufacturing facilities and for their speculative side projects. Particularly for short-term jobs, it was often easier to capitulate to avoid protracted struggles. Conciliation did not avoid all problems, however. In fact, defending an agreement with the Federation of Labor, a shotgun-toting Albert Carry chased off a contractor's non-union men from erecting a new stable for the National Capital Brewing Company. Perhaps the first significant labor difficulty at Robert Portner's brewery was a brief strike by the African-American laborers employed in the plant. They walked out on a Saturday evening in June 1881, protesting pay unequal to their white counterparts. Portner dealt with the strike swiftly and severely. Within two days, all of the hands had been discharged and replaced.¹⁷ (*Alexandria Gazette* January 27, 1875 and December 15, 1896; Portner n.d.:30; *Washington Post* June 28, 1881, December 25, 1895, June 30, 1897 and September 28, 1897)

The corporation seems to have escaped the strikes that occurred in the big-city breweries beginning in 1886. But the brewery floated along on the tide of events and eventually unionized, likely simultaneously with or slightly lagging the firms of the city of Washington. After all, the breweries in the two cities drew from the same pool of employees; if one brewery or city offered better conditions, workers could "vote with their feet." The Portner brewery was a union shop by the mid 1890s and associated with the Alexandria Trades Council. Nonetheless, the company made the Federation of Labor's "unfair list" in 1896, along with the four biggest Washington outfits. This may have had as much to do with conflicting inter-union claims to brewing industry employees as with any bad feeling between men and management. That year saw a boycott of the District of Columbia breweries by the Knights of Labor, who demanded that all the drivers, engineers and firemen be members of their local "Gambrinus Assembly" of brewery workers, rather than competing groups. But it was a group of 40 Gambrinus men who ultimately paid for it. Given to believe that they were striking to defend wrongfully discharged union men, they were locked out. The breweries' reaction? They closed ranks: when one firm is "struck, all would be struck." The unions backed down, renouncing the boycott. (*Washington Post* January 7, 1896, February 6, 1896, April 1, 1896 and September 24, 1896)

¹⁷ A few months later, the hands at Burgess & Company's guano mill struck, hoping to achieve a more favorable result. Presumably mostly black too, they were not fired but forced to return to work at the same pay. (*Alexandria Gazette* September 18, 1881)

Still, many of the Portner brewery's depots had not yet unionized, earning the company the condemnation of the Virginia assembly of the Federation of Labor, "asking their friends to withdraw their patronage from dealers handling Portner beer." One of the consequences may have been the unionization of the Richmond depot, whose men all entered Local 120 in 1901. (*Richmond Dispatch* May 26, 1900; *Richmond Times* March 1, 1901)

The Robert Portner Brewing Company's bottlers did not organize until the beginning of 1902. It was the organization of these lower-paid workers, in fact, that sparked the next strike. After only a few months, 30 of the bottlers walked out in protest of the firing of their co-worker, William H. Thaler, president of their chapter and about to lead them into the brewers' union. The company claimed that Thaler's activism had nothing to do with his discharge and, after failing to convince their co-workers to walk out, most of the men returned to work. But they ultimately formed Branch No. 1 of Local 251 of Washington, electing their fellows William Wenk, Joseph Martin, Edward J. Harrison, and Charles Keys as stewards. A sad postscript: Will Thaler ended up in the lowly job of "helper" for another local business. (*Alexandria Gazette* July 1, 1902 and July 3, 1902; *Washington Post* July 3, 1902 and March 20, 1905; W.L. Richmond 1904)

Shortly after the troubles of 1902, the brewery and its employees signed a new contract limiting work to ten hours a day in summer and eight in the winter—conditions not available to Washington bottlers until a strike two years later. Pay was gradually increased ten to twenty percent, depending on position, over next three years. But with this contract set to expire in early 1906, shortly before Robert Portner's death, the workers now demanded a year-round eight-hour day and another raise averaging fifteen percent.¹⁸ The company objected, arguing that its competition in Virginia and elsewhere was paying less for nine- to twelve-hour days, and that further restricting the summer hours, when they did most of their business, would render them unable to operate. The men, all now affiliated with the Washington-based unions, again threatened to stay home. On the eve of a strike and following a week of daily conferences, management and workers inked a new, two-year agreement, a compromise between their positions. While the terms were not divulged publicly, the workers' hours probably remained the same, but the contract likely raised wages ten to fifteen percent and may have guaranteed a minimum wage of \$10 a week for most positions. Two years later, the union agreed to renew this contract for a year, as management again pled its inability to meet demands for more wages and shorter hours. (*Alexandria Gazette* March 20, 1906 and March 29, 1906; *Washington Post* June 25, 1904, March 21, 1906, March 31, 1906 and April 1, 1908)

It would not be surprising if the death of Robert Portner left his former employees less awed by the company management. By the end of March 1909, with the contract again running out, the scene played out again, with demands for higher wages, shorter hours, and more paid holidays for the men. Management again pled poverty and simply offered to extend the contract. But this time, things ended somewhat differently, perhaps evidence of some truth to the company plaint. Six months later, the company laid off nine bottlers and put most of the rest of the men on a five-hour day, rather more of a reduction of hours than they had hoped for. The ostensible reason was the Virginia courts prohibiting the sale of near-beer in dry territory, curtailing the profits from one of

¹⁸ *The Washington Post* mentions, however, the settlement of some "difficulties" between the company and the men by the signing of a contract in early 1905. Of course, the brewery was dealing with multiple trades unions representing different segments of the workforce. (*Washington Post* March 21, 1905)

the company's most promising products. (*Alexandria Gazette* March 29, 1909; *Washington Times* November 11, 1909)

Despite the precariousness of business, as the extension expired in the spring of 1910, strike talk was once more in the air.

Inquiry at the office of the company brought the information that a new contract had been presented by the Brewery Workers' Union demanding increased wages and shorter hours, and that the company has acceded to the request for higher wages but were unable to grant shorter hours. The offer of the company makes the wages \$17 to \$19 per week in the brewery and \$12 to \$15 in the bottling house [i.e., workers made up to between \$624 and \$988 annually], with an eight-hour day in winter and nine-hour day in summer.... The Portner people state that they are unable to comply with the Washington conditions, where they do no business, and compete with Norfolk, Richmond, Roanoke and other southern breweries, who pay less wages and work longer hours. In Richmond they work ten hours in summer and nine hours in winter; Norfolk and Roanoke ten hours all year round. In those cities the pay is from \$13 to \$15 in the breweries and \$9 to \$13 in the bottling houses. With higher wages and shorter hours in Alexandria, and lower wages and longer hours in the territory where the company has to compete, it is inconceivable that the employees would resort to a strike to enforce their demands with the prospect of their places being filled by many who would be glad to get them. (*Alexandria Gazette* May 2, 1910)

The employees apparently did not share the opinion of the newspaper editors.

The rumors of a strike... crystalized into a movement this morning by which Alexandria was made the scene of a May-day strike, the employees in the various departments of the brewery walking out. They will await orders from the central body in Washington.... The brewery officials are employing other men to take the places of the strikers, and they say their business will suffer no material interruption from the walkout. It is said that the employees at the brewery have no issue with the officials, who have granted an increase in pay, and if left to themselves, would not have quit work. They are, however, obeying the mandate of the leaders of the union in Washington... (*Alexandria Gazette* May 3, 1910)

Despite its bravado—and with loyal clerks now manning the wagons—the brewery management quickly caved in, faced with a near total shutdown without its skilled men during its busiest season. Twenty-four hours after it began, the strike was over. The board of directors approved a pay increase of a dollar a week and finally conceded to an eight-hour day year-round, with the likely exception of the drivers and stablemen. The only face-saving concession to the company was a moderate restriction of the amount of free beer consumed by the men, a small cost saving and a productivity and safety enhancing measure. “The employees have agreed to take not more than two drinks of beer during the eight hours. Before and after working hours it is agreed the employees can drink all the beer they want.” Average pay may now have reached at least \$688

Vienna Cabinet
and Tivoli Beer.
Robert Portner Brewing Co.
Export Beer.
7 East Fifth Street, Charlotte, N. C.

annually. Many men remained on part-time, seasonal and even non-unionized work, because one source suggests that some were making only an average of \$450 a year. Other sources, however, assert that the average union wage across the industry a couple of years later was nearly \$900, again putting brewing well ahead of most businesses. Indeed, the brewery's marketers even tried to capitalize on the defeat, advertising to its Alexandria customers that its Hofbrau was made locally "by well paid labor." (*Alexandria Gazette* May 4, 1910, November 27, 1910; September 14, 1914 and September 18, 1914; Beer Drivers' and Stablemen's Union 1910:2-3)

The 1910 strike shaped up as the classic union-business struggle: the company bringing in "scabs," and the newspapers siding with the firm and blaming outside agitators. Washington was the scene of agitation too, but admittedly by the workers themselves. They continued to demand improved conditions, perhaps consciously trying to out-earn their brethren in Alexandria. It would not have been an unusual tactic for the United Brewery Workmen to play two localities off each other, hoping each time to make additional gains for the movement. Portner brewery management always maintained that the company could not afford to pay its employees comparably to Washington workers because it had to sell its product down South. The Alexandria brewery's former sister firm, the National Capital Brewing Company, was having similar labor troubles in Washington and even sought a court injunction to avert a 1912 strike. The courts and the newspapers supported the business owners more often than not. Representing the establishment and accusing labor unions of anarchism or socialism, they tended to side with management whenever possible. With regard to their view of the United Brewery Workmen, they were not wholly wrong. A capitalist's nightmare, the union's national leadership was thoroughly socialist by the turn of the century and soon quarreled with the Knights of Labor and the A.F.L. over issues of jurisdiction, methods, and stance on the prohibition issue. Certainly, it was only a small portion of the membership that actually joined the Socialist Party, particularly in such a conservative locale as Alexandria. But in 1912 the union's influence was still waxing; in that year the United Brewery Workmen and the United States Brewers Association agreed to a pension plan for 70,000 workers. It was an innovation not only in the sense that it was a global agreement but also in that the pension was portable between industry employers. Each worker would contribute five percent of his wages to the pension fund, and each employer would chip in an additional amount equivalent to one fifth of one percent of the total payroll. Remarking on the reverse of workers' fortunes a dozen years earlier, from the epicenter of the brewing industry's former resistance the *New York Times* would now editorialize that "[t]his is a complete recognition of the union as a legitimate organization..." (*Evening Star* January 19, 1912; Montgomery 1987:280; Schlüter 1910:136,221-233,226; *New York Times* February 1, 1912)

Portner company management apparently coped with the costly world of vigorous unions by creating two and three shifts, to boost production and not leave the plant idle most of the day. But they also gradually introduced a number of non-union men and seemed to single out union members when it came time for layoffs. These practices soon provoked another walk-out. Fifty bottlers, brewers, and drivers struck Tuesday morning, January 11, 1915. By this time the work force included seven locals representing brewers and allied trades. The union men left in sympathy over the next few days, with the steam engineers and mechanics the last, after their Saturday day shift. In total, 78 of the 200 employees failed to report for work, and office workers again took their places. After interviewing union representatives, the newspapers were pessimistic: "There is said to be but little prospect of the differences between the union officials and the brewery company being

settled at an early date,” although this may have represented the bluff presented by both sides. (*Alexandria Gazette* September 18, 1914, January 15, 1915; *Evening Star* January 15, 1915, January 16, 1915 and January 18, 1915; *Washington Post* January 13, 1915 and January 16, 1915)

M.F. Padgett, jr., chairman of the committee appointed to arrange a settlement, if possible, declared the union men would remain firm in their demands and not return to work until their request had been complied with.... At the plant of the brewing company this morning it was said that operations... have practically ceased. (*Evening Star* January 16, 1915)

The International Association of Brewery Workers and Bottlers opined that the dispute would be settled within a week and distributed financial assistance to the brewers, bottlers, engineers and fireman to tide them over. But the company made good on threats to bring in scabs. (*Washington Post* January 20, 1915)

An effort was made by the brewery management to secure men to take the place of the engineers and firemen in order to keep steam up on the pumps and other apparatus which is absolutely necessary at all times, and they were successful. The striking employees made no effort to prevent these men from going to work and everything has been conducted in orderly manner. (*Alexandria Gazette* January 16, 1915)

This time the company triumphed, with the cooperation of its allies owners further north.

With the arrival of a number of brewers and other skilled employees from New York last night and the employment of helpers from this city as firemen, bottlers and drivers, work in all departments of the Robert Portner Brewing Co. was resumed this morning and the backbone of the strike... is believed to have been broken.... It is said that several of the strikers have applied for work but the management would only take them back with the understanding that hereafter the brewery would be run as an “open shop.” (*Alexandria Gazette* January 18, 1915)

While the International Association of Brewery Workers vainly attempted to prolong negotiations, the company simply took the position that all jobs had been filled and that former union employees could only come crawling back as unaffiliated individuals. An epilogue to the struggle illustrates the lingering resentments between the cashiered employees and their replacements. Out-of-work bottler Joseph Reynolds was still leading picketers in front of the brewery in October when he approached a beer wagon being loaded. A verbal altercation with driver Tanney Trigger led Trigger to horse-whip him. (*Washington Post* January 30, 1915; *Alexandria Gazette* October 28, 1915)

In retrospect, the struggle seems like arranging deck chairs on the recently sunk *Titanic*. Yes, the Robert Portner Brewing Company had indeed broken the union. But circumstances would allow no opportunity for a rematch, because both worker and management faced a greater, common foe poised to destroy their livelihoods.

Chapter 15

The Cold Water Army: Temperance and Prohibition

Jonadab the son of Rechab, our forefather, was the one that laid the command upon us, saying, "You must drink no wine, neither you nor your sons, to time indefinite."

The Book of Jeremiah, Chapter 35, Verse 6

*Lay the jest about the julep in the camphor-balls at last,
For the miracle has happened, and the olden days are past!
That which made Milwaukee famous does not foam in Tennessee.
And the lid in old Missouri is as tight-locked as can be:
And the comic-paper Colonel and his cronies well may sigh,
For the mint is waving gaily, and the South is going dry!*

From an anonymous poem printed in the Alexandria Gazette, 1914

By the time the Robert Portner Brewing Company had solved its labor troubles, the state and even the nation were on the eve of Prohibition. It was a cause that brewery workers and management could agree to oppose, but the many differences within the alcoholic beverage industry weakened their resistance.

The regulation of alcohol in America goes back to the seventeenth century. The colonies passed laws against drunkenness and for the collection of revenue through liquor excise taxes. Georgia was the first colony to attempt a total prohibition of alcohol, but the law was repealed in 1742, a failure after only nine years. A *bona fide* temperance movement, consisting of those who advocated moderation in or abstinence from the consumption of alcohol, sprang up after the American Revolution. Much of the support for temperance was morally and religiously based; reformers were convinced that "social diseases had their roots in alcohol." The earliest temperance organizations formed in the North during the first two decades of the nineteenth century, dedicated to moderation in the use of "ardent spirits." The movement gained strength in the 1820s, as the industrial revolution fractured traditional relationships and created fears among many élites of a rootless mob of workers uncontrolled by social strictures. In 1826 a group of distinguished men of religion founded the American Temperance Society, with its own newspaper and national conventions. By 1830 the Society claimed 100,000 members, and its success encouraged the formation of similar organizations. Soon, nearly every town and city of any size had its own temperance groups. As early as the 1840s several states and territories enacted prohibition laws. Some of these were rolled back immediately, and others survived until the beginning of the Civil War. But the results of the movement were tangible and almost immediate. *Per capita* consumption of hard spirits peaked between 1810 and 1830 at a remarkable seven gallons annually, and dropped to a shade over three gallons by 1840 and 2.1 by 1850.¹ (Baron 1962:191-193; Jankowski 1994; Levine and Reinerman)

¹ Of course, these figures are *averages*; women, children and slaves undoubtedly drank less, on average.

Not surprising, the Civil War reordered the public's priorities. Soldiers and civilians alike experienced suffering too awful to have scruples about a few drinks. Alcohol consumption quadrupled during the war, and the largest immediate gain in demand was for hard spirits. (Schlüter 1910:74) But when the bloody conflict ended, the temperance organizations, often sharing members with abolitionist and women's rights groups, re-emerged to re-civilize the battered nation.

Temperance found strong adherents in the small towns of rural America. Northern Virginia proved fertile ground for the movement despite (or because of) a long familiarity with rum, whisky and ale. There were also racial dimensions to the regulation of alcohol in the Jim Crow South, namely social control of the formerly enslaved.² The late 1860s and early 1870s saw the re-establishment of Alexandria's antebellum chapter of the Sons of Temperance and, somewhat later, the founding of several branches of the Independent Order of Good Templars at Alexandria, Arlington and Falls Church. The Alexandria Tent of the Independent Order of Rechabites met weekly at Phoenix Hall at the northwest corner King and Royal Streets, and a new council of Sons of Jonadab was established from Washington. There was even an Alexandria "juvenile temperance society." Some organizations had multiple lodges in town. Residents witnessed numerous processions, meetings and conventions promoting the cause, and fiery denunciations of demon rum emanating largely from the pulpits of the Methodist and Baptist churches.³ Alexandria and environs offered alcohol-free recreation grounds and even experienced a brief soda water "craze." The temperance movement in Alexandria reached its peak in the late 1870s, with weeks-long "campaigns" and the founding of the Alexandria Reform Club, a "Colored Reform Club," and the Charley Nye Young Men's Temperance Club. The *Alexandria Gazette* noted a significant drop in alcohol consumption as reflected in excise tax revenues. Across the country, calls for moderation in the consumption of spirits gradually transformed to demands for the prohibition of spirits altogether, and then the outlawing of all alcoholic beverages. (Herd 1991; *Alexandria Gazette* January 2, 1868, June 2, 1869, June 14, 1869, June 26, 1869, August 12, 1869, October 28, 1869, November 30, 1869, May 7, 1872, February 12, 1873, May 1, 1872, August 12, 1878, October 13, 1879, October 29, 1879, December 2, 1879, February 3, 1880, March 2, 1880, January 31, 1893 and April 7, 1914)

Temperance groups in Alexandria first attempted to reform public behavior by calling for the strict enforcement of local "Sunday laws," which forbade the operation of most businesses—and particularly saloons—on the Christian Sabbath. Alexandria's trustees first adopted Sunday laws during the eighteenth century. In 1833 a Common Council committee appointed to consider legislation to close the city markets on Sunday reported that:

We view Sunday markets (detached from religion) as tending to weaken and perhaps ultimately to the breaking down of the philanthropic custom of abstaining

² The Freedmen's Bureau promoted the formation of temperance organizations among the freedpeople, and after some criticism, the all-white Sons of Temperance agreed to permit the establishment of a segregated chapter in Alexandria. Although successful measured by the number of groups founded, African Americans were no more or less likely to imbibe than whites.

³ The Methodists and Baptists were well known for their general support of abstinence and prohibition. The Presbyterians, Seventh-Day Adventists, and the Church of Christ were like-minded, but not as influential in that regard in Alexandria at the time. The Episcopal churches in town also contributed support, although the church was less prominent in the early days of the temperance movement.

from labor on this day. We view Sunday as a day set apart for the resting of all creatures, man or beast.... The poor man instead of being benefited is more frequently injured by the inducements held out by the numerous liquor shops in the vicinity of the market places... (O'Flaherty Papers)

Since that time, Sunday laws were observed sporadically. The Civil War period saw both the harshest enforcement and the most consistent violation of the alcoholic beverage regulations under the military government (see Chapter 4). Dr. J.B. Johnson, elected in 1876, was the first mayor of the city to consistently fine drunkards. In 1869 Mayor Berkley responded to temperance pressures by threatening to close bar rooms and then making good the threat. Restaurateurs and liquor dealers raised funds to challenge the Sunday law in court but lost. In spite of this, it was not long before advocates of alcoholic abstinence were again petitioning City Council for more rigid adherence to the statute. In an early 1881 debate, opponents included Louis Krafft, a Council member and restaurateur who maintained that saloonkeepers could police themselves, and Judge Charles E. Stuart who, although sympathetic, insisted that the law was simply unenforceable. An 1882 convention at the Potomac Lodge brought together all of Alexandria's temperance groups to support Mayor J.T. Beckham's expressed commitment to Sunday-law enforcement and his promise to revoke saloon licenses if necessary. (*Alexandria Gazette* February 10, 1869, May 3, 1871, February 18, 1881, May 10, 1882, May 13, 1882, October 19, 1916 and November 7, 1916)

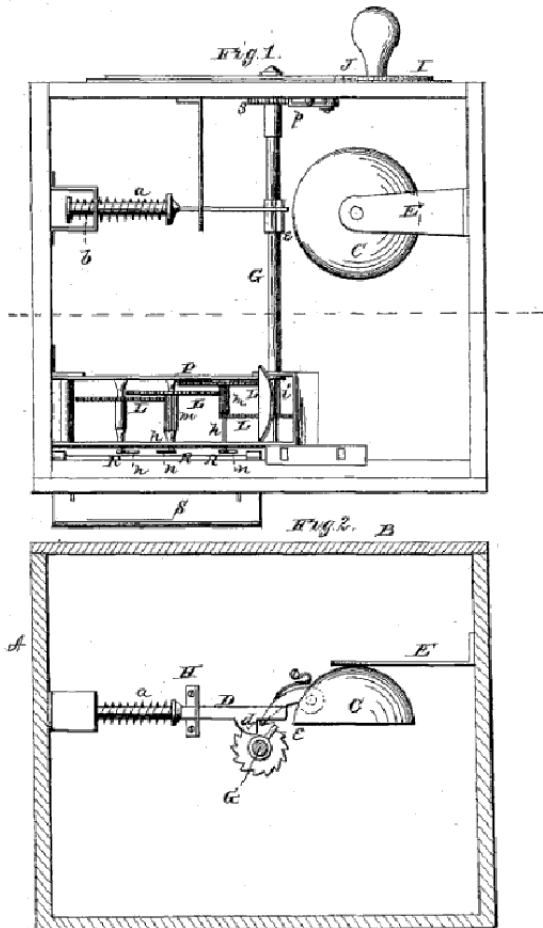
The "Moffett Law" was perhaps Virginia's first statewide effort to license and regulate saloons. Passed by the General Assembly in March 1877, it was named for physician and state delegate Samuel H. Moffett, a native of Rockingham County who had invented a "bell-punch" or register apparatus to track alcohol sales.⁴ Each licensed saloon would have to purchase from the state auditor two of the Moffett registers, one for beer sales and the other for wine and spirits. For every bottle or drink sold, the licensee was required to turn the crank of the appropriate register, a bell would ring, and a series of dials would record the sale for monthly reading by the revenue officials. The tax was half a cent for a glass of beer and two and a half cents per drink of liquor (fifteen cents for a half pint), working out to about a ten percent surcharge on beer and probably almost twenty percent on spirits and wine, leading bars to raise prices. This expense raised the ire of liquor sellers and manufacturers who argued that taxes on dealers should be limited to reasonable license fees. Alexandria's Liquor Dealers Association joined its counterparts in Norfolk and other places to oppose the law—but in vain—in the General Assembly and then the Virginia Supreme Court.

If expensive, this system was at least novel. "Thousands from Washington visited Alexandria merely through curiosity of turning the crank and listening to the patriotic jingle of the bell." It had a pleasant ring to other localities for a time. The state of Texas adopted the system, and it was considered by New York as well. But imitators were hasty, as Virginia's law produced only about

⁴ During the Civil War, Samuel Moffett was a director of the Western State Hospital, at Staunton, Virginia. At the end of Reconstruction he was one of the founders of the Readjuster Party, which split from the conservative Democrats, favoring the refinancing the enormous postwar state debt by "readjusting" the interest payments previously promised to bond holders so as to cut costs, keep taxes stable, and fund functions such as schools. The conservatives opposed reneging on or lowering interest payments on principle and because it would lower investor faith in future bond issues. Dr. Moffett was also a major early defector from the Readjuster Party, which collapsed in the 1880s. (Wayland 1912:356-357; Library of Virginia 2006)

\$500,000 in 1879, not nearly enough to make up the state's deficit. Still reeling from wartime expenditures and the cost of the public education system required by its 1870 constitution, Virginia was desperate to retire its debt, the primary political issue of the 1870s. Moffett's plan had been to increase revenue while depressing demand for alcohol, but as with other "vice" taxes, the revenue was dependent upon the vice. More important, the system was vulnerable to fraud and error, "since only the conscientious bar-keeper remembered to turn the crank every time he handed liquor across the bar." These defects, coupled with criticism from the liquor dealers and the anti-tax Readjuster Party, persuaded the General Assembly to strike the law from the books during its 1880 session. (Library of Virginia 2006; U.S. Patent and Trademark Office 2006; Lalor 1899:293; *Alexandria Gazette* January 22, 1878, January 26, 1878, March 27, 1878, April 4, 1878, April 5, 1878, September 8, 1879, November 28, 1879 and July 20, 1880)

S. H. MOFFETT & C. DEAN.
ALARM-REGISTERS FOR USE IN BAR-ROOMS, &c.
No. 194,951. Patented Sept. 4, 1877.



Left: An 1877 patent drawing for Dr. Samuel H. Moffett's "Alarm-Register."
Above: A cast-iron Moffett register used to record beer purchases.

WITNESSES
Frank E. O'Connell
Frank Hall
 INVENTOR
Samuel H. Moffett & C. Dean
 ATTORNEYS.
Alexander Watson

By this time, “temperance” organizations were advocating a referendum on the complete prohibition of alcohol sales within the Alexandria city limits. The choice to be a “wet” or “dry” city, district or county was already permitted under the laws of many states and was known universally as “local option.” If local prohibition were approved, alcohol could not be sold but could technically still be imported from wet areas for personal use. Resolving to seek a final solution in a complete national ban of alcohol manufacture and sales, temperance organizations quickly evolved into prohibition ones, and local option became an incremental method of bringing this dream to fruition.⁵ As a national movement, the local option effort began in earnest only in the mid 1890s, but Fairfax County briefly adopted such a restriction in 1880, perhaps the first county to do so in Virginia. Local prohibition victories followed the turn of the century, including in Alexandria County (now Arlington), then in next-door Fairfax.⁶ But the independent city of Alexandria remained wet, and soon “a great percentage of each liquor merchant’s business [was] in shipments to dry territory.” Other cities saw an opportunity to assume a popular moral stance while raising revenues by increasing wholesale and retail license fees. Norfolk, for instance, levied a \$250 annual tax on firms that sold alcohol from wagons. (*Alexandria Gazette* February 24, 1880, May 1, 1880, May 13, 1882 and May 5, 1910; Monahan 1911:223-228; Brick-Turin 1996:17; *Richmond Times* November 19, 1901)

No longer content with piecemeal regulations and the reversible local choice on alcohol sales, prohibitionists pushed statewide restrictions that resulted in the Byrd Act of 1908. Speaker of the House of Delegates Richard Evelyn Byrd, no teetotaler himself, opportunistically sponsored a bill that attacked sales in two ways. First, it set high state license fees. Second, it banned the issuance of licenses outside of incorporated cities or towns of 500 people or more, except for immediately contiguous communities and resorts.⁷ Many rural counties and districts had already gone dry under local option, so this did not have a serious effect on the availability of alcoholic beverages. The number of licensed bars, however, did drop somewhat in Alexandria. Perhaps most damaging to the Portner brewery was a simultaneous decision of the State Corporation Commission that brewers and distillers could not ship their products in bulk to dry cities and counties *via* common carriers such as railroads or express companies, as it would tend to cause violations of the prohibition on resale in those localities. (Brick-Turin 1996:9; *Washington Post* December 4, 1908)

Although it was home to many true believers, Alexandria never fell into the prohibition camp. The local paper reflected the general mood during the late nineteenth century: “Knownothingism was killed when it reached Virginia, prohibition has met a similar fate... People in Virginia are opposed to all sorts of isms, and to any man or set of men who may attempt to restrict their personal liberty.” There were plenty of individuals who were more than willing to evade the Sunday restrictions, and as enforcement continued, scofflaws resorted to extreme measures. The *Alexandria Gazette* flippantly commented that “It is said that whisky is now peddled about the city on Sunday in milk cans. The boys must have their rations.” Saloonkeepers did indeed have liquor licenses revoked

⁵ Some organizations were calling for total prohibition as early as the 1830s. (Behr 1996:19)

⁶ The law required first the petition of one quarter of the registered voters in a city, town or district. There would be a referendum 40 days later. If a whole county voted, only those districts that voted dry would go dry. A decision at the polls could not be overturned for at least two years.

⁷ The provision for such hotels, social clubs and resorts was an obvious sop to tourist-dependent interests.

for breaking the Sabbath, although they were usually allowed to continue operating as restaurants.⁸ The list of those arrested for such violations would include most of the best-known bar owners, including Portner clients and debtors Louis Brill and George Pettey. Henry Englehardt, the small-time lager and weiss beer brewer and saloonkeeper in the adjacent village of West End, was repeatedly caught and fined enormous sums.⁹ And in 1896, a Fairfax County constable arrested Richard Burnett for selling Portner beer at a Sunday camp meeting! (*Alexandria Gazette* May 1, 1886, September 18, 1890, May 13, 1891, May 14, 1891, September 28, 1891, October 2, 1891, October 9, 1891, October 10, 1891 and October 15, 1891; *Fairfax Herald*, October 2, 1891, January 10, 1893, January 11, 1893 and February 1, 1893; *Washington Post* September 10, 1896)



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Advertisements from an 1876 issue of The People's Advocate, the first African-American newspaper published in Alexandria. The newspaper was pro-temperance, and its ads reflect its editorial policy. These ads demonstrate the availability of alternative beverages for teetotalers and the availability of medicines claiming to cure "dipsomania," or alcoholism, and drug addiction. The irony is that such patent medicines were likely to contain the alcohol or opiates they purported to combat.

Was it simply avarice or general immorality that motivated bar owners to serve alcohol even on the single proscribed day each week? The enactment of Sunday laws and the other saloon regulations were quite harmful to these small businesses. As we have seen, workers at that time typically put in six-day weeks—with workdays as much as twice as long as today's standard—practically leaving only Sunday afternoons for recreation. Thus, the exclusion of customers on Sundays or past a mandated closing time on weekday evenings cost saloonkeepers substantially more than one-seventh of their potential weekly profits. Furthermore, the nature of lager beer itself, especially contained in oak kegs, demanded considerable patronage for a saloon. Best

⁸ Some saloonkeepers opened just after midnight Monday mornings to avoid the blue laws, but the authorities put an end to this practice. New laws called for opening no earlier than 6 a.m. on Mondays. (*Alexandria Gazette* August 25, 1896)

⁹ The charges caused something of a constitutional dispute as Englehardt actually did business in Fairfax County. The City of Alexandria had previously claimed police jurisdiction a mile beyond the corporation limits, and Englehardt's lawyer argued that this law was illegal. The lower court upheld it, and Englehardt appealed. The fines assessed may have driven Englehardt's little brewery out of business. At \$400 or \$500 each, they were very substantial when one considers that cases of simple assault and public drunkenness were commonly disposed of with fines of \$5. (*Alexandria Gazette*, October 9, 1891; *Fairfax Herald*, October 16, 1891; Walker, Dennée and Crane 1996)

when freshly tapped, lager beer can rapidly become stale and unusable if not consumed quickly. “A rapid consumption can take place only where many people congregate.... Only on Sundays and holidays, when Germans got together to spend their free hours, was this the case.” As it was, bar owners tended to purchase quarter- and eighth-barrel kegs in order to control the amount of beer exposed to the air at any one time. As it became more available, bottled beer began to resolve such problems, but it ultimately undercut the saloon business as well, as patrons eventually could consume bottled beer at home any day. (Schlüter 1910:54)

Alexandria Councilman Henry S. Martin, a commercial ale brewer himself, was a vocal opponent of the Sunday laws during the late 1860s:

In all cities there were persons whose practice and habit it was to frequent places where liquor was sold on Sunday—not for the purpose of creating disturbances, but in the exercise and enjoyment of their natural rights; and those rights should not be infringed.... There were certain classes in every community who had no other day but Sunday during which to enjoy themselves, and if a part of their enjoyment consisted in visiting saloons or [beer] gardens, they should not be deprived of it. If after frequenting such places they became riotous or disorderly, there were laws for their punishment, which should be executed. Each man must render an account of his own stewardship, and not of his neighbor’s... The attempt to prevent the sale of liquor on Sunday had failed wherever it had been tried, and laws passed to effect such a purpose would surely be violated... (*Alexandria Gazette* June 24, 1868)

In the opinion of many purveyors of alcohol, permitting people to drink openly in the society of their peers was preferable to forcing them to take their “medicine” behind closed doors. The saloon was an important neighborhood center for news, political and union organizing, “networking,” and simple good fellowship. “[T]he lower [classes], when their day of toil was done, clung closely to the little beer taverns and restaurants of their neighborhoods.” (Heurich n.d.:42) The exhausted workingman had little use for the pieties of the prohibition crowd.

[T]he church was open about four hours every week and the saloon was open at least 108 hours and the city places were open 7 times 24, or 168 hours. Most of the churches harbored small groups of sedate men and women who were already saved and sanctified and ticketed for future rewards. The saloon gave boisterous welcome to every male adult, regardless of his private conduct, his clothes, his manners, his previous record or his ultimate destination. The saloon was the rooster-crow of the spirit of democracy. (Ade 1931:100)

The most serious challenge to the purveyors and consumers of strong drink came in the 1890s in the form of the Anti-Saloon League. Founded in 1893 by Oberlin, Ohio minister Howard Russell, the League solicited moral and financial support from the pulpits of churches. (Jankowski 1994)

Part of the success of the League was the nature of its organization: a loose confederation of evangelical churches that crossed denominational boundaries.... The League was also “omnipartisan,” working for bipartisan support of its cause.

