

Just For Openers January-December 2026 1

Peter W. Ballantine's Timeless Three-Ring Logo by Don Thornton

When beer baron Peter W. Ballantine died in 1883 at the age of 91, the *New York Times* described him as “a man of unblemished reputation” who “enjoyed the esteem of a large circle of friends.” The *Times* obituary also said that “in his business relations he was characterized as square as a die, and his word was held to be always as good as his bond.”

At the time of his death Ballantine was president of the very prosperous P. Ballantine & Sons (described by the *Times* as “one of the best-known brewers and maltsters in the country”) and considered the wealthiest man in Newark, New Jersey, with a fortune valued at \$5 million.

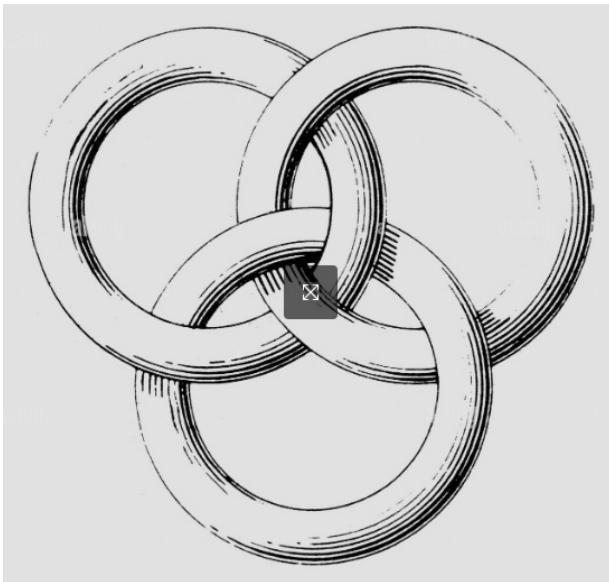
He launched a brand of beers in the 1840s that put Newark on the map. The brewery was active for more than a century until its closure in 1972 and Ballantine beer -- with its distinctive three-circle logo -- was on the market for 185 years.



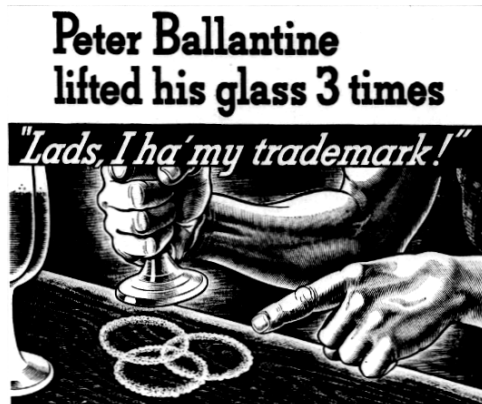
Just For Openers January-December 2026 2

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The Ballantine logo, first introduced in 1879, made the brand very recognizable and over the years a valued part of American brewery history. Its three-circle design of Purity, Body, Flavor became an exemplar of positive brand identification. As the fabled story goes, Peter Ballantine was enjoying one of his beers when the idea came to him. After setting his glass down a few times on a tabletop, he noticed overlapping condensation rings – and the three-ring logo was born and trademarked the following year.



P. BALLANTINE & SONS TRADEMARK 1880



TIME: 1840. Place, Peter Ballantine's brewery in Newark... The founder and brewmaster himself had just completed his three-fold test of a keg of ripened ale, and pronounced it "per-r-e-lect!"

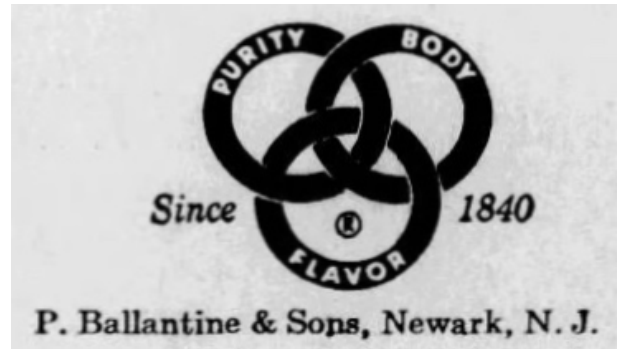
Being a Scot, he trusted his taste for ale. "It ha' the PUR-R-ITY, the BODY, the

FLAVOR-R-R," was his thoughtful verdict. On the table were three moisture rings left by his glass as he made the tests.

"Thr-r-ee tests—thr-r-ee rings—the sign of good ale," he mused. "Lads, I ha' my trademark! Ye'll put the thr-r-ee rings of quality on every keg."

ON DRAUGHT—IN BOTTLES—IN KEELER CANS
BALLANTINE'S ALE
America's finest  *since 1840*

Copyright, 1935, P. Ballantine & Sons, Newark, N. J.



