

# Barrel Industry Losing Hope for Its Hoops and Staves

By RUTH ANNE SILBAR

Fun even came in barrels years ago, but the cooperage business now is almost non-existent, according to G. A. Ziegler, 1701 Maryland, who has been in the cooperage business for the past 50 years.

Ziegler, once the owner of four cooperage mills, now is semi-retired, but still maintains an office in the Birmingham Bank building as a cooperage broker. He admits there is very little left to what once was a thriving industry and holds no hope for its future.

"When I was a boy working in a grocery store, almost everything came in barrels," he said.

Apples, potatoes, dried fruits, rolled oats, salt, flour, sugar, corn meal, crackers, rice, dried peas and beans came in "slack" barrels.

MOLASSES, vinegar, sauerkraut, dill pickles, paint and ketchup were among the items shipped in "tight" barrels. "Nowadays," he said, "it's even hard to find those small nail kegs. Glories of a past industry were recalled by Ziegler.

"Why, 10,000 apple barrels a season were packed right here in Birmingham 45 years ago," he said, "and the barrels were made by a man named Albert Sauer in Pontiac. In one year, 1915, according to U. S. Statistics, 2,351,501 barrels of apples were exported."

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It is the only container with a bulge and has never been improved upon. Few, though, there are, the barrel today is made in the same manner as it was years ago.

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for a cover. He received his barrel material by the carload from the mills.

Staves, hoops and headings were made in different mills near their wood supply and each mill required different machinery, as well as different wood, to make their particular item.

Slack barrels for dry products and tight barrels for liquids are two different divisions, Ziegler emphasized. In his 50 years in the business, Ziegler dealt only with the slack barrel line.

HOOPS FOR barrels were (and still are) made of elm because the woven fiber of the wood is tough and flexible.

"While other woods split, elm is flexible you can almost tie it in knots," explained Ziegler. Headings years ago were made of basswood which was once very plentiful, but now headings are made of southern pine—a soft wood.

Barrel staves came from cottonwood, gum, hackberry, willow, certain species of maple and other elm. It was cut into logs just the right length and steamed in live steam until the material was wood soft enough to cut into staves.

THE STAVES then were sent out to a drying shed, edges clipped and the staves bundled—50 staves to a bundle.

"Fifty years ago there were 70 mills in Michigan making hoops, staves and headings," Ziegler said. "Today there are none. In fact, there are only three hoop mills in the whole United States. One is in Ohio, the others in Arkansas and Louisiana. There is only one in the whole of Canada. Fifty years ago there were over 100 hoop mills in the U. S."

There are several reasons why the barrel has practically vanished; the scarcity of timber, its high cost, and the high cost of freight charges to ship the timber to the barrel factories.

"HOWEVER, the industry received its first jolt during World War II," Ziegler said. "Barrels were put under price controls, but timber was not. Naturally the material out of which the price-controlled article was made, went way out of reach."

To solve their dilemma, the big woodworking plants began to develop a replacement for the staves. They came up with a fiber drum made from wood pulp. When that happened, it helped roll the barrel out of existence. Other new developments within the past few years have completed the process of elimination. These are moisture-proof bags.

"At St. Clair," he said, "barrel salt is packed in those moisture-proof bags," Ziegler said. "Why, they could drop one of these bags in the Detroit river and let it stay overnight and the salt wouldn't even be damp."

"WHEN THE Panama Canal was built, all the cement used was shipped there in barrels. Millions of 'em. They didn't have moisture-proof bags then.

"One day the days when farmers used to come into town during log-killing time to get a barrel of salt. They drove into town by a horse-drawn vehicle and rolled a barrel of salt into the wagon."

"Now the farmer comes into town more often in his automobile and puts a bag of salt in the trunk of his car whenever he needs it."

"ZIEGLER is philosophical about the passing of the barrel. "It's progress," he says. "And besides, where would you keep a barrel of anything in the houses of today?"

RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT that they plan to increase the price of ten cents appears to be a much-appreciated, especially by those who think very little of this type of entertainment." Indeed, several Birmingham men this week were overheard discussing "Say, why not us start a campaign to raise the per centage to 60 cents per barrel?" to which most music lovers will say "Amey."

TWO TRIPS TO a Detroit hospital have Chris Bailey, popular business district mail carrier, more fully aware of what his "customers" think of him. Bailey, home again and expecting to return to his job next week, said he had had nearly 100 calls in the last week. "I know, some from people I don't know and quite a few from former residents who read about my hospitalization in The Eccentric. I want to thank every one of them for their encouragement and good wishes, especially those with whom I am not acquainted. I want to add another thanks to the many who sent money to help me meet expenses."

SLIPPERY ROADS and inadequate road combinations, some resident "Bill" M. Richard P. Kroebel of Hickory Grove West (Third and Hickory) says, "The most they should do is to get the workers to work. You never have to break these roads because there are so many cars coming in and out of the workers building the new homes. There's always a lot of nice men around here to help if you get stuck, and even fall-down can be helped if the emergency requires."

IT'S TOUGH TO HAVE ONE'S birthday near Christmas. One Birmingham housewife, whose birthday falls on Jan. 3, has found the subtle hint the best means of reminding friend ribbs that although the holidays are past, there still are big events in the family life. She greeted him Monday morning with a bright and cheery "Well, what have you to say to me this morning?" His answer stopped her momentarily, because he replied with complete simplicity, "Good morning." Several more hints and inquiries brought about an invitation to dine out that evening, and happiness took over once more.

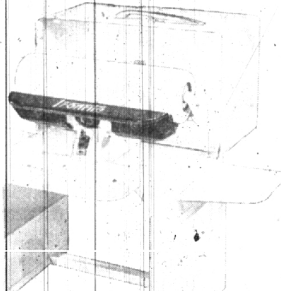
DETROIT EDISON to the rescue! Complete with ladders and flood lights, a crew responded to an appeal to remove a cat from a light pole at the rear of The Eccentric plant Tuesday night. The animal had been perched at the top of the pole throughout the afternoon, thoroughly maddening in the cold rain. Repeated attempts were made to get it down with offerings of food and much calling. DE workers said they believed the cat never would have jumped without aid, for it was terrified, wet and chilled through.

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The property is situated in the City of Birmingham, Alabama, and is bounded by the following property: North by the property of the Birmingham Steel Corporation, East by the property of the Birmingham Steel Corporation, South by the property of the Birmingham Steel Corporation, and West by the property of the Birmingham Steel Corporation.

The property is being offered for sale to the highest bidder at public auction on Friday, January 12, 1935, at 10 o'clock a.m. at the Court House in Birmingham, Alabama.

Witness my hand and the seal of the Birmingham Steel Corporation this 5th day of January, 1935.

JOHN J. HANLEY, President

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