By concentrating on candidates who were favorable to its objectives, regardless of political party, it held the balance in many places and obtained an ever-increasing control over legislative bodies. The League retained attorneys to force closure of saloons, influenced the elections of officials whom it favored, and had its own periodical, *The American Issue*. This barrage of continuous information began to sway public opinion about saloons and about alcohol in general.

Business leaders began to see the benefits of the temperance movement. Besides religious beliefs, their reasoning included the idea that sobriety would increase productivity. Supporters of the League included John D. Rockefeller Sr., Henry Ford, Pierre DuPont, and the Pillsbury family.... It was through the business community that the League acquired the majority of its donations to fight the saloon. At the height of the movement, between 1910 and 1923, the League collected up to \$2 million a year in revenue... (Jankowski 1994)

The Anti-Saloon League and like-minded groups, such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, attacked every aspect of the liquor trades. They criticized industry labor practices, questioned the ingredients in beer and, most of all, condemned saloon operations. What made them most indignant was the fact that alcohol consumption heedlessly increased. After 1864 the gain was almost entirely due to the success of U.S. breweries. In 1870 average *per capita* consumption of alcohol stood at approximately 5.31 gallons, about half of which was spirits. A decade later, the average person indulged in only 1.27 gallons of hard liquor annually, a plateau that was maintained over the rest of the nineteenth century. On the other hand, beer production and consumption rose to seven gallons per person by 1880 and 14.74 gallons by 1900. To slow this growth, the groups achieved increases in excise taxes and saloon license fees. (Schlüter 1910:74)

Warnings about the temperance movement first arose at the United States Brewers Association conference in St. Louis in 1866. No one could then foresee the ultimate peril to the industry. Indeed, the movement was still sufficiently small, disorganized and unfocused to be much feared. By the 1890s, however, prohibition agitation was a primary concern of the U.S.B.A. The organization began to publish its own series of propagandistic tracts. The periodical *American Brewers' Review* was devoted mainly to the prohibition question after the turn of century. The brewers defended themselves, claiming to pay better than other major industries and, like Portner, extolled the wholesomeness and purity of their products.¹⁰ And, as malt extract (including Portner's) had been marketed as a medicine, so too was everyday lager lauded for its health-giving qualities. Brewers conveniently considered their mildly alcoholic product to be the "temperance drink" for the masses. (Schlüter 1910:80; Monahan 1911:76; Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897; *Alexandria Gazette* August 14, 1896)

¹⁰ Some critics had discovered trace amounts of harmful substances in some beers, and purists decried the use of cheap adjuncts. In 1896 Portner published testimonials from Dr. William H. Taylor, Virginia state chemist and professor of chemistry and toxicology. Taylor analyzed Tivoli-Hofbrau and found it "pure and in all respects, of excellent quality... I recommend it especially for medicinal use." Tivoli-Hofbrau was later advertised as a "pure food beer."

Through his involvement with the United States Brewers Association, Robert Portner was active in the brewing industry's defense against the prohibition movement. He served on the Association's Committee on Agitation during the 1870s. When he was U.S.B.A. president, the Association opposed Congress' consideration of a committee to investigate the "alcoholic liquor traffic" while paying lip-service to "honest efforts to check the evils of intemperance." Portner personally lobbied Congressmen on behalf of the Association before and after this official leadership post. He was also one of the many "vice presidents" of a National Protective League founded to fight the Sunday laws and the temperance movement around the country. Its membership included Congressmen, retired military officers, doctors, lawyers, prominent German-Americans, and businessmen who relied on liberal laws and blue-collar Sunday patronage—brewers, liquor dealers, maltsters, cigar dealers, bakers, grocers, department store owners, etc.¹¹ The League's call to arms attacked intolerance and repression of a sort.

Many business men and other good citizens have long seen with concern that under the banners of temperance, morality and religion, intemperate, unjust and fanatical attacks are being constantly and insidiously made on the liberty sought to be secured to every citizen by the Constitution. To organize resistance to these attacks, threatening alike to civil security and to business interests, and to provide efficient and permanent protection for the future, is the purpose of the league.

Such efforts were surely a countervailing force to the slowly gaining prohibitionist movement. But despite a promising start and its own official newspaper, *The Agitator*, it appears that the National Protective League amounted to little. (H.S. Rich & Co. 1903:554,556; *New York Times* June 4, 1880; *Washington Post* April 6, 1884, April 10, 1884 and May 7, 1884)

On the local level, Portner officers similarly lobbied against restrictive saloon and alcohol sales regulation in the District of Columbia and joined Washington's Liquor Dealers' Association for the purpose. But the growing influence of anti-alcohol forces in other states began to threaten the brewery's vital interests. (*Critic-Record* April 15, 1875; *New York Times* April 7, 1898; *Washington Post* March 30, 1893)

The first major challenge was South Carolina's 1892 and 1893 dispensary laws, which centralized alcohol distribution through a state bottling plant and county dispensaries, effectively preventing beer imports unless purchased by the state itself. But in addition to curtailing saloons and ensuring the "purity" of the beverages consumed, the laws effectively favored local manufacturers, both by making the state the sole purchaser and by requiring manufacturers to buy their materials in the state. Robert Portner openly defied the law, traveling south to strategize with Christian Valaer just before it took effect, and sending Carl Strangmann to South Carolina to coordinate shipments from Charlotte and Wilmington to Charleston and Greenville. The company first notoriously shipped a single barrel to its Charleston depot. Portner's men put the keg on ice "in a conspicuous place in the establishment. There it remained throughout the day, unmolested by the many spies with which the governor has flooded the city." Portner and Valaer then declared to the Charlotte newspapers

¹¹ Not all of the members can be identified as to occupation at this time. Because it was a Washington-based organization, Washingtonians are disproportionately represented. Brewers included Portner, Christian Heurich, and Maximilian Schaeffer of New York. Baltimore maltster Francis Denmead was also a member.

that their beer was on its way to Greenville, and the Richmond and Danville Railroad publicly agreed to carry it. On July 10, 1893, C.J. Pride, Greenville agent for Portner, received a few barrels. South Carolina's *The State* newspaper gleefully reported that "The Robert Portner Brewing Company has knocked the chip off Governor [Ben] Tillman's shoulder, and is quietly asking him, „What are you going to do about it?“” For his part, Pride quipped that the shipment had "evaporated" shortly after its arrival. Saving face after taking no action despite his earlier threats, the Governor claimed that the barrels had contained only water. This was only the first battle in a protracted war, but the brewery sustained serious damage in these opening salvos, as it ended up having to shutter its two-year-old Charleston branch. (Watson 1908:35; *Washington Post* March 30, 1891 and July 13, 1893; *The State* July 8, 1893, July 9, 1893 and July 11, 1893; *The News* July 8, 1893; *Charlotte Daily Observer* July 6, 1893, July 13, 1893 and July 23, 1893; Lucas & Richardson Co. 1894)

The conflict in South Carolina continued for several years. Keepers of "blind tigers" flouted the law, continuing to serve whisky at a premium. The liquor interests and their allies resorted to the courts, and the state's original dispensary law was declared unconstitutional for seeming to aim principally at revenue enhancement rather than alcohol regulation, giving the state a monopoly of the liquor trade. The legislature amended the law to pass muster with the justices, but dealers continued to probe it for vulnerabilities. In 1897 the State and U.S. Supreme Courts upheld the right of persons to order for their own use from out-of-state dealers alcoholic beverages in their original individual boxes or bottles—"original packages"—shipped by common carrier. This promised to curtail bulk shipments. Supported by the railroads that profited from such shipments, Robert Portner again set out to test the system. (*New York Times* April 20, 1894; *The Arena* 1895:412-413; *New York Tribune* August 8, 1897)

In summer 1897, with the cooperation of Southern Railway, the brewing company had its Charlotte and Augusta depots load cars with individually wrapped bottles of beer for delivery to agents in Greenville, Anderson, and Columbia, South Carolina. This was the scene in Columbia in mid July:

[W.B. Meetze] announced some days ago that on yesterday morning at the regular hour fixed for the [government liquor] dispensaries to open he would open an original package store on Assembly street. So when 7 o'clock came, he opened the doors of his place and began to sell original packages of whiskey and beer. He did a rushing business. He sold out \$50 or \$60 worth of stuff. The whiskey was in pint and half-pint packages and the beer was in pint bottles. The latter he kept on ice in his place. He had the Robert Portner export beer and the Hofbrau Tivoli beer. (*The State* July 18, 1897)

"The shippers... instead of merely wrapping the separate bottles in paper, stamping, sealing and labeling them with the agent's name and address, put each in a separate pasteboard box addressed to Mr. Meetze... [T]he two grades [of Portner] beer are done up in packages containing three bottles each, properly marked and stamped" so as to meet the State Supreme Court's requirement that no "cask, crate, box or basket of liquors... be broken by any dealer after crossing the state line. To the distress of the authorities, the private agents began to undercut and outsell the dispensaries. Meetze continued unmolested for a month, but others were not so lucky. Portner agents F.M.

Butler of Anderson and F.M. Simmons of Greenville and their clerks and porters were arrested almost immediately. (*New York Times* May 11, 1897; *The State* June 19, 1897, June 21, 1897 and August 15, 1897)

A new governor, William H. Ellerbe, ultimately made peace with the out-of-state brewers by opening branch depots to receive their products into the dispensary system. But this did not end the matter. The dispensary law had proved a failure. While it increased revenues and had some effect in depressing alcohol consumption, it was badly managed, and the uneven and unpopular state enforcement measures had even provoked violence. So, under pressure from prohibitionists, the legislature permitted local option in 1907, and in 1909 promoted a referendum for those counties that wished to abandon the system entirely and go dry. By the end of the latter year, 36 of 46 counties had banned alcohol. (*Cyclopedic Review of Current History* 1897:661-662; McLaughlin and Hart 1914:360)

It was a similar story elsewhere in Portner's market area. Georgia had introduced local option in 1885, and most counties had banned alcohol sales by the time the state adopted prohibition in 1907. In North Carolina, where the company had five branches and several agents, state prohibition had been defeated in 1881, but the temperance forces had made gradual gains since. The Anti-Saloon League organized there in 1902, and scarcely a year later the "Watts law" banned the manufacture of alcoholic beverages and sales in the rural districts and instituted local option for the incorporated towns. The brewery fought the trend by formally establishing a branch at Rocky Mount in 1904, but at the beginning of the next year, the city of Charlotte went dry, placing the Portner company and its local manager, Christian Valaer, in an untenable position. Shifting to producing sodas and mineral and distilled water, Valaer ceased bottling beer, but he continued to take orders for it, orders that were transmitted to Alexandria and shipped back to the Charlotte depot addressed to the purchaser. Before long, he too was in trouble with the authorities. Summoned before the city court for his Charlotte-area sales, Valaer and his attorney maintained that such transactions were legal under the U.S. Constitution, "claiming that the merchandise did not lose its character of inter-State commerce, until it was delivered to the consignee." Before this issue was resolved, the Watts law proved a stepping stone to statewide prohibition, achieved by referendum in 1908. (Jackson 1908:23; Sims 1997:65-66; Executive Committee of Anti-Saloon League 1908:4; *Charlotte Observer* June 10, 1905)

As the prohibitionists drew a *cordon sanitaire* around the deep South, the Robert Portner Brewing Company understandably shifted its focus to its own back yard, Virginia and Maryland. It expanded its network of agents, opened branches at Charlottesville, Fredericksburg and Winchester, Virginia in 1904-1905, and even contemplated erecting a depot in the hotly contested brewing center of Baltimore. Within the year following Robert Portner's death, the company established its final branch at Hagerstown, in western Maryland. (Hill Directory Company 1908a; *Ice and Refrigeration* 1902; *Alexandria Gazette* April 30, 1904)

Even before this time, Portner concluded that he had to further diversify his product line to mitigate the harm done to his business. Several brewers had found that there was some demand for a low-alcohol beer, or "near-beer," a product that would become much more widespread during national Prohibition. By 1908, in direct response to the Byrd Act, the Portner company began to open soda-

only distribution branches in Virginia and developed in quick succession two near-beers of less than two percent alcohol, below the law's limit for "intoxicating" beverages. Peter Westelaken's "Small Brew" and "Amberine" were marketed simply as "beverages" consisting of "a mild fermented and carbonated infusion of Malt and Hops," some of it under the label of the "Portner Malt Extract Company" instead of the "Robert Portner Brewing Company." But in the harsh environment, even these products came under fire. In Manassas, site of the Portner family's country estate and officially dry territory, constables arrested brewery agent Wade Goodwin for selling Small Brew, and the mayor fined him for violating the town's prohibition on the sale of malt liquors. Within three months, a Hagerstown, Maryland hotel was fined for vending Amberine without a license, and a dealer in the dry territory of Brunswick, Maryland was arrested. In all cases, the brewery asserted that the neither liquor licenses nor local-option laws applied to such "nonspiritous and not fermented," "non-intoxicating" drinks. The company initially prevailed in the circuit court of Prince William County, Virginia, but with the backing of the Virginia Anti-Saloon League, the decision was overturned by the Court of Appeals, the judges holding that, intoxicating or no, the low-alcohol brew was indeed a malt liquor by definition and thus prohibited by the local law. (*Winchester Star*, May 18, 1908; Commissioner of Patents 1909; *Commonwealth v. Goodwin*¹²; *Washington Herald* May 17, 1908)

By the end of 1909, near-beer was contributing substantially to the company's bottom line. Thus, when it was decided that its sales could be restricted in Virginia's dry territories, a natural market, management took the drastic measure of laying off nine men from the bottling plant and cutting the shifts of the rest. Lacking many of its former Southern depots, the company nonetheless returned to its former markets with its low-alcohol and even no-alcohol beverages. Immediately following the vehemently prohibitionist administration of North Carolina Governor William Walton Kitchin, bottles of the Portner company's "No Tax" alcohol-free beer began appearing in Wilmington soft drink stands. The brand name tweaked the authorities, but they were more concerned about any beer-like drink being the "entering wedge... to get some idea of the attitude of the authorities on the enforcement of the preservation law" and perhaps "a blind for the sale of something stronger." The New Hanover County solicitor threatened indictments if Wilmington city chemists detected any trace of alcohol in samples of the beverage. (*Washington Herald* November 11, 1909; *Washington Times* June 6, 1908; *Charlotte Daily Observer* May 13, 1913)

Virginia foes opened up a broader front against beer sales to dry territory.¹³ The State Corporation Commission ruled that the Portner company could not ship its product into dry territory by "common carrier"—train, express company or other "public" freight conveyance—for the purpose of sale where alcoholic beverages would be otherwise outlawed, except for small amounts (less than two pints at a time) ordered by residents for personal use. The Virginia Supreme Court, while pointing out some inconsistencies in the Byrd Act, upheld the administrative ruling. (*Washington Post* August 6, 1908; *Robert Portner Brewing Company v. Southern Express Company et al*¹⁴; *Alexandria Gazette* December 3, 1908)

¹² 109 Va. 828; 64 S.E. 54; 1909 Va. Lexis 102.

¹³ Portner's Danville, Virginia agent was arrested in 1903 for selling

¹⁴ 109 Va. 22; 63 S.E. 6; 1908 Va. Lexis 117, otherwise known as the Roanoke liquor case, for the brewery's attempts to send beer to the surrounding dry towns of Marion, Radford, Saltville and Abingdon.

Portner's challenges to each restriction spoke for themselves. But in the propaganda war over alcohol, he was not as personally outspoken on the subject of prohibition as some of his peers, such as Washington's feisty Christian Heurich, who penned several articles on the subject. Portner typically responded to his foes' arguments indirectly through his company's promotional literature:

To the American temperament, too nervous and sensitive, beer is peculiarly suited. It is certain that the human race always has, and probably always will, resort to beverages more or less stimulating. The preaching of moralists and the efforts of legislators will not exclude them permanently from our use. It is not in the use but in the abuse that the difficulty lies. Neither tea nor coffee answers for all temperaments and all occasions as nervous ailments. In most instances they excite the nervous system, while beer tranquilizes it.... The bitter tonic, the richness of the alimentary principle which it contains, and its digestibility make it a real liquid food, which, for many temperaments, is medicine.... Physicians counsel it for consumptives, and for nervous thin people in the most diverse climates.... One of the great advantages of beer, too much forgotten even by physicians, is that it reverses the influence of alcohol, by which it loses its irritating properties on the mucous membrane of the stomach.... "Beer exercises on the digestion, on the circulation, on the nerves, and above all on the whole system, a beneficial effect." (Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897)

The brewery's advertising asserted that its product was a pure, "healthy drink," that "Physicians recommend... [it] for the grip [i.e., grippe or influenza]," that it drove away malaria and other "prevailing diseases," that it "quiets the nerves" and was a remedy for weakness and loss of appetite. At the very least, it would not cause harm; one ad claimed no hangover headaches. The company invited Alexandrians and even members of the Medical Society of North Carolina "to visit their plant and test the quality of their beer." (*Washington Post* January 20, 1890, January 27, 1890 and October 5, 1890; *Alexandria Gazette* December 10, 1910; *The North Carolina Medical Journal*, Vol. XXX [1892]:353)

Health claims were not wholly without merit. Modern analysis shows beer to contain most of the B vitamins, plus biotin and a large number of minerals and trace elements. A liter of beer contains about 400 to 500 calories (with about 60 percent from the alcohol). Beer has been claimed to reduce blood pressure and help prevent heart disease, to improve circulation and digestion, to fight constipation and stomach acidity—and even to help prevent hair loss and tooth decay! But brewers oversold these health aspects in the face of very visible and sometimes dire consequences for those who overindulged. (Ein Stein Brew House 1998)

[T]he saloons and their partners, the brewers who operated through tied houses, did little to bolster their image.... [The saloon] was also a place to evade everyday life and the responsibilities that went with it. Fights were common... and many of these working class establishments did not know when the patrons had reached their capacity of liquor. For 5 cents one could buy 24-oz. schooners of beer, and public drunkenness was not uncommon. (Jankowski 1994)

PORTNER'S HOFBRAU

EXPORT BEER



IS A PURE LIQUID FOOD
CONTAINING LESS ALCOHOL
THAN OTHER BEVERAGES.

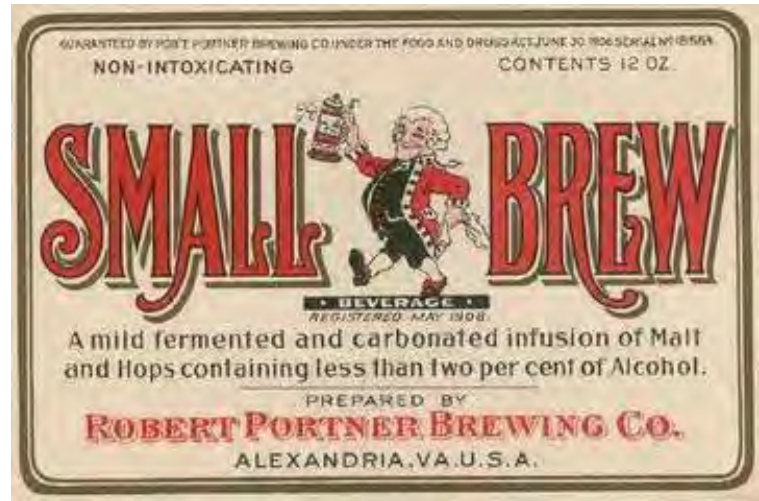
BEER.....	4% ALCOHOL
CIDER.....	6 . . .
CLARET.....	9 . . .
CHAMPAGNE.....	12 . . .
SHERRY.....	23 . . .
GIN.....	45 . . .
WHISKEY.....	51 . . .
RUM.....	72 . . .

FOOD VALUE OF BEER COMPARED WITH OTHER FOODS.

	BEER *	TURNIPS	EGGS	MILK	LEAN MEAT	POTATOES	CABBAGE	BREAD
<i>* 4% Alcohol</i>								
NITROGENOUS MATTER	0.5	1.2	17.6	3.9	19.3	2.1	2.0	8.1
CARBOHYDRATES	5.3	7.2	-	4.9	-	22.	5.8	51.
FATS	trace	-	11.	2.6	3.6	0.2	0.5	1.6
MINERAL MATTER	0.2	0.6	1.4		5.1	0.7	0.7	2.3
WATER	90.	91.	70.	88.6	72.	75.	91.	37.

In the 1890s, reformers and prohibitionists began to claim that many beers were adulterated and contained impurities, adjuncts and harmful substances. Like many other firms, the Robert Portner Brewing Company responded by advertising the purity and salubrious nature of their beers. This Alexandria Gazette advertisement was published in 1906, the year of the enactment of the Pure Food and Drug Act.

A bottle label for the Robert Portner Brewing Company's "Small Beer," a low-alcohol product introduced two years after Robert Portner's death. Efforts to placate prohibition forces came too late for the industry. Of course, the Portner company had been vending "temperance drinks" such as mineral water, soda and non-alcoholic malt beverages since the 1890s.



A 1911 Alexandria Gazette advertisement touting the healthful properties of Tivoli-Hofbrau. Four years later, things German, including toasts, were no longer popular; the majority of Americans favored the Triple Entente powers in World War I.

There was no denying the ravages of alcoholism nor its financial and emotional consequences, particularly for families living on the economic and social margins.¹⁵

Prohibitionists blamed brewers for failing to rein in the excesses of the bars under their control. By 1909 even the United States Brewers Association acknowledged the need to clean up the worst saloon abuses. But brewers responded by largely denying responsibility.

¹⁵ Naturally, brewery workers were not immune to alcoholism. After a month-long binge, John Herke, a powerfully built cooper for the National Capital Brewing Company, was subdued following a violent outburst and taken to the Washington Asylum Hospital, where doctors treated him for a perilously high fever. (*Washington Post* September 2, 1900)



Turn-of-the-twentieth-century brewers' propaganda. Above: An allegorical image favorably contrasting the noble Gambrinus, the personification of brewing, and his orderly and prosperous kingdom, with a bedraggled and besotted "King Whiskey" and his fractious and impoverished progeny. Such moralistic contrasts of beer and spirits go back at least to William Hogarth's paired 1751 engravings "Beer Street" and "Gin Lane." Below: A lithograph associating beer drinking with health, family, friendship, and even patriotism. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.



No brewer should knowingly finance a saloon-keeper who runs a disreputable place, and I believe that when he plays the part of the saloon-underwriter by lending the money for the license and taking a chattel mortgage of the fixtures as his security, he should reserve to himself the right to correct abuses under penalty of foreclosing his mortgage. There is, however, a popular misconception of the legal status of the brewer in relation to the saloon. The fact that he finances the licenses does not give him any control over the saloon-keeper, and his chattel mortgage gives him no more power of action than that which any other man who takes a mortgage upon a piece of real estate. The impression that the brewers actually own most of the saloons and that the saloon-keepers are virtually employed by them as managers, is entirely erroneous. The brewer's lien does not carry with it any proprietary rights. (Fox 1911:16)

Instead of divesting themselves of direct interests in saloons, breweries such as Portner's began to disguise their role by putting mortgages in the names of employees (see page 169). They still had confidence in the political might of their industry, given its size and revenues.

When the prohibition movement finally proved itself a grave challenge to the brewing industry, Robert Portner was approaching what we now consider retirement age and was frequently ill, ceding much of the day-to-day control of the Alexandria brewery. He had ceased an active role in the U.S.B.A. Already excluded from his short-lived South Carolina market, outright bans on alcohol sales would go into effect in Georgia and North Carolina in the two years after his death.

Brewers awoke too late to the reality of their position and had misjudged their enemies and neglected their natural allies. Although they shared a common fear of prohibition, the brewers, distillers, saloonkeepers, and workers were not united. Brewers often made common cause with the distillers (including a national association founded in 1882), but they also publicly tried to distinguish their low-alcohol, "not intoxicating" "temperance drink" from whisky and "demon rum."¹⁶ Most saloonkeepers were now absolutely dependent upon the breweries but did not necessarily appreciate the fact. The rest were resentful of the breweries as the force responsible for the proliferation of competing bars. The divergence of the interests of brewery workers and management over the conditions of employment were only too clear (see Chapter 14). Nonetheless, the employees enjoyed beer themselves and recognized that they owed their livelihoods to the golden beverage. Indeed, the brewery workers' union split with the Knights of Labor largely because of the latter's ambivalent stance on temperance.

Enemies skillfully exploited these divisions. By the turn of the century, six states had enacted prohibition laws. A decade later the number had risen to nine, with all but twelve of the rest using local option to whittle away the "wet" territory. Under the single-minded and masterful leadership of Wayne Wheeler, the Anti-Saloon League declared in 1913 that it would now seek the institution of a nationwide prohibition law. The following year, a bill for a national prohibition amendment to the Constitution gained a majority of votes in the House of Representatives, but failed, lacking the support of two thirds of the Congressmen. (Monahan 1911:223; Jankowski 1994)

¹⁶ The Portner company made the not-politically-correct gesture of including recipes for a range of cocktails within one of its pieces of turn-of-the-century promotional literature. (Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897)

In Virginia, prohibition supporters had been even more successful. Slowly bringing many of the counties into the dry column through local option, the anti-saloon forces were prepared to take the ultimate prize. After a two-year struggle, proponents began a petition drive to initiate a statewide prohibition referendum in 1914. Needing only 18,000 signatures to get the proposition on the ballot, they collected more than 70,000. But only 89 Alexandrians affixed their names. (*Alexandria Gazette* July 8, 1914, July 11, 1914 and August 6, 1914; Brick-Turin 1996:17)

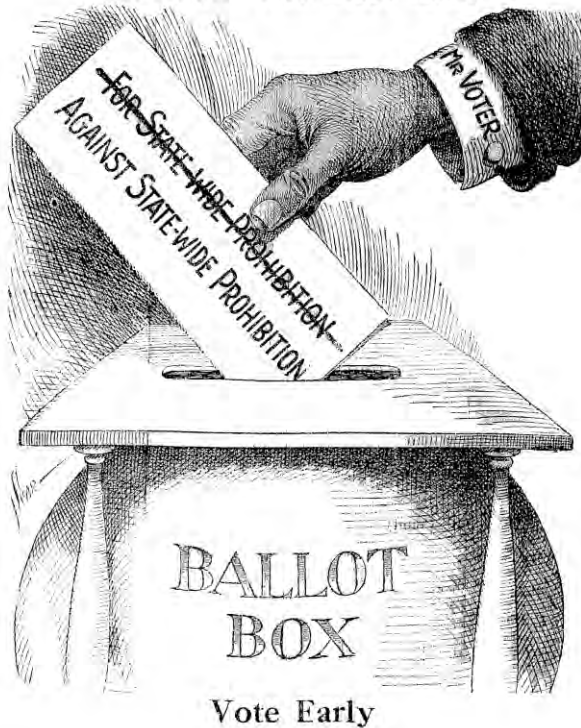
In Alexandria, the Anti-Saloon League was represented by county circuit court clerk George H. Rucker and attorney Frank Lyon, both residents of the decidedly more dry Alexandria County.¹⁷ The city was also temporary headquarters to Women's Christian Temperance Union national field secretary Amy C. Weech, who returned to her home state to carry on the fight. A month and a half before the September 22 referendum, the city's two WCTU chapters hosted the fiery anti-saloon orator Mary Harris Armor, known as "the Georgia Cyclone." The third president of the WCTU in Georgia, Armor oversaw the prohibition victory there in 1907, then was engaged by the National Union of the WCTU to carry the struggle elsewhere as emissary and agitator. Royal Street innkeepers watched nervously during a 1910 visit by Missouri's Myra Warren McHenry, who delivered two anti-saloon and anti-cigarette lectures and informed listeners that "she was not Carrie Nation, but was 'just as good' and had been in jail with the Kansas hatchet wielder." Local and national prohibition groups were backed, of course, by several of Alexandria's religious congregations. Perhaps most prominent among these anti-alcohol clerics was Rev. D. Kern, presiding elder of the Alexandria District of the Southern Methodist Church. (*Alexandria Gazette* August 5, 1914 and September 22, 1914; *Washington Post* February 17, 1910; Hill Directory Company 1915c; Collins 1912)

Prohibition opponents contended that local option was working, that "the law had to suit local conditions," and that for the Alexandria area, in particular, prohibition would simply transfer the booze trade across the river. They essentially transferred the nineteenth-century states' rights doctrine to this intra-state fight. In so doing, they conjured up hallowed Confederate ghosts, suggesting that prohibition would drive a wedge through the body politic, as they intimated that abolitionism had done. Prohibition proponents responded by invoking a Civil War-era quotation of Robert E. Lee condemning saloons. (Brick-Turin 1996:14-15; *Alexandria Gazette* May 4, 1914, July 9, 1914, July 28, 1914, September 8, 1914 and September 23, 1914)

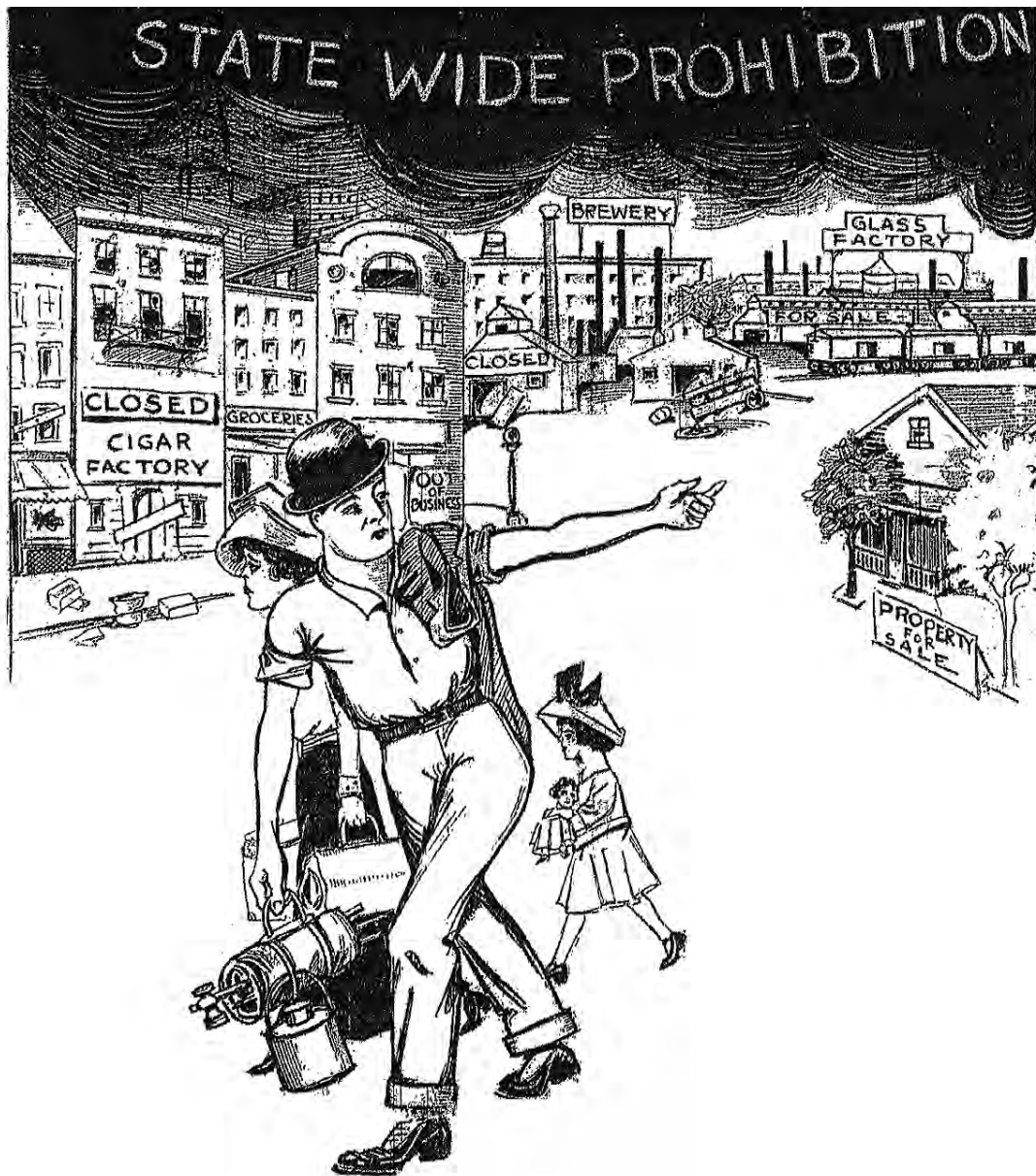
The anti-prohibition Virginia Association for Local Self-Government (VALSG) had a powerful ally in much of the press, including in Alexandria. Despite being published by Robert South Barrett, Jr., the son of Progressive reformers and community leaders, the *Alexandria Gazette* was solidly against prohibition, as it had been in the 1870s. During the run-up to the vote, the paper ran numerous editorials, many VALSG ads, and even published rare, front-page editorial cartoons on the subject. On September 18, 1914, a two-column article appeared estimating a "stupendous loss" to the Alexandria economy of 1,000 jobs and \$1,500,000 annually. The Portner company management actively courted reporters and editors; when the Virginia Press Association met at Alexandria two months before the issue was decided, the membership was entertained with a

¹⁷ In 1903-1904 the upstanding citizens of Alexandria (now Arlington) County shut down the Saint Asaph racetrack and the saloons near Long Bridge. Prohibition was consistent with their general war on vice.

