

# The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

*April 2015*

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## Meeting – April 28th

Please join us at St. Mark's Orthodox Church in Bethesda at 8 PM.



Mike Cianciosi displayed deco soda bottles at our March meeting.

Other March show & tell items included fruit jars acquired at the recent Baltimore Antique Bottle Show (above) and a variety of local bottles (below).



Meetings: 8:00 PM on the last Tuesday of each month January-June, October-November; picnic in September.

President: Andy Goldfrank

Vice President: Al Miller

Secretary: Jim Sears

Pontil: Jim Sears (email: searsjim@usa.net, PH: 609/472-5473) &

Andy Goldfrank (email: amg\_sticky@yahoo.com, PH: 202/588-0543)

Web Site: [www.potomacbottlecollectors.org](http://www.potomacbottlecollectors.org)

Maintained by Mike Cianciosi (chosi@cox.net)

## Christian and the Xanders: Selling Spirits in D.C.

By Jack Sullivan

[Special to the Potomac Pontil]

For many years in the era before Congress in an act of utter hypocrisy in 1917 voted the District of Columbia “dry,” the name Xander was a prominent one among the whiskey men of the Nation’s Capitol. In the Xander clan, Christian was the stand out, conducting a highly successful liquor business as well as operating his own prize-winning winery.

Christian Xander was born in 1837 at Grossweier, a town in the state of Baden located in southwestern Germany, not far from the French border. He was the son of an earlier Christian Xander and his wife Maria Jorger. Of his early life, little is known but Xander may have had exposure to wine making.

About 1853 Christian, 16 years old, is recorded as having emigrated from Germany to the United States and settled in Washington, D.C. He may likely found employment in one of the District’s proliferating liquor houses. In late December of 1864 at age 27, he married Caroline Blume (also given as Blum), also a German émigré, at DC’s Concordia Lutheran Church. She was eight years his junior. They would have three children, Henry born in 1866, Mina in 1868, and a third child who died in infancy.

Throughout this period Christian was establishing himself as a respected local businessman. By 1872 his wholesale liquor dealership was a recognized successful enterprise. Moreover, Xander himself was sufficiently established as a merchant to act as an incorporator for the Boundary & Silver Springs Railway Company, a trolley system for the District of Columbia. In contemporary accounts he was reputed to be a visionary businessman willing to invest to build the latest in transportation systems for his adopted city.

He had set up his business at 909 Seventh Street, N.W., (Fig. 1), shown here in a photo, likely with Christian himself standing in the doorway. The structure had been built to his specifications in a major DC commercial area. It was three floors, 25 by 150 feet each, with a warehouse two stories in height. Although listed as a wholesaler, Xander did not employ traveling salesmen, but advertised widely, even in the “Negro” press (Fig. 2) and cultivated a customer base in eight surrounding states.

He featured a number of national brands, advertising that he carried 240 kinds of distilled spirits. Among them were several of his own labels indicating that in addition to selling from his address, he was also “rectifying” — that is, blending and compounding — whiskey in one of the several stories of his business. Those brands included “Chr. Xander’s Family Brand,” “Old Private Stock,” “Old Reserve,” and “Gold Medal.” In addition, his company featured a line of proprietary “medicinal” beverages, including stomach bitters, coca wine,

