

BOTTLES *and* EXTRAS

The official publication of the
Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors



The Eagle has Landed By Steven R. Libbey

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Beginning hunter collectors hope to find extremely rare and early bottles, yet we seldom do. Not for lack of heart or effort, they're extremely rare. Over years collecting the futility of hoping to find, in any matter of acquisition, the ones you only know through rumor or rubbing of embossing or rainbow and unicorn descriptions, becomes clearly futile. You can only win if you are in the game and so we work to stay in the game. Collecting the rarest of the rare, some games can't be won. We can't have them all or The One partially because that's what the most complex and advanced collectors tell us for years. Any collector CAN parlay the joy of hunting and collecting into the purchase price of their holy grail, should it ever come up for sale. Every moment from the moment The Blossom's Badger Ale went up at auction until the gavel struck was simply a formality until The Eagle landed in my collection.

Sincerely,
I hope you land
your eagle.



The Bottle

An exceptionally enticing advertising piece for one cup of beer. Perhaps just enough beer to wet one's whistle. Black glass impervious to light infiltration. Lustrous surface texture exclusive to attic mint early American glass. Huge kicked up graphite pontil. Short squat body, broad shoulders and long neck terminating in curt applied blob.

Speculated product of Lancaster Glass, New York due to faint circles characterized as "200" on bottom. McKearin and Wilson attribute flasks with similar base markings to Lancaster. Blossom advertised bottled ale two years prior to Reed, Allen, Cox & Co founding Lancaster Glass. Discovering and documenting origin is important yet premature in this instance. The mismatched timing as much or more likely points to an earlier glass works making The Blossom's Badger Ale as well as the flasks rather than the transposition.

The human collective has always known promoting products and services creates demand. The Eagle Brewery advertising demonstrated the naïve boldness of mid-nineteenth century business. The advertising is spot on. A product 'as good as' the competition isn't needed. Alonzo Blossom called his "A very fine Ale put up in glass, far superior to anything of the kind manufactured in this section of the Western World." It works; I've wanted one since I first read it. With very limited capability to bottle, like any great entrepreneur, Alonzo would figure out how to fulfill orders if lighting were to strike, and so he advertised year one, "In casks or bottles by the hundred or thousand."

Alonzo KNEW market perception is a core building block of true superiority. Brands matter; brands create attachment and consumer recall. Many Wisconsin territory settlers lived in lead mining camp sustenance shelters cut into hillsides, or "Badger dens." Those who risked all to venture West loved their connection to taming the wilderness. Pale Amber, Scotch Ale and Brown Ale told the consumer what to expect yet anyone could brew them. Alonzo's branding genius, Blossom's Badger Ale, created a relationship between his consumer and product. A brand superior to any beer branding before or after in this section of the Western World, I'd say.

Manufactured exactly mid-nineteenth century, in the infancy of American glass houses providing proprietary embossed bottles, the Blossom's Badger Ale has everything an advertising aficionado could ask for on a beer bottle. Sixty-five percent of this half pint ale is boldly embossed with proprietor, brand, product and place.

Free of standardized font or line rule, a glass artisan painted a brand cutting this Blossom's Badger Ale mold. A glass billboard worthy of promoting an ale superior to anything of the kind manufactured in this section of the Western World. Bold letters, occasional flourishes, spans crossed with oversized letters, almost childlike composition yet historic and elegant. Completely imbalanced, perfectly balanced.

Locked in The Don Mericle collection for two and a half generations, this Blossom's Badger Ale has inspired collectors to dig deeper, look harder, network and more recently to be certain digital assets are found in search engine queries. The oldest Wisconsin brewery artifact and one of the top Wisconsin Territory/State antiquities. The brewery consuming fire in 1852 surely destroyed many Eagle Brewery bottles while making the few in use homeless. Still, there has to be more out there, or does there? A once every two or three generations opportunity just passed.

The Eagle Brewery bottle has landed!

Fragments

A menagerie of beautifully colored Blossom's Badger Ale bottles once existed. One mint and fragments of at least four different mold varieties of Blossom's Badger Ale bottles have been recovered.



The Brewery Proper

Built between 1841 and 1843 under a chain of hills near Chestnut Street at the northwest corner of 8th & Prairie by Robert Baker. Baker died in 1843 sans brewing a barrel of beer.

While there are anecdotal reports of The Eagle Brewery as early as 1841, the earliest deed record for The Eagle Brewery is a quit claim from Francis Lachner to William Miller October 2, 1844. Miller was Robert Baker's estate administrator. Miller & Co operated the Eagle Brewery as evidenced by their November 18, 1844 advertising for "5000 bushels of barley for which cash will be paid at the Eagle Brewery." It is unclear if Miller took on brewery management as administrator of Bakers estate or if Miller & Co acquired the brewery.