How to Vote For Local
Self-Government
AND
Against State-Wide
Prohibition Sept. 22d
Scratch The First Line



Two Alexandria Gazette advertisements prior to the September 22, 1914 referendum on statewide prohibition. The cartoon on the right is clearly an appeal to the mythic independent free spirit of Virginia and the Confederacy as represented by the aged disabled veteran. The clear message: "Don't betray the ideals for which we fought." A similar ad featured an allegorical female figure of Virginia holding scrolls marked "Home Rule" and "Local Self-Government" surrounded by representations of the state's major industries—except those directly related to alcohol.



During the early twentieth century, the Alexandria Gazette rarely published editorial cartoons. This front-page image accompanied an extensive September 14, 1914 article on the projected damage to the local economy posed by statewide prohibition. The message was clear: prohibition would result in the closure of the brewery and the glass factories and would affect consumption of complementary products such as tobacco. This would, in turn, result in the displacement and departure of workmen and their families and the depression of the real estate market and general retail. Whatever the actual effect on land prices, Alexandria's assessments remained steady in the 1916-1919 period, and both tax assessments and rates went up in 1920. There is no doubt that the local glass industry was very hard hit but managed to struggle on for a few more years. While the law permitted the Portner brewery to sell beyond the state's boundaries, most of its former markets had similarly been closed by the laws in those states, and to continue was not realistic. As many as 40 percent of former Portner employees left town altogether within the five years following the institution of prohibition in Virginia, and a number of others commuted to Washington for work.

luncheon and tour of the plant. On the eve of the vote, the *Gazette* predicted that the measure would be defeated by a margin of at least 10,000, suggesting that popular opinion had lately shifted strongly against the prohibition movement as the arguments of foes sank in. This proved exceedingly optimistic. (*Alexandria Gazette* September 14, 1914, September 20, 1914 and September 21, 1914; *Washington Post* June 23, 1914)

Statewide prohibition passed by at least 35,000 votes with the overwhelming support of rural communities. But there were even small dry majorities in Richmond and Norfolk. The “Wets” won Alexandria, however, by more than three to one in heavy voting (1,121 to 358). Alexandria’s Anti-Saloon League chapter immediately turned its sights on Washington. Its members agitated for the closure of the saloons at 36th and M Streets in Georgetown, located at the head of the electric commuter railroad that served Alexandria, a source of booze for revelers returning to Virginia. (Brick-Turin 1996:25; *Alexandria Gazette* September 23, 1914, September 24, 1914 and September 28, 1914)

As the final details of the Virginia prohibition law were worked out in the legislature in the fall of 1915, the bill came to be known as the Mapp Act. “One of the most drastic [laws] ever passed by a State Legislature,” the act forbade the sale, advertisement or giveaway of spiritous or malt liquors within the state or importation in bulk. Manufacture of malt beverages not exceeding two and a quarter percent alcohol was permitted only if the products were shipped out of state in bulk and by common carrier. The law did allow individuals to keep and drink small amounts of alcohol in the home. The only legal way to obtain it, however, was to import a small quantity each month—no more than one quart of whisky, one gallon of wine or two gallons of beer. With a state license, druggists could administer small amounts of wine or other alcohol for medicinal or religious purposes. (*Alexandria Gazette* September 26, 1916, October 31, 1916, November 1, 1916, November 20, 1916 and November 21, 1916)

The new law was set to go into effect on November 1, 1916, but its effects were felt months before. Alexandria had little economic reason to welcome its good intentions. At the end of April, only 39 businesses applied for licenses for the last six months before Prohibition, down from 44 for the prior half-year and nearly 50 the year before. Some bar owners began reducing their stocks as early as February. Others were shuttered when they sold out in mid October. A number closed the Saturday before Halloween. The pattern was the same elsewhere in the state; the total number of legal bars was quickly reduced from about 800 to 650, then to zero. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 19, 1915, February 25, 1916, April 30, 1916, October 27, 1916, October 31, 1916 and November 1, 1916)

A sign posted over the cash register of the Falstaff Cafe, at the corner of Royal and Prince streets, is suggestive. It reads as follows: “Don’t ask us what we are going to do after November 1st. What are you going to do?”.... Some days before the election on state wide prohibition was held the *Gazette* issued a special issue in which it stated its belief that more than 1000 people then connected in some way



*A panoramic photograph of the triumphant Anti-Saloon League at Richmond, 1914.
Virginia Historical Society.*

with the liquor business would be compelled to leave the city. We see no reason to revise our figures at this time. Already a number who were connected with the glass factories have left because of the decrease in their business... (*Alexandria Gazette* February 25, 1916)

Alexandria had lost several saloons and stood to lose many more—said to represent 832 owners, employees and dependents—plus the Robert Portner Brewing Company, the city's largest employer. At least one of the city's three glass factories produced mainly beer bottles, and these firms had a total weekly payroll of \$5,000. The state would soon forgo \$550,000 to \$600,000 annually from just the license fees for liquor manufacturers and dealers, money that paid government salaries and supported state schools and hospitals. Nationwide, the brewing industry was said, with some exaggeration, to employ directly or indirectly 750,000 people with 4,000,000 dependents. Thousands of farm hands were also employed growing barley and hops. (*Alexandria Gazette* May 5, 1910, September 14, 1918, October 30, 1916 and November 20, 1916; *Evening Star* September 7, 1914; Peoples Library Company 1908:6)

Alexandria residents fortified themselves as the dreaded day approached.

Considerable business has been done the past few days by way of disposing of the stocks of goods on hand, so that the supply still left is not large they say. In some places raffles have been held and quite an amount has changed hands in that way, it is claimed. One dealer said this morning that the price of good liquor had advanced from ten to seventeen per cent since May 1st... (*Alexandria Gazette* October 31, 1916)

[T]here was many a wine cellar created over night. People who had been in the habit of going after their liquors in small quantities last night were seen in the driving rain carrying it home in armfuls, wrapped up in newspaper, plain paper and in handsatchels and suit cases. Traveling equipment which looked as though it had laid in the attic or cellar for years appeared on the streets in tow of some one who didn't want to be caught high and dry on the rocks this morning or for some mornings to come. They disappeared through the swinging doors and when they came out, carrying the self same cases, showed a heavy list to port or starboard, depending, of course, upon the side on which they carried the surplus baggage....

Friends meeting friends on the streets told of their new wine cellars or “wine attics,” invited them to come around and they would “show them where the bottle is,” for it is even a violation of the new law to treat in Virginia. Judging from the size of the packages which left many of the saloons last night, there is going to be much more than the [legal allowance]... in many households for some time to come. (*Evening Star* November 1, 1911)

The *Alexandria Gazette* accepted the new state of things, editorializing that “We all know that it is impossible to legislate vice out of the world.... [But] we hope those entrusted with [the new law’s] execution will see that it is carried out in letter and spirit.” (*Alexandria Gazette* October 18, 1916)

Halloween came and went relatively peacefully, with high spirits dampened by a rain shower and pangs of regret.

The barkeeps seemed to be in good humor, although they didn’t have their customary smile. Most of them had disposed of their stock, and they seemed pleased at that. There were greetings on placards and written on the big mirrors, but following the greetings were “farewells”.... Some of the barkeeps celebrated by giving away some of their glasses as souvenirs. (*Evening Star* November 1, 1916)

The advocates of prohibition were rejoicing at the passing away of the saloon, while many who had doubted the wisdom of the movement vied with the enemies of King Alcohol in their rejoicings. In the main, good feeling prevailed, and while numbers of persons who were on the streets showed the effects of drink but few manifested any disposition to act disorderly. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 1, 1916)

Serenity prevailed for the next few days. Some hopeful imbibers were disappointed in failing to gain access to familiar establishments, some of which had had even their doorknobs removed. The contrariness of the new law to human nature was apparent, however, by the first “dry” Saturday. As many had feared, the proximity to the still unrestricted District of Columbia encouraged a cavalcade of tipplers and petty smugglers. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 2, 1916)

The trains, after nightfall set in, carried capacity crowds, and for the accommodation of the small-sized army of persons, many of whom wished to get their Saturday night supply of whisky and beer, etc., the electric railway company operated extra trains... Many persons from the country who came to Alexandria and had forgotten about the going into effect of the prohibition laws also went to Washington for their supplies.... [M]any bottles of whisky, in half pints, pints and quarts, were brought back to Alexandria... No disorder from overindulgence in liquor was reported by the police.... Close watch is being kept here for violations of the prohibition law.... (*Evening Star* November 5, 1916)

Indeed, Washington proprietors took full advantage of the situation, placing a spate of advertisements in the Virginia papers in late October, requesting patronage “When Virginia Goes Dry.” The Washington *Evening Star* published an editorial cartoon depicting the Washington-

When Virginia Goes Dry

Get acquainted with

SCHNEIDER'S RESTAURANT

416 Twelfth Street, N. W.,

Opposite Raleigh Hotel,

Washington, D. C.

* * * * *
* **First-class dining rooms for ladies and gentlemen. Pack-** *
* **ages checked free. Wines and liquors shipped to all points.** *
* * * * *

Taking advantage of the situation, Washington liquor merchants advertised in the Alexandria Gazette as Virginia's Prohibition approached. As it turned out, the District of Columbia would have only one year more before its own Prohibition law went into effect.

51 Years In Business

BUY YOUR

**Wines and
Liquors**

At

**Christain
Xander's**

famous

Family Quality House.

353 foreign & domestic.

bereages.

Have national fame for quality.

Shipments to all sections.

909 Seventh Street, N. W.
Phone Main 274.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

No Branch Houses.

Alexandria ferry crowded with Virginians literally falling over the rails on their way to D.C. watering holes. But only a year later, Washington's saloons too were shuttered, and Alexandrians had to seek their drink farther afield.¹⁸ (*Alexandria Gazette* October 27, 1916)

Nearly every time a man has been arrested for drunkenness in Alexandria during the year ending last night and brought before the Police Court he has been asked "Where did you get your liquor?" The answer has been stereotyped—"In Washington." The same query will be put in the future, and, in the language of a well-known hymn, "What will the answer be?" (*Alexandria Gazette* November 1, 1917)

Although there were a few celebrated cases over the years, Prohibition enforcement soon assumed a routine of a couple arrests nightly for drunkenness. Illegal importation cases went to the grand jury. This pattern would persist even after Washington went dry. Despite the levy of increasingly substantial fines, arrests remained common. For example, in 1926 there were 681 convictions for drunkenness, 35 for driving under the influence, and 338 for the manufacture, transportation or distribution of alcohol in Alexandria. Nearly a dozen autos were seized from rum runners that year. But overall, the nighttime streets were quieter than they had been before. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 6, 1916, November 7, 1916, November 8, 1916, November 13, 1916 and November 17, 1916; Alexandria Corporation Court Prohibition and Drunk Fines)

As soon as Prohibition began there was an explosion of license applications for "furnishing innocent potions [i.e., soft drinks] to customers." Among the applicants could be found the names of many former saloonkeepers. Other former barkeepers sought refuge in a variety of undertakings. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 1, 1916)

Jacob Brill, who is located at the foot of King street... has fitted up a separate room on the east of what was formerly his saloon, where... [he] will handle the best grades of oysters which come to this market.... A representative of the Gazette has... visited certain places where liquor was formerly dispensed. The proprietors were cheerful, some suggesting that they will be as well off in the future as if they had continued in the liquor business. They were required to make between four and five dollars a day to pay government, state and city taxes before they could lay aside a cent as profit. These former saloon keepers are now dispensing soft drinks, cakes and candy peanuts, cigars, cigarettes and tobacco.... The Gazette sincerely hopes that these tradesmen will be given a fair share of the patronage of the community and the encouragement they deserve. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 8, 1916)

¹⁸ Washington's law, the enactment of the Sheppard Act, went into effect November 1, 1917. It was harsher than Virginia's in that it forbade all sales, importation or possession of alcohol, except that prescribed by a pharmacist. Christian Heurich's account of the "funeral" of a popular Washington saloon (Shoemaker's) could stand for the experiences of many a *habitué* of the vanishing watering holes in the area: "About an hour before the doors were shut for the last time, those in charge began to strip the walls and to shake the dust of other years from the ancient adornments strewn over the back bar. The existing mourners were invited to help themselves—and there was a scramble for the long-sacred stuff—old photographs, civil war sabers and muskets, framed poems, glasses out of which famous men had quaffed libations on ceremonious occasions. It took less than an hour to convert the shrine of American imbibers into the wreck of an ordinary drinking place."

"Eat a Plate of--

ICE CREAM

Every Day,"


BUT--Be Sure It's



MADE IN WASHINGTON BY

THE CARRY ICE CREAM CO.

1337-53 D STREET S. E.
WASHINGTON, D. C.
LINCOLN 5900



THE BEVERAGE
FOR
HEALTH

Malt Marrow


Malt Marrow tones and enriches the blood, brings the glow of health. It sharpens the appetite, revives mental energy.

Drink it with your meals and between meals

The Tonic of the Age

Order it by the Case

C. Valaer Bottling Works
Distributor
317 College St.
Charlotte, N. C.



The National Capital Brewing Company of Washington, wholly under Carry family control after Robert Portner's death, switched to manufacturing ice cream, sherbet and ices when Prohibition came to Washington in 1917. Christian Valaer bottled sodas, mineral and distilled water, and even malt extract.

Others undoubtedly moved on. A sharp Baltimore owner put his bar up for sale, advertising to potential Alexandria buyers only a week before Virginia went dry. The boosterish *Alexandria Gazette* maintained a stiff upper lip throughout. At the end of 1916, the paper trumpeted the reactivation of the Old Dominion Glass Company after an eighteen-month lay-off. The bottle manufacturer managed to survive until 1921, when national Prohibition, a failure to modernize, and difficulty procuring coal after the Great War doomed the factory, throwing 250 out of work. The Virginia Glass Company, on the other hand, did perish at the onset of Prohibition, as predicted. (*Alexandria Gazette* October 21, 1916; Miller 1991b)

Seemingly unrelated international events soon helped make Prohibition a reality across America. Once the United States entered the Great War against Germany, nativist anti-German sentiment

surfaced. The predominantly German ancestry of the industry's owners and workers was almost too attractive a target for the Anti-Saloon League to resist.¹⁹

At the insistence of [the Anti-Saloon League's] Wayne Wheeler and the League for unpatriotic activities, the Senate investigated the [German-American Alliance, a two-million-member sociopolitical organization dedicated to the furtherance of German *Kultur*]. Although the Alliance did display a German flag at conventions, it was because of interference with elections and payoffs to newspapers for crafting anti-prohibition articles... that the Senate ordered the Alliance to disband in 1918. (Jankowski 1994)

Mistrust of Germans and the campaign to demonstrate brewery abuses in the operation of saloons were enough to put the brewery lobby at a distinct political disadvantage. The decisive blow came in late 1919, with the passage of the Volstead Act over President Wilson's veto. Actually authored by Wayne Wheeler, the act completely banned the manufacture or sale in the U.S. of any beverage exceeding one half of one percent alcohol by volume, to take effect one year after its ultimately rapid ratification. (Jankowski 1994)

What of the Robert Portner Brewing Company? Rumored to be shutting down as early as May 1916, the plant curtailed operations, but remained open until the end of October of that year. Then, more than 100 of the brewery's men and women were suddenly thrown out of work, not to mention scores in other Virginia and Maryland cities. A substantial number of the older workers simply retired. Among these were Percy McKnight Baldwin, the company's last secretary-treasurer and a board member, clerk Simon Blondheim, and brewer John Baier.²⁰ Most found other pursuits. City directories of 1917 and 1924 show some employed as metalworkers, laborers, drivers, clerks, painters, bookkeepers, railroad workers, carpenters, salesmen and engineers. Some established their own businesses. Scottish-born machinist George Whitton opened a grocery. John A. Ewald, the plant's former bottling manager, established his own small bottling works a block away. His brother Charles became a confectioner. Several men began commuting to jobs in Washington, including some to the still-operating breweries there. Henry Reif, Jr. and John J. Sorrell went to work, briefly, as bottlers for the ill-fated Washington Brewery Company. If the group of known Portner employees of the period 1910-1916 constitutes a representative sample (see Appendix A), then as many as 40 percent of the brewery employees left town over the next five years, headed for Washington and beyond. (*Alexandria Gazette* February 25, 1916, September 16, 1916 and November 22, 1920; Boyd's Directory Co. 1917; Hill Directory Company 1924; Provost Marshal General)

¹⁹ Portner's German employees were at least as well assimilated as any other first-generation immigrants. Naturally, there is no evidence that any were guilty of subversion or even pro-German demonstrations. Henry Reif, Jr., a former Portner employee and son of a longtime Portner employee, died as an American soldier in France in 1918. One employee, Albert Kallweit, did later return to Germany and swear allegiance to Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, but this was a standard requirement of repatriation, and he was likely of Polish extraction. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 26, 1918; Alexandria Corporation Court Naturalization Records)

²⁰ Coincidentally, all three of these men died in the early 1920s. (Work Projects Administration 1939a) Many Portner employees are identified in records as "brewers." This was a catch-all for various types of employees, from common laborers to bottlers to actual skilled brewers and others.

In mid September 1916 the brewery management announced that the firm would enter new fields. Alvin and Paul Portner and secretary George H. Beuchert rechartered the company as simply “The Robert Portner Corporation,” with Alvin as president, to engage in real estate, farming, and the manufacture of feeds and other products. Farming and feeds were an unusual line of work for a former brewery, although breweries typically possessed substantial grain storage capacity. Many other brewers, using much of their existing machinery, naturally moved into the production of near beer, soda, cheese, or ice cream (as did the National Capital Brewing Company) during Prohibition. While the Portner company had diversified into soda manufacture two decades earlier, there is no evidence that that venture continued after 1916. That side of the business was probably insufficient to sustain or justify the company’s considerable capital investment in production and transportation. On the other hand, real estate was no great stretch. The Portner Corporation still possessed “substantial and valuable buildings in seven other Virginia cities, which are now used as distributing houses,” in addition, of course, to the brewery’s Alexandria properties and the residual Portner holdings in Alexandria, Washington and Manassas.²¹ Although now dark, the former Richmond depot was not wholly vacant in 1920; rum runners briefly used it to stash and transfer booze. (Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 8:198-199; *Washington Post* January 18, 1917; *Hutzler v. Commonwealth*²²)

Citizens of Alexandria will be glad to learn that the Robert Portner Brewing Company will engage in the manufacture of stock, dairy and poultry feeds, and that the present buildings owned by the company will be utilized for that purpose. The company is already investigating and arranging for the purchase of the necessary machinery, and it is expected that they will begin operations around the first of the year. The plant will have a capacity of 20 tons per hour of the various kinds of feeds they will handle. The industry will supply a long felt need [of] this locality which may be readily understood when it is known that the State of Virginia alone consumes about 200,000 tons of these feeds per year, nearly all of which comes from the western States.

The firm will remain under the same ownership as at present and under the management of Mr. W[ilkinson] Stark, a practical feed man who gained his experience in the business while assistant state chemist in Mississippi.

All will join the Gazette in wishing the new enterprise abundant success and prosperity. (*Alexandria Gazette* September 16, 1916)

Success was unfortunately not so abundant. Oscar Portner, now 36 years old, and Paul Portner, 34, assumed the presidency and vice-presidency, respectively, of the feed operation. In the guise of the Virginia Feed and Milling Corporation, the Portner firm sank \$5,000 into adding a second story and an elevator to and otherwise fitting out the former Wythe Street ice plant. This structure apparently became the factory. The main brewery buildings were likely storage, as they still contained huge grain bins and could accommodate more. The feed business lasted only three

²¹ The seven Virginia branches then presumably included Norfolk, Danville, Phoebus, Newport News, Roanoke, Petersburg and Staunton—or possibly Winchester. The depots elsewhere were probably already all sold.

²² Supreme Court of Virginia, 126 Va. 828; 101 S.E. 785; 1920 Va. Lexis 24.

or four years, as no mention appears in local records beyond 1919. Paul Portner's death that year may have been partly responsible for the business's dissolution, and the brewery buildings were indicated to be mostly vacant on the insurance map of 1921. The old cotton factory building, unused by the firm since 1913, had been sold and was leased by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for storage purposes for five years. After a wartime tenancy of the building by the Briggs Aeroplane Company's "flying boat" factory, the USDA moved its storage to the 1912 bottling house. The cotton factory's next tenant was the Express Spark Plugs factory from about 1919 to 1928. In the mid 1920s, proposed new uses for the now vacant brewery property included a creamery and a slaughterhouse. (*Alexandria Gazette* July 28, 1933; R.L. Polk & Company 1917; Alexandria Building Permits 1896-1928; Virginia Military Institute Archives; *Washington Post* March 28, 1917, November 9, 1919, December 17, 1925, April 13, 1927, June 9, 1927 and October 14, 1928; Chesapeake and Potomac Telephone Company 1919; Sanborn Map Company)



*Oscar Portner, early 1920s.
Washington Post photograph.*

Prohibition was the beginning of the end for the world that Robert Portner had created. The Alexandria brewery, the source of his fortune and reputation, was mothballed and would soon be obsolete. The National Capital Brewing Company, returned to Carry family control, was now an ice cream factory. So many of the Portner sons passed away that the family businesses could not maintain much continuity or identity. The Capital Construction Company and Robert Portner Corporation shared essentially the same directors and were less well capitalized than in earlier years. Eddie, Oscar and Alvin Portner kept these real estate concerns going until the 1930s, making a modest success of leasing and liquidating the assets.²³ The family moved out of its Washington

²³ From the mid 1930s, Louis Allwine, the Capital Construction Company's secretary, and S.C. Peale and R.H. Yeatman carried on the business, which consisted of the ownership and management of Portner Flats and the Virginia Flats. The Woodmont Flats at Logan Circle, was the first major residential property to be sold, in 1921. The rowhouses at 1224-1228 13th Street were sold between 1933 and 1935 and the Virginia Flats in 1937. The Portner was finally sold in late 1944 and became the Dunbar House or Dunbar Hotel. Edward Portner died in 1917,

home in 1909 and let it out until 1922. Even precious Annaburg fell into disuse after Oscar and his family moved away in 1918. The tax and maintenance burdens were undoubtedly too great. Anna Portner had taken on its management after the death of her husband. After her passing, the estate “disintegrated, piece by piece each portion dissolved. It was the passing of one of the great show places of Virginia.” When son Oscar died in 1924, it was no longer used even during the summer, and the furnishings went up for auction.²⁴ A developer bought the estate in 1947, selling parcels and building upon others. Finally, in 1964, John K. Sills purchased the house itself and added large wings, establishing there a nursing home. It remains standing today, known as Annaburg Manor. (Killmer 1984; Muse 1975; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 8:198-199; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 11:141-143,567; Valaer 1969)



The former Mount Vernon Cotton Factory/Portner bottling house/government warehouse/spark plug factory stood vacant in 1935. It was converted to apartment use in the mid 1930s. National Archives and Records Administration photograph.

Oscar in 1924 and Alvin Portner in 1931. (District of Columbia General Assessments; *Washington Post* December 16, 1917, November 2, 1924 and December 20, 1931)

²⁴ One of Portner’s grandsons later recalled that “My mother was furious when she heard about it later.” To some family members, the sale of Annaburg must have represented a betrayal of Robert Portner’s dream and admonition to always keep the family retreat. Of course, Portner had elsewhere written that he had purchased much of the property as an investment for the family.

Chapter 16

After Prohibition

Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?
William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night, Act II, Scene 3

*But the cheerful Spring came kindly on,
And show'rs began to fall;
John Barleycorn got up again,
And sore surpris'd them all.*

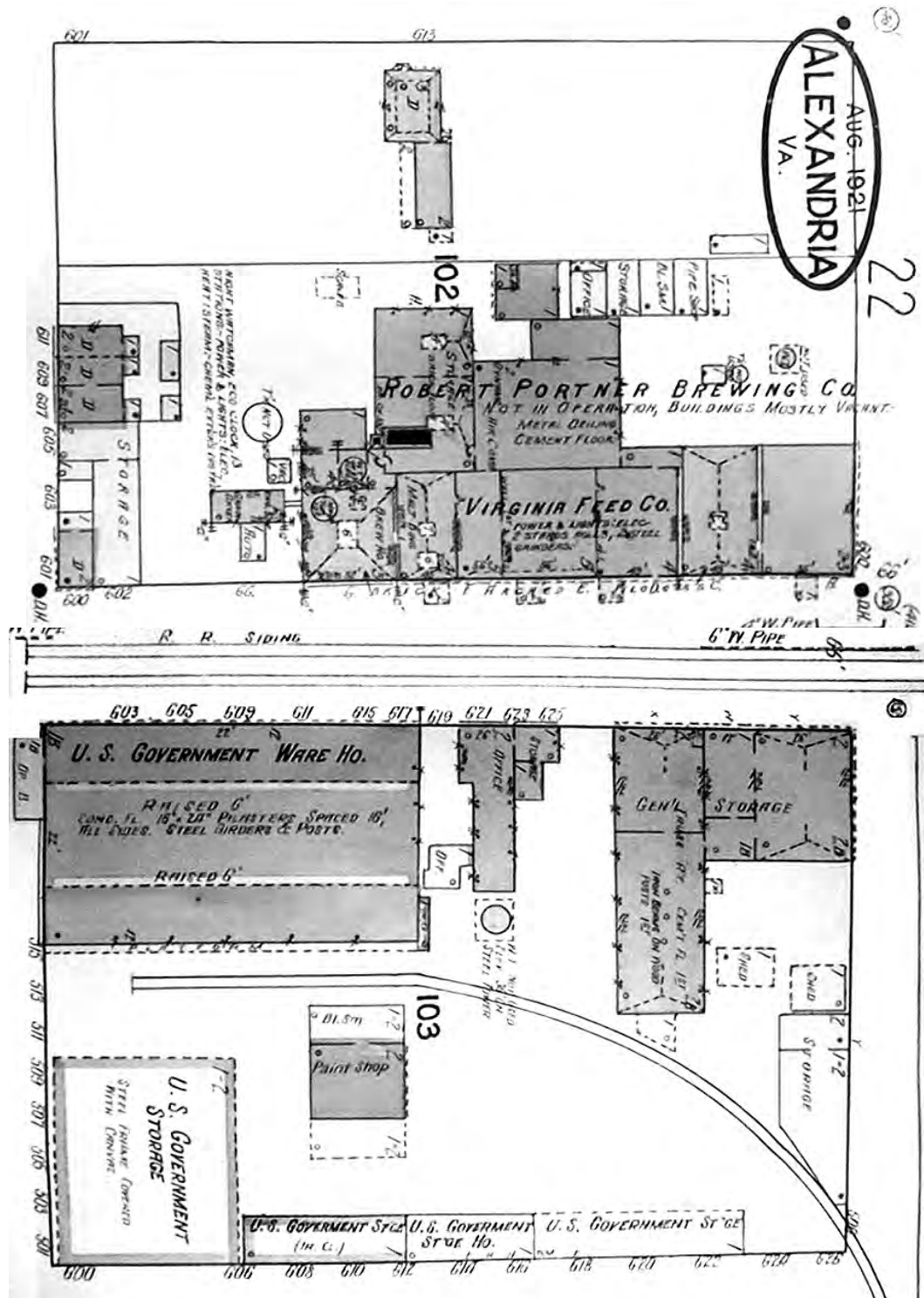
Robert Burns, John Barleycorn: A Ballad

The costs and challenges of enforcement and the unintended encouragement of criminality made many Americans question the virtues of Prohibition. Even more important, the onset of the nation's worst-ever depression rearranged national priorities. Perhaps there was nothing so bad after all about drowning a few sorrows in a social beer. And it was clear that the nation's shrinking economy could use the labor demand and huge tax revenues that the alcoholic beverage industry provided prior to 1920. In the 1932 election campaign, northern Democrats—of the party a half-century earlier derided as championing “Rum, Romanism and Rebellion”—supported the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. Already in 1926 Montana repealed its state Prohibition law. Several organizations, including the Moderation League, the Women's Organization for National Prohibition Reform, and the Crusaders, formed in the 1920s to protest the organized crime and corruption stimulated by the national and state laws. In 1931 the American Legion voted to support a national referendum on the repeal of Prohibition. Alexandria native Ray Gallagher recalled the change in the national mood.

I remember one of [the “Drys”] telling me, shaking his finger in my face, back in 1930, 14 years after the state law went into effect, that “I'd never live to see the day that the 18th Amendment... would be repealed.” Shortly after the election of FDR in 1932, who ran on a platform of Repeal, among other things, I said to this fanatic, “Well, Mr. S., it doesn't look like I've got long to live... FDR is going to repeal the 18th Amendment, and you said I'd never see the day.” He turned livid, and quickly turned away. (Gallagher n.d.)

Congress passed the 21st Amendment in February 1933, even before Franklin Roosevelt took office, but only rolled back Prohibition gradually, first permitting the sale of beer with no more than 3.2 percent alcohol in states without their own anti-alcohol laws.

Prohibition was still a state and local issue, however, and its repeal required both state ratification of the 21st Amendment—achieved December 5—and the roll-back of state and local laws. Neither



Details of the 1921 Sanborn insurance atlas of Alexandria depicting most of the brewery complex. Many buildings were then occupied by the federal government; the rest, while owned by the Portners' Virginia Feed Company or the Robert Portner Corporation, were vacant.

posed much of a problem. Most of the public had lost faith or interest in the noble crusade. Several Alexandria restaurateurs were tried in 1933 for possessing a case or two of beer, but they were acquitted by juries of their peers, presumably because their “3.2 beer” was generally not considered intoxicating and was already being widely sold in Washington. In 1933 the State of Virginia calculated that it was losing \$600,000 to \$1,000,000 a year in tax revenue by continuing to ban the alcohol sales. Alexandria’s fines for violations of the liquor laws amounted to less than three fifths of the costs of arresting, jailing and prosecuting offenders. With the support of groups such as the Chamber of Commerce, the City Council repealed the local laws—still promising to prosecute under state laws, but with the state to collect fines and pay costs. (*Alexandria Gazette* June 27, 1933, June 28, 1933, June 14, 1933 and June 30, 1933; *Fairfax Herald* July 21, 1933)

By end of summer 1933 “Repeal” seemed assured, at least for the sale of beer. One-third of the states, including the most populous, had voted to repeal but were awaiting full national ratification. A Virginia referendum on the issue was slated for October. By early August, 782 Virginia retailers had secured federal licenses to sell 3.2 beer, although it was still unlawful actually to vend it. Nonetheless, beer was being widely and openly dispensed in Richmond, Virginia Beach and Charlottesville. Local Women’s Christian Temperance Union chapters fought a rearguard action to the end, petitioning against Repeal, even against the sale of beer or light wines, and taking the fight to the polls. (*Alexandria Gazette* July 6, 1933, August 8, 1933, July 11, 1933, June 14, 1933, August 14, 1933 and October 3, 1933)

On October 3, 1933 the Repeal forces took Virginia by a nearly two-to-one margin. Urban Alexandrians were five to one in favor. Voters did approve significant state controls over sales, including a direct role in distribution, and many counties retained local option. Two days later, the *Alexandria Gazette* published its first beer advertisement in seventeen years. The following day, grocery stores were stocked with the product. (*Alexandria Gazette* October 4, 1933, October 5, 1933 and October 6, 1933)

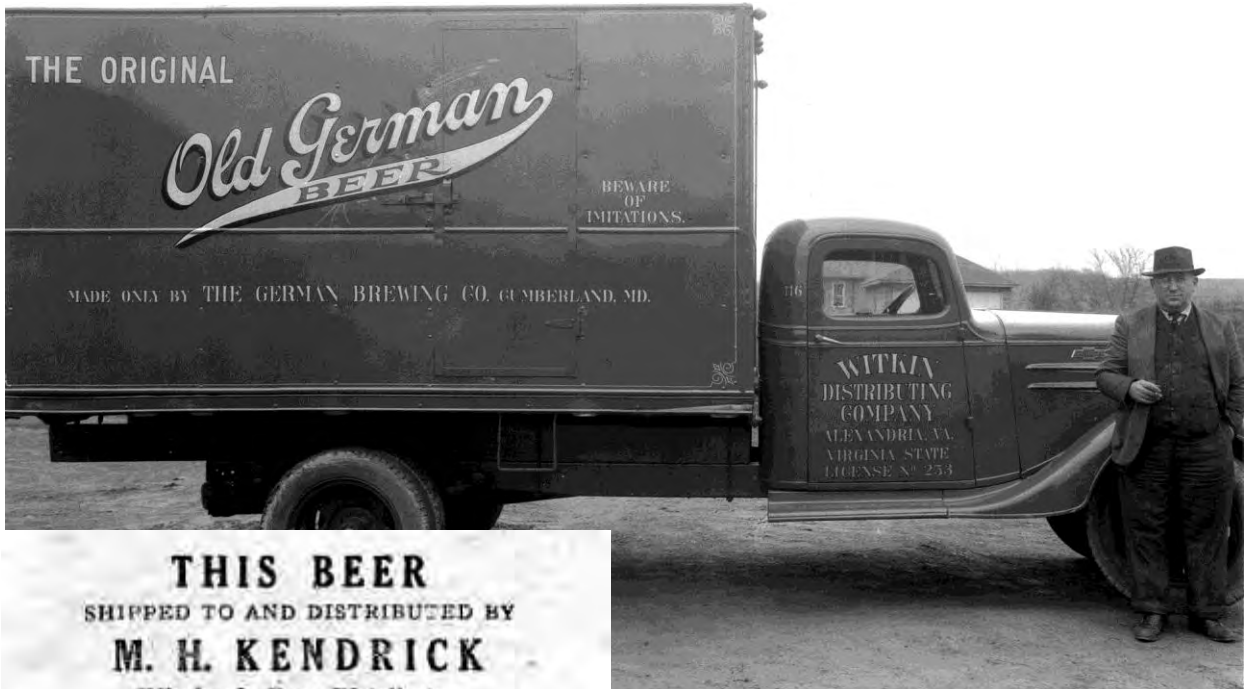
It was no wonder then that there was talk of reviving the Portner brewery. Negotiations for its sale began in February 1933.