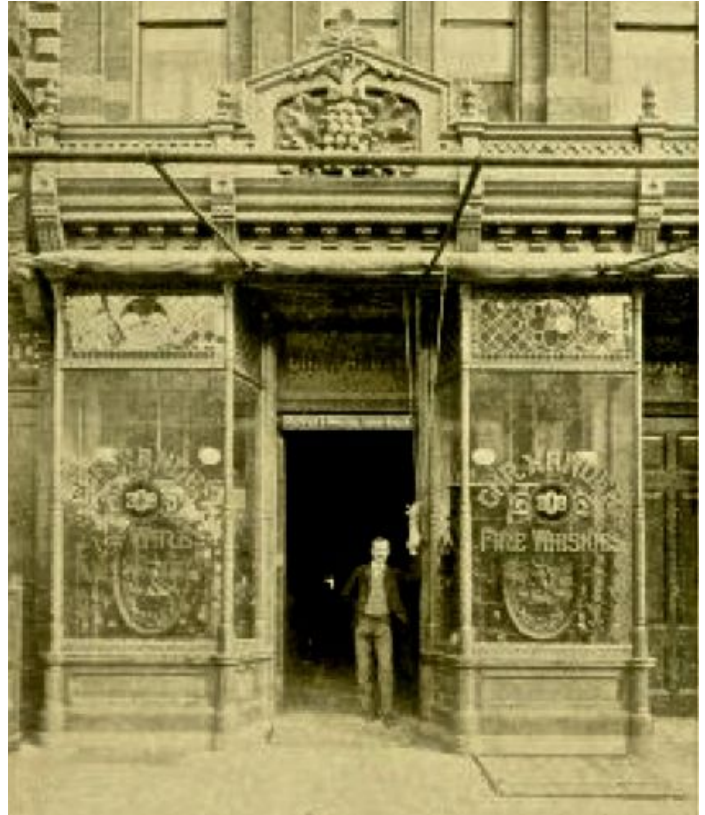


Fig. 1: Xander business at 909 Seventh Street, N.W.

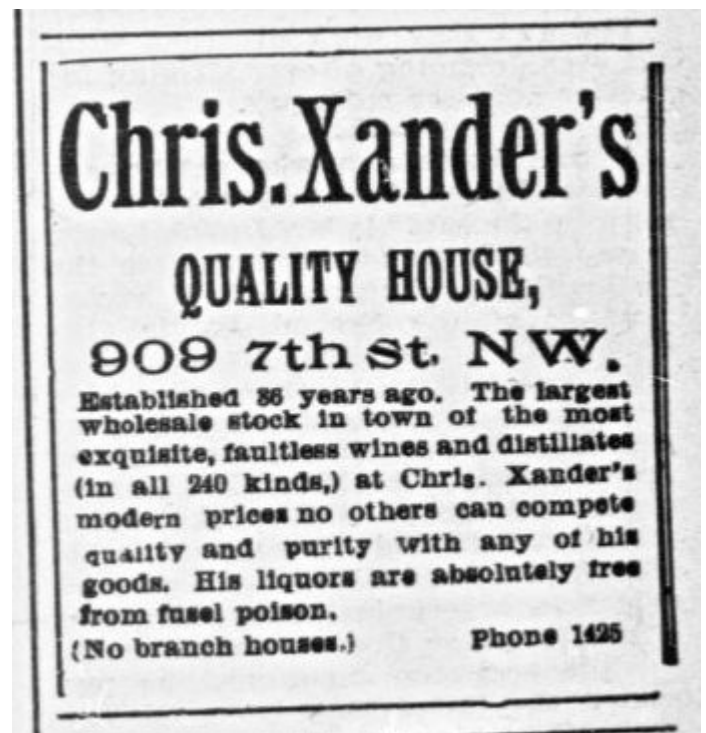


Fig. 2: Newspaper advertisement

and cordials. His “Melliston Cordial” was advertised as a “Great Curative in Pulmonary Affections.” Xander’s whiskeys were sold in glass bottles, as shown here, often with fancy labels describing their contents (Figs. 3-6).





Fig. 3 – 6: Labeled Xander bottles



He called his store “Quality Place.” An 1894 publication said of Xander’s operation, “His premises and vaults were built with the view to perfect depuration and maturing of wines and liquors, and his goods, sold direct and by retailers, are the accepted standards in hotels and private families. Mr. Xander’s business policy is one of unwavering integrity, and his house stands in the first rank of reliable commercial firms.”