Most likely looking for working capital, on May 3, 1845 William Miller took on a \$500 mortgage from William Anson for the Eagle Brewery & appurtenances situate thereon. The terms of loan: William Miller to pay \$500 with interest of 12% per annum 6 month from date above.



Enter Levi Blossom

In 1836 Levi Blossom, age 23, "Settled at Milwaukee". While it is not clear how Levi made his fortune or came to control money, it is clear Levi financed many iterations of the Eagle Brewery.



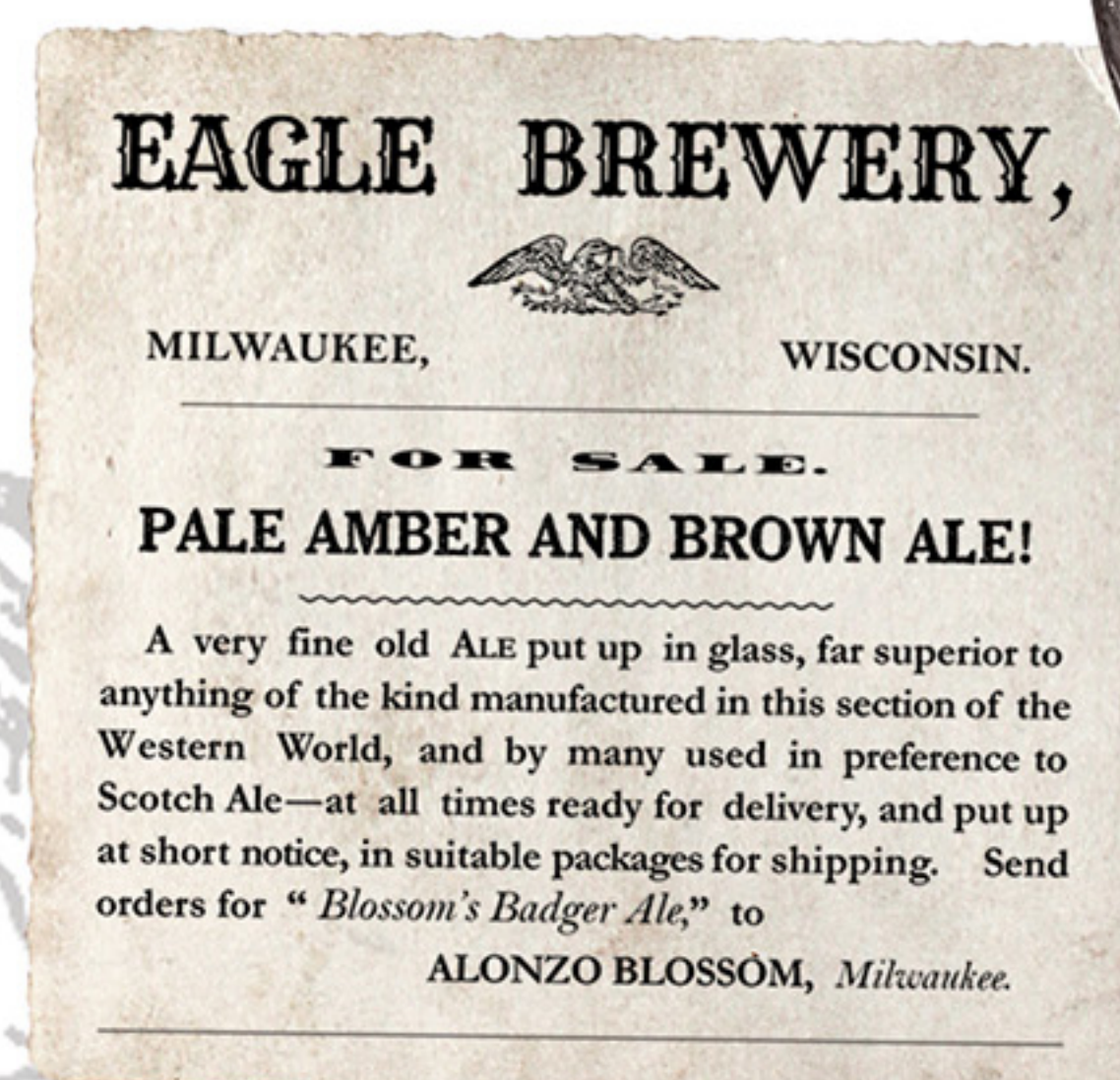
A September 22, 1845 article depicts Levi as 'cut-throat' taking unfavorable action against home-steaders and laying the blame elsewhere. "A violent Loco-Foco." Loco Focos, formerly The Equal Rights Party, were a free trade anti-government interference/regulation wing of the Democrat Party of the early 19th century. "Levi bid against the Settlers on the Canal Lands at public sale of the 'frostional' section at Walkers Point. A Mr. Rice was to be made a scapegoat for the misdeed. Mr. Rice a Whig was cleared having, "No more to do with the transaction than the man in the moon." Rice was out of town. In fact, "No Whig countenanced, much less cooperated in the proceeding. It was a Loco-Foco operation throughout."