A movement for the reopening of the Robert Portner Brewing Company... [was] launched by the Alexandria Chamber of Commerce, Inc. Officials of the trade body have conferred with L.P. Allwine, manager¹ of the Portner Realty Company on the matter. It is stated that there are several prospects in view and the Chamber of Commerce has been requested to confer with them with a view of getting the brewery in operation. (*Alexandria Gazette* June 30, 1933)

The plant had seen better days, however. By the late 1920s it was already “a hulking, red-brick ruin, with all of its windows out, and its vats and tubs exposed.” The buildings behind the brewery, including the old Portner house, were razed under the direction of the city’s fire chief in 1932. By

¹ Officially, Allwine was the corporation’s secretary. He led the Capital Construction Company after Portner’s sons died or withdrew from the firm. The company sold the Virginia Flats apartments in 1937 and the Portner Flats, its last holding, in 1944.

1934, plans to reopen the firm had fallen through.² In 1935 the management of the Corporation decided to demolish the main brewery buildings. Two years later the Robert Portner Corporation itself dissolved. (*Fairfax Herald* February 17, 1933 and April 24, 1936; *Alexandria Gazette* April 12, 1932, June 30, 1933 and April 26, 1935; Gallagher 1978:2; Alexandria Corporation Court Charter Book 3:27)



THIS BEER
 SHIPPED TO AND DISTRIBUTED BY
M. H. KENDRICK
 Wholesale Beer Distributor
 Phone Alex. 1329
 Jefferson Davis Highway
 POTOMAC, ALEXANDRIA, VA.
WHOLESALE BEER LICENSE NO. 168
 Issued by Virginia Alcoholic Beverage
 Control Board, April 11, 1934

The distributor must collect the Virginia State excise tax on this beer and transmit same to the State.

Immediately after Repeal, numerous private beer distribution firms superseded the old brewery-owned depot systems. Virginia retained a version of the dispensary system, however, with state-run retail stores. In other states, although strictly regulated, distributors cooperated closely with their suppliers, striking deals on promotions and often agreeing to carry a brewery's products to the exclusion of its major competitors.

Despite being vacant since about 1920, the 1901 ice plant at the northeast corner of Saint Asaph and Wythe Streets still stood. It housed a laundry from about 1937 to 1950. The 1912 bottling house, after serving as storage for the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Exhibits, was

² Also rejected were plans for a slaughterhouse and a gas "by-product plant" on the site. U.S. Creamery, a manufacturer and purveyor of butter and chicken feed, nearly leased a portion of the brewery in 1925. (*Alexandria Gazette* December 16, 1925 and April 8, 1927; *Washington Post* September 19, 1930)

remodeled as “Portner’s Arena,” the Washington area’s most important venue for boxing matches between late 1931 and 1933. About 1936, however, it became the Parkway Motor Company’s used-car showroom. Two years later, the “old” Portner Arena was a soundstage and production facility of the American Film Corporation. By 1940 it had again been transformed, this time into a skating rink. (Hill Directory Company 1924, 1932, 1934, 1936, 1938, and 1940; *Alexandria Gazette* May 4, 1938; *Washington Post* March 28, 1917, November 2, 1931 and June 23, 1934)

Toward the mid twentieth century, new construction began to obliterate most traces of the once great brewery. In 1941 the American Red Cross unveiled plans to erect a headquarters for its Eastern Division immediately north of the 1912 bottling house/warehouse/arena/studio/rink. The 1892 bottling house and other subsidiary buildings on the block were razed in preparation. The 1912 bottling house, however, was retained and incorporated as a wing for office space and storage. (Hill Directory Company 1951; *Alexandria Gazette* May 23, 1941)

After the Second World War, rapid suburbanization in the Washington area encouraged Woodward & Lothrop, the area’s largest department store chain, to scout new locations. The vacant block upon which the main brewery buildings once stood seemed a perfect place for an Alexandria branch store as it was immediately accessible to Washington Street, now a section of the Mount Vernon or George Washington Memorial Parkway. The parcel also offered ample parking area to serve an increasingly mobile and affluent public. With a little re-grading, the site permitted access to the building on two levels—at street grade on the Washington Street facade and through the basement from the parking lot at the rear (east side). “Woodies” remained until 1968, when the W.J. Sloane Company purchased the store in order to showcase its home furnishings. A similar chain, Mastercraft Interiors, succeeded Sloane’s in the early 1980s. (Hill Directory Company 1953, 1968, 1969 and 1980; Alexandria Building Permits 1928-1985)

An economic boom of the 1990s brought another wave of development that reshaped the neighborhood. The 1901 ice plant was partially demolished and then encapsulated within the “Riverport” office project. The Red Cross headquarters was razed to make way for a townhouse/condominium complex, “Portner’s Landing,” which retains the gutted 1912 bottling works, now adapted to residential space. Finally, in 1999-2000, the former site of the main Portner brewery buildings was redeveloped to contain a five-story office/commercial project occupying the entire block.

Nonetheless, physical evidence of Robert Portner’s influence remains, in addition to the extant brewery buildings, archaeological finds, and an extensive line of descendants. While his Alexandria and Washington homes are gone, his Manassas mansion remains, now the main block of a nursing home. There is also a Portner Avenue in Manassas. Portner Road, a street just north of Alexandria’s “Old Town,” takes its name from a formerly brewery-owned plot of land along a railroad line there. The Holton-Arms School in Bethesda, Maryland, *alma mater* of several distaff Portner descendants, has a science laboratory named for their ancestor. Portner Alley bisects public housing erected on the site of the demolished Portner Flats in Washington. Similarly, the Portner’s Landing development that incorporates the 1912 bottling house is served by an interior alley known as Tivoli Passage, in honor of the old brewery. These new homes

Portner's Tivoli Beer is the best.

were featured in an HGTV segment in 1999. There was even an Alexandria restaurant named "Portner's," not for any direct connection to the man or brewery, but because a couple of beer bottles were unearthed on the site during the building's renovation!



Above left: The "Riverport" office development at the northeast corner of Saint Asaph and Wythe Streets, Alexandria. The building contains the remnant of the 1901 Portner brewery icehouse, now expressed only in the piers visible on the side of the building.

Above right: The 1912 brewery bottling house, gutted and converted to condominium residences.

Right: A modern photograph of the site of Robert Portner's Civil War-era brewery. The present commercial building was erected in 1930.



Chapter 17

Archaeological investigation of the Robert Portner Brewing Company site

The construction of cellars has almost ceased, for the reason mentioned, that their temperature is influenced by the heat of the ground during the winter, and also because of difficult or almost impossible ventilation.

H.S. Rich & Co. One Hundred Years of Brewing (1903)

Just that cheap beer they makin' now.... It ain't good as Portner's.

Henry Johnson, 1983

In the late 1970s, as a direct response to “urban renewal” redevelopment in the heart of the historic city, the City of Alexandria formed a municipal agency responsible for conducting archaeological investigations and curating and interpreting local artifact collections. By the early 1990s Alexandria Archaeology was also charged with enforcing an archaeological ordinance that requires documentary research and the testing or excavation of many large development sites.

The first controlled investigation of any part of the Robert Portner brewery property occurred in 1994. City archaeologists monitored the demolition of the rear of the 1901 ice plant and excavation behind it along Pitt Street in preparation for a mixed-use office/residential development. Little was discovered except plentiful brick rubble, a few bottle sherds, and clumps of purple-stained refuse and clay, presumably residue from Eddie Portner’s 1908 ink factory across Wythe Street (see Chapter 14). Backhoe excavation of the rear (east side) of the 1912 bottling house during the winter of 1997-1998, prior to the construction of “Portner’s Landing,” a residential project, produced no evidence of the brewery’s large, *circa* 1898 stable. Demolition within the bottling house itself did not reveal evidence of any tunnel under Saint Asaph. (Alexandria Archaeology site files)

In 1998 a developer proposed demolition of the former Woodward & Lothrop department store (later Mastercraft Interiors) building at 615 North Washington Street to make way for a multiple-story office and retail development to occupy the entire block. The store stood directly atop the old Portner house site, and its rear parking lot included the former location of the brewing plant and cellars. Because the new construction required very deep foundations, it was clear that any remnants of the former brewery would be destroyed. Developer Saul Centers, Inc. and Alexandria Archaeology agreed that a private cultural resources management firm would be engaged to perform testing and, if necessary, more extensive excavation to recover physical evidence related to Portner’s old firm. Parsons Engineering Science, Inc. of Fairfax, Virginia was selected for the work.

Fieldwork began at the end of October 1998 and concluded in January 2000. Initial trenching through an extensive rubble and fill soil layer revealed a variety of structures at a depth that



Above: The east side of the 600 block of North Washington Street. Saul Centers' commercial development on the brewery site was completed in 2001.

Left: A 1952 Washington Post photo of a beer vault unearthed in the preparations for the construction of Alexandria's branch of the Woodward & Lothrop department store. The vault is quite similar to that excavated at the former Shooter's Hill Brewery site in the 1990s.

suggested they would have been located at the very lowest points of the brewery's interior. Clearly, mid-twentieth-century demolition and grade modification had been extensive. For example, a 1952 *Washington Post* article describing preparation of the Woodward & Lothrop store site reported that, in addition to old lager cellars, there was "a concrete mound on the site, 30 feet square with walls, hand mixed and laid in strips, 6 feet thick. It held [up under the weight of] heavy equipment." Very likely the floor of the engine/boiler room northwest of the 1894 brewhouse, this had to be demolished gradually with jackhammers, after more dramatic methods failed, in order to proceed with grading and excavation for the store. (*Washington Post* March 2, 1952)

Structural features unearthed in the 1998-2000 excavations could be divided into several categories: bearing wall foundations; partition or platform footings; column bases or footings; equipment mounts; flooring; and water source or storage features. Backhoe trenching was useful in quickly fixing the locations of the various sections of the 1868 brewery and the 1893-1894 brewhouse and suggesting where further excavation would be required.

Naturally, the uncovered features represent the arrangement of the brewery at its latest date—that is, at the time of its closure in 1916 or even later. Interpretation of the structural remains therefore mainly relies upon the latest pre-Prohibition insurance maps (1907 and 1912) and the 1894 description of the "new" brewhouse.

Notable was the relative absence of individual artifacts related to brewing or identified with the company. This can be attributed to three factors. First, cleanliness was the first commandment in a brewery, in order to protect the beer from microbial contamination and souring during fermentation or thereafter. The "modern" brewery was also a very mechanized place; machinery had to be kept clean and well maintained to remain in working order. For these reasons, the brewery was kept spotless, and its site was no depository for refuse. Second, between the time the brewery closed and when it was clear that it would never reopen, Robert Portner's sons almost certainly sold the brewing equipment to other firms or as scrap. By the time the buildings were demolished in 1935, there would have been little remaining inside them. Third, many of the operations, including bottling, occurred across Saint Asaph Street, and expensive materials such as glass were recycled. Finally, the 1935 demolition and debris removal and the later demolition, re-grading and excavation for the Woodward & Lothrop building would have been extensive, accomplished by mid-twentieth-century earth-moving equipment. Only a few possibly brewery-related loose metal objects were unearthed, including a large iron strap hinge, a wall anchor, some steel and copper pipe, and some sort of reciprocating machine part.

Similarly most of the brewery's accessory structures had vanished. Test trenches near Pendleton Street and along Washington Street failed to produce evidence of former carpentry and cooper shops and storage sheds. There was also no sign of a structure, depicted on the 1877 Hopkins map, which may have been a pre-Civil War dwelling—one of the "*kuttke*" cottages occupied by Portner, Recker and family after the war—or a building associated with Portner's beer garden. This and other frame structures on the brewery lot were probably razed in the autumn of 1878 to make way for expansion of the brewery. (*Alexandria Gazette* November 25, 1878) The 1872 Portner family house was, of course, also long gone, demolished in 1932 and replaced two

decades later by the department store. In a few spots just west of the 1868 brewery foundations, archaeologists uncovered small sections of foundations or flooring, undoubtedly remains of the late nineteenth-century additions that contained the boilers, steam engines, electric dynamos and ice engines. In fact, in one of the first trenches, archaeologists discovered a wooden box conduit containing seven insulated wires, surely related to the plant's early electrical system.

Earlier demolition notwithstanding, the archaeology crew found, a few feet below the current grade, the massive foundations of the 1868 and 1894 brewhouses, confirming the size and location of the structures as depicted on Sanborn insurance maps. Constructed of load-bearing brick masonry, the footings measured as much as four and a half feet wide. There were also sections of brick flooring or walkways found within the buildings, plus possible footings for smaller partitions or brewing equipment platforms.

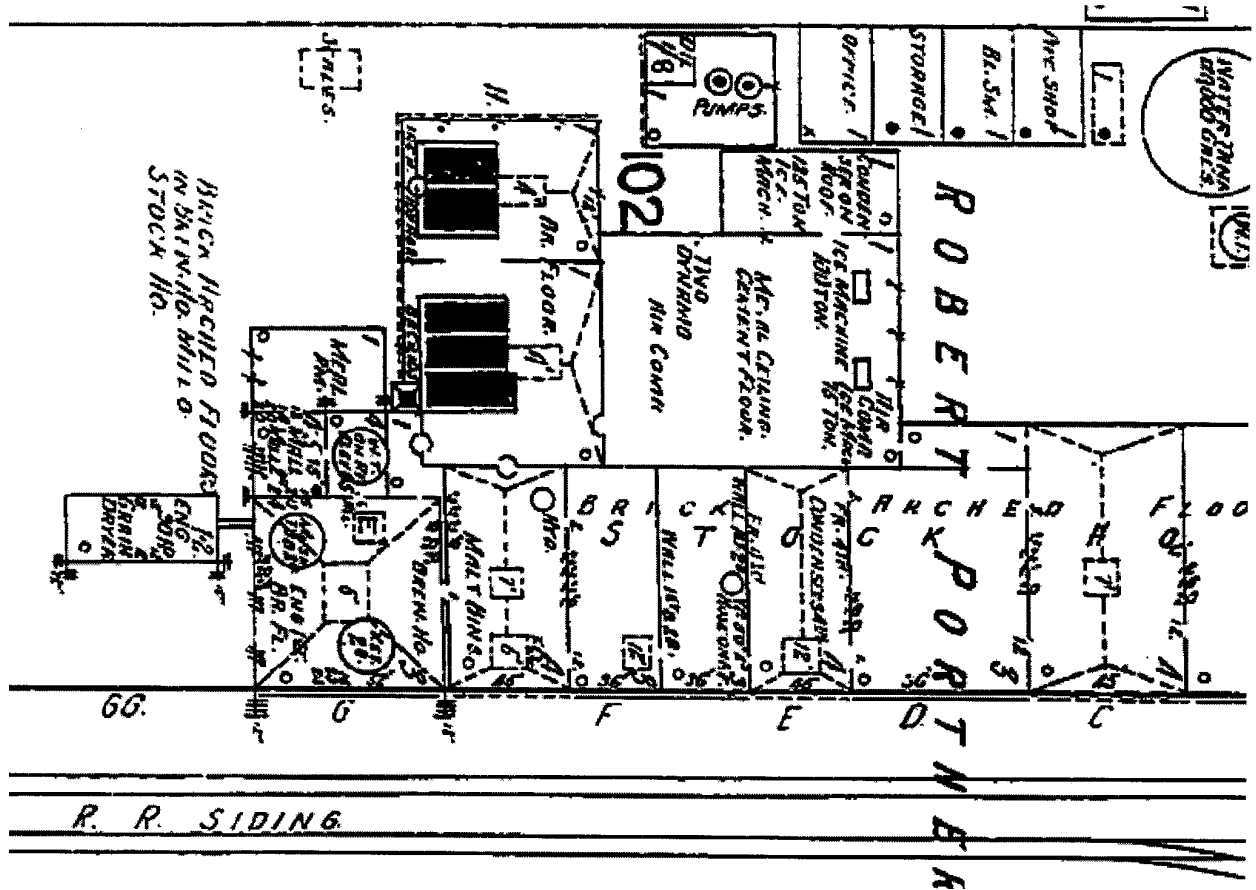
Each of the brewhouses contained three or four dressed granite slabs about eighteen inches tall and at least four feet square, obvious piers for iron columns or mounts for equipment. In fact, most had residual iron oxide concretions on the top surface, left from the vanished posts or machinery attachments. The documentary evidence provides the basis for reasonable guesses as to the function of at least some of the stone blocks in the "new" brewhouse.

On the ground floor of the brew house is the big hop jack and in the rear is the receiving tank holding 350 barrels. On the same floor is the new Corliss steam engine of 65 horse power, fitted with a pulley weighing four tons, and an eighteen inch wide belt.... Three steps above is the machine floor for the accommodation of the special driving device to the wash machine overhead. On a floor above, reached by a short flight of stairs, is located the kettle designed to carry the great load of 55 tons when full, its own weight being over 5 tons.... Broad flights of iron stairs lead from floor to floor and a power elevator of two tons' capacity furnishes access to all main levels. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 18, 1894; Miller 1987:364)

It is known, of course, that the steam engines were actually located *behind* the brewhouse by 1894. Nor were the mash tuns or brew kettles positioned directly above the remaining stone slabs. The granite, therefore, may have supported either the cast iron framework of the interior platforms and stairs and/or the hop jack (which added hops to the wort for flavoring, then strained them out) and/or the receiving tank for the brew on its way to the coolers. But perhaps the most likely alternative is that these stones served as the base for the brewhouse freight elevator, depicted on the 1902, 1907 and 1912 Sanborn maps as being in roughly the same location. The granite slabs in the southeast quarter of the "old" brewhouse may have also supported elevators. When that building was remodeled for barley malt storage, the first floor became the mill room for grinding malt: "On the ground floor is the malt mill with the two elevators on either side." Bricks remaining nearby suggested that there used to be a partition between this space and the area to the immediate north, where a floor-level malt scale was located at least *circa* 1885. On the other hand, blueprints dating to the 1894 construction of the new brewhouse depict the old one as given over to grain storage, with huge malt bins supported by ten-inch-square timbers set on cast-iron plates and concrete, or possibly granite, footers (see

pages 139-140). The plant's floors may generally have been supported by similar piers; an 1881 account of a structural failure below the "beer [fermenting] room" described two stories supported by iron pillars standing upon two-by-two stone footers atop a concrete floor. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 18, 1894; Miller 1987:364; Sanborn Map Company; Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections; *Washington Post* January 7, 1881 and March 2, 1952)

The other notable features of the southern end of the brewery were water source or water storage structures. Two brick shafts were discovered within the old brewhouse, not far from the south wall. The larger measured approximately eleven feet in diameter and only seven feet deep from the elevation at which it was discovered. The other shaft was approximately 70 inches in diameter, although its upper section was distorted and irregular in shape. On its interior were remnants of a parge coat of mortar used as a water barrier—in this case, to keep water in. The shallowness of the wider shaft also suggests that both of these were cisterns for water storage and not wells for drawing ground water.



A detail of a Sanborn insurance map of 1912 showing the brewhouses, boiler house, and adjoining sections of the main plant. The map indicates both the aperture in the vicinity of the water feature at the rear of the 1894 brewhouse and the elevator "penthouse" atop the former brewhouse.

An elevator diagram from Dow's Practical Mechanical Engineering of 1907. Some of the well or cistern-like features in the brewery may have related to the building's elevators, possibly serving as the "pit," as below, or holding the discharge tanks of hydraulic motive systems.

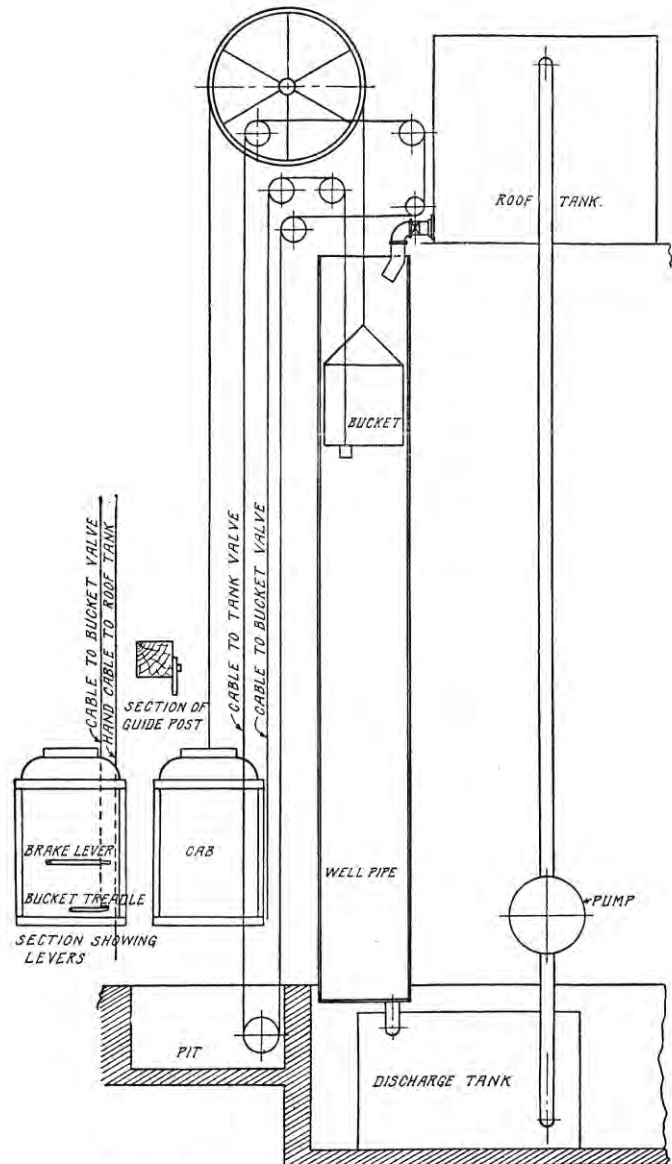


Fig. 70. Diagram of Hale Water-Balance Hydraulic Elevator

At the rear of the 1894 brewhouse—in fact, interrupting its rear wall—was a third brick shaft, ten feet in diameter, at least twenty feet deep, and showing no evidence of parging. Its location attests to the fact that it was dug prior to construction of the brewhouse, although possibly not long before. It corresponds to the location of the brewery's *circa* 1885 pump house, razed before 1891, which contained "four driven wells." The fact that the builders of the 1893-1894 brewhouse did not run the walls around this shaft or fill it in suggests that it was still in use at the time. The Sanborn insurance maps depict an aperture or passage through to the machine room at this location. The shaft may therefore relate directly to the functioning of the machinery. It or the larger cisterns could possibly be related to the hydraulic machinery used to lift the elevators. (Sanborn Map Company)

Brewing required an enormous amount of water. Water is the main ingredient of beer and the primary medium for its preparation. Simply to fill the Portner company's big brew kettle required 10,850 gallons. The production of 25 to 30 tons of ice a day required at least another 6,000 or 7,000 gallons. Large quantities were also needed as coolant and to convert the heat energy of the boiler fireboxes into steam for motive power to operate the brewery's malt mill, mash agitators, pumps, elevators, hoists, conveyors, electric generators, washers, bottling machines, etc. Cisterns or tanks also had to be available in case of fire, for cleaning purposes, for watering the company's horses, and perhaps even for the boilers of the locomotives that carried away loads of beer. In 1869 Portner probably drew his water from surface wells and possibly from the city water supply. By the mid 1880s, however, deep wells were driven far below the water table. More than 300 feet deep, these wells were essentially narrow pipes bored into the earth—"Artesian wells—three in number—more than supply our needs. Pure, crystal, deep-rock water, from a thousand feet below the surface." Some of the earlier water features may have been retained, either filled in or re-used for other purposes. By 1912 the brewery had had at least ten dug or driven wells, plus a number of other unidentified subterranean receptacles, not to mention large, above-ground, upper-story, and rooftop storage tanks. The location of the two shafts in the old brewhouse may roughly correspond to a "hyd[rant]," or city water inlet, depicted on the 1907 and 1912 Sanborn maps (and perhaps as early as 1885). Such structures may also have been built over the driven wells to contain pumps or serve as reservoirs for the rising and back-splashing water. For safety reasons, archaeologists could not reach the bottom of two of the three uncovered shafts and so could not determine their full depth. (Sanborn Map Company; *Alexandria Gazette* September 30, 1886; Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897)

After much searching, the perfectly preserved floor of the beer cellar was uncovered at the southwest corner of Saint Asaph and Pendleton Streets. The northernmost section of the plant, this exposed portion measured nearly 40 by 50 feet, although some of Portner's vaults may have reached 70 feet in length, but narrower.¹ This would have been the location for the fermentation and aging of much of the beer produced by the brewery in the 1880s. The concrete floor was bisected by a gutter running west to east and dropping about a foot over its course. The gutter served to drain off ice melt as well as wash water and spilled beer. Immediately to the north of the gutter were the remnants of footers for a line of four vanished cast-iron columns that once supported the ground floor above. The columns were probably of identical heights; the footers grew taller as they went east, accounting for the slope in the floor. The truncated section of the cellar's western brick wall held pairs of cut spikes at two-foot intervals, nailed across each other and into the mortar joints. With tiny bits of wood still attached, they apparently held vertical scantling that would have served as furring strips for horizontal wood paneling along that section of wall.

The most remarkable aspect of the cellar was the marks left in its floor. Apparently, great weights set upon the concrete surface left a permanent series of shallow, rectangular depressions in regular rows. Each was perhaps four and a half feet long and a foot wide, at four-foot intervals from the other similar and parallel depressions. Oriented east-west, these depressions appear to

¹ The archaeologists were unable to define the edges of the room entirely, for fear of dangerously undercutting the adjacent sidewalks. A 1952 *Washington Post* article describes a beer vault of 70-foot length, fifteen-foot width and twenty-foot height with intersecting "tunnels." (*Washington Post* March 2, 1952)

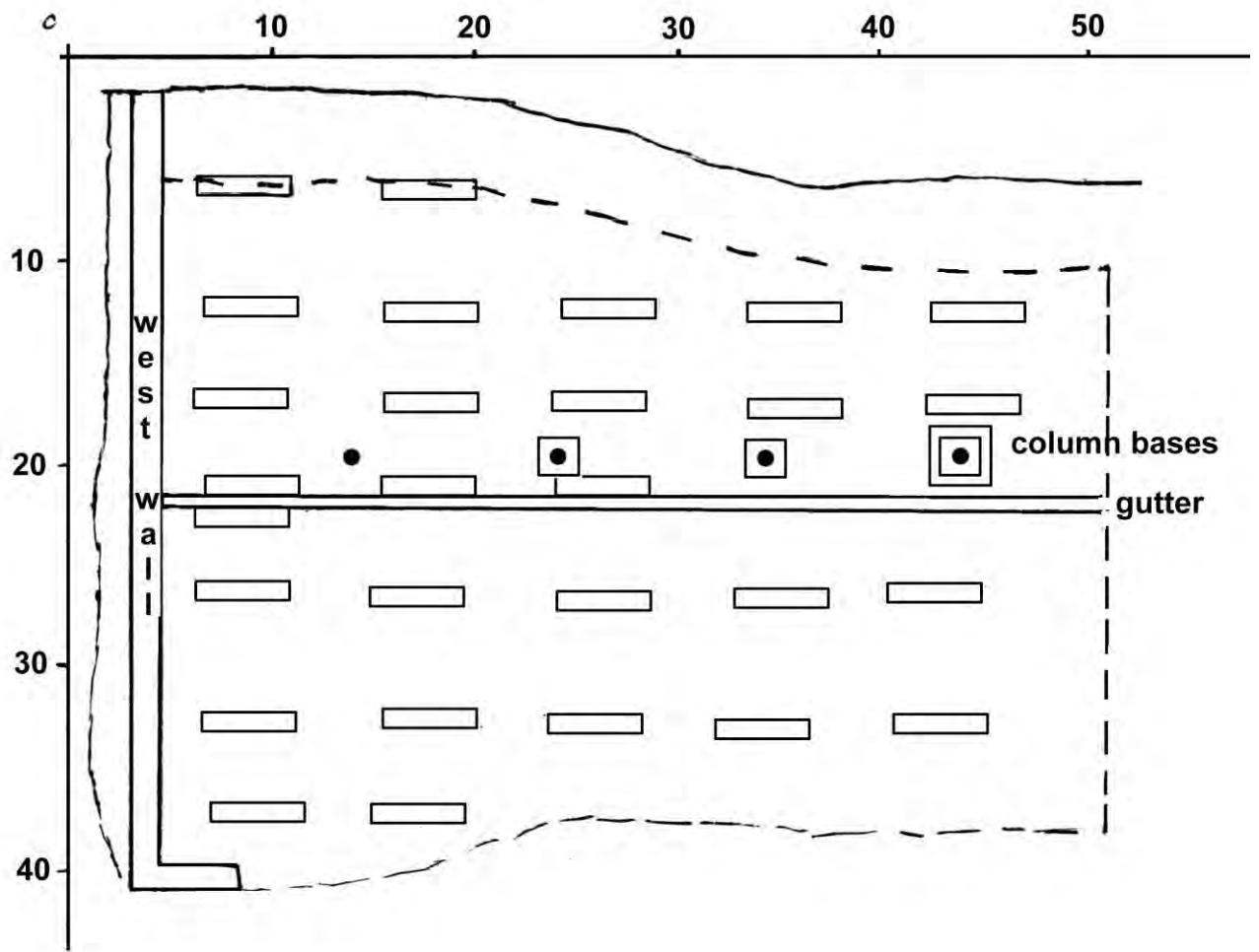
have been left by the immense loads upon timber stillions or stands that once supported the large aging casks. Extrapolating from the depressions that were actually exposed, it appears that there were once four parallel rows of five casks each in the cellar.² Given the size and spacing of the depressions, the casks might have held well over 100 barrels of beer each. A concrete of Portland cement would suggest a date for the floor consistent with the late nineteenth century. At that time, above-ground, artificially cooled spaces were increasingly employed.

Archaeologists uncovered no trace of supposed tunnels under Saint Asaph Street between the brewhouse and the 1903 or 1912 bottling houses (see Appendix B for further information).



A portion of the lager cellar floor uncovered. Alexandria Archaeology photograph.

² Portner's mid-1860s deeds of trust state that he then had 36 large casks of unstated capacity in his cellar.



A simplified map of the uncovered portion of the northernmost brewery cellar. The oblong shapes are the locations of depressions of the cask stands in the concrete floor. Derived from a sketch field map by Parsons Engineering-Science, Inc.

APPENDIX A

A partial list of Robert Portner Brewing Company employees, 1883-1916

The following list of about 375 names, represents just a sample of the total brewery work force over the years following the company's 1883 incorporation. (*For employees of Portner & Company, 1862-1865, and the 1865-1883 Robert Portner Brewery, see Chapters 4 and 5.*) During 1907 alone the company employed 277 people, 109 of whom worked in Alexandria.

The types of sources from which this list is drawn—mainly censuses and city directories (plus immigration records, marriage records, voter registrations, newspapers, World War I draft registrations, company invoices and legal records)—tend not to identify all employees, either because they were somehow missed or simply classified occupationally as bottler, cooper, laborer, clerk, accountant, auditor, bookkeeper, driver, salesman, collector, stableman, engineer (i.e., operator of a stationary steam engine), fireman (i.e., stoker of a boiler), oiler, foreman, car repairer, machinist, electrician, boxmaker, bottle washer, messenger, packer, helper, etc., without reference to their place of work. African-American workers are undoubtedly underrepresented because directories, censuses and newspapers typically dismissed black men as undifferentiated “laborers” even if they held skill positions. The records contain many more likely company employees, particularly bottlers who lived in the neighborhood of the plant, but the list is based upon positive evidence. The occupation of many of the employees below is given as “brewer,” because the source records appear to have applied the designation to nearly any sort of brewery employee, whether or not they were directly involved in the creation of the beer, although it may frequently indicate such involvement. The 1910 census indicated that only 57 percent of all U.S. brewery workers were employed directly in brewing and bottling, and by that time, the proportion of bottlers within this number was already quite large.

If an occupation below is not followed by the name of another city, then the individual was employed in Alexandria. The “Approx[imate] dates of employment” column refers to the earliest and/or latest or the only dates at which the employee was known to be working at the brewery, according to the available records. While the dates are often written to suggest a span of time, such as 1900-1910, they should not necessarily be considered initial and terminal dates. In only a handful of cases, the precise beginning or end dates are known based on death dates or known commencement or termination of employment. In the “Place of birth” column, the ancestry of some of the American-born workers is indicated by the following notations: “(a)” stands for African-American, “(e)” for second-generation Anglo-American, “(g)” for second-generation German-American, “(i)” for second-generation Irish-American, “(s)” for second-generation Swiss-American, and “(sc)” for second-generation Scottish-American. The surnames themselves certainly suggest ancestry, although the list relies upon direct documentation. Alternative, but often simply incorrect, spellings of names are in brackets, and likely proper variant spellings are in parentheses.