As Christian was prospering, other German-born Xanders had arrived in the United States, related to him, either as siblings or certainly as cousins. They were Karl Xander, born 13 years after Christian, and Jacob, birth date unknown. It is highly likely that they initially worked for Christian in his enterprise. By 1889, according to directory listings, both had struck out on their own. Karl was running a liquor store at 439 K Street, N.W., and Jacob a wine and liquor store at 1315 Seventh St, N.W. The Xander DC liquor empire was much noted by the local populace and by the Washington press.

What distinguished Christian from the other Xanders was his reputation as a vintner. In 1882 he established his own winery and was calling himself “Chr. Xander, Wholesale Wine Merchant,” as shown on his letterhead (Fig. 7). The winery was located behind his sales offices at 630 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W. A contemporary photograph shows a three story building with the sign “Xander...Vaults and Warehouse.” Again, that may well be Christian himself standing in the doorway (Fig. 8).



Fig. 7: Letterhead

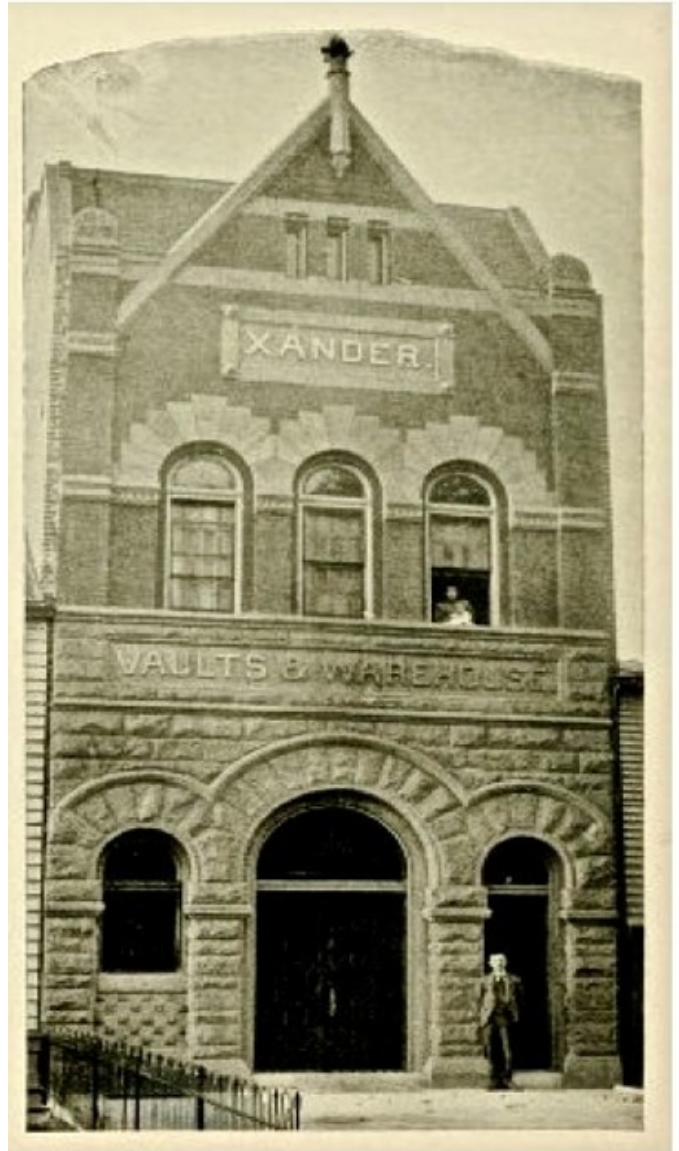


Fig. 8: Vaults and warehouse at 630 Massachusetts Avenue

By 1883 Xander had achieved the reputation of producing the first wine ever made in the District of Columbia. A decade later he was producing approximately 10,000 gallons of reds and clarets. They were sweet wines made from grapes grown in Virginia and known as the Norton Variety. On September 23, 1900 an article appeared in *The Washington Post* announcing that Xander had been given a medal for his wines at the 1900 Paris Exposition. The newspaper failed to mention, however, that it was only a bronze medal, an award given to virtually any vintner who displayed at the Exhibition. Xander also was importing fine champagnes (Fig. 9).

