Mike Bartels donates his collection to the Cone Top Brewery Museum

by Ken Quaas

NABA partners with the Cone Top Brewery Museum in Vicksburg, MI.

This column brings our members news about the developments of the museum.

The Bartels beer name is familiar to breweriana collectors, especially those in Pennsylvania, Upstate New York, and Ohio. Herman Bartels, Sr. left his mark in brewing history across the Great Lakes region.

Four breweries bore the Bartels name. There was one in Syracuse NY, which was Herman's home and his primary interest. He also founded a brewery in Edwardsville, PA (near Wilkes-Barre) and he helped develop two more breweries in Cincinnati: the F. Bartels Brewery and Bartels Brothers Brewery.

There may have been multiple breweries with the Bartels name, but there is only one collector—at least that we know of—who not only specializes in Bartels breweriana but also shares the Bartels last name. That man is Mike Bartels, a NABA member for 52 years from West Chester, OH. Over the course of many decades, Mike has assembled an extraordinary collection of Bartels breweriana. Interestingly, although his last name is the same, Mike says that as far as he knows, there is no family relation with the famed and prolific brewer.



Longtime NABA member Mike Bartels is donating his extensive collection of Bartels breweriana to the Cone Top Brewery Museum.



Helena and Mike Bartels stand in front of some of their breweriana collection in the lower level of their Ohio home.

How it started

And while it's not hard to figure out why Mike is interested in breweriana that bears the same last name as his, it is interesting to know how he got started collecting it. As it turns out, he was always a collector. "If there's a gene for collecting, I inherited it from my parents. My parents, aunts, and uncles were collectors and we used to go to farm auctions, antique shows, and flea markets. I developed an appreciation for history and local artifacts." Mike demonstrated his own abilities to build a collection at an early age. "My first collection was pencils, which began when I was 5 or 6 years old. Anywhere we went, I would ask for pencils. By junior high, I had well over 1,000 pencils."

Interestingly, although he had the "collector gene," Mike never gave collecting breweriana much thought as a young man. Unlike many of today's veteran collectors, he did not start collecting beer cans in his youth. Instead, it was a discovery by his parents that triggered what would become a 50+ year interest in breweriana in general and Bartels items in particular.

"It was in 1969 and I was in college in Indiana. My parents were traveling in New England and saw a Bartels Beer sign at a flea market in New Hampshire. They didn't buy it but told me about it and I expressed an interest. They returned many months later and it was still there, so they bought it for me. That sign hung in my dorm room and from that point on I was hooked on Bartels beer and Breweriana in general. Eighteen months later in 1971, I had graduated and I was earning money and actively pursuing Bartels memorabilia."

Joining NABA

Mike learned about NABA at the famed Indianapolis Advertising Show. He joined NABA in 1974 and in 1975 Mike attended his first—and NABA's fourth—convention in Stevens Point, WI. This event was hosted by NABA co-founders Herb and Helen Haydock and was the first of many memorable conventions for Mike. "Helen Haydock was so welcoming to me as a new member," Mike recalled. "It made me look forward to going back."

Mike has attended many NABA conventions over