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Adams, Lockett W.	fireman/engineer	1903-1916	1878	Maryland
Addison, James H.	driver, Wilmington, NC	1896-1897		(a)
Aldrich, John	workman, Augusta, GA	1897-1898		(a)
Alexander, Frank	workman (drayman?), Charlotte, NC	1897	1874	North Carolina (a)
Alexander, John A.	bottler/helper/laborer	1898-1911	1859	Ireland
Alexander, John H.	workman, Charlotte, NC	1897	1855	North Carolina (a)
Alexander, John P.	bottler/washer	1898-1915	1887	Virginia (i)
Allen, William E.	fireman	1900-1904	1856	(i)
Allmendinger, Andrew	collector, Washington, DC and Alexandria, VA	1886-1890		Germany
Anderson, Samuel	workman, Charlotte, NC	1899		(a)
Baertsch (Bartsch), John		1880-1904		
Bage (Badge), John	cooper	1895-1900	1856	Virginia
Baier, Frederick	bottler	1911-1916	1885	Maryland
Baier (Baer), John	“brewer”	1899-1914	1856	Germany
Bailey, Lee	drayman, Charlotte, NC	1899		(a)
Baldowski, George H.	workman, Augusta, GA	1897-1899		
Baldowski, Henry F.	workman, Augusta, GA	1897-1898		
Baldwin, Percy McKnight	clerk?; secretary-treasurer and director	1888-1895; 1895-1916	1860	Virginia
Ballenger, William Walters	clerk/bookkeeper; assistant treasurer	1893-1911; 1911-1916	1874	Virginia
Banck, C. Otto	depot manager Augusta, GA; depot manager Charleston, SC; depot manager Wilmington, NC	1884-1890; 1891-1893; 1895-1905	1850	Prussia
Bastian, John J.	foreman, Norfolk, VA	1909	1885	Maryland
Baumgarten, Michael	“brewer”	1897		
Baxter, Charles W.	driver, Petersburg, VA	1901-1902	1873	Virginia (e)
Baxter, Walter A.	driver/bottler, Petersburg, VA	1899-1902	1871	Virginia
Beaton, George N.	depot agent, Norfolk, VA	1903-1904		
Bebi, Charles	workman, Charlotte, NC	1897		

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Bell, Andrew	depot manager, Harrisonburg, VA and Staunton, VA	-1912; 1912-1916	1880	Tennessee
Bell, Robert Jr.	depot manager, Norfolk, VA	1876-1880	1837	Virginia? (e)
Bennett, John N.	driver, Wilmington, NC	1899-1900		
Bernhard(t), Casper W.	laborer	1898-1902	1871	Virginia (s)
Bernhardt, Henry G.	fireman/engineer	1898-1916	1868	Virginia (g)
Bernhardt, John	washer/bottler; helper/fireman/engineer	1898-1908; 1909-1915	1874	Virginia (g)
Bethell, George W.	depot manager, Norfolk, VA	1899-1903	1870	Virginia
Beuchert, George H.	stenographer; traveling agent; assistant secretary; secretary-treasurer	1898-1904; 1904-1910; 1910-1915; 1915-1916	1878	D.C. (g)
Bignon, Henry L.	clerk, Augusta, GA	1885-1886		
Bissing, Henry W.	depot agent, Norfolk, VA	1891-1892	1863	Germany
Bixby, John S.	salesman, Charlotte, NC	1896-1900		
Black, Joseph	workman, Augusta, GA	1888-1889		(a)
Blenheim, John	laborer	1910	1889	Virginia (a)
Blondheim, Simon	clerk	1890-1916	1836	Germany
Bock (Bach), Friedrich "Fritz" W.	brewer	1911-1912		
Bohraus, Edward		1896		Virginia (g)
Bontz, John	driver, Norfolk, VA	1887-1888		
Bradbury, John	depot agent, Norfolk, VA	1904-1905	1864	England
Brock, Robert J.	driver, Richmond, VA	1891-1892	1857	Virginia
Brown, Charles P.	depot agent, Norfolk, VA	1883-1884	1842	North Carolina
Brown, Charles T.	depot manager, Richmond, VA and Norfolk, VA	1895-1902; 1909-1910	1856	Virginia
Brown, John R.	workman, Augusta, GA	1897-1898		
Brown, W. Robert	driver, Augusta, GA	1897-1898		
Brunckhorst, Charles	driver, Charleston, SC	1892-1893		
Bryan, Haywood A.	bottler, Staunton, VA	1904		

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Burba, Martin	laborer	1897-1912	1864	Raguit, East Prussia
Burgess, Robert T.	clerk, Charlottesville, VA	1906	1880	Virginia
Butt, George H.	depot agent, Newport News, VA	1896		
Capps, David B.	bookkeeper, Norfolk, VA	1896-1898		
Carr, George P.	depot agent, Roanoke, VA; bottling supervisor?, Roanoke	1893-1900; 1901-1909	1831	Pennsylvania (i)
Cheeks, Robert	laborer	1910	1885	Virginia (a)
Chessire, Louis C.	bottler	1910	1895	Virginia
Cline, Bernhard	engineer	1909-1912	1886	Virginia
Coleman, J. Edward	bottler, Richmond, VA	1891-1892		
Coleman, William H.	driver and bottler, Wilmington, NC;	1896-1900; 1901-1905		
Coles, John R.		1880-1907	1843	Virginia (a)
Connell, William	Norfolk, VA	-1890		
Cook, John F.	agent, Hampton, VA	1887-		
Cooper, James J.	collector, Augusta, GA	1899	1879	
Corbin, James A.	"helper"	1910	1897	Virginia
Cowhig, Dennis G.	depot agent, Charlottesville, VA; clerk, Orange, VA; depot manager, Hagerstown, MD	1906-1907; 1907-1908; 1908-1916	1864	Virginia (sc, i)
Creegan, John T.	clerk	1913-1915	1891	Virginia
Creth, Walter	bottler, Petersburg, VA	1896-1900	1872	Virginia (a)
Crupper, Winter P.	helper/laborer/ice plant worker/foreman	1906-1916	1866	Virginia
Daniels, Harvey O.	labeling department	1908	1892	Virginia
Davis	Frederick, MD	1897		
Davis, Elmo	carpenter	1910	1872	Virginia
Davis, Littleton Morgan	boss carpenter/superintendent	1892-1916	1841	Virginia
Davis, William H.	workman, Augusta, GA	1897-1898		(a)
Derndinger, Ferdinand Friedrich	workman	1903-1908	1872	Grotzingen, Baden
Devers, Timothy N.	bottle washer	1907-1913	1882	Virginia
Diedrich, Joseph Frederick Bernard		1899		Hanover

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Diedrich, Otto	oiler/engineer	1903-1915	1883	Virginia (g)
Diedrich, Theodore	bottler	1909-1910	1884	Virginia (g)
Dilger, Carl F.	fireman	1902-1915	1875	Germany
Donovan, Michael F.	driver, Lynchburg, VA	1892		
Downey, Edward Arthur	bottler/packer	1910-1916	1876	Virginia (e)
Downham, Emanuel Francis	clerk/bookkeeper; local agent	1892-1909; 1909-1916	1870	Virginia
Dunn, David R.	depot agent, Norfolk, VA	1885-1891	1847	Virginia (i)
Ebert, William	“brewer”	1895		
Eils, Bette Edward Julius	director	1883-1886	1841	Tengshausen, Oldenburg
Erlar, Otto		1899		
Ewald, Charles Leo	bottler; clerk; bottler; foreman packing department	1901-1904; 1905-1907; 1907-1910; 1910-1913	1883	Virginia
Ewald, John Alexander	bottler; bottling department foreman/superintendent	1898-1916	1877	D.C. (g)
Ewald, Leo J.	watchman	1882-1907	1846	Bavaria
Farrar, Robert	driver, Charlottesville, VA	1906		(a)
Finch, Charles C.	depot agent, Norfolk, VA	1905-1909	1853	North Carolina
Fin(n)egan, Charles J.	bottler/bottle inspector; salesman/driver	1902-1907; 1907-1916	1881	Maryland
Fischer, Franz L.C.	“brewer”	1889		
Fischer, Wilhelm Moritz		1887		Hungary
Fortman, Henry A.	driver/collector, Charlotte, NC; foreman, Wilmington, NC	1889-1896; 1896-1900	1848	Prussia
Fuchs, Jacob	“brewer”	1895		
Fultz, William L.	depot manager, Winchester, VA	1908-1916?		Virginia
Fuqua, Tuckerman John	depot manager, Newport News, VA; depot manager, Raleigh, NC; depot manager, Winchester, VA; agent, Hagerstown, MD	1899-1901; 1902-1905; 1905-1906; 1907-1908		

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Garrett, Richard/Robert A.	clerk	1905-1910	1882	North Carolina
Gebner, Rudolph	agent, Washington, DC	1883-1886	1838	Berne, Switzerland
Gehly (Gehry), Leopold	“brewer”	1888		
Gensmer, Jeremiah “Jerry” M. Jr.	engineer/fireman	1907-1915	1875	Virginia (g)
George, Edmond Eugene	agent, Norfolk, VA	1910-1916	1876	Virginia
Gibson, Daniel	laborer	1899-1900	1872	Virginia (a)
Gibson, John W.	depot manager, Danville, VA	1900-1916	1869	North Carolina
Gibson, William	messenger	1899-1900	1864	Virginia
Giles, Thomas H.	depot agent and driver, Lynchburg, VA	1881-1886	1844	Virginia
Glabitschwig, Ferdinand	“brewer”	1902-1903		
Glabitschwig, Johann	“brewer”	1902-1903		
Glousmann, Andrew	“brewer”	1895		
Gotzen, Henry		-1896		
Gouldman, Charles H.	solicitor, Lynchburg, VA	1894		
Graham, Edgar Raymond	bottler	1906-1913	1886	Virginia
Graumann (Grauman), John K.	cooper	1898-1903	1856	Austria
Green, Heyward	workman, Charleston, SC	1892-1893		(a)
Greene, Martin Edmund	shipping clerk/ accountant	1900-1916	1887	Virginia
Greene, Martin P.	traveling agent/general agent/accountant/ auditor	1898-1916	1866	Virginia (i)
Greenwald, I.W.	Frederick, MD	1897		
Gries, Christopher	laborer	1900	1857	Germany
Griffin, C.G.	driver, Richmond, VA	1905-1907		
Griffin, James W.	engineer	1900-1901	1852	Virginia
Groves, Charles E.	helper/bottler	1909-1916	1893	Virginia
Hall, _____	driver	1914		
Hall, Ernest	bottler	1900-1911	1872	Virginia
Hanger, Alexander M.	salesman, Danville, VA; depot agent, Phoebus, VA	1888-1893; 1896-1916	1865	Virginia
Harris, David	workman, Augusta, GA	1897-1897		(a)

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Harrison, Edward Joshua	bottler	1905	1873	
Harrison, J.A.	workman, Charlotte, NC	1897		
Hart, Lewis W.	engineer	1896-1916		
Harvey, Frank	workman, Augusta, GA	1881-1882		(a)
Hayes, James T.	packer/shipping clerk	1909-1911		
Hayes, Thomas	bottler	1905	1872	New Jersey
Hayes, William	bottler	1901-1904		
Haywood, Joseph T.	engineer	1909-1912	1875	Virginia
Heissenbuttle, John	driver, Charleston, SC	1891-1892		
Herbort, Charles Gustave	depot manager, Lynchburg, VA; depot agent, Augusta, GA; company director; depot agent, Richmond, VA	1879-1881 and 1883-1886; 1881-1882; 1883-1888; 1886-1888		
Hett, J. Henry	driver/salesman, Augusta, GA	1898-1900	1852	South Carolina (g)
Himmelman, Frederick	“brewer”	1896-1903	1860	Germany
Hitchings, Tobias	driver, Norfolk, VA	1882		
Holland, John R.	fireman	1899-1905	1852	Virginia (a)
Holzl, Albert	bottler	1901-1910	1855	Germany
Hoppie, _____	bookkeeper, Lynchburg, VA	1885		
Howe, Rockwood M.	“brewer”	1907-1908	1858	Virginia
Hoyes, William W.	“brewer”	1902	1867	Virginia
Huffines, Daniel R.	depot agent, Greensboro, NC	1900-1906	1864	North Carolina
Hutchens, James H.	bottler, Staunton, VA	1904		
Jackson, Harry	“brewer”	1914-1916	1893	Virginia
Jackson, Parker	laborer, Augusta, GA	1892-1893	1873	Georgia (a)
Jackson, Samuel E.	engineer	1898-1901	1851	Virginia
Jaeschke, Otto W.	laborer	1895-1905	1861	Germany
Jamison, Robert J.	workman, Charlotte, NC	1897	1838	North Carolina
Jefferson, Joseph	workman, Augusta, GA	1890-1891		(a)
Jester, Oden (Otey) B.	solicitor, Lynchburg, VA; manager, Lynchburg	1890-1891; 1891-1895	1863	Maryland
Johnson, Charles Sidney	depot manager, Roanoke, VA	1900-1916	1872	Virginia

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Johnson, Clarence French	clerk	1900	1879	Virginia
Johnson, John H.	fireman	1888-1900	1855	Maryland (a)
Johnson, John R.	salesman/driver, Staunton, VA	1912-1916		
Johnson, John T.	bookkeeper; assistant secretary-treasurer	1898-1907; 1907-1910	1860	Virginia
Johnston, Andrew W.	depot clerk, Richmond, VA	1888-1890	1859	Virginia (i)
Jones, F.H.	driver, Richmond, VA	1906		
Jones, Lee T.	depot clerk, Norfolk, VA	1904-1905		
Jones, Thomas R.	depot agent, Raleigh, NC	1899-1901	1846	District of Columbia
Joyce, C.F.	depot manager, Danville, VA and Greensboro, NC???	1888-1890; 1892-		
Kallweit (Kalbowit), Albert	laborer	1905-1915	1887	Kindschen, East Prussia
Kaus, Frederick B. Jr.	engineer/machinist	1900-1916	1876	Pennsylvania (g)
Kaus, George W.	bottler; driver	1905-1908; 1908-1913	1878	Pennsylvania (g)
Keegan, George F.	depot agent, Rocky Mount, NC	1904-1910	1870	
Kell, John William	helper/laborer	1909-1915		
Kelly, James	"brewer"	1895		
Kenny, J. Thomas	depot clerk, Norfolk, VA	1887-1888		
Kerit, George	"brewer"	1900	1857	Germany
Kessler, Martin		1899		Germany
Keys, Charles	bottler/fireman	1904-1910		
King	Frederick, MD	1897		
King, John H.	engineer	1910-1912	1874	Maryland
King, Robert	laborer, Norfolk, VA	1882		(a)
Kitts, William		1895		
Klages, Louis	"brewer"	1909-1911	1870	Germany
Klein, George	"brewer"	1903-1915		
Kleindienst, John H.	clerk, Norfolk, VA	1882-1884	1844	District of Columbia (g)
Kloppmeier, Henry	cooper	1901-1903		
Koch, Charles	"brewer" (driver?)	1885-1889		

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Koenig, George	“brewer”	1899-1902		
Koenig, William	depot manager, Petersburg, VA	1896-1916		
Kohler, Frank	driver, Charleston, SC	1891-1892		
Krafts, William		1896-		(g)
Kuhblank, Emil	depot manager, Wilmington, NC; depot manager, Richmond, VA	1888-1891; 1892-1895	1854	Halle, Westphalia
LaRoach, P.	workman, Charleston, SC	1891-1892		(a)
Lamb, George W.	engineer	1896-1904	1862	Virginia
Lash, Joseph Lee Jr.	clerk	1907-1910; 1913-1915	1866	Virginia
Lawson, William	driver, Richmond, VA	1900		(a)
Leicht, John M.	vice-president, director and brewmaster	1891-1896	1867	New York (g)
Leese, Martin W.		1890	1841	Maryland
Lindemann, William G.	bookkeeper, Charlotte, NC	1889-1903		
Liedlie, Daniel	“brewer”	1900	1866	Germany
Lightfoot, William	bottler, Charlottesville, VA	1906	1875	Virginia (a)
Lyles, Samuel	cooper	1880-1903	1829	Virginia
Mack, John Peter	“brewer”	1908	1887	Kienfeld, Germany
Madigan, Frank P.	general manager, Washington, DC; director	1886-1890; 1890-1895	1862	D.C.
Maier (Meyer), William	laborer	1900	1870	Massachusetts (g)
Manger, George A. Sr.	laborer	1901-1910	1864	Germany
Manly, W.W.	manager, Salisbury, NC	1902-1906	1869	North Carolina
Martin, John T.	bookkeeper, Lynchburg, VA	1892		
Martin, Joseph	bottler	1905		
Mason, James “Sandy”	boiler cleaner	1878-1888	1857	Virginia (a)
Maud (Mourtz, Mouk), Friedrich “Fritz”	laborer	1900	1858	Germany
Mayhugh, William	car repairer	1899	1870	Virginia
McDonough, Patrick	depot agent, Richmond, VA	1888-1892	1865	Ireland

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
McLaughlin, James M.	depot agent, Lynchburg, VA	1890-1891	1858	Virginia
McKnight, B.	“brewer”	1900	1875	Virginia
McKnight, William J.	salesman, Augusta, GA	1887-1888		
McNamara, John A.	driver, Petersburg, VA	1899		
Meyer [Meyers, Myer, Myers, Maier], William	laborer	1900-1902	1852	Germany
Milstead, George	laborer	1900	1867	D.C.
Milstead, John H.	engineer	1898-1900	1870	Virginia
Minter, Frederick	brewer	1913-1914		
Moss, C.E.	depot manager, Danville, VA	1881-1882		
Mühlhauser, Paul	brewmaster and superintendent; brewmaster, vice-president and director	1871-1878; 1883-1890	1849	Holzheim, Wurttemberg
Muller, Theodore E.	bottler/washer	1887-1902; 1903-1914	1866	Germany
Muller, Theodore E. Jr.	helper/bottler	1910-1915	1892	D.C. (g)
Myers, William	brewer	1907-1908		
Newman, John T.	depot manager, Wilmington, NC	1906-1910		
Newsome, Charles E.	driver, Petersburg, VA	-1906		
Norris, Harold T.	packer/bottler	1910-1915	1878	Virginia
Nugent, John J.	depot manager, Augusta, GA; salesman/collector, Alexandria; auditor, Alexandria	1902-1905; 1905-1907; 1907-1916	1867	Virginia (i)
Nugent, Owen J. Jr.	clerk	1909-1916	1892	Virginia
O’ Bryan	driver, Staunton, VA	1909		
Overton, George M.	depot manager, Augusta, GA	1906-1907		
Padgett, Millard Fillmore Jr.	helper/bottler; electrician	1914-1915	1884	Virginia
Pagenstecher, Ferdinand	depot agent, Norfolk, VA	1884-1885		
Palmer, George O’Neill	depot agent, Norfolk, VA	1892-1899		
Palmer, John T.	depot agent, Augusta, GA; traveling agent	1890-1892; 1892-		
Patterson	clerk	1909		

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Patterson, George	bookkeeper, Lynchburg, VA	1890		
Payne, Edwin C.	depot manager, Richmond, VA	1902-1904		
Payne, George F.	depot manager, Newport News, VA	1901-1916	1853	Virginia
Payne, Lucius P.	driver, Roanoke, VA	1901-1905		
Payne, Richard W.	depot manager, Richmond, VA	1904-1916	1878	Virginia
Payne, William W.	depot agent, Charlottesville, VA	1904-1905		
Pendleton, Charles	cooper, Richmond, VA	1910		Virginia (a)
Penn, Jessie	bottler	1898-1900	1860	Virginia
Penn, John	laborer	1910	1884	Virginia (a)
Perkins, Edward	workman, Augusta, GA	1898-1899		
Pettey, George Washington	laborer	1900	1881	Virginia
Portner, Alvin O.	vice-president; president	1906-1909; 1909-1916	1877	Virginia (g,s)
Portner, Edward G.	bottling manager; vice- president and director; president	1896; 1897- 1906; 1906- 1909	1885	Virginia (g,s)
Portner, Oscar Charles		1906-1909	1884	Virginia (g,s)
Portner, Paul V.	vice-president	1909-1916	1882	Virginia (g,s)
Portner, Robert	president and chairman	1883-1906	1836	Rahden, Westphalia
Purcell, John E.	stable boss/foreman	1900-1914	1858	Virginia
Quill, John	laborer/helper	1913-1915	1885	Virginia (a)
Rankin, James T. Jr.	clerk/bookkeeper, Richmond, VA	1891-1895		
Reed		1902		
Reed, L.G.	bottler, Lynchburg, VA	1892-1895		
Regali, Pietro	driver, Richmond, VA	1886-1887		
Reif, Henry W.	foreman	1888-1916	1857	Germany
Reif, Henry W. Jr.	apprentice/bottler	1914-1916	1894	Virginia (g)
Renz, Henry A.	bookkeeper, Petersburg, VA	1896-1899		
Reynolds, Joseph W. Jr.	bottler	1905-1915	1873	Virginia
Rhodes	Frederick, MD	1897		
Rhodes, John T.	driver, Staunton, VA	1904	1876	Virginia
Richardson, Samuel F.	driver, Charleston, SC	1892-1893		(a)
Richter, Ernest W.	chief engineer	1893-1914	1860	D.C.

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Riddlemoser, Louis E.	driver, Frederick, MD	1897	1868	Maryland
Rixey	engineer	1901		
Roberts, William	teamster; bottler?	1898-1907	1857	Maryland (i)
Rolland, Thomas J.	salesman, Norfolk, VA	1896-1897		
Rose, Sampson	porter, Lynchburg, VA	1890	1864	Virginia (a)
Rothmund, Carl A.	engineer/fireman	1913-1916	1879	Virginia (g)
Royster, George H.		1891		
Royster, Thomas H.		1888		
Russell, Charles	workman, Charleston, SC	1891-1893		(a)
Sachs, Louis	brewer	1910-1916	1848	Germany
Schafe (Schaafe), John N	helper/bottler	1906-1915	1865	Virginia
Schafe (Schaafe), John R	helper; clerk	1912-1913; 1913-1916	1896	Virginia
Schafe, William T.	bottler	1909-1916	1894	Virginia
Schlag, Albert Gottlieb	machinist/oiler/fireman	1907-1908; 1913-1916	1890	D.C. (g)
Schlag, Christian	engineer	1905-1908		
Schlag, Gottlieb	“brewer”/helper	1902-1916	1850 or 1864	Germany
Schlam, Herman	brewer	1910-1911		
Schmidt (Smith, Schmith) Bernhard	“brewer”	1900-1915	1879	Maryland (g)
Schmidt (Smith, Schmith), Charles J.	laborer	1903-1913		
Schmidt, James C.	laborer	1909-1916	1885	Maryland (g)
Schneider, Carl	“brewer”	1908	1887	Baden, Germany
Schneider, Joseph	assistant brewer; brewmaster and foreman	pre-1890-1891		
Schoellhorn, Henry	“brewer”	1916	1877	
Schoellhorn, Louis		-1915	1894	
Schroff, Louis	“brewer”	1908-1910	1860	Baden
Sedan, Joseph	“brewer”	1890		
Seibold, Evaristus	“brewer”	1892	1868	Germany
Sheehan, Edward	depot manager, Augusta, GA	1892-1901	1850	Limerick, Ireland
Sheehan, John A.	bookkeeper, Augusta, GA	1900-1902	1875	Georgia (i)
Sheffer, Joseph A.	bottler, Staunton, VA	1912		

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Shelton, William H.	clerk, Richmond, VA; clerk Norfolk, VA; manager, Phoebus, VA	-1890; 1890-1894; 1894-1896		
Shumate, Rice T.	foreman, Staunton, VA	1906-1916	1877	Virginia
Simms, Jerry	laborer	1901-1905		(a)
Simms, Peter	helper on beer wagon; laborer	1899-1908	1872	Virginia (a)
Singleton, John L.	bottler, Charleston, SC	1892-1893		(a)
Smied (Schmidt), Joseph H.	“brewer”	1887-1888		
Smith, Charles W.	bottler, Lynchburg, VA	1897		
Smith, Daniel H.	bottler	1909-1910		
Smith, Edgar	workman, Lynchburg, VA	1897		
Smith, Ervin	clerk	1912-1913		
Smith, John W.	bottler/laborer	1903-1912	1871	Virginia
Smith, Raymond W.	fireman	1910-1911	1871	Virginia
Smith, Samuel H.	bottler/helper	1909-1910	1875	Virginia
Smith, Thomas Francis “Frank”	clerk	1909-1914	1889	Virginia (i)
Smith, William	helper, Staunton, VA	1912		(a)
Sorrell, John H.	bottler; driver	1897-1908; 1909-1916	1869	Virginia
Sorrell, John J.	helper on wagon; bottler/wrapper;	1910-1911; 1912-1916	1896	Virginia
Sorrell, Robert E.	bottler/packer/helper; fireman	1898-1906; 1906-1912	1870	Virginia
Sparrow, James W.	cooper	1901-1916	1867	Virginia (a)
Springs, Daniel L.	bottler, Salisbury, NC	1907		
Steiber, Henry	depot manager/bottler, Washington, DC; clerk, Washington, DC	1880-1883; 1884-1887	1854	Hanover
Stender, Conrad	salesman, Charleston, SC	1891-1892		
Stephens, Estell	laborer, Lynchburg, VA	1900	1840	Virginia (a)
Stephens, Willis B.	bottler, Lynchburg, VA	1885-1900	1842	Virginia (a)
Steuernagel, Joseph	“brewer”	1896		Virginia (g)
Stewart, Ventress	workman, Greensboro, NC	1892		
Stoecker, Henry	laborer	1875-1905	1857	Germany
Stoecker, John	brewer	1900	1860	Germany

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Strangmann, Carl Augustus	shipping clerk; secretary-treasurer	1875-;1883-1895	1860	Rahden, Westphalia
Strangmann, Robert C.	depot manager, Lynchburg, VA; depot cashier, Frederick, MD; depot agent, Frederick	1895-1896; 1897; 1898-1905	1864	Rahden, Westphalia
Sutherland, Luther A.	“brewer”	1915-1916		
Sweeney, Edward	laborer, Lynchburg, VA	1890		(a)
Sweeney, John T.	auditor/clerk	1896-1907	1853	Virginia
Taylor, George	peddler of brewery grains	1900-1907	1861	Virginia (i)
Taylor, Robert R.	unknown; depot manager, Salisbury, NC	1887-1906; 1906-1907		
Taylor, Stephen Jr.	driver	1916	1884	Virginia
Taylor, Walter C.	“brewer”	1914-1915		
Tebbetts, T.D.	depot agent, Danville, VA	1890-1893		
Thaler, William H.	bottler	1899-1902	1860	Germany
Timberman, Park C.	night watchman	1896-1901	1850	New Jersey
Trigger, Tanney	driver	1914-1916	1882	Virginia
Underwood, Charles T.	driver	1899-1914	1869	D.C.
Underwood, John	watchman	1909-1910	1848	Virginia
(von) Valaer, Christian	bottling department manager; depot manager, Charlotte, NC and director	; -1882; 1889-1905	1862	Switzerland
Van Valkenberg, Charles H.	depot manager, Staunton, VA	1902-1911		
Wallace, Thomas E.	depot superintendent, Augusta, GA	1882-1884		
Waltman, John	laborer	-1900-1901	1879	Germany
Warfield, James R.	depot manager, Frederick, MD	1897	1858	Maryland
Warnock, Thomas H.	laborer; beer steamer (i.e., pasteurizer); driver	1900-1907; 1907-1909; 1909-1916	1867	Ireland
Washington, James	laborer	1870-1910	1831-1840	Virginia (a)
Webeler, Joseph	“brewer”	1895		
Weingart, Ernest	brewer	1913-1914	1897	Virginia (g)
Weingart, Frederick	bottler	1910-1915	1895	Virginia (g)

Name	Occupation	Approx. dates of employment	Date of birth	Place of birth (Ancestry)
Weingart (Weingardt), Joseph	washroom foreman	1897-1912	1867	Germany
Weingart, Louis K.	“brewer”	1888-1898		Germany
Weiss, Herman	“brewer”	1901-1903		
Welch, Benjamin	bottler	-1916	1868	
Welch, John Paul	“brewer”	1898-1915	1829	Bavaria
Welch, Robert A.	bottler/laborer	1907-1913	1889	Virginia
Wells, Earl C.	clerk	1912-1913		
Wells	driver	1904		
Wells, Jacob	driver, Norfolk, VA	1897-1898		
Wenk, John William	bottler/laborer	1901-1911	1875	Virginia
(von de) Westelaken, Frank D.	clerk/assistant brewmaster	1909-1913	1891	Maryland
(von de) Westelaken, Peter W.	brewmaster and foreman	1896-1915	1859	Holland
Wheary, William I.	bookkeeper, Petersburg, VA; depot manager, Goldsboro, NC	1900-1902; 1902-	1868	Virginia
White, Thomas	workman, Roanoke, VA	1901		
Whitton, George	machinist	1902-1916	1857	Scotland
Whyte, William W.	depot agent, Lynchburg, VA	1886-1889		
Wich, George	“brewer”/laborer	1901-1915		
Wiedeman, Joseph	bottler	1890-1900	1864	Germany
Wilkening, William H.	Clerk/salesman	1892-1912	1842	Germany
Williams, Edward V.	bottler	1904-1909	1878	
Williams, George	workman, Augusta, GA	1898-1899		(a)
Williams, Mattie H.	stenographer	1910-1912	1868	Georgia
Wills, Edwin D.	depot agent, Lynchburg, VA	1897-1899	1868	Virginia
Wilson, Wadsworth	laborer	1910	1881	Virginia (a)
Wise, George D.	employee, Richmond, VA	1898		
Yahn, Charles F.	bookkeeper, Norfolk, VA	1893-1894	1846	Germany

APPENDIX B

ARCHAEOLOGICAL REPORT (ABRIDGED)

**“ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF
THE ROBERT PORTNER BREWING COMPANY SITE (44AX196),
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA”**

Prepared for:

**Saul Centers, Inc.
Chevy Chase, Maryland**

Prepared by:

**Parsons Engineering Science
10521 Rosehaven Street
Fairfax, Virginia 22030**

December 2002; Compiled 2005

PROJECT PERSONNEL

Principal Investigator (Phase I):	Petar D. Glumac, Ph.D.
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Field Director (Phase II):	John Rutherford
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Laboratory Personnel:	Victoria Robertson, M.A. Emily Williamson Brian Hutchins
Conservation:	Lisa Young
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Backhoe Operators:	Bob Anderson Ed Lanning
Report Editors:	Cynthia Liccese Susan L. Bupp, M.A.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1998 and winter of 1999-2000, Parsons Engineering Science (hereafter “Parsons ES”) conducted Phase I and II archaeological investigations at the Portner’s Brewery site, located in the parking area at the rear of 600 North Washington Street in Alexandria, Virginia. The property was bounded by Wythe Street on the north, Pendleton Street on the south, Saint Asaph Street on the east, and Washington Street on the west (Figure 1). The Portner’s Brewery site existed on this property during the mid-nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries. This study was conducted in compliance with the City of Alexandria Archaeological Standards, May 1990, *Guidelines for Preparing Archaeological Resource Management Reports*, and *The Secretary of the Interior’s Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation*. All work was carried out in consultation with and overseen by the staff of Alexandria Archaeology.

Parsons ES conducted Phase I archaeological investigations in October and November 1998. The purpose of these studies was to determine if archaeological resources remained intact beneath the parking lots. After the analysis of historic maps of the project area, eleven trenches were excavated using a backhoe monitored by an archaeologist. These trenches were placed on the property where they could best intercept potential archaeological resources. Archaeological testing revealed the presence of fifteen architectural features related to the use of the property as a brewery, including the beer vault, where lager beer was produced; walls from several associated structures; and two deep features (wells or privies) that would have provided and stored water for use in the beer making process. No artifacts were found, however, in direct association with any of the structures.

A Phase II archaeological study on the property in December 1999 and January 2000 utilized a backhoe to remove the asphalt parking surface and overburden from above intact archaeological resources. Forty-one additional features were identified and recorded in areas representing the 1868 brewhouse, the 1894 brewhouse, and the north beer vault.

The version of the report that follows has been edited and abridged for consistency with the forgoing history and mainly to avoid redundancy, as the background and interpretive information had been extracted from the 2002 edition of *Robert Portner and His Brewery*.