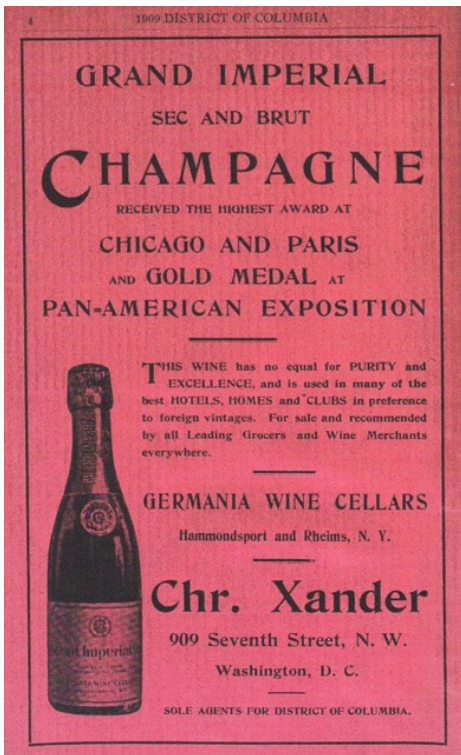


Fig. 9: Imported Champagne advertisement

With success came more local recognition for Christian. He was a significant enough citizen to serve on one of the committees charged with organizing the DC inaugural ceremonies and parade for President Theodore Roosevelt in March of 1905.

As Christian aged he took his son into the business. Henry Xander was also a music teacher with a studio downtown, but spent his evenings working with his father in the family liquor and wine trade. Henry, assisted by company vice president, F. Pohndorff, Sr., increasingly took over the management of the firm. In 1908 Christian died at age 71. He was interred in Prospect Hill Cemetery, an historic German-American burying ground, originally just for Lutheran dead, located on North Capital Street in the District. His gravestone is shown here (Fig. 10).



Fig. 10: Xander tombstone

Meanwhile, the other Xanders continued to achieve success in the DC liquor trade. Karl was reported doing a brisk business from his wholesale liquor store on K Street, said to be “one of the finest fitted and elaborately appointed places in the city.” His house brands were “Southern Bouquet” and “Millvale” whiskeys. According to a local history, this Xander was well known as “one of the most prominent German-Americans in the city and stands at the very pinnacle in commercial rectitude and in the esteem of the public.” Jacob Xander, reputedly prospering in similar fashion on Seventh Street, also received accolades: “He is wide awake, active and reputable businessman, and well known in mercantile circles.”

However high Karl’s pinnacle was, or wide awake Jacob may have been, nothing could stand before the force of prohibition sentiments in the U.S. Congress. In 1917 the Xander liquor empire in the District of Columbia came tumbling down as legislation passed that turned DC ostensibly “dry” until 1934.

**Note:** Much of the material and several of the illustrations shown here are from the October 2009 issue of *Prince William Reliquary*, an article about the Xanders based on cited original sources.

## Upcoming Area Bottle Shows



- May 2 Gray TN
- May 3 Marcy, NY
- May 3 Antioch, IL
- May 9 Mansfield, OH
- May 9 Coventry, CT
- May 9 Adamstown, PA
- May 16 Aiken, SC
- May 17 Washington, PA
- June 5-6 Butte, MT
- June 27 Tulsa, OK
- July 17-18 Reno, NV
- July 25 Birmingham, AL
- July 26 Ankeny, IA

- May 16 Lake City, FL
- May 30-31 Santa Rosa, CA
- June 7 Ballston Spa, NY
- July 11 Houston, TX
- July 18-19 Adamstown, PA
- July 25 Castle Rock, CO

**July 31-August 2 Chattanooga, TN – The Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors 2015 National Bottle Show**