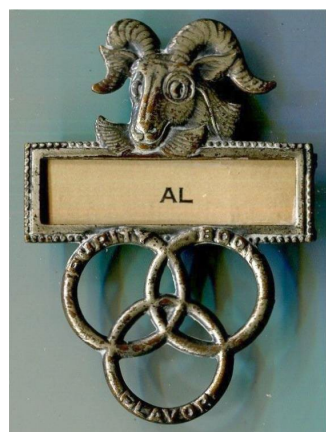
A Ballantine's Ale 1935 newspaper advertisement commemorated the tale of the three rings with the headline: **Peter Ballantine lifted his glass 3 times** and the quote: **"Lads, I ha' my trademark!"**

It should be noted the three-ring design has existed for centuries. Called Borromean rings, the design consists of three mutually interlocked rings named after the Italian Renaissance family who used them on their coat of arms. Whatever the history, Peter's rings over the decades graced millions of bottles and cans of Ballantine ale and beer and was branded on hundreds of thousands of promotional bottle and can openers. Branding promotions also included key rings, tie clips, pins, badges, golf ball markers, women's earrings and sweater clips, among other things.

Just For Openers January-December 2026 3

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Just For Openers January-December 2026 4

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Ballantine was born in Scotland in 1791 and immigrated to America in 1820. He settled in Albany, New York, working at a brewery. He moved to Newark in 1840 and with partner Erastus Patterson launched the Patterson & Ballantine Brewing Company. The partnership ended five years later and Ballantine built a new brewery on the Passaic River. His sons, Peter H., John and Robert, joined the business and in 1857 the company was renamed P. Ballantine & Sons. Twenty years later it was the fourth largest brewery in the U.S.

Peter W. Ballantine died in 1883 and his sons ran the brewery until the last one, Robert, died in 1905. At that time George Frelinghuysen, the company's vice president, took over. Frelinghuysen was married to Sara Ballantine, Peter's granddaughter. He was an attorney and son of Frederick T. Frelinghuysen, former U.S Senator from New Jersey and Secretary of State under President Chester A. Arthur. Frelinghuysen helped the company launch a pioneering newspaper advertisement campaign in 1904 and continued it over the years with all the ads prominently featuring the three-ring logo.



NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT (1904 & 1909)



Just For Openers January-December 2026 5

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The company flourished under Frelinghuysen until the darkness of Prohibition engulfed it in 1920. It barely survived by turning its production lines to malt syrup for bakeries. At the end of Prohibition in 1933, the Frelinghuysen family sold the brewery to Carl and Otto Badenhausen.

The brothers turned the company into a beer powerhouse, with Ballantine moving up to the third most popular beer in the country in the next two decades. Badenhausen, a resident of Short Hills, a tony town about 10 miles from Newark, had a brewery background, owning a beer equipment supply company. He recognized the power of advertising and continued the newspaper blitz, with all the ads featuring the three rings.



**C. W. BADENHAUSEN
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD**



NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENT (1939, 1944, 1954)

Just For Openers January-December 2026 6

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Ballantine also sponsored the radio and television airings of New York Yankee baseball games spanning the 1940s to the 1960s. The ads included a jingle that went in part: "Hey, get your Ballantine! Just look for the three-ring sign and ask the man for Ballantine." The company also tried for the attention of beer drinkers with sponsorship of Philadelphia Phillies games. Its TV shows included *Foreign Intrigue* and *Highway Patrol*.

At its peak, the brewery had more than 4,000 employees at its 40-acre complex, working around the clock to produce 4 million barrels of beer and ale a year. But by the late 1960s, things had gone south for Ballantine's. A fickle public was switching to light beers with fewer calories and other beverages. Sales plummeted and losses were in the millions of dollars. The workforce was down to less than 2,000 in 1969 when the decision was made to sell. At the time, the privately owned company was made up of seven families, including those of Carl and Otto Badsenhausen.

The new owner was Investors Funding Corporation of New York City. The purchase price was a reported \$20 million, mostly in cash. Just three years later in 1972 Falstaff Brewing Corporation of St. Louis purchased Ballantine, paying \$4 million for trademarks, brand names and trade names, plus an amount equal to 50 cents per barrel of all Ballantine products sold during the next six years.

Falstaff shuttered the Newark brewery, saying Ballantine products would be produced in Falstaff's seven existing plants. According to one report, about 1,800 workers lost their jobs. Falstaff sputtered but remained mostly steady in its production of Ballantine products until the 1980s when it suffered severe financial problems. It was purchased by Pabst Brewing Company of Milwaukee in 1985. Over the years, Pabst, with its changing ownership, gradually discontinued Ballantine products until it was down to Ballantine XXX Ale in cans and bottles. By 2025 – 185 years after its founding – Ballantine and its three-ring circle trademark were deceased.



Just For Openers January-December 2026 7

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Peter's rings are gone but not forgotten. A description of the trademark in an editorial in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* on June 25, 1938, is still appropriate today. The editorial, touting private enterprise and P. Ballantine & Sons, stated: "So successful has this enterprise been that, today, the Ballantine three-ring symbol is perhaps the best know drink trademark there is."