January 2, 1846, less than a year after borrowing money from Anson, Miller made a deed of indenture with Levi Blossom. It is uncertain the value of the indenture, if it was to cover operational expense, pay back Anson or possibly a payment toward purchase. It IS certain Levi Blossom loaned Miller money, credit or made a payment for the brewery. June 1, 1846, Levi Blossom advertised, "50,000 staves and headings wanted at the Eagle Brewery, for which cash will be paid

by May 10th." Levi was in operational control. Eleven months later, December 1, 1847, a final indenture/sale of \$2,000 was made between William Miller and Levi. Miller was financially out; Levi would have a hand in the property for most of the next decade.

Enter Alonzo Blossom

As a young man of 28 years, Alonzo seemed to have been in the right place at the right time. His older brother handed him a functional brewery and all the financing he would ever need. In retrospect, Alonzo Blossom appears to have been vexed. Under his operation, financial ownership and debt, The Eagle Brewery burned under suspicious circumstance between midnight and 1 a.m. November 9, 1852. When the Eagle Brewery burned Alonzo estimated his loss between \$15,000 and \$18,000. Alonzo was profoundly underinsured with a \$4,000 policy from Northwestern Insurance and a second \$4,000 policy from Atna insurance. On his slide out of the public record Alonzo suffered the loss of his infant son November 3, 1853. "Died in this city on the 12th Cossington William Blossom, infant son of Francis and Alonzo Blossom, six months and ten days old." And finally November 26, 1853, Alonzo was sued by Michael O'Connor to recover a span of horses purchased for \$85. When O'Connor went to collect payment Blossom said he was garnished and offered \$40 less than the agreed \$85. "December 30th verdict for the plaintiff".



Financing, Fire, a New Day

December 2, 1847, ONE DAY after taking control of the Eagle Brewery from Miller, a deed of indenture between Levi Blossom and Alonzo Blossom was enjoined: "\$1500 - pay \$500 plus interest one year from date of origination, for all of the undivided half of block 161 in 2nd ward of the city of Milwaukee, county of Milwaukee & Territory of Wisconsin with the Eagle Brewery & fixtures thereon." A second indenture also dated December 2, 1847 of \$2,500 for the same plot, "Together with the undivided half The Eagle Brewery & the dwelling house and barn thereunto situated in the city and county of Milwaukee, W.T."

July 1, 1850, Levi issued a \$6,000 deed to Alonzo. Fourteen months later, September 4, 1851, Levi loaned Alonzo an additional \$8,000 - \$3,000 to be paid in three years and another \$5,000 to be paid in five years, 10% interest annually.

