## IMPERIAL BEER BY WEIBEL

There has long been a debate concerning the origins of the Imperial Extra Pale Beer "Packed Expressly for Weibel Brewing Co., of New Haven, Conn"., listed in USBC as 85-9. Since the can lists the brewery as Weibel, one would assume that it was filled by the Weibel Brewing Company of West Haven.



Imperial Extra Pale Beer, USBC #85-9

I have conducted an investigation to attempt to determine the origins of the Imperial can. The following paragraphs summarize the paths taken during the investigation and the results.

First, I have been collecting cans for over 46 years. During that time I was somewhat familiar with Connecticut cans but did not begin to specialize until around 2000. For some reason, I thought that the Weibel Brewing Company that has its name on the Imperial can was a name made up by Wehle, of West Haven, Connecticut, just to sell the Imperial cans. Maybe it was because "Wehle" and Weibel" are similar sounding names but I believe that story was told to me by other collectors.. I also did not know until the last 7 or 8 years that these cans are only found in Missouri. There are all kinds of theories about who and who didn't fill these cans. It was only after I started this investigation that I discovered that there really was a Weibel Brewing Company and that they were located in New Haven, Connecticut. The rusty bunch web site has a great deal of information about the Imperial can and where they think it comes from. The initial part of my investigation was focused on the Weibel Brewing Company. I went to the New Haven Historical Society and also to the New Haven Library as well as various web sites for this investigation.

# WEIBEL BREWING COMPANY

YES! There was a Weibel Brewing Company in New Haven between the years 1859 to 1936. The original brewery was started by Charles Nicklas and was located at 270 – 310 Legion Avenue in New Haven from 1859 to 1883. In 1884 they actually did not move but expanded the brewery and the address was changed to 322 Oak Street. It was at this time that Joseph Weibel became president of the brewery and renamed it "Joseph Weibel's Oak Brewery". This lasted between the years 1883 to 1894. Joseph had a son, Joseph Alexander Weibel born October 11, 1876. I mention him now because he was the president of the Weibel Brewing Company at the time when the Imperial can was just a thought on paper. In 1894, Joseph's wife Teresa Weibel took over as proprietor, lasting until 1898. The original owner, Charles Nicklas, then took over again lasting until 1925. It was at this time that Joseph Alexander Weibel took the helm lasting as president until Weibel went bankrupt in 1936.



Some early ads for the Weibel Brewing Company are shown below.

Early Weibel Ads. Left 1890's, Upper Right 1919, Lower Right 1914

Brewing operations were shut down by National Prohibition in 1920. Weibel was abel to survive by making soda, other carbonated drinks, and near beer. Below is their ad from the New Haven City Directory of the late 1920's



Late 1920's Weibel Near Beer Ad

Prohibition was repealed on December 5, 1933. It is truly amazing to me how fast the breweries were able to produce beer. They must have had everything ready to go because by the start of the new year in 1934, they were all in full swing. Below are ads from the New Haven Register in early January, 1934. In going through the New Haven Register newspaper from January 1934, it was apparent that just about every brewer in the area and some national brewers put in beer ads. These were tough times. The country was in a deep recession. Many people were out of work. Beer was not a necessary food source so in the end, brewers suffered through the depression. The generally accepted price for beer was 3 bottles for 25 cents. This was a lot considering ham was 15 cents a pound, pork shoulder was 10 cents, coffee 17 cents and butter 23 cents a pound.



January 1934 New Haven Register Beer Ads

So here I was in the middle of the Weibel investigation. Quite a bit of information on the Weibel Brewing Company but nothing very specific in their ads. They just talked about ale, porter, and lager beer and nothing really about the brands they produced. I decided that I would try and run down a Weibel ad for Imperial Beer. I assumed that they would have sold Imperial Beer in bottles in the 1934 to 1936 time period before they decided to have cans made. So I dug further into the New Haven Register Weibel advertisements for 1934, 1935, and 1936. If I could find an Imperial Beer bottle made by Weibel, this would add to the story. In the August, 1934 Register newspapers there were again quite a few ads but not nearly as many as in the January papers. In fact, Weibel ads were only in the Sunday papers. By September of 1934, there were very few beer advertisements of any kind and no Weibel ads at all. By the 1935 and 1936 time periods all types of beer ads were few and far between. I believe this was the heart of the depression and very few people could afford to buy beer. Business transactions of the bankrupt Weibel Brewery ended on April 11, 1936. Even though the company had considerable beer to be sold, the court decided to end the business since they were losing about \$100 per day. This was an enormous sum of money in 1936. A Mr. Louis Evans offered \$100 for the real estate and \$15,000 for the assets of the firm but the offer was withdrawn. Thus ended many years of brewing history at Weibel. Nowhere in my search of Weibel have I found any reference to Imperial Beer at all.