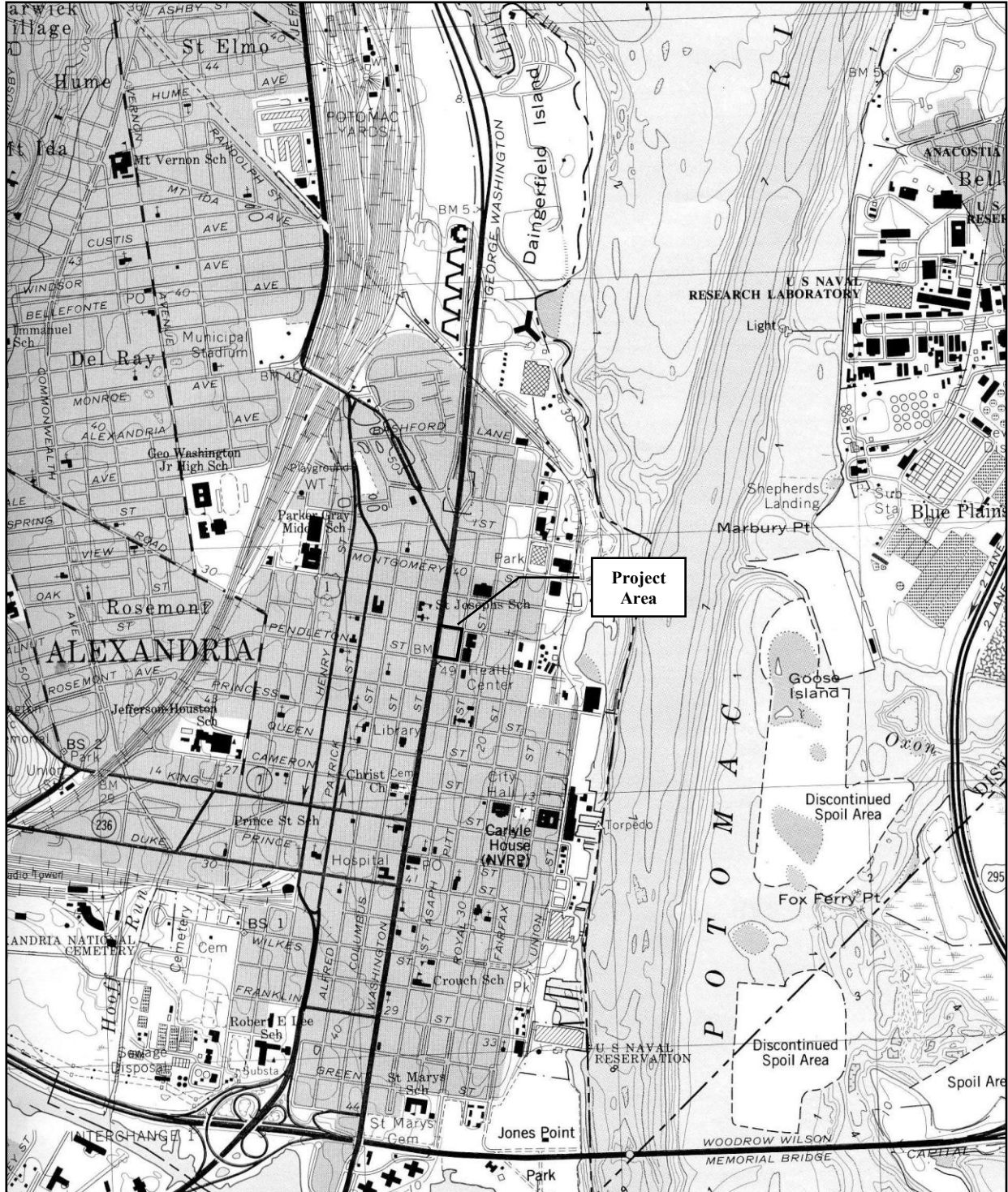


Figure 1. Project area, 600 block of North Saint Asaph Street, Alexandria, Virginia

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Phase I

The goal of the Phase I archaeological study was to determine the presence or absence of archaeological resources on the site that related to the use of the property as Portner's Brewery. Parsons ES prepared a series of overlay maps showing the locations of features associated with the brewery and consulted with Alexandria Archaeology to determine the best locations for the trenches. A testing strategy was proposed to sample areas where features were predicted to be present. Eleven Phase I trenches were excavated in October and November 1998 (Table 1; Figure 2).

Table 1. Phase I Trench Information

Trench Number	Type	Dimensions (in feet)	Area provenience
1	linear	6.5 x 20	
2	linear	6.5 x 10	
3	linear	5 x 31	Area 2, North
4	linear	6 x 40	Area 2, North
5	trapezoid	6 x 6 x 14	
6	linear	4 x 43	Area 1, South
7	linear	6 x 10	
8	linear	7.5 x 24	Area 1, South
9	linear	6.5 x 45	Area 1, South
10	linear	6 x 25	
11	linear	5 x 20	

Excavation was conducted using a backhoe monitored by an archaeologist. Information from each trench was recorded in field notes and the trenches were drawn and photographed in profile and plan view. The location of all trenches was recorded on a site map. The features were drawn, photographed, described, and sampled. Those features considered to be significant were recommended for further investigation.

B. Phase II

The goal of the Phase II archaeological testing was to determine the boundaries, integrity, and significance of the potential archaeological remains associated with the resources identified through archival research and the Phase I survey of Portner's Brewery. The project area was approximately one half of a city block, fronting Saint Asaph Street on the east, with Pendleton Street on the south, Wythe Street on the north, and the Mastercraft furniture store building on the west.

Based on consultation with Alexandria Archaeology, the Phase II testing of the property was limited to two areas within the project area. The Phase I survey had already revealed intact features in both of these areas that were associated with Portner's Brewery. Phase II excavations

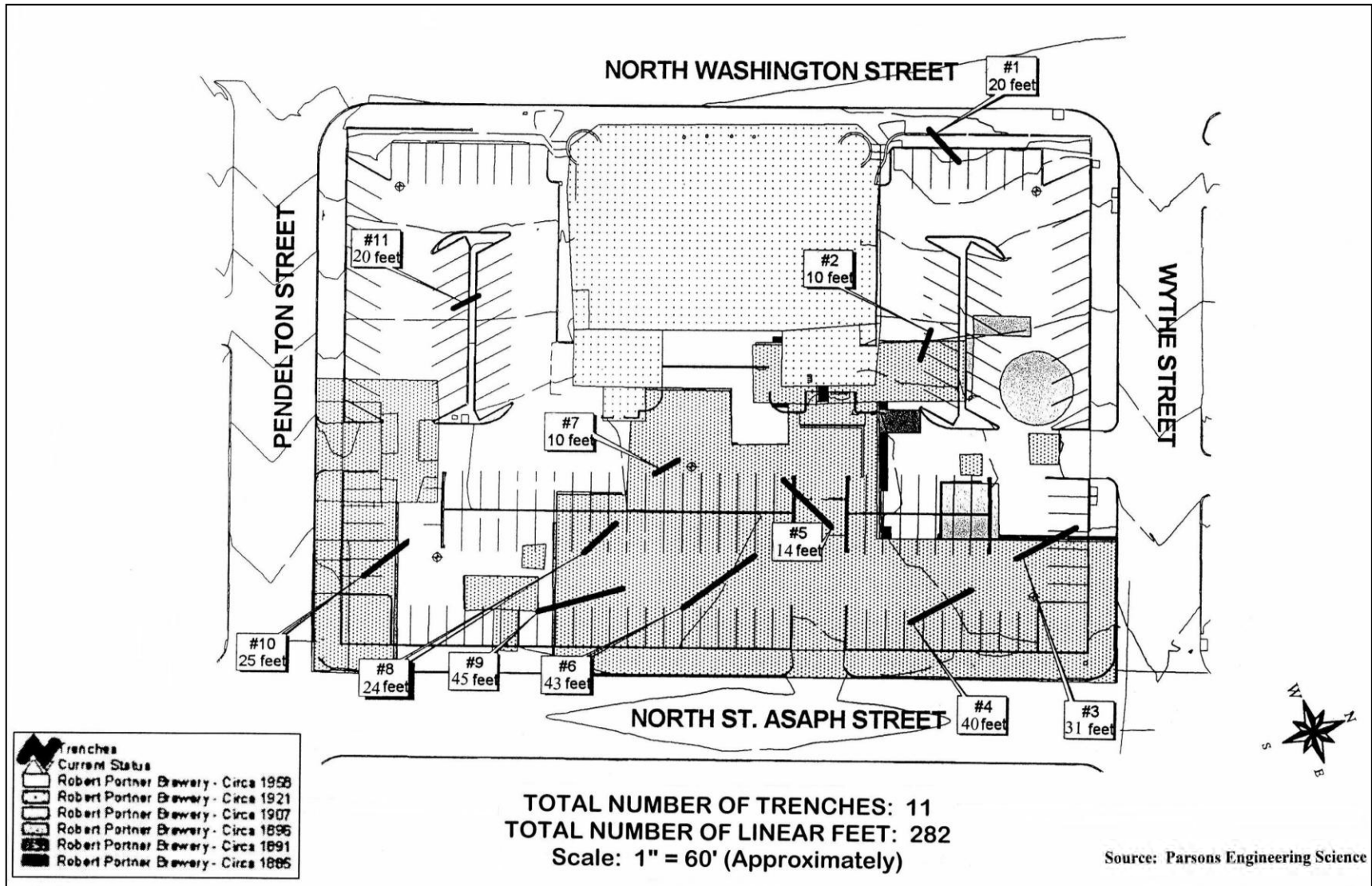


Figure 2. Phase I trench locations

occurred during December 1999 and January 2000.

Two areas of the property contained intact features (Figures 2 and 3). Both of these areas were covered by an asphalt parking lot. The asphalt was broken using a jackhammer and was removed with a backhoe. These areas were then mechanically cleared of demolition overburden, also with the backhoe, to expose entire features or groups of features. Excavation was monitored at all times by an archaeologist. After all overburden was removed, all existing and newly exposed features were mapped in plan and profile, photographed, and described in detail. The northernmost area contained the beer vault and the southern area contained a deep shaft feature (Feature 5), as well as masonry walls (Feature 1) and a concrete pier (Feature 2). The contents of both the shaft features and the beer vault were removed by a backhoe monitored by an archaeologist.

Feature 15, the wooden conduit, and a small number of artifacts from Phase II investigations were collected. With the exception of Feature 15, the artifacts were not related either to the dates of construction or the functions of the structures as a brewery. All artifacts collected were transmitted to Alexandria Archaeology for curation.

III. DESCRIPTION OF FINDINGS

A. Phase I Results

Fifteen features were identified during the Phase I trenching (Table 2). These features included brick walls and foundations, brick, concrete and stone pads, a circular brick shaft, and cement and rubble matrix concentration.

Trench 1

Trench 1 measured twenty feet long by 6.5 feet wide. It was placed at the northwestern end of the block, in an area where the 1877 G.M. Hopkins map indicated a structure (see page 57). By the time of publication of the first Sanborn insurance map in 1885 (see page 132), this building was gone. The area in the Trench 1 vicinity remained unimproved throughout the remainder of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Trench 1 was to straddle portions of the current parking lot and the adjacent sidewalk. However, due to the impracticability of excavating the portion from the parking lot to the sidewalk, which included a steep berm and retaining wall leading up to Washington Street, the trench location was amended to include only the parking lot area and this section was extended to the original twenty-foot length.

Stratigraphy in Trench 1 consisted of asphalt (Stratum A) and coarse sand and gravel bedding material for the asphalt (Stratum B) overlying a thin (less than 0.5-foot thick) silty clay fill layer (Stratum C) (Figure 4). The fill layer rested on subsoil (Stratum D). No features were found in this trench. It is likely that any former cultural deposits were graded away during construction of the present parking lot.

Trench 2

Trench 2 measured ten feet long by 6.5 feet wide. It was placed in the central part of the northern end of the block. During the nineteenth century, this portion of the block was unimproved. By the 1907, this area contained several one-story buildings, including a pipe shop and a structure attributed to a blacksmith. The trench partially overlapped the former footprint of these buildings.

There were four strata in this trench, but no intact cultural deposits (Figure 5). Strata A and B were the asphalt parking lot surface and the coarse sand and gravel bedding material for the asphalt, respectively. Beneath these modern strata were two layers of subsoil. Stratum C was mottled silty clay subsoil and Stratum D was mottled sandy subsoil. No features were found in this trench. As in Trench 1, it is probable that any former cultural deposits were graded away during construction of the present parking lot.

Table 2. Phase I Features

Feature Number	Provenience	Description	Association
1	Trenches 8 and 9	stepped brick foundation walls trending north-south	
2	Trench 9	square slab of dressed granite	Feature 1
3	Trench 9	brick wall trending north-south	
4	Trench 6	square brick surface over square concrete pad	
5	Trench 6	circular brick feature	
6	Trench 6	brick wall trending north-south	
7	Trench 4	matrix of hard packed cement and rubble	atop of Feature 12
8	Trench 4	square slab of dressed stone with square shaped iron pedestal and solid cylindrical shaft	atop of Feature 12
9	Trench 4	brick wall trending east-west	
10	Trench 4	brick pad	
11	Trench 4	two parallel brick walls with oversurface covered in concrete with dressed stone slab	surface similar to Features 7 and 8
12	Trench 4	intersecting brick walls and surface	
13	Trench 5	brick wall trending north-south	
14	Trench 3	two parallel brick walls trending north-south	
15	Trench 7	wooden conduit with seven rubber coated wires	

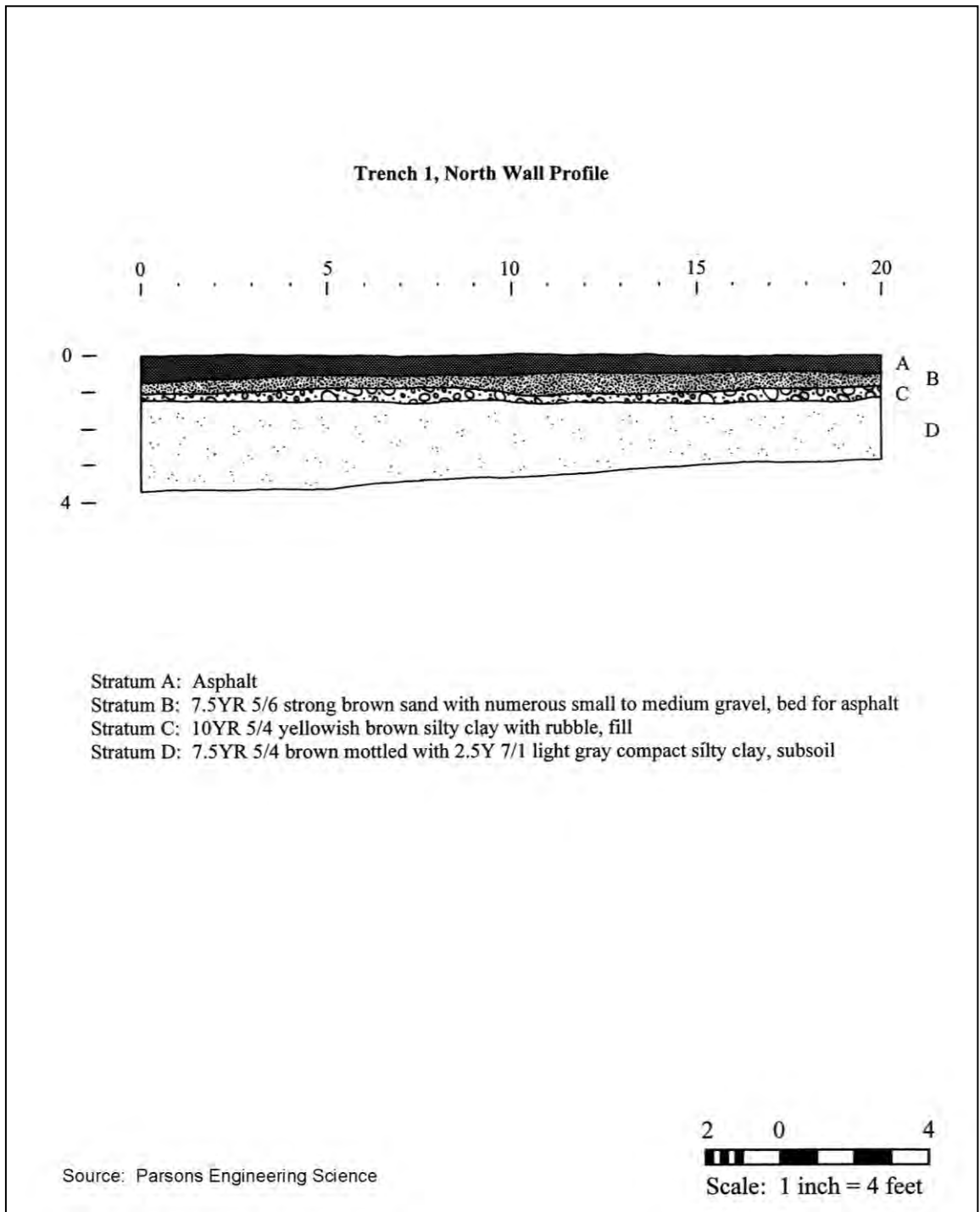


Figure 4. Trench 1 north wall profile

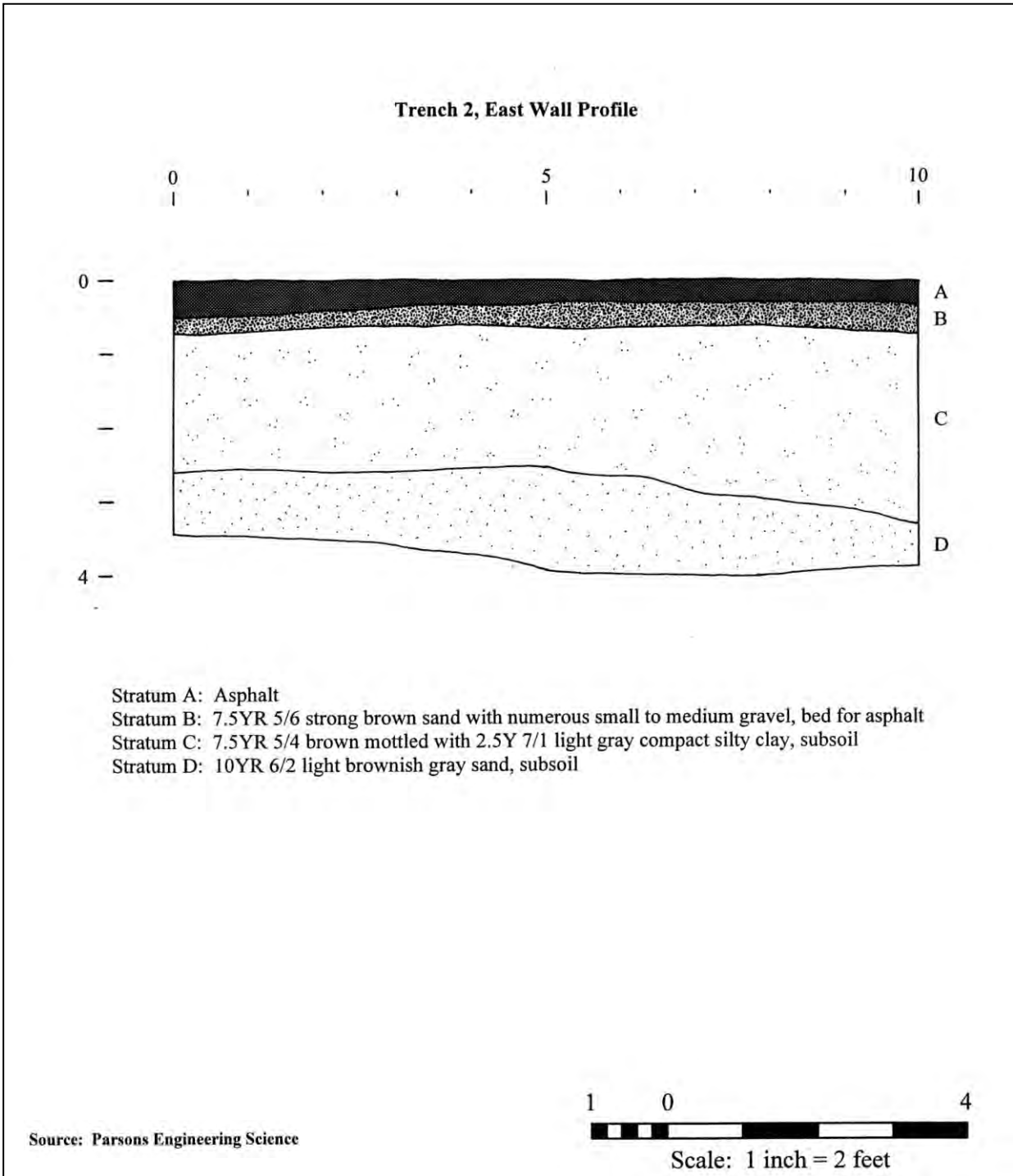


Figure 5. Trench 2 east wall profile

Trench 3

Trench 3 measured 31 feet long by five feet wide. It was placed to intercept the former beer vault at the northeast corner of the block, labeled on all the Sanborn maps beginning in 1885 (page 132), and shown but not labeled on the 1877 Hopkins map (page 57).

The entire trench overlaid the cavity of the beer vault, which had been backfilled with demolition debris in the mid-twentieth century when the present parking lot was constructed. At about seven feet below grade, the trench encountered the vault's concrete floor. The western brick wall of the vault was found just beyond and undercutting the northern sidewall of the trench and labeled Feature 14. Although the trench was too deep to enter safely and rubble fill from the sidewall masked the upper extent of the brick wall, visual inspection revealed two distinct building episodes associated with the wall. The main wall extended 2.5 feet up from the concrete floor and contained at least ten courses of brick. Although mortar adhered to the ends of the bricks made distinctions between courses difficult to discern, the pattern appeared to include several rows of stretchers, a row of headers, followed by several more rows of stretchers. The second wall-building episode consisted of a four-course thick shelf of stretchers immediately adjacent and parallel to the first wall. This shelf would have been on the interior of the vault. Based upon the darker color and straighter sides of these bricks, it appears that this second wall represents a later addition to the first wall. The wall complex matches the west wall of the vault footprint on all the Sanborn maps, beginning in 1885 (page 132). Measurements extrapolated from the trench indicate the vault cavity extended at least 23 feet to the east. The trench did not encounter an eastern edge to the vault.

There were four strata observed in Trench 3 (Figure 6). Strata A and B were the asphalt surface and the underlying coarse sands and gravel bedding material, respectively. Stratum C was a *circa* 0.8-foot thick clay fill layer under Stratum B. Stratum D was the rubble fill found in the remainder of the vault cavity and about five feet thick. Since the concrete floor covered the entire trench base and could not be penetrated, subsoil was not reached in this location. The vault cavity did not contain any intact cultural deposits or any additional features.

Trench 4

Trench 4 measured 40 feet long by 6 feet wide. The trench originally was scoped to be 30 feet long, but was extended when a sizeable feature (Feature 11) was encountered at the northern end. This trench was placed to intercept the interior of two former beer vaults along Saint Asaph Street, labeled on all the Sanborn maps beginning in 1885 (page 132), and shown but not labeled on the 1877 Hopkins map (page 57).

Unlike in Trench 3, no beer vault cavity was found. However, several other features were encountered (Figure 7). Feature 9 was a brick wall three courses wide, oriented roughly east-west near the center of the trench. This feature matched the former location of an east-west interior wall between the two middle beer vaults, shown on all Sanborn maps beginning in 1885. Feature 12 represented the southeast corner of a structural element composed of two intersecting brick walls and an overlying surface. These walls were found at 3.2 feet below the parking lot

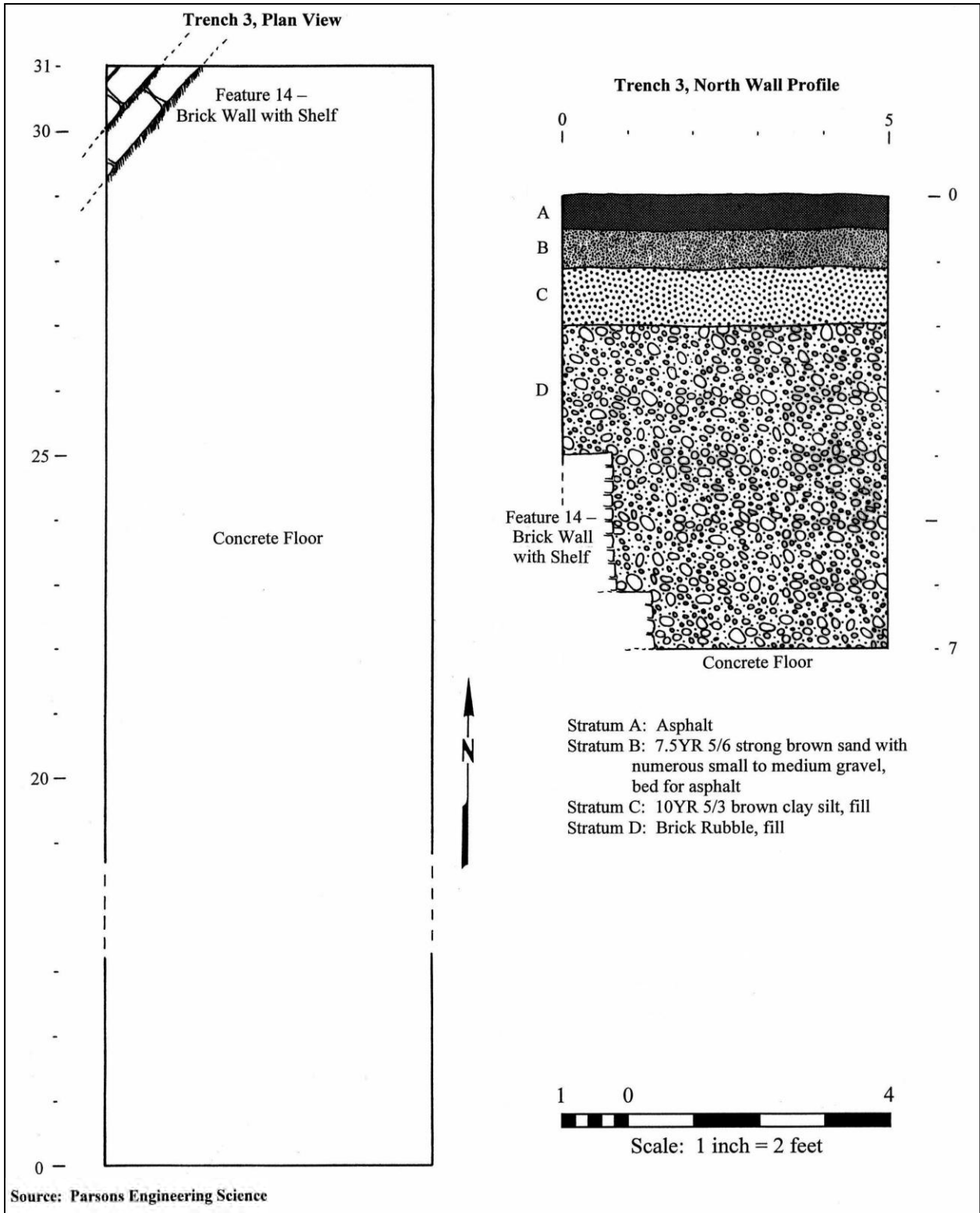


Figure 6. Trench 3 plan view and north wall profile

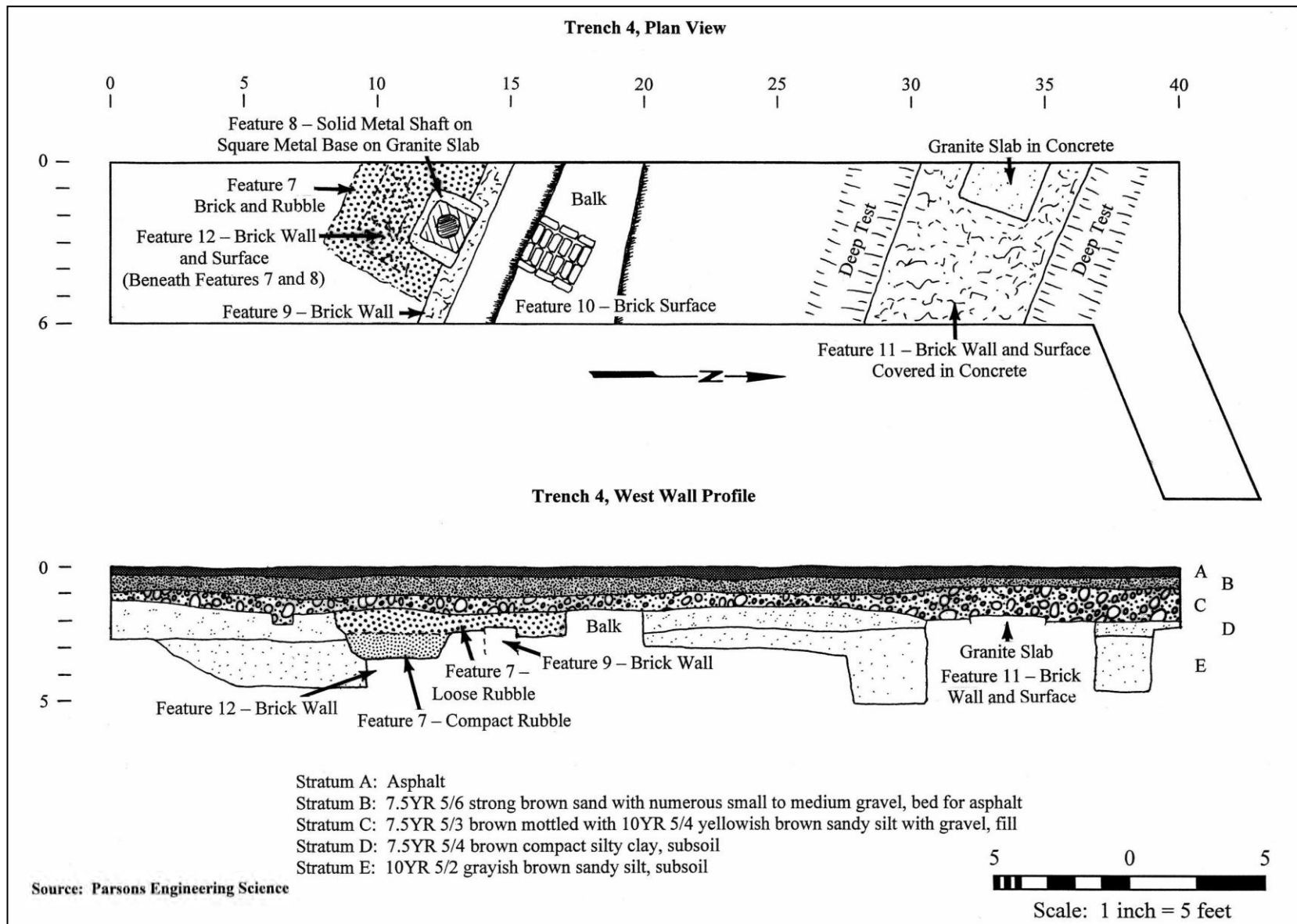


Figure 7. Trench 4 plan view and west wall profile

surface and were exposed for an additional foot into subsoil before safety regulations precluded further excavation. The base of the walls was not reached. On top of Feature 12 was a matrix of hard-packed cement and rubble, previously designated Feature 7. This matrix contained an *in situ* dressed stone slab, 1.1 feet thick and 1.2 feet wide, which served as the base for a square-shaped iron pedestal and a solid cylindrical shaft. The stone slab, iron pedestal, and iron shaft were designated Feature 8. Feature 10 was a two-course deep brick pad located 0.8 feet north of Feature 9, the brick interior wall, and would have been located just inside the northern of the two beer vault structures. The sequence of construction in this area of Trench 4 appears to be Feature 12 first (intersecting brick walls), then Feature 9 (brick interior wall) and finally Feature 7 (brick rubble) and Feature 8 (stone slab and iron pedestal).

Feature 11, located about fifteen feet north of Feature 9, contained two parallel brick walls connected by an overlying surface. As in Feature 12, these walls were cut deep into the subsoil and their bases could not be reached due to safety considerations. The width of the walls and the surface was 5.5 feet. A cement and brick rubble matrix similar to that overlying Feature 12, and containing an *in situ* dressed stone slab, covered the surface. This slab measured 1.7 feet in width.

Features 11 and 12 are substantial brick walls with concrete surfaces across the walls. Feature 11 occurs within the confines of the second beer vault and Feature 12 is located in the third beer vault. These features do not correspond to any interior beer vault walls as indicated on the Sanborn insurance maps.

Stratigraphy in Trench 4 consisted of asphalt (Stratum A) and coarse sand and gravel bedding material for the asphalt (Stratum B), followed by a layer of mixed silty clay fill with some brick rubble (Stratum C), and in most parts of the trench, two layers of subsoil (Strata D and E) (Figure 7). In the southern part of the trench overlying Features 8, 9, and 12, a discrete rubble and mortar-filled stratum occurred beneath Stratum C and was labeled Feature 7. This feature was later separated into two parts: the loose rubble and mortar covering the structural features, and the hard-packed cement and rubble matrix covering Feature 12 and surrounding Feature 8. It seems likely that the looser part of the rubble layer was deposited after the structure was abandoned, while the more compact portion actually was laid down while the building was in operation as a matrix to support the stone slab, iron pedestal, and iron shaft.

Trench 5

Trench 5 straddled a concrete barrier separating a row of parking spaces from a ramp leading to a loading dock. It was located near the center of the block, and was placed to intercept the brewery's engine room, shown on the 1891 and 1896 Sanborn maps. By the time of publication of the 1907 Sanborn map, the building had been expanded to the west. This structure was located behind the main brewery buildings along Saint Asaph Street. Only the southern half of the trench was excavated at this time since the loading dock was still in use when the fieldwork occurred. The trench was oriented southwest-northeast and the concrete barrier intersected the trench running east-west along the city grid lines. Thus, the trench measured six feet long on the

north side, fourteen feet long on the south side, and six feet in width. In plan view, the trench was trapezoidal in shape (Figure 8).