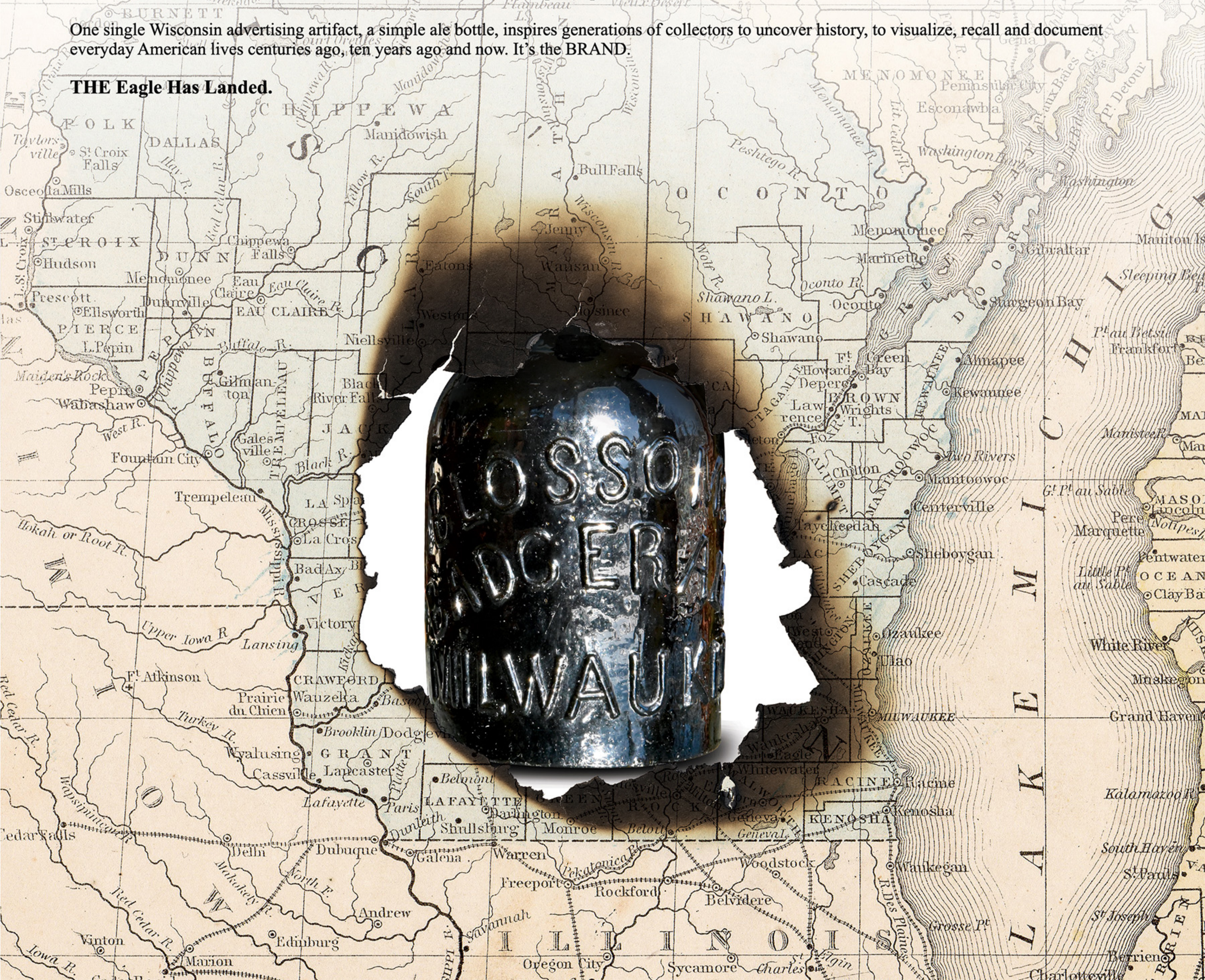
Wednesday November 10, 1852, "FIRE! The large brewery in the second ward, belonging to Alonzo Blossom, was discovered to be on fire between 12 and 1 o'clock yesterday morning, and, owing to the impossibility of getting water, was entirely consumed. Only one engine was got to work, and that was supplied by a spring on the hill. Mr. Blossom estimates his loss at \$15,000 to \$18,000. Insurance \$8,000. \$4,000 in the Hartford Protection, and \$4,000 in the Northwestern. The fire is supposed to be the work of an incendiary."

The 1854 city directory accurately lists Levi as banker corner of Jackson and Biddle; maybe not so accurately, Alonzo as Brewer corner of 8th and Chestnut. May 6, 1854, Levi borrowed Mathias Middlewood of Cincinnati's Middlewood brewery \$12,500 to rebuild Milwaukee's Eagle Brewery. The Eagle would rise from the ashes. It seems Middlewood made good on his loan/purchase as Levi doesn't show up after 1854.

In 1856-1857, brewers Middlewood and Gibson were on the corner of 8th and Chestnut, as was Mathew Gibson Corner of 8th as was Pearson of the Middlewood and Gibson firm. An Advertisement in November 1860 puts brewery operation in the hands of Chicago's Sands Brothers. "J.J. Sands Brewer of Pale and cream ale corner 8th and Chestnut." In 1863 the brewery is listed as the Sand's Spring Brewery. In 1865 the Bavaria Brewery operated by Goes and Falk is on the SW corner 8th and Chestnut. And finally a century later in 1975, "Excavation of historic brewery site during the construction of a warehouse for the world famous Pabst Brewery exposed previously hidden cavernous arched beer caves."

One single Wisconsin advertising artifact, a simple ale bottle, inspires generations of collectors to uncover history, to visualize, recall and document everyday American lives centuries ago, ten years ago and now. It's the BRAND.

THE Eagle Has Landed.