August, 1934 Weibel Brewing Company Newspaper Ads

During my newspaper searches, I found some interesting things about daily life in the mid 1930's. A new Cadillac was \$2395 and a new Chevy was \$550. The popular movie of the day on August 34, 1934 was "Flying Down to Rio". The strange thing about this was that the stars of the picture were Dolores Del Rio, Paul Roulien, and Gene Raymond and 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> billing went to Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. Public enemy number one was George "Baby Face" Nelson and there was a lot of talk about Nazi's in Germany.



Note how the Weibel Brewing Co. named their brands: Weibel's Light Ale, Weibel's Golden Ale, Weibel's Ale, Weibel's Porter, and Weibel's Lager Beer. In all the documents I examined, I could not find one mention of "Imperial". I also sought out bottle collectors and they also had no Weibel Imperial Beer bottles. The Weibel Brewing Company did not produce any beer in cans for the simple reason that they had no canning equipment. Also, note from the photos of the can the statement "PACKED EXPRESSLY FOR WEIBEL BREWING CO., NEW HAVEN, CONN.". Thus they did not fill the Imperial cans. Moreover, the Weibel Brewery went out of business in 1936 and the cans were filled circa 1938.

I seriously doubt that Weibel Brewing Company ever brewed Imperial Beer but I do not have positive proof. I decided to turn my attention to the Joseph Alexander Weibel Family. Perhaps I could find a living relative that could shed light on Imperial Beer.

#### Joseph Alexander Weibel Family

Joseph A. Weibel was the owner and chief executive officer of the Weibel Brewing Company from approximately 1925 to 1936, after which they went belly up. I really cannot blame him for the bankruptcy since the U.S. economy was in shambles during the time he was brewing beer from the end of prohibition in 1933 to 1936. Before he became the principal owner, he worked at the brewery in various management capacities and learned the brewing business from the ground up as a teenager.

Joseph A. Weibel passed away on July 21, 1963. He was 86 years old. Strangely, his obituaries only briefly mention that he was associated with the brewery business even though he was involved for 42 years. He joined the Connecticut Governors Foot Guard in 1905 with the New Haven Grays. In June, 1916, the Grays went to the Mexican border and he was a lieutenant of the company. He eventually attained the rank of Colonel and was the Foot Guard Commander at the time of his death. While serving his early years with the foot guard, he was still working for the Brewery.

He was married and had a daughter, Marguerite, born in 1915. His first wife passed away and he remarried Leah W. sometime in the early 1930's. He had no children with Leah. Joseph Weibel had a wonderful large home at 106 Sherman Avenue in New Haven with 6 bedrooms and "modern plumbing" A photo of the home is seen below. It still stands today near St Raphael's Hospital. The Weibel's living in the household could walk the several blocks to the brewery located on Oak Street and Legion Avenue.



Weibel Homestead at 106 Sherman Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut

Since Leah and Joseph have both passed away, I decided to see if his daughter Marguerite ever was married and had children. She worked in the Brewery office when she was a student in 1933 and lived at the Sherman Avenue home. She attended school in New Haven and lived the life of an aristocrat taking vacations abroad to Europe and Bermuda. Her high school 1931 yearbook states "Plans to go to finishing school. Hobbies are drawing and dancing".

In 1942 Margaurite married Nelson Joseph Lambert of Towanda, PA. They lived in the Weibel home on Sherman Avenue up until the time of Joseph Weibels death in 1963 at which time they moved to another home in New Haven. Nelson Lambert eventually became the president of the New Haven Casket Company. He passed away in July 1995. Marguarite passed away in 2000. The Lamberts never had any children.