One feature was found in Trench 5. Feature 13 was a brick wall running north-south along the city grid lines, with a possible builder's trench adjoining on the east. The wall was two courses wide, with all the bricks laid as stretchers. Both the wall and the possible builder's trench extended beyond four feet in depth from the parking lot surface, which precluded further excavation for safety reasons. This feature matched the location of the western wall for Ice/Engine room on the 1885 Sanborn map (page 132). The possible builder's trench would have been on the interior of the structure.

Four strata were observed in Trench 5 (Figure 8). Stratum A was the asphalt parking lot, Stratum B was the coarse sand and gravel bedding for the asphalt, Stratum C was a silty clay fill layer overlaying the brick wall (and partially re-deposited in a builder's trench next to the modern concrete barrier), and Stratum D was subsoil.

Trench 6

Trench 6 measured 43 feet long by four feet wide. The trench originally was scoped to be 40 feet long, but was extended slightly when a sizeable feature (Feature 4) was encountered at the southeastern end. This trench was placed to intercept the interior of the southern two structures of the brewery shown on the 1885 and 1891 Sanborn maps and shown but not labeled on the 1877 Hopkins map (page 57), as well as the malting structure and the adjacent building to the north shown on the 1907 Sanborn map.

Three features were found in Trench 6 (Figure 9). Feature 4, located at the extreme southeastern end of the trench, was a square brick surface over a thick concentric square concrete pad. At one time, the brick surface was at least two courses thick, but grading appears to have truncated it, and only one full course and part of a second course survive now. The concrete pad measured 1.5 feet thick and was cut into subsoil. Because the trench encountered only a corner of this feature, complete horizontal measurements of either the brick surface or the concrete pad could not be taken. A thin clay fill layer capped the entire feature.

Feature 5 was located approximately six feet northwest of Feature 4 and was a brick and mortar-constructed shaft feature cut into subsoil. The upper courses of the shaft were partially disturbed from grading on the block. The shaft was lined (or parged) with cement on its interior surface, and the cavity of the feature was filled with brick rubble in a silty clay fill matrix. After removing some of this fill to delineate the shaft outline, the remainder was left *in situ*. In plan view, Feature 5 appeared roughly "figure 8"-shaped on the east, but rounded on the west. Since the width of the trench was narrower than the diameter of the feature, it is unclear whether the shape of the shaft was originally round or oval, and later pushed out in places during demolition or backfilling, or whether the intended shape actually was more irregular, like a "figure 8." It appears that the feature was constructed by excavating a shaft and pressing the bricks and mortar out against the subsoil. The exterior of the feature, where it would have been below grade and

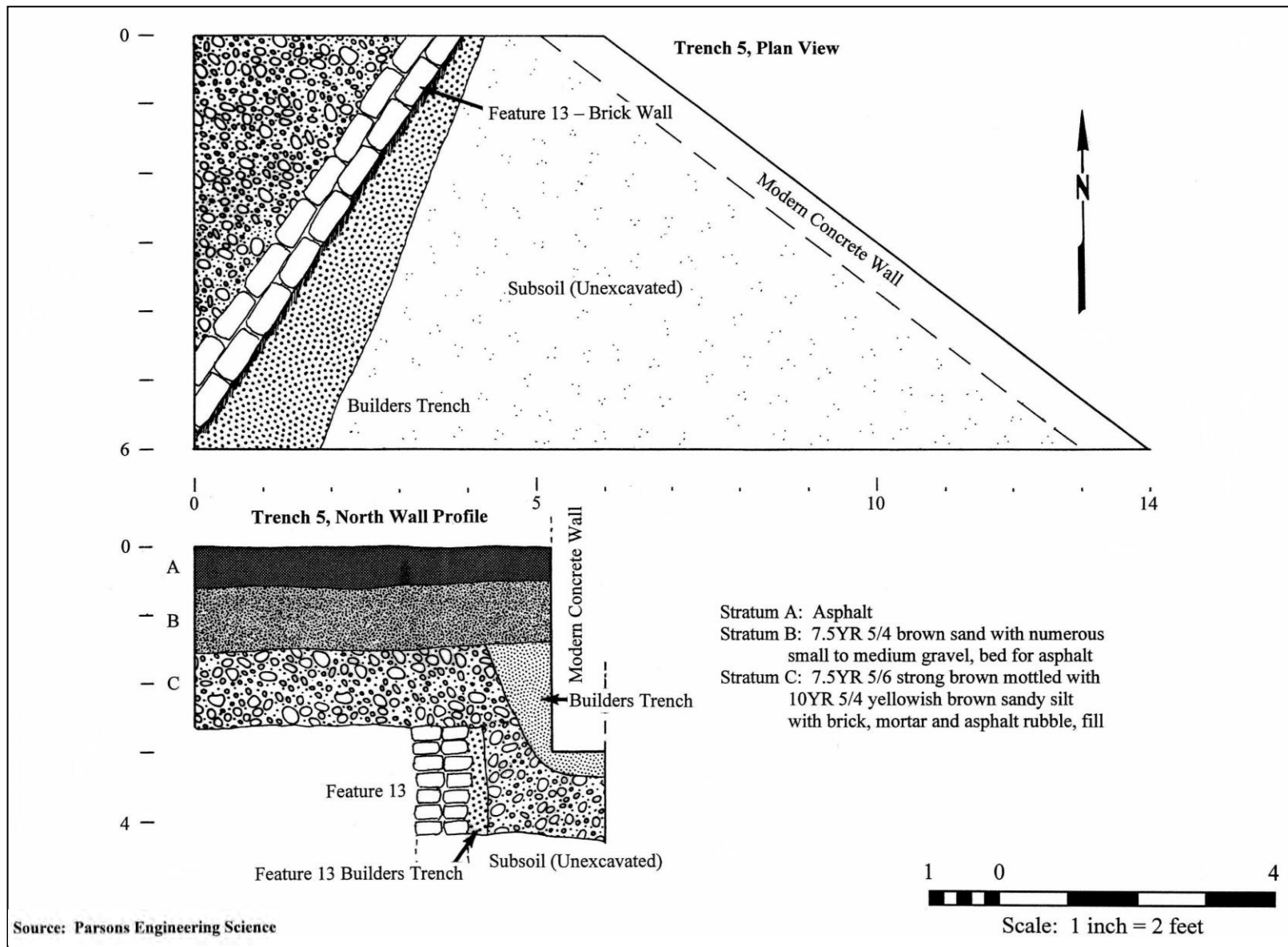


Figure 8. Trench 5 plan view and north wall profile

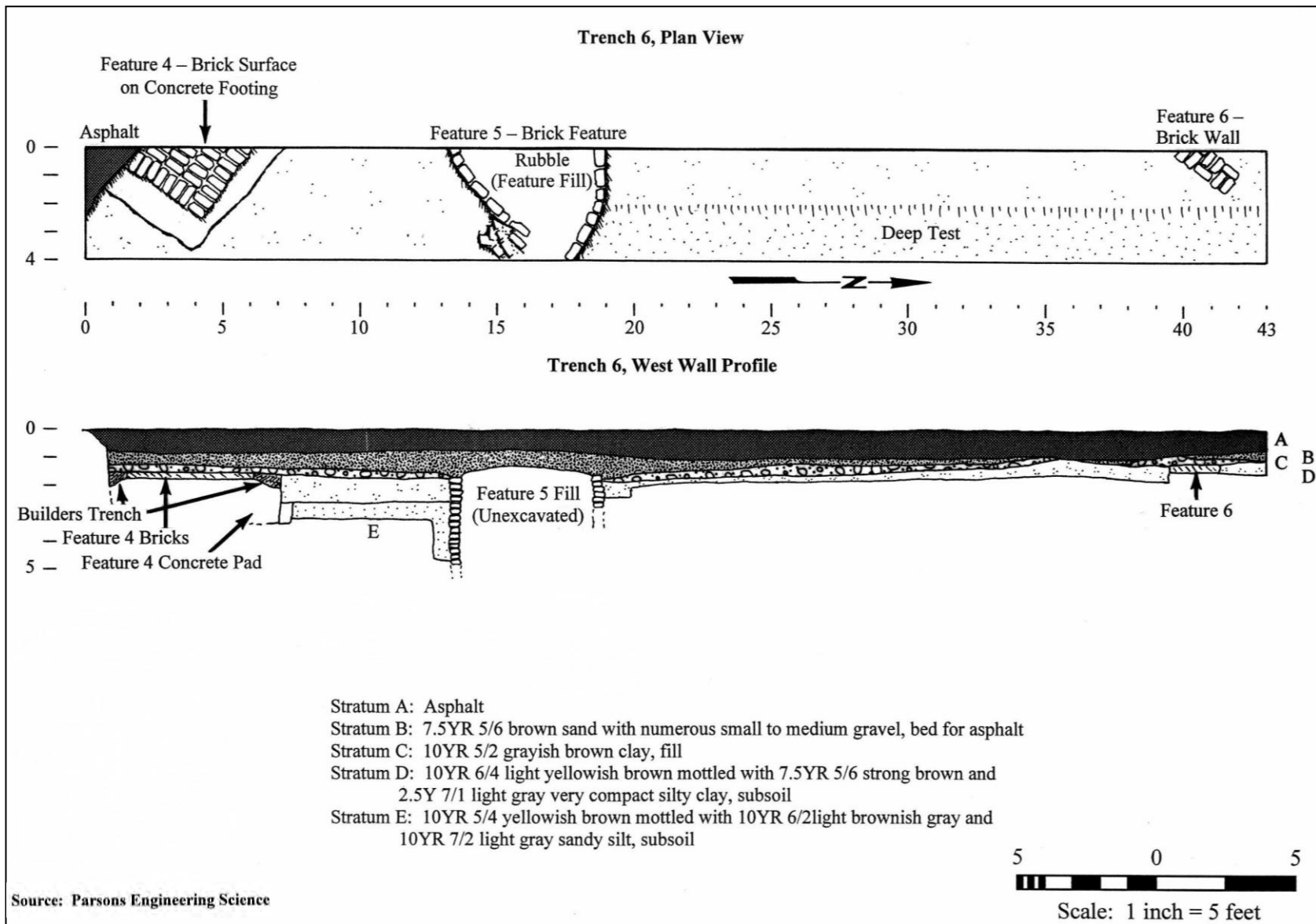


Figure 9. Trench 6 plan view and west wall profile

unexposed to view, was laid in a haphazard manner, implying the bricks and mortar were pressed directly into the adjacent subsoil and not smoothed from the outside. On the east side, the exterior of the feature was exposed for twelve courses of bricks, or approximately three feet, below the top of the feature. Probing revealed at least three more feet of bricks below that. Feature 5 matched the approximate location of a circle labeled “pump over 2 driven wells” in the washroom on the 1885 Sanborn map (page 132). Later Sanborn maps do not retain this notation.

The last feature, labeled Feature 6, was located at the northwestern end of the trench. It was a single course of bricks, measuring one-foot wide and oriented north-south, parallel to Saint Asaph Street. The brick alignment rested on a thin bed of mortar, which sat on top of subsoil. Since this brick alignment was only one-course thick and not a load-bearing wall, it probably was an interior wall. The location suggests that Feature 6 may represent a remnant of the interior wall between the ice/engine room and the beer vault (as depicted on the 1885 Sanborn map).

Stratigraphy for Trench 6 consisted of asphalt and underlying coarse sand and gravel bedding material for the asphalt (Strata A and B, respectively), followed by a clay fill layer (Stratum C) capping all of the features, and subsoil (Strata D and E) (Figure 9). The trench contained no intact cultural deposits other than the fill within Feature 5.

Trench 7

Trench 7 measured ten feet long by six feet wide. It was placed to intercept portions of the boiler room, shown initially on the 1885 Sanborn map (page 132). A single feature was found in this trench. Feature 15 was a north-south wooden conduit housing seven rubber-coated wires (Figure 10). According to the Sanborn maps, this conduit would have been located just west of and parallel to the boilers.

The stratigraphic profile in Trench 7 consisted of asphalt and associated coarse sand and gravel bedding material for the asphalt (Strata A and B), followed by a layer of mixed silty sand with pockets of clay and some brick rubble (Stratum C), and subsoil (Stratum D) (Figure 10). Feature 15 lay on top of and cut into Stratum C, which was probably not fill, but an intact cultural deposit. In profile, Stratum C measured approximately 0.5-foot thick.

Trench 8

Trench 8 measured 24 feet long by 7.5 feet wide. It originally was scoped to be twenty feet long, but was extended when a large feature (Feature 1) was encountered at its south end. The trench was placed to intercept the former footprint of the mill house, shown initially on the 1896 Sanborn map (page 143).

The stratigraphy in Trench 8 consisted of asphalt (Stratum A), coarse sand and gravel bedding for the asphalt (Stratum B), a layer of mixed demolition rubble and clay fill (Stratum C), and subsoil (Stratum D) (Figure 11). There were no intact cultural deposits.

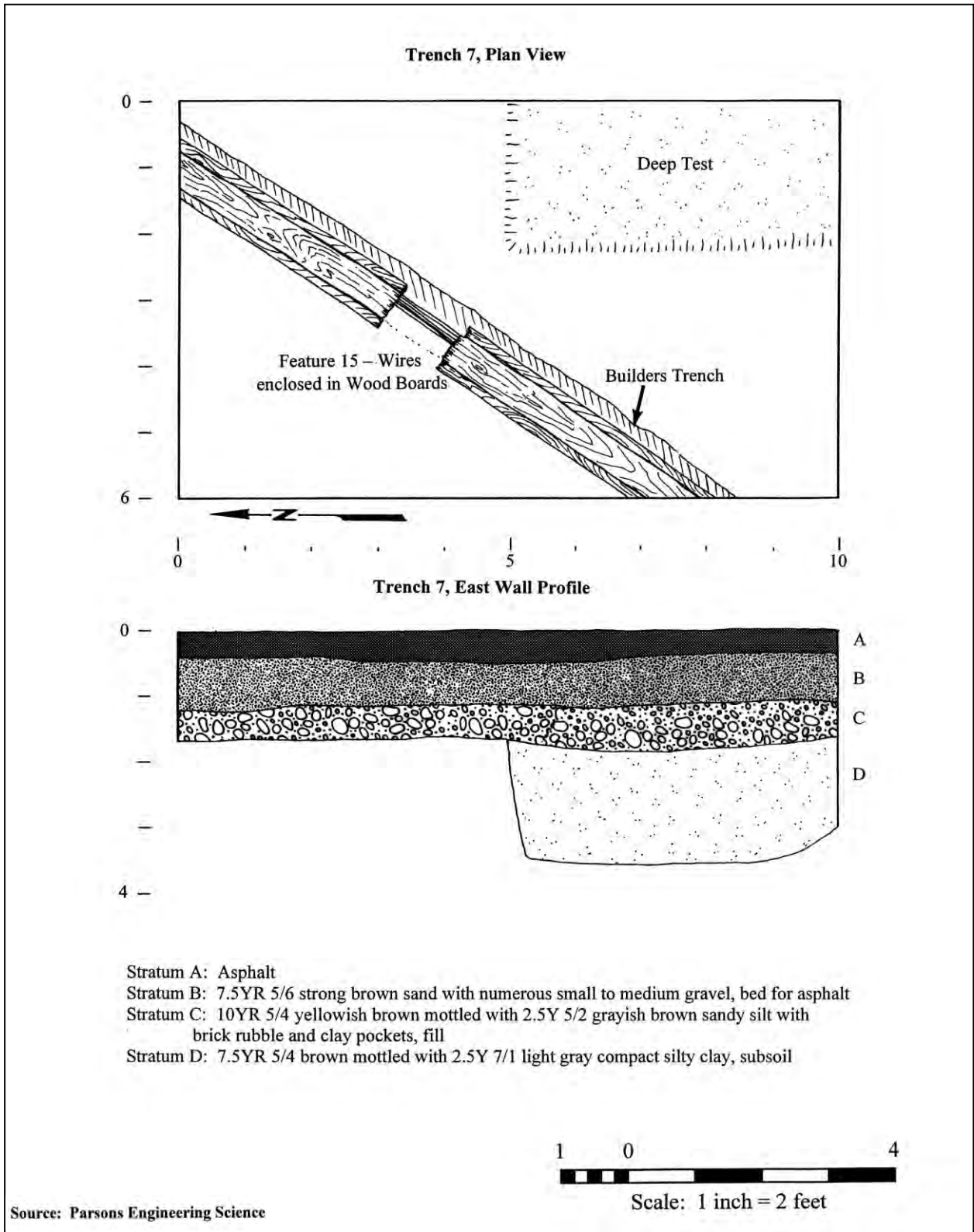


Figure 10. Trench 7 plan view and east wall profile

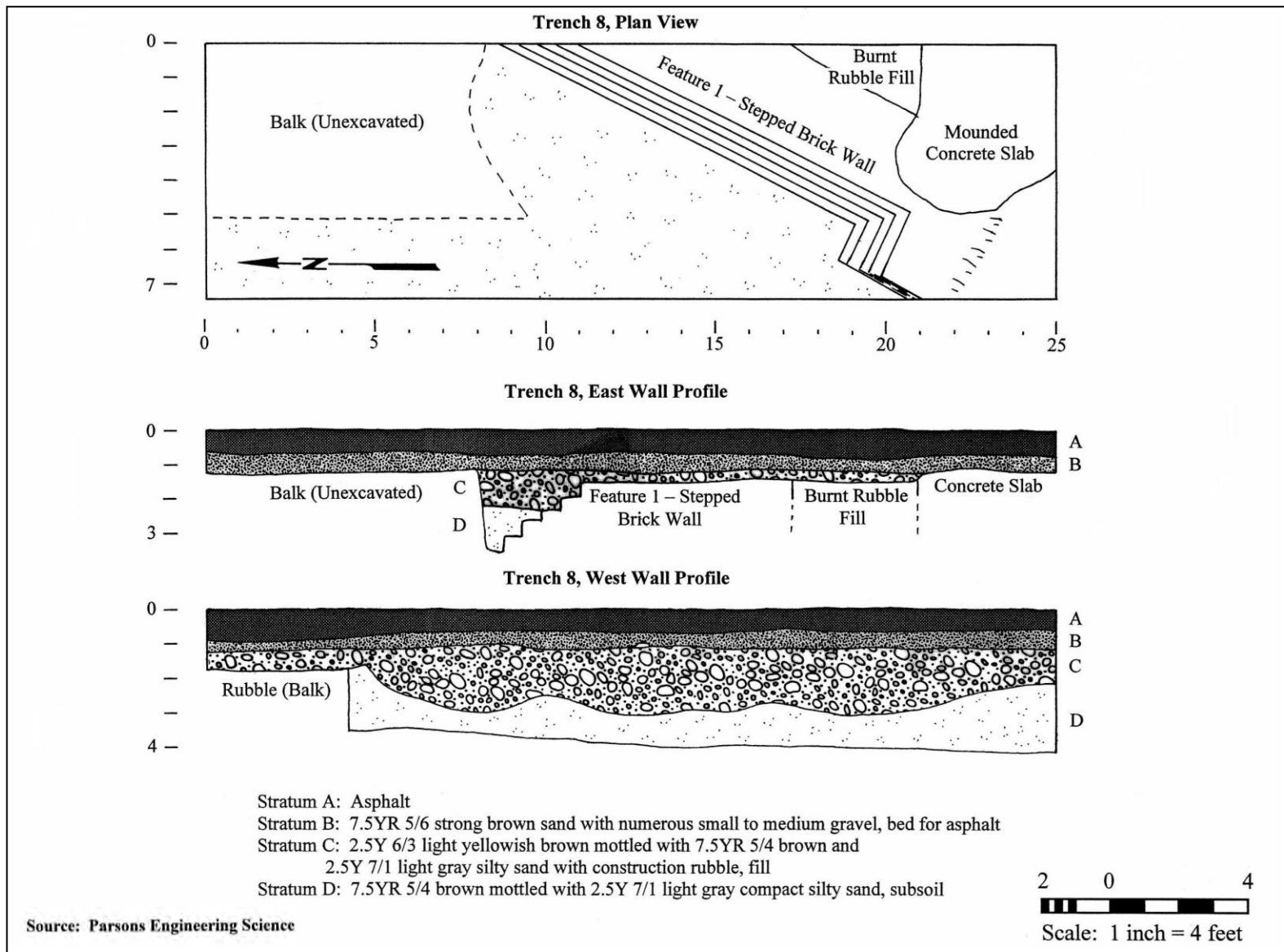


Figure 11. Trench 8 plan view and east and west wall profiles

The corner of a substantial stepped brick foundation, designated Feature 1, matched the location of the new brewhouse's (1894) southwest corner, shown initially on the 1896 Sanborn map (page 143). The trench exposed the exterior side of the west wall, which was cut into subsoil. The wall had seven courses of bricks and rested on a shelf of concrete tempered with brickbats and cobbles.

Trench 9

Trench 9 measured 45 feet long by 6.5 feet wide. Although originally scoped to be 40 feet long, the trench was extended when a feature (Feature 3, described below) was found at its south end. A 5.5-foot balk was left in the center of the trench, running east-west, to avoid active gas and sewer lines connecting the furniture store to the west with trunk lines under Saint Asaph Street to the east. The trench was placed within the former footprint of the new brewhouse (1894), shown initially on the 1896 Sanborn map (page 143).

Stratigraphy in Trench 9 consisted of asphalt and coarse sand and gravel bedding for the asphalt (Strata A and B, respectively), a thin lens of demolition rubble and clay fill (Stratum C), and subsoil (Strata D and E) (Figure 12). There were no intact cultural deposits.

Three features were found in Trench 9 (Figure 12). In the approximate center of the trench, more of Feature 1 was uncovered and represented the south wall of the new brewhouse (1894). Here, the wall was eight-courses thick rather than seven, probably due to the slope of the ground moving east. It was stepped on both the north and south sides. Feature 2 was a square slab of dressed granite set in a concentric square pit of soil, all of which rested on top of a concrete pad. Feature 3 was the eastern face of a brick wall, which was visible only in the west profile, at the southern end of the trench. The wall had 5 courses of bricks and measured 3.2 feet in width. Feature 3 may correspond to part of the east wall of the grain dryer building shown on the 1907 and 1921 Sanborn maps.

Trench 10

Trench 10 measured 25 feet long by six feet wide. It was placed to intercept the former cooper's shop and house, shown initially on the 1885 Sanborn map (page 132) and labeled as a grocery and print room. By 1907, the buildings were used for storage.

Stratigraphy in this trench consisted of asphalt (Stratum A), coarse sand and gravel bedding for the asphalt (Stratum B), a very thick (2.5-3.5 feet) layer of redeposited mixed clay fill (Stratum C), and subsoil (Stratum D) (Figure 13). There were no intact cultural deposits.

An approximately one-inch diameter cast iron water or gas pipe and associated pipe trench was found near the base of Stratum C at the southwestern end of the trench. This pipe was oriented north-south and would have connected to a line under Pendleton Street. Because the pipe and pipe trench appeared to be twentieth-century in origin and were found in association with demolition fill, they were not assigned a feature number. No other features were found in Trench 10.

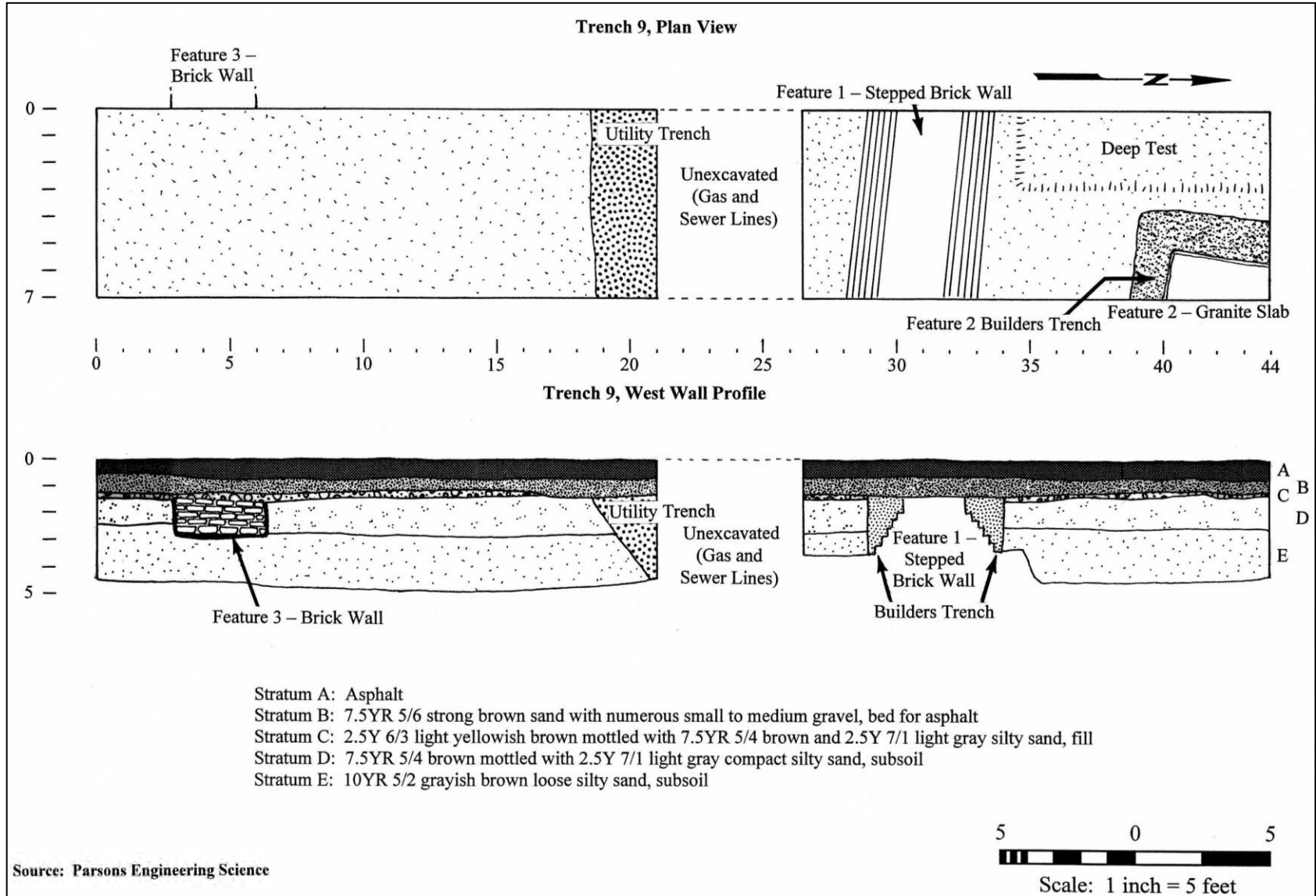


Figure 13. Trench 9 plan view and west wall profile

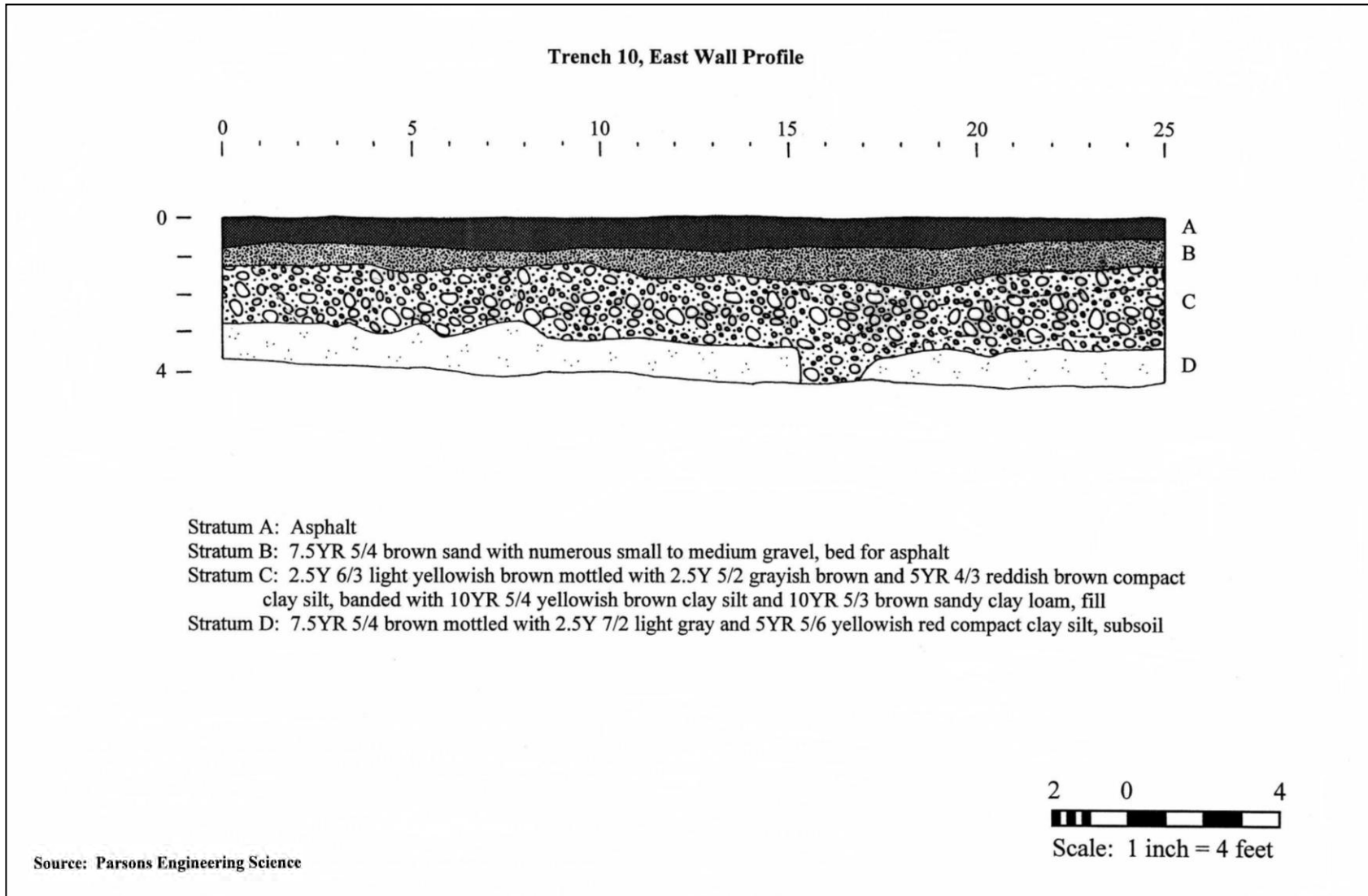


Figure 13. Trench 10 east wall profile

Trench 11

Trench 11 measured twenty feet long by five feet wide. It was located in an unimproved area of the block, according to historic maps. The trench straddled a four-foot wide concrete parking divider. This barrier was left as a balk and not removed.

The stratigraphy in this trench consisted of asphalt (Stratum A), coarse sand and gravel bedding for the asphalt (Stratum B), and subsoil (Stratum C) (Figure 14). Unlike other soil profiles on the block, there was no historic fill between the modern asphalt and the subsoil. This area appears to have been truncated by modern grading. No features were found in Trench 11.

B. Phase II Results

Forty-one additional features were identified during Phase II investigations (Table 3). These features included brick walls and foundations, circular brick shafts, brick, concrete and stone pads, a concrete floor, concrete and metal mounts, builder's trenches, modern utility trenches, and drain elements.

Area 1 (South Area, Figure 3)

Area 1 was a rectangular excavation, roughly 100 feet (north-south) by 60 feet (east-west). Phase I features identified in this area included Feature 1, a large brick wall and concrete slab, located near the far southwest corner of the excavation. The corner of a substantial stepped brick matched the location of the new brewhouse's (1894) southwest corner, shown beginning on the 1896 Sanborn map (page 143). Excavations in Phase I exposed the exterior side of the west wall, which was cut into subsoil. The wall had seven courses of bricks and rested on a shelf of concrete tempered with brickbats and cobbles. When exposed, Feature 1 extended twelve feet north from the southern end of the excavation and was five feet wide. At the northern extent of this section of Feature 1, a large cistern (Feature 41) interrupted Feature 1. The cistern was ten feet in diameter, and was mechanically excavated to more than twenty feet below the current surface. As this depth was approximately five feet deeper than the construction impact, excavation ceased. Feature 41 consisted of an unparged interior brick structure. The fill excavated from it was a homogenous dense clay and brick rubble stratum. No meaningful archaeological deposits or artifacts were found. The cistern appears to predate the wall (Feature 1), as the points of contact between Features 1 and 41 showed the cistern to be intact, and a repair to the wall was detected. Feature 41 may represent one of the four driven wells located in the pump house on the 1885 Sanborn map (page 132). The north-south portion of Feature 1 continued ten feet to the north.