Milwaukee City Directory

■ The Eagle Brewery: Julius Patricus Bolivar McCabe 1847-1848

"The Eagle Brewery, is situated under a chain of hills near Chestnut Street on the West Side of the river. The main building is 175 feet long, 3 stories high, with extensive Malt floors and working cellars. Connected with this establishment, is an extensive cellar, built under the hill with a brick tunnel 2 feet thick of solid masonry, being 100 feet deep with a span of 20 foot arch. There is a constant stream of running water passing through it from an extensive spring of the finest water, situated about 50 feet above, which spring fills a reservoir of solid masonry, cemented with water lime, capable of holding 500 barrels, from which the water is drawn for the manufacture of the different kinds of ale. There is also an extensive cooperage connected with the brewery, in which the casks are manufactured for this establishment. This brewery is capable of turning out about 200 barrels per week. In connection with the Eagle Brewery, the proprietor has about 10 acres of ground upon the hill, on the highest point of which stands the Eagle Cottage, a beautiful villa, commanding a delightful prospect of the whole city and bay, and the river from the waterfall to the mouth.

I understand that the enterprising proprietor, Levi Blossom, Esq. (a native of the state of New York) intends to ornament this ground with a handsome public garden and vineyard, containing the finest variety of shrubbery, fruits, and grapes, adopted to this climate, and also to construct fountains and jets for the purpose of contributing to the natural beauty of this delightful spot."



Man Behind The Bottles



Don Mericle

Historian/collector Don Mericle fancied becoming, "One of those old eccentric New England codgers." Don's collection? The culmination of sixty-seven years passionately collecting rarities and the history emanating from them. Don passed December 10, 2010. Eight years later, Don's family allowed history to pass to another generation of caretaker collectors.

"Collect what you enjoy. Learning the human history of objects is what truly gives them and collecting value." - Don Mericle

In 1969, while all of Wisconsin and America focused skyward hoping to catch a glimpse of our eagle landing, Don implemented a move of epic proportions. Don moved the then 130 year old house 30 miles west of Milwaukee to avoid the wrecking ball's history crushing menace. Don recalled noticing that very house, as a seven year old boy, close to the Best House blocks from the Pabst Brewery. In 1969, Don was the most advanced collector of Wisconsin's earliest 'settled' history. For the next fifty years, Don's collectable home housed the most complex Wisconsin stoneware collection ever assembled, some of the rarest Wisconsin bottles AND The legendary Blossom's Badger Ale.

I visited Don's collection a few times just as Don visited mine. I still wonder what it was, exactly, Don saw in an oil lamp burner I found scuba diving, he had asked to buy.



What makes this special?

Mericle Collection / Auction

There was too much to see visiting and so the auctions of Don's collections brought surprise after surprise. If I saw many of them, I simply could not recall, there was too much to process in those three or four visits... I remember a crazy green pontiled east coast flask; a citron Kiewerts whiskey; an insane, possibly pontiled, Otto Zwietusch pint soda; a few cobalt pontiled sodas, and The Blossom's Badger Ale, as Wayne Kroll described in his book *Badger Breweries Past and Present* as "very crude" and "Wisconsin's oldest glass brewery bottle." Kroll's rubbing of the embossing was all any of us got to see until Don allowed me to photograph it for *mrbbottles.com*.



Knowing stoneware was Don's first love, I offered trade of the only known (at that time) Herrmann Pig for his Blossoms. Turned out stoneware was his first love,,, right after his Blossoms. Years later, faced with once in multiple generation opportunity, losing was not an option.

Don's auctions set four Wisconsin bottle category record prices. Through a half dozen Proxy Bid auctions, over a year, the ONE I could not win: The insane Otto Zwietusch soda. Wisconsin collector legend and historian Roger Peters bested my \$6,500 bid.

Otto Zwietusch Soda
\$8,050



Historian,
Auction Dominator
Roger Peters

Final sale at auction prices listed include 15% buyer's premium.

GAR Bitters Waukesha - \$195.00

Fess Bitters Milwaukee - \$207.00

Quart Peter Barth Whiskey Flask - \$1,035.00

Hopkins Pontiled Cobalt Soda - \$1,380.00

Schneiders Amber House Figural Whiskey - \$1,380.00

Weis Bros Ladies Leg Applied Seal Knickerbocker Stomach Bitters - \$2,530.00

Chas Schlitz German Wine Bitters - \$3,795.00

Lime Green E. Kiewert & Bro Whiskey - \$5,290.00

Otto Zwietusch Soda 'the one that got away' - \$8,050.00

Magical, Mericle Pontiled Half Pint Black Blossoms Badger Ale - \$20,987.50



Bailey's Honor
Auction Service



\$195



\$207



\$1,035



\$1,380



\$1,380



\$2,530



\$3,795



\$5,290



\$20,987.50