I then turned to Joseph A. Weibels sister Anna Weibel. She was married to George Henry Brethauer who was a politician in New Haven. Anna died in 1967 and had no children. My last lead came from the 1930 census which showed Marie Weibel living on Sherman Avenue near the Joseph Weibel home. Marie was never married and never had any children. The census, however lists John C. Weibel as also living at the home. John was secretary and treasurer of the Weibel Brewery in the early 1930's. He was married but as his brothers and sisters, he had no children. Thus the Weibel family fizzled out and left no living ancestors after the year 2000.

### 9-0-5 Liquor Store

It would seem strange that the only examples known of this can are found in Missouri and it was said around the BCCA circles that the can was filled by the Manhattan Brewing Company of Chicago. The design is very similar to other Manhattan Brewing Company designs.

To clear up the mystery of why the cans are only found in Missouri, noted BCCA historian Rich La Susa has sent me an advertisement for 9-0-5 Liquor Stores that appeared in the St Louis Post Dispatch on September 29, 1939. The Imperial cans were made only for sale to 9-0-5 stores, as far as we know, and they were located in Missouri in 1939.



9-0-5 Liquor Store Ad, St. Louis Post Dispatch Newspaper, 9-29-1939

Also, from the web site of the Rusty Bunch, is a similar ad posted in the St Louis Globe Democrat in September, 1939.



9-0-5 Liquor Stare Ad, St Louis Globe Democrat, September, 1939

Thus, it is clear that Imperial beer in cans was sold in Missouri in 1939.

## Facts Ascertained From the Can.

Note from the can photos the zoom into the can manufacturers logo, The logo is so small, it is difficult to photograph but it says "68 A  $\checkmark$ ". These symbols identify the can company and when the can was made. The "A" identifies the can as being manufactured by the American Can Company. The "68" identifies the American Can Company in Chicago Illinois and the symbol identifies the date as being between 1936 and 1945. The original symbol started as a plain "X" with early American Can Co. cans. This was followed by first filling in the left side with a vertical line and then the right side. This was then followed by adding a single dot above the "X" symbol and then adding the dot below the "X" symbol ending up with the canning company symbol as seen in the photo. Although no definitive time period can be ascertained, it is believed to represent 1938 and later. So this is quite a strong statement against the can being filled in Connecticut, otherwise, why would they manufacture a can in Chicago, Illinois and ship it back to Connecticut for filling when there were ample canning facilities in the East? It would not have made sense to pay for the extra shipping.

# Crown Cork and Seal

Crown Cork and Seal enters the story of the Weibel Brewery because they had a business relationship with Weibel in the form of supplier of bottle caps. The relationship may even be more than just bottle caps, however since in November, 1936, five months after the Brewery went bankrupt, Crown Cork and seal filed an appeal to the Circuit Court of Appeals, Second Circuit, of Connecticut in the matter of Weibel Brewing Co. bankruptcy.

A review of the Crown Cork and Seal Company showed that in the 1930's, they supplied half of the world's supply of bottle caps. In 1892, William Painter patented the "crown cork" and the Crown Cork and Seal Company of Baltimore was formed.



Crown Cork 1892 Patent

They provided numerous packaging improvements throughout the years becoming the world leader in packaging. In 1936, it is interesting to note that Crown Cork and Seal acquired the Acme Can Company of Philadelphia and entered the tin can business. In 1937, Crown perfected the electrolytic plating process and introduced the crowntainer. The crowntainer was first introduced as a quart beer can but never went into production as a quart.

It would be very interesting to find out what the Crown appeal was all about. I determined through the secretary of a New Haven Judge, that the case is too old. Nothing is digitized for that time period. What is needed is ruling from district court. The records would be at the federal record center. Request for the file would have to come from whatever court heard the case. The Appeals court simply agreed with whatever ruling was issued by the district court. All very complicated lawyer mumbo jumbo. Bottom line is that I found out nothing about the appeal. I do have the data required as follows if there is a law sleuth that would care to take it on:

- 1. Circuit Court of Appeals, Second Circuit
- 2. No. 65
- 3. 1936.CO2.40067; 86 F.2d 1022
- 4. November 2, 1936
- 5. In the matter of Weibel Brewing Co., bankrupt; in Crown Cork & Seal Co., Appellant
- 6. Appeal from the District Court of the United States for the District of Connecticut
- 7. Before L. Hand, Swan, and Agustus N. Hand, Circuit Judges.
- 8. Per Curiam
- 9. Decree affirmed on the authority of In re Day & Co., 178 F.545 (C.C.A.2); In re Stradley & Co. (D.C.) 187 F.285.