At this point, Feature 1 turned east and continued out of the excavation area (this section of the wall was designated Feature 44 in the field, but changed to Feature 1). A perpendicular section of brick wall was found at the extreme southern extent of the excavation adjoining the north-south section of Feature 1. As both of these walls were determined to be the exterior of the building, the east-west section also was designated as Feature 1. Abutting Feature 1 on the north was

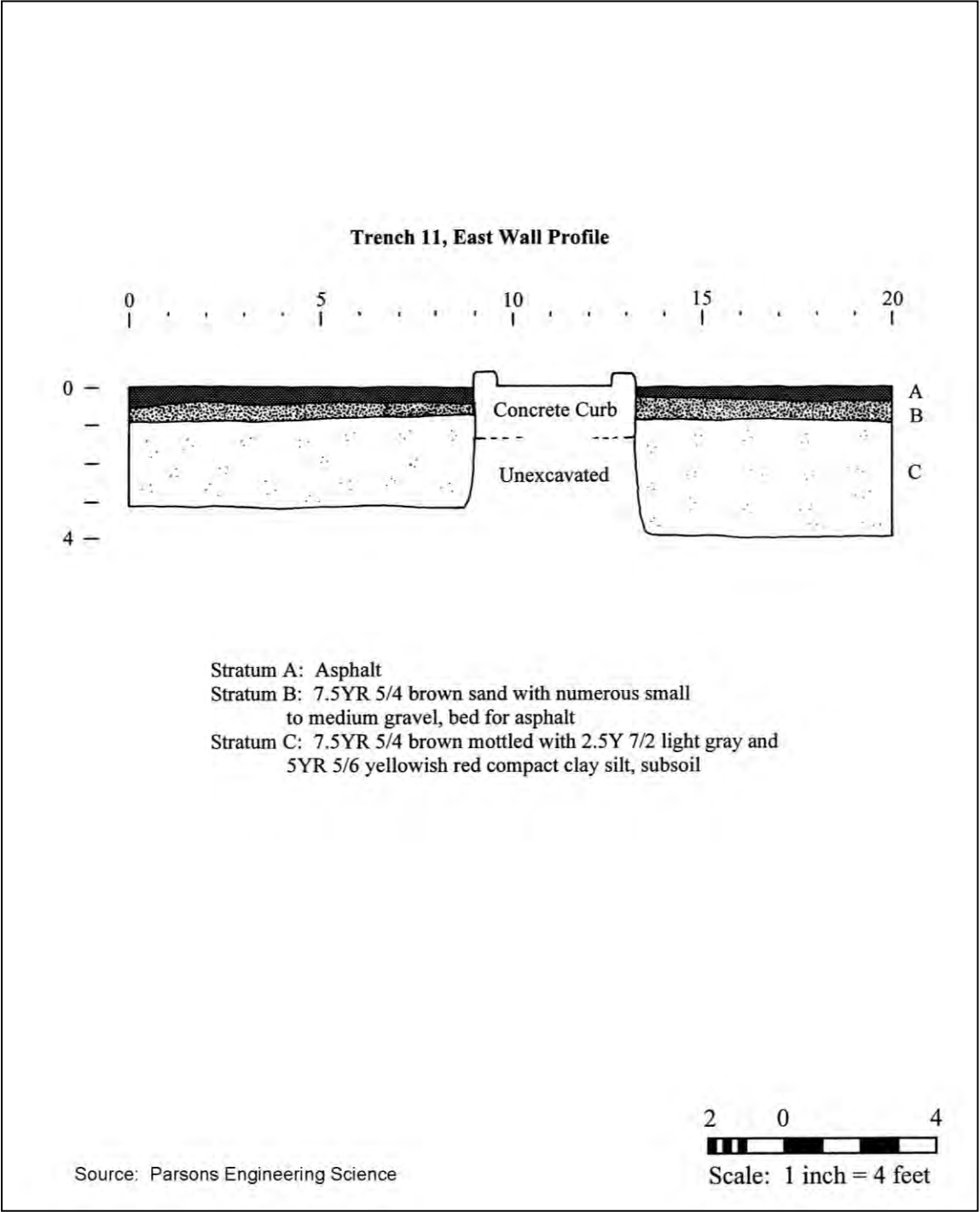


Figure 14. Trench 11 east wall profile

Table 3. Phase II features

Feature	Provenience	Description	Association
16	Area 2, North	support base	Feature 33
17	Area 2, North	support base	Feature 33
18	Area 2, North	support base	Feature 33
19	Area 2, North	support base	Feature 33
20	Area 2, North	central floor gutter	Feature 33
21	Area 2, North	soil boring	Feature 33
22	Area 2, North	iron staining on the floor	Feature 33
23	Area 2, North	alcove in brickwork	Feature 33
24	Area 2, North	three-inch round floor opening	Feature 33
25	Area 2, North	rectangular concrete mount with central metal attachment	Feature 33
26	Area 2, North	rectangular concrete mount with central metal attachment	Feature 33
27	Area 2, North	builder's trench	Feature 14
28			
29	Area 2, North	builder's trench remnant	part of Feature 27
30	Area 2, North	square concrete slab	atop of Feature 31
31	Area 2, North	concrete covered rectangular brick support	
32	Area 2, North	brick footer, four courses of brick with plaster coating	Feature 14
33	Area 2, North	concrete floor of beer vault	below Feature 32, associated with Feature 14
34			
35	Area 2, North	concrete slab	
36	Area 1, South	modern utility trench	Feature 1 interior (intrusive)
37	Area 1, South	builder's trench	Feature 1 interior, north of south wall
38	Area 1, South	irregular soil discontinuity-large utility trench	Feature 1 interior (intrusive)
39	Area 1, South	concrete square pad, with single course of brick, two wide	Feature 1, associated with Feature 2
40	Area 1, South	brick structure with bolts in arc, capped with concrete	Feature 1
41	Area 1, South	circular brick feature, unperged interior	

42	Area 1, South	square concrete pad	Feature 1
43	Area 1, South	square slab of dressed granite	Feature 1
44	Area 1, South	brick wall trending east-west	Feature 1
45	Area 1, South	brick wall trending east-west	
46	Area 1, South	circular brick feature	
47	Area 1, South	concrete pad	
48	Area 1, South	concrete and brick support	
49	Area 1, South	brick wall trending east-west	
50	Area 1, South	brick wall trending north-south	
51	Area 1, South	brick wall trending east-west; wall depression and brick rubble	
52	Area 1, South	brick wall trending north-south	
53	Area 1, South	brick wall or pier fragment	Feature 51
54	Area 1, South	slab of unmortared bricks	Feature 36
55	Area 1, South	brick wall trending north-south	
56	Area 1, South	irregular soil discontinuity-large utility trench	part of Feature 38 (intrusive)

another brick wall (Feature 45). It was paved on the top section with concrete and was 2.5 feet in width. The building associated with Feature 45 was offset slightly with the Feature 1 structure. Feature 45 continued an additional four feet west, and turned north. This section of the north-south portion of the wall extended an additional three feet. The remainder of the wall was likely destroyed during demolition of the buildings and the construction of the current parking lot.

Several interior features were found in the confines of the Feature 1 walls. These consisted of Features 2, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42 and 43. A description of each feature follows below.

Feature 37 was a shallow, narrow remnant of a builder's trench immediately north of the south wall of Feature 1. It varied from seven to twelve inches in width, but was only three to four inches deep. No meaningful artifacts were recovered from Feature 37.

Feature 40 ran perpendicular to the western wall of Feature 1. It was a large brick structure capped with concrete with four sets of protruding bolts spaced in a wide arc. The pairs of bolts most likely were used to secure the machinery to its foundation. Feature 40 was likely the support base for some type of machinery.

Feature 2 was a concrete pier located twenty feet east of Feature 1. Feature 2 was a square slab of dressed granite set in a concentric square pit of soil, all of which rested on top of a concrete pad. The granite slab was 1.5 feet thick and approximately four by four feet. Two additional support features were found in association with Feature 2. Slightly offset to the east and two feet south of Feature 2, Feature 39 was another square concrete pad measuring four by four feet. It had a single tier of brick; two courses wide adhered to it. The bricks were offset two inches inside the edge. Feature 43 was another four- by four-foot square pier located four feet north of Feature 39. It was identical to Feature 2 in size and materials.

Feature 42, found 1.5 feet east of Feature 41, was a 2.5 by 2.5-foot concrete support. Based on its proximity to the cistern (Feature 41), it may have supported a pump or some other associated equipment.

Feature 36 was a north-south linear feature located on the extreme eastern portion of the excavation immediately adjacent and parallel to the sidewalk fronting Saint Asaph Street. It was detected directly below the asphalt layer. Its fill component was re-deposited subsoil clay containing high concentrations of brick rubble and gravel. Artifacts collected from Feature 36 were consistently modern bottle glass, gravel, and metal. Feature 36 most likely represents a modern utility trench.

Feature 38 was an irregular soil discontinuity located just south of the northern most wall portion of Feature 1. It truncated Feature 36, indicating an even more recent origin. Its fill was comprised of sand and gravel, and is likely a large utility trench. It continued on the west side of Feature 1, and out of the excavated area on both the east and west sides. It was mechanically cross-sectioned, but its base was not found.

North of Feature 45 (the east-west wall abutting Feature 1) was a cluster of features. These appeared to be inside the structure associated with Feature 45 and included Features 4, 5, 6, 46, 47, 48, 54 and 55. Feature 4, a brick and concrete pier found during Phase I, was a square brick surface over a thick concentric square concrete pad. At one time, the brick surface was at least two courses thick, but grading appears to have truncated it since only one full course and part of a second course survive now. The concrete pad measured 1.5 feet thick and was cut into subsoil.

Phase II testing of Feature 5, a well found during Phase I, revealed that at a depth of seven feet, the teardrop shape changed to a more regular, circular configuration. Below this first seven feet of excavation, the well was not parged on either the interior or the exterior surface. It had a rough mortar between the bricks. The first seven feet were excavated by hand, but the nature of the fill and the artifacts indicated that the fill was of recent origin. The remaining thirteen feet of excavation were conducted by backhoe and reached a maximum depth of twenty feet. Fill from the well was inspected by archaeologists until maximum depth was attained. Based on the nature of the fill and modern artifacts, it appeared that the well was filled relatively late, probably during the final demolition of the plant.

Feature 46 was a large brick cistern located approximately four feet southwest of Feature 5. Its diameter was eleven feet. From the current excavated surface, Feature 46 extended to a maximum depth of 7.5 feet. Its interior surface (both sides and bottom) was parged with a thin (1/18-inch) layer of concrete. The upper three feet of fill encountered consisted of dark yellowish brown, very compact sandy clay and pea gravel. This fill was the same material used to cover the entire parking lot beneath the asphalt surface. Beneath the first layer of fill was another fill layer of very dense clay, brick rubble, wood, and other architectural refuse. Several large fragments of mortared brick were revealed during excavation and interpreted as part of the cap for the cistern. The base of the cistern was parged over a single layer of bricks. Feature 46 showed no obvious builder's trench, again implying that the cistern was built by laying bricks against the outer edge of the excavated depression.

Feature 47 was located immediately east and abutting Feature 46. It consisted of a concrete pad measuring four feet by five feet. It was badly disturbed during the demolition of the plant and subsequent grading. It may have been an interior building support.

Feature 48 was another concrete and brick support measuring four feet (north-south) by seven feet (east-west). It was also disturbed by demolition and grading. Located eleven feet east of Feature 47 and one foot east of Feature 4, Feature 48 most likely served as an interior building support.

Feature 55 was a small wall remnant located on the east side of the excavation. It consisted of only a single tier of three bricks that extended three feet within a small trench. It has been badly disturbed by Feature 36, the large modern utility trench running parallel to Saint Asaph Street.

Feature 54 consisted of a large slab of mortared bricks located in Feature 36. It was determined to be a portion of demolition debris redeposited in the utility trench rather than an *in situ* feature.

Feature 49 was a portion of the east-west wall of the structure containing Features 4, 5, 46, 47 and 48. It was also badly disturbed by grading activities, and only a fifteen-foot section remained. It was truncated on its east side by Feature 36 (utility trench) and its western portions had been graded away.

At the northern extreme of Area 1, another cluster of features was documented. These included Feature 6, located during the Phase I survey, and a series of brick wall features labeled Features 50, 51, and 52.

Feature 6 was located near the northern and western limit of Area 1 and consisted of a brick wall fragment. Phase II excavations fully exposed Feature 6. It extended five feet in a north-south orientation, but most of this wall had been destroyed during demolition and grading activities. Since this brick alignment was only one course thick and not a load-bearing wall, it probably was an interior wall. The location suggests that Feature 6 may represent a remnant of the interior wall between the ice/engine room and the beer vault as depicted on the 1885 Sanborn map (page 132).

Feature 50 was a north-south wall that formed a T-shaped foundation fragment with Features 51 and 52. It was a 9.5-foot section of wall that joined Feature 51, an east-west section of the same structure. Feature 50 may represent the remnants of an interior wall and may be the west wall of the malt scale room if this room was located on the first floor.

Feature 51 was badly disturbed, with only a fourteen-foot section retaining brickwork. The wall base continued an additional 28 feet west, but only a shallow depression with brick rubble survived.

Feature 52 was another north-south wall that continued north from, and formed a right angle with, Feature 51. Only a small 5.5-foot section remained since grading had destroyed the northern portions. It lined up with Feature 50, but was only two brick courses wide and one foot further west than the western extent of Feature 50. Feature 52 may have been an interior wall associated with the disturbed northern portions of Feature 50.

Feature 53 was a small group of bricks aligned with Feature 51. Measuring fifteen by eight inches in diameter, it was found nine feet west of the end of Feature 51. It may be a small remnant of Feature 51.

Area 2 (North Area)

Area 2 was an excavated area measuring approximately 60 feet north-south by 70 feet east-west. This excavation was targeted to fully expose the 50- by 70-foot beer vault previously discovered during the Phase I survey in Trenches 3 and 4. During the excavations of the beer vault, many additional structural features were encountered, including a series of interior supports, walls, drains, and other industrial features. Due to the extreme disturbance to the surrounding soils during demolition of the buildings and subsequent grading, no meaningful archaeological strata were encountered.

The excavated portion of the beer vault consisted of an area approximately 50 feet (north-south) by 35 feet (east-west). The actual area was larger, but due to the unconsolidated nature of the demolition debris contained in the vault, it was necessary to attain a 2:1 slope on this fill to maintain a safe working environment.

Excavation revealed that Feature 14 was the western extent of the vault, as sterile subsoil was found immediately west of the wall. The northern corner could not be found due to proximity to Wythe Street. A number of utilities fronting on Wythe Street, combined with the unconsolidated nature of the fill inside the vault, made continuing the excavation to the street unsafe. Feature 14 was exposed to the distance of 33.5 feet, at which point the wall turned east. This corner formed the southwestern extent of the northern beer vault. Feature 14 was comprised of eleven courses of stretcher bricks, or bricks placed on the long axis end to end. In some areas, a thin, quarter-inch plaster adhered to the walls. The plaster was poorly preserved, but it did appear that the entire wall had been plastered. Between the second and third courses of brick, pairs of cut nails were observed driven into the mortar joint. These pairs of nails were spaced at relatively even intervals of every two feet. Wood fragments were observed on these nails and were likely remains of wood paneling that covered the brick walls and added after the plaster coating. Below the eleventh course of brick, a footer (Feature 32) was observed. This footer consisted of an additional four courses of brick, but extended in an overlap fashion, increasing in width as depth increased. Plaster coating was also observed covering the footer. The footer terminated onto a concrete floor (Feature 33).

A total of 12 additional features were found on the floor of the vault. These consisted of Features 16 through 19 (structural supports); 20, 23, and 24 (floor drains); 22 (iron staining on floor, which may have been an equipment mount); 21 (not an associated feature, but a soil boring excavated at some time after the demolition of the brewery); Feature 24 (a small round hole in the concrete floor that may have been a drain); and Features 25 and 26 (two small rectangular [6.5- by five-inch] concrete equipment mounts with 1.5-inch diameter metal attachments in the center).

Feature 20 was a ten-inch wide gutter located in the center of the vault floor. The floor (Feature 33) was pitched and sloped from the west to the east. The elevation of the floor at the western extent was one foot higher in elevation than at the eastern extent. This central floor gutter was designed to carry away any water from ice melt, cleaning water, and spilled beer from the vault. It likely carried these liquids out of the vault and into a storm sewer or some other catchment system. Feature 23 was an alcove in the brickwork that drained into Feature 20. It probably was installed to drain condensation liquids that would have gathered behind the brick walls or woodwork. Feature 24 was a three-inch round opening in the floor that also may have served as a floor drain.

Features 16 through 19 were a series of four support bases located two feet north of the center floor drain (Feature 20). These supports were evenly placed at ten-foot intervals (from center to center), with Feature 16 farthest east and Feature 19 at the westernmost post. As the floor sloped, each subsequent support to the east increased in size with a larger and higher base.

A jackhammer was used to break the concrete floor and a backhoe trench was excavated into the substrata beneath the basement. No meaningful archaeological strata were found during the excavation of the test trench beneath the beer vault. A thin layer of fill consisting of pea gravel and coarse sand was noted overlying sterile, natural subsoil. Feature 14 also continued beneath the concrete floor to an additional depth of two feet. The builder's trench (Feature 27) also was located in the test trench at the base of Feature 14. No artifacts were recovered from this portion of Feature 27. The builder's trench (Feature 27) was also located immediately west of Feature 14. It consisted of very dense brown and gray mottled clay mixed with brickbats and cobbles. A small section was excavated and no artifacts were recovered. A small soil irregularity was noted along the south wall of Feature 14. This consisted of a small portion of a builder's trench (originally called Feature 29), but included with Feature 27 as it was part of the same builder's trench.

The floor of the northern beer vault also exhibited evenly distributed depressions across the entire area of the exposed floor. The depressions measured about 4.5 feet long by one foot wide. These depressions were located from center to center exactly five feet apart north to south and from four to five feet apart east to west. It is likely that these depressions were pressed into the concrete floor by the immense weight of the beer on stands stored in the basement.

Just south of the northern beer vault, three additional structural features were found. Feature 30 was a 26.5 by 26.5-inch square concrete slab that sat atop Feature 31 along its western extent. Feature 31 was a concrete-covered rectangular brick support. It was seven feet east-west by five feet north-south. The brickwork was regular on the exterior and beneath the concrete pad portion of the feature, but the interior was comprised of brickbats and compacted clay fill. Feature 35 was a concrete slab located four feet east of Feature 31. It was in very poor condition due to the various demolition/grading activities. It was ten feet east-west by six feet north-south and likely functioned as a support feature.

IV. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS (SEE ALSO CHAPTER 17)

The first controlled excavation of any part of the Robert Portner Brewery site occurred in 1994. City archaeologists monitored the demolition of the rear of the 1901 ice plant and the excavation behind it along Pitt Street in preparation for a mixed-use office/residential development. Little was discovered except for brick rubble, a few bottle sherds, and clumps of purple-stained refuse and clay, presumably from Eddie Portner's 1907 ink factory across Wythe Street. Similarly, backhoe excavation of the rear (east side) of the 1912 bottling house during the winter of 1997-1998, prior to the construction of "Portner's Landing," produced no evidence of the brewery's large *circa* 1898 stable. (Alexandria Archaeology site files)

In 1998 Saul Centers, Inc. proposed to demolish the former Woodward & Lothrop department store (later Mastercraft Interiors) building at 615 North Washington Street to make way for a multi-use office and retail development to occupy the entire block. The store stood directly atop the old Portner house site and its parking lot included the former location of the brewing plant and cellars. In preparation, the Saul Centers engaged Parsons Engineering-Science to conduct an archaeological excavation. Fieldwork at the end of October 1998 and concluded in January 2000. Initial trenching was conducted through an extensive fill and rubble layer and revealed a variety of structures. These structures were discovered at a level that suggests they would have been located at the very lowest points in the brewery interior or below ground. Clearly, mid-twentieth century demolition and grade modification had been extensive. The structural features encountered could be divided into six categories: bearing wall foundations; partition or platform footings; column bases or footings; equipment mounts; flooring; and water source or storage features. The trenching was useful in quickly identifying the locations of the various sections of the 1868 brewery and the 1894 brewhouse and suggesting where further excavation would be required.

The features exposed in the stripping of the site reveal the arrangement of the brewery at its latest date, such as at the time of its closure in 1916, or even later. Therefore, interpretation of the structural remains will rely mainly upon the latest pre-Prohibition (1907 and 1912) insurance maps and the 1894 description of the "new" brewhouse.

A notable factor of the investigation was the absence of individual artifacts related to brewing or associated with the Robert Portner Brewing Company. This can be attributed to the cleanliness of the site during brewing operations, plus the reuse and re-grading of the site and likely sale of former brewery equipment for scrap. Only a few possibly brewery-related metal objects were observed, including a large iron strap hinge, a wall or beam anchor, some steel and copper pipe and some type of reciprocating machine part.

Demolition, re-grading, and excavation activities were undoubtedly responsible for removing all trace of most of the brewery's accessory structures. Test trenches near Oronoco Street and along Washington Street failed to produce evidence of former carpentry and cooper shops, storage sheds, or a structure depicted on the 1877 Hopkins map (page 57), which may have been a pre-1865 cottage occupied by Portner, Recker and family after the Civil War or a building associated with Portner's beer garden. The old Portner family house was, of course, replaced by the

“Woodies” department store. In a few spots just west of the site of the 1868 brewery buildings, minor sections of foundations or flooring, undoubtedly parts of the late-nineteenth century additions which contained the boilers, steam engines, electric dynamos, and ice engines were uncovered. In fact, in one of the first trenches, a wooden box conduit containing seven insulated wires was recovered and likely associated with the plant’s electrical system.

Sixteen brick wall/foundations or wall fragments were identified during these investigations and represent both exterior and interior walls from various construction episodes at the Robert Portner Brewery (Table 4). Exterior walls associated with the beer vaults (Feature 14), the Ice/Engine room (Feature 13), and the 1868 brewhouse (Feature 45), and interior walls separating the beer vaults and brewhouse (Features 6, 9, 49, 50 and 51) represent the 1885 brewery configuration.

Additional brick foundations associated with the construction of the new brewhouse in 1894 consisted of exterior walls (Feature 1) and new interior walls (Feature 44) which were slightly skewed from the original wall (Feature 45). A later construction period (pre-1907) is represented by the east wall of the Grain Dryer building (Feature 3).

Table 4. Foundation Features, Robert Portner's Brewery

Feature	Feature type	Dimensions	Function	Dates
1	brick wall		south and west walls of new brewhouse (1894)	1896/1907
3	brick wall		east wall of grain dryer building	1907
6	brick wall		interior wall between ice engine room and cooling room (1885 map)	1885/1891/1896/1907
9	brick wall		interior wall between the middle two beer vaults (second and third vaults)	1885/1891/1896/1907
11	brick walls with concrete and stone slab	slab- 1.7 feet	pre-1868 beer vault walls?	
12	brick walls		pre-1868 beer vault walls?	
13	brick wall		west wall of ice engine room	1885
14	brick walls		west and south walls of northern beer vault (pre-1868 exterior wall?)	1885/1891/1896/1907
32	brick footer		under northern beer vault wall	
33	concrete floor		floor of northern beer vault	
44	brick wall		west and north walls of new brewhouse (1894)	1896/1907
45	brick wall with concrete		original south wall of brewery	1885/1891
49	brick wall		interior wall between original brewhouse (1868) and cooling room (1885 map)	1885/1891/1896/1907
50	brick wall		interior west wall of malt scale room	1885
51	brick wall		interior wall between cooling room and beer vault (1885 map)	1885/1891/1896/1907
52	brick wall		interior wall	
53	brick wall		footer or continuation of Feature 51	
55	brick wall		interior wall remnant?	

A. The Brewhouses

Earlier demolitions notwithstanding, the massive foundations of the two (1868 and 1894) brewhouses were found approximately four feet below the current grade, confirming the size and location of the structures as depicted on Sanborn insurance maps. Constructed of load-bearing brick masonry, the foundations were as much as 4.5 feet wide. Possible footings or pads for structural support or equipment platforms were located in both brewhouse footprints. Three support features occurred in the 1868 brewhouse: a brick pavement on concrete about four by four feet (Feature 4); a concrete pad, four by five feet (Feature 47) and a concrete and brick pad, 4 by 7 feet (Feature 48). Five similar features occurred in the new brewhouse (1894): two granite slabs on concrete, 1.5 feet thick and four by four feet (Features 2 and 43); a brick and concrete pad four by four feet (Feature 39); a brick and concrete pad about five by fifteen feet with a series of bolts (Feature 40); and a concrete pad about 2.5 by 2.5 feet (Feature 42). Feature 40 was most likely a machinery mount and Feature 42 may be related to the cistern (Feature 41).

The new brewhouse (1894) contained two dressed granite slabs (a non-native stone), generally about eighteen inches tall and usually at least four feet square, that served as pedestals or mounts for equipment or steel posts. The documentary evidence provides the basis for reasonable guesses as to the function of at least the stone blocks in the “new” brewhouse:

On the ground floor of the brew house is the big hop jack and in the rear is the receiving tank holding 350 barrels. On the same floor is the new Corliss steam engine of 65 horse power, fitted with a pulley weighing four tons, and an eighteen inch wide belt.... Three steps above is the machine floor for the accommodation of the special driving device to the wash machine overhead. On a floor above, reached by a short flight of stairs, is located the kettle designed to carry the great load of 55 tons when full, its own weight being over 5 tons....Broad flights of iron stairs lead from floor to floor and a power elevator of two tons' capacity furnishes access to all main levels. (*Alexandria Gazette* April 18, 1894; Miller 1987:364)

However, it is known that the steam engines actually were located behind the brewhouse by 1894. Nor were the mash tun or brew kettle positioned directly above the remaining stone slabs. The granite, therefore, may have supported the cast iron framework that held up the interior platforms and stairs; or the hop jack, which added hops to the wort for flavoring, then strained them out; or the receiving tank for the brew on its way to the coolers. But perhaps the most likely alternative was that the stones served as the base for the brewhouse freight elevator, depicted on the 1902, 1907 and 1912 (see page 291) Sanborn maps as being in roughly the same location.

Similarly, the slabs in the southeast quarter of the “old” brewhouse also may have supported elevators. When the building was remodeled for barley malt storage, the first floor became the mill room for grinding the malt. “On the ground floor is the malt mill with the two elevators on either side” (*Alexandria Gazette* April 18, 1894; Miller 1987:364). Remaining bricks nearby suggested a partition separated this space and the area to the immediate north, where a floor-level malt scale was located at least *circa* 1885. However, blueprints dating to the time of the

construction of the new brewhouse (1894) depict the old one converted to grain storage with huge malt bins supported by ten-inch-square timbers set on cast iron plates and concrete, or possibly granite, footers. (Sanborn Map Company 1885; Alexandria Gazette 1894; Miller 1987:364; Alexandria Library Local History Special Collections)

The other notable features of the southern end of the brewery were water source or water storage structures. Two brick shafts were discovered within the old brewhouse (1868), not far from the south wall. The larger measured approximately eleven feet in diameter and only seven feet deep from the elevation at which it was discovered (Feature 46). The other shaft was approximately 70 inches in diameter, although its upper section was distorted and irregular in shape (Feature 5). On its interior were remnants of parging, a coating of mortar used as a water barrier, in this case, to keep water in. The shallowness of the wider shaft also suggests that these were cisterns for water storage rather than wells for drawing ground water. Feature 5 matched the approximate location of a circle labeled “pump over 2 driven wells” in the washroom on the 1885 Sanborn map.

At the rear of the 1894 brewhouse, interrupting its rear wall, was a third brick shaft, ten feet in diameter, at least twenty feet deep, and showing no evidence of parging (Feature 41). Its location attests to the fact that it was excavated prior to construction of the 1894 brewhouse, although possibly just before. It corresponds to the location of the brewery’s *circa* 1885 pump house, which was torn down before 1891 and contained “four driven wells” (Sanborn Map Company 1885). That the builders of the 1894 brewhouse did not run the walls around this shaft or fill it in, suggests it was being used at the time. The Sanborn insurance maps depict an aperture or passage through to the machine room at this point; the shaft may therefore relate directly to the functioning of the machinery. The shaft or the larger cisterns could possibly relate to hydraulic machinery used to lift the elevators.

Because water is the main ingredient of beer and the primary medium for its preparation, a substantial amount of water is required throughout the brewing process. Simply to fill the Portner company’s big brew kettle required 10,850 gallons. The production of 25 to 30 tons of ice per day required at least another 6,000 or 7,000 gallons. Large quantities also were needed to convert the heat energy of the boiler fireboxes into steam for motive power to operate the brewery’s mash agitators, pumps, elevators, hoists, conveyors, electric generators, bottling machines, etc. Cisterns or tanks also had to be available in case of fire, for cleaning purposes, for watering the company’s horses, and perhaps even for the boilers of the locomotives that carried away loads of beer.

In 1869, Portner probably drew his water from surface wells and possibly, the city water supply. By the mid-1880s, however, deep wells were being driven far below the water table. Ranging from 330 to more than 1,000 feet deep, these wells were essentially narrow pipes bored into the earth. Some of the earlier water features may have remained, either filled in or re-used for other purposes. By 1912, the brewery had had at least ten dug or driven wells, plus a number of other unidentified subterranean receptacles (not to mention large above-ground and rooftop tanks). The location of the two shafts in the old brewhouse (1868) may roughly correspond to a “hyd[rant]” or city water inlet, depicted on the 1907 and 1912 (see page 291) Sanborn maps (and

perhaps as early as 1885). Such structures also may have been built over the driven wells; they may have contained pumps and served as reservoirs for the rising (and back-splashing) water. For safety reasons, the depth of two of the three uncovered shafts could not be determined nor could the presence of pipes that might have sunk further. (Sanborn Map Company; *Alexandria Gazette* September 30, 1886; Robert Portner Brewing Company 1897)

B. The Beer Vaults

Two brick foundation features (Features 11 and 12) were identified in the beer vault area which do not correspond to any interior beer vault walls as indicated on the Sanborn insurance maps. Both features were substantial brick walls with concrete surfaces; Feature 11 occurred within the second beer vault and Feature 12 was located adjacent to the interior wall inside the third beer vault. Two distinct construction episodes were recorded for the west wall of the north beer vault (Feature 14) with the exterior portion representing the original construction and an inner wall characterizing a later stage of construction. These features indicate structural changes to the beer vault configuration. It is possible that Features 11 and 12 could be associated with the original beer vault configuration constructed by Portner in 1865-1867 and the original west wall (Feature 14) of the north beer vault also represents that time frame.

The perfectly preserved floor of the beer cellar (Feature 33) was uncovered at the southwest corner of Saint Asaph and Wythe Streets. The northernmost section of the plant, which measured nearly 40 by 50 feet (the edges of the room could not be determined because it would have required dangerously undercutting the adjacent sidewalks), would have been the location for the fermentation and aging of much of the beer produced by the brewery, especially prior to 1880. The concrete floor was bisected by a gutter (Feature 20) running west to east and dropping about a foot over its course. The gutter obviously served to drain off ice melt, wash water and spilled beer. Immediately to the north of the gutter were the remnants of footers for a line of four vanished cast iron columns that once supported the ceiling (Features 16-19). The columns were probably of identical lengths; the footers grew taller as they went east, accounting for the slope in the floor. The truncated section of the cellar's western wall contained pairs of cut spikes at two-foot intervals, nailed across each other and into the mortar joints. With tiny bits of wood still attached, they apparently held vertical scantling that would have served as furring strips for horizontal wood siding or paneling along that section of wall.

The most remarkable aspect of the cellar was the marks left in the floor. Apparently, substantial weights on the not entirely cured concrete surface left a permanent series of shallow, rectangular depressions in regular rows. Each was perhaps 4.5 feet long by twelve inches wide and at four- to five-foot intervals from other similar and parallel depressions. Oriented east-west, these depressions appear to have been left by the timber stillions or stands that once supported large aging casks. Given the arrangement of the depressions that were actually exposed, it appears that there were once four parallel rows of casks in the cellar, each row containing at least five casks. Portner's mid-1860s deeds of trust state that he then had 36 large casks in his cellar.

ARTIFACT INVENTORY
(Phase II artifacts)

Feature 5, Brick and Mortar Well

0-4 feet

one possible wooden pipe bowl/tool handle
one oyster shell
one metal lid with attached brush
one bone fragment
six nails

4-20 feet

one worked stone with metal mount

Feature 15

one wooden conduit

Feature 46, brick cistern

one brick sample

Beer vault

two crossed nail pairs from brick wall
one large hinge
one curved metal bracket
one decorative star shape
one spike
one nail
one metal pipe/bracket
one copper pipe section with smaller pipe branching off

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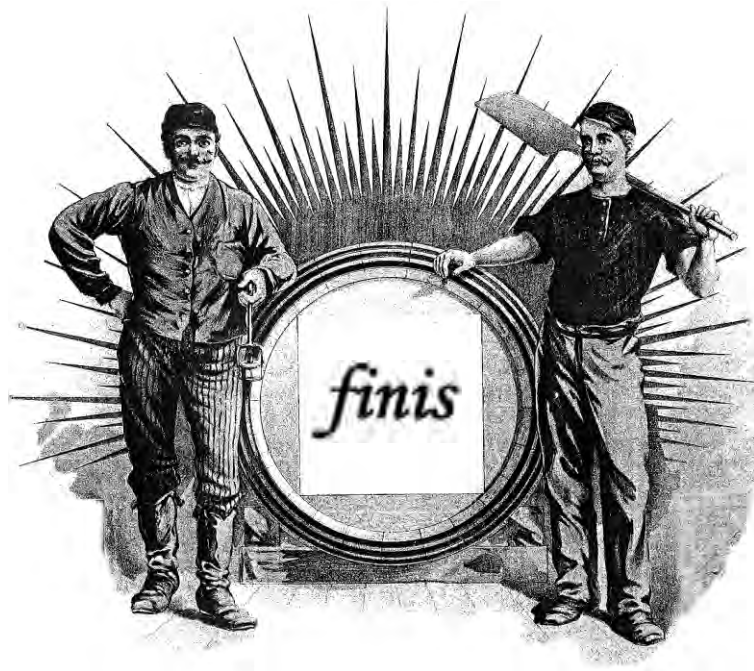
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