

Anheuser Busch Blue Label Beer Joseph Zapf Jacksonville FL B-18-493 Bottle Opener

By John Stanley (Zapf History by Jack Sullivan 2020)



It is always nice when a relative of the opener name buys it. I sold the B-18-493 on 11/1/2024. Buyer received it on 11/4/2024 and left this feedback, "I like to say it's coming home since I am the great grandson of Joseph Zapf." The funny part for me was I had gotten the opener from Norm Jay at the Oldenburg JFO Convention in 1992 (the one really good opener I got in one of the worst trades I ever made, 30 beer "A"s and "B"s for this opener and a K-4-1 Pabst Tapster. In 2009 I traded it to Art Santen for his Anheuser-Busch Collection and then bought it back in 2018 when Art was selling his openers. The buyer told me to check out "Whiskey Men Zapf" on the internet and this nice article that follows was found.

Joseph and the Zapfs Flooded Florida — with Bottles

By Jack Sullivan (2020)

Shown below is a photograph of a large, prosperous German family. Parents Gebhard and Josephina are holding hands. Behind them are their nine well-dressed children, neatly arranged, five boys and four girls. They are the Zapfs of Helmhoften, Wurttemberg, Germany. Who would suspect that within several decades these Zapfs would be dominant from Jacksonville south to Miami in Florida's liquor, soft drink, and bottling industries.

The first family member to immigrate to the United States, and the main subject of this vignette, was Franz Joseph Zapf, standing second from left. Born in 1860 and dropping the "Franz" for business purposes somewhere long the way, Joseph arrived in Joplin, Missouri, in 1884 where he may have found employment in a local liquor house.




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Zapf also found a wife in Joplin, Mary Danner Muller, Missouri born of German immigrant parents. Seven years younger than Joseph, Mary was a teenager when they met and 20 when they married in November, 1887. By that time, Zapf had moved to Jacksonville where he took his new bride to live. They would have two children, Augusta Emily, born in 1888, and Franz Joseph Jr., born in 1892. A photograph shows a well-to-do young family possibly overdressed for Florida heat.



Florida's Favorite
Is a true epithet for Anheuser-Busch



BLUE LABEL
BOTTLED BEER

The most exquisite and price-worthy article in the market

The Joseph Zapf Company
JACKSONVILLE, FLA.

Are the sole authorized bottlers of this delicious beverage. They also sell at wholesale, Wines, Liquors, Mineral Waters, and Henry George Cigars

By this time Zapf was a prosperous Jacksonville merchant. He had acquired a business “gold mine” by being selected by the Anheuser Busch Brewery of St. Louis as its representative and bottler of its beer for a large swath of Northern Florida. Florida heat can work up powerful thirsts and Zapf had the brews to quench it. He would receive the beer in barrels from the brewery and decant it into bottles with his distinct embossing. Over this would be a standard AB paper label, likely with a “bottled by” designation at the bottom.

Zapf parlayed this advantage into establishing what he soon called “*the best known and largest liquor house in the state.*” He sold at both wholesale and retail. An array of large

ceramic and glass jugs with his name testify to his selling containers of whiskey and wine to local Jacksonville area saloons, including a saloon he operated in connection with his store at 620 West Bay Street. By his own admission Zapf was not a rectifier who mixed up his own brands of whiskey in a back room. In a 1908 ad aimed at mail order customers, he asserted: “*We do not bottle any whiskies, all our case goods are bottled at the distillery.*”

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Meanwhile, back in Germany, other Zapfs were noting Joseph's progress. Next to come was his older brother George in 1889, the boy standing far left in the top photo. Likely fueled by funds from Joseph, George settled 280 miles south in West Palm Beach, involved in liquor sales and a bottling operation. This Zapf was best known for building the Seminole Hotel in West Palm at the corner of Banyan and Narcissus. Elected to the first West Palm Beach City Commission, George watched his hotel burn down twice as fires ravaged the city. He rebuilt it each time, the last as a "fireproof" structure, shown below. The Seminole featured several saloons at ground level, part of a row that caused Banyan to be called "Whiskey Street."

The next to migrate to the U.S. was Gephard Zapf. In the top photo he is to the right of Joseph. Like George, he too went to southern Florida where he opened a bottling operation at West Palm Beach. "*Lake Worth Soda Water Factory. Gephard Zapf, Proprietor,*" read an ad in an 1896-97 directory for Dade County: "*Soda water, sarsaparilla, lemon, strawberry, pineapple, vanilla, orange, ginger ale, root and birch beers, cream soda, distilled water.*"

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Last to join the family in America was Alois (a.k.a. “Max”) Zapf. In the photo above he is the little boy sitting on an older sister’s lap with an apple in his hand. Alois is recorded running a bottling operation in Miami in 1896. On December 27 of that year a fire that began in a local grocery soon engulfed two blocks of business buildings, including Zapf’s soda water factory. A generator there exploded killing one of his workers trying to escape the flames. Later Alois would join his brother in Jacksonville at the Joseph Zapf Company. He supervised Anheuser Busch bottling and was vice-president of the Jacksonville Bottlers & Fountain Supply Company, another family enterprise.

Histories of the beverage industry in Florida are replete with references to the Zapfs: *The Historic Palm Beach* website: “The Zapfs...ran bottling operations across Florida.” *The Archeology Society of Southern Florida*: “There are records of this family’s bottling business throughout the state.” *Palm Beach Past* website: The Zapf family had bottling businesses in many Florida cities.”



Meanwhile in Jacksonville, Joseph continued to prosper with his multi-faceted businesses, expanding into real estate. He became a vice president of the Trout Creek Development Assn., an organization devoted to selling building lots along a stream located entirely within Jacksonville known for its brackish, swampy conditions. Joseph was exhibiting a sense of humor as he posed for a photographer with alligators in a scene reminiscent of Trout Creek. About the same time Joseph also created the Florida State Grocery Company and served as its president.

Gradually going “dry” through local option, Florida in 1918 passed a statewide prohibition against the making or sale of alcoholic beverages. The Zapfs took less of an economic blow than other liquor dealers because of their diversification. Staying at his Bay Street address, Joseph created a new entity designated the “Atlantic Distributing Company.” This firm was bottling and selling soft drinks, supporting the move by Anheuser Busch to non-alcoholic beverages. Shown here is an Atlantic Distributing Company ad for the St. Louis company’s ginger beer “mellow, yet full of pep and ginger.”

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Joseph Zapf lived to see National Prohibition end but had retired by that time and did not re-enter the liquor trade. He died in 1939 at the age of 79 in Jacksonville and was buried in Duval County's Oaklawn Cemetery next to his wife, Mary. Earlier a book of cartoon "biographies" entitled "*Floridians as the World Sees Them*" featured Joseph Zapf among those honored. His cartoon serves as a memorial to the German immigrant's career. Joseph is depicted driving the American eagle of opportunity to new heights, with Anheuser Busch providing the wind at his back.

Note: Thanks to a family website on *Ancestry.com* a great deal of information and photos are available on the Zapfs, including the fascinating picture of the family as it looked about 1875.