I can only speculate on what this was about. I doubt that it was about non payment for bottle caps sent to Weibel. I am guessing that it had something to do with cans that perhaps Weibel wanted to get into since by 1936, cans were becoming a big thing in the brewing industry. Did Weibel want Crown Cork & Seal to make Imperial Cans?

### Who Filled the Can.

In a conversation I had with Rich La Susa at the BCCA canvention in Springfield, he also stated emphatically that he has thoroughly researched the Manhattan Brewing Company records and can say without a doubt that the Imperial Beer was never filled by Manhattan Brewing Company. Rich has an Abundance of correspondence between Manhattan and the owner of 9-0-5 Liquor Stores that stretches from 1934 into the 1940's. There is absolutely no mention of Imperial. Rich also has all the original drawings for cans that were sent by a customer to Manhattan. Again, no Imperial in any form.

The Rusty Bunch web site goes into a lengthy discussion about the Imperial can and why and why not it could have been filled by A.B.C .Brewing of St Louis. The conclusion is that it was not filled by A.B.C.

### Summary of Facts.

- 1. Manhattan, Chicago never brewed any Imperial Beer
- 2. Manhattan, Chicago never filled Imperial Beer in bottles or cans
- 3. A.B.C., St. Louis never brewed any Imperial Beer
- 4. A.B.C., St. Louis never filled Imperial Beer in bottles or cans
- 5. There was a Weibel Brewing Company located in New Haven, CT.
- 6. Weibel went out of business in 1936
- 7. Weibel never brewed any Imperial Beer
- 8. Weibel never filled Imperial Beer in bottles or cans
- 9. There are no living relatives of Joseph Alexander Weibel, owner of the Weibel Brewing Comapany, New Haven, Connecticut from 1925-1936
- 10. Imperial cans were manufactured in Chicago circa 1938
- 11. Imperial cans were sold in 9-0-5 Liquor Stores in Missouri circa 1938 1940

So how is it that the Weibel name is on the can? I believe they had plans to brew the beer and can it. At the time they went out of business in 1936, they may have wanted to eventually fill beer in cans with the purchase of a canning line. I believe Crown Cork and Seal may have had a lot to do with it. Crown may have designed the Imperial can but never made any. I believe Weibel had a contract with 9-0-5 Liquor Stores for Imperial Beer in cans that they could not fulfill because they were out of business but 9-0-5 still wanted the Imperial Beer to sell in their Missouri stores. This is all unsubstantiated supposition of course but could explain why the Weibel name is on the cans.

In discussions with Jon Milillo, He said that when he first started collecting cans (circa 1976) he purchased a bunch of Connecticut cans from an older gentleman who had been collecting cans for many years. This person only collected cans from the local area and had a large group of different Connecticut cans. Included in the group was an Imperial Beer. So Jon believes that the can was sold in Connecticut even though none have ever been found here except perhaps for this one instance. Were a small number of cans shipped back to Connecticut as part of the packing run?

I can also see an amazing resemblance to the Imperial Beer can and the Imperial Beer bottle brewed by Ajax Brewing Co. of Indianapolis Indiana as seen below. Look at the logo showing two lions holding an object with a crown on top and a ribbon below. The ribbon on the bottle states "Extra Pale" as does the can. The time line for the Ajax Brewing Company is correct since they brewed Imperial Beer from 1938 to 1941 when they went out of business. One problem is that Ajax never canned any beer because they did not have a canning line. However, the Indianapolis Brewing Company was also located in Indianapolis only a short distance away from the Ajax Brewery and they had a canning line. The Indianapolis Brewing Co. packed only four different cans that are today very rare. Did the Indianapolis Brewing Co. use their canning line to package Imperial brewed by Ajax? It is possible although there is no proof. It is approximately 250 miles from Indianapolis to St Louis so the shipping cost would have been reasonable. In fact Indianapolis is closer to St Louis that Chicago.



Thus we have a true Connecticut can, only found in Missouri. But what I like the most is that at \$1.65 per case, each can cost just under 7 cents. How many did you buy?

Jules Kish BCCA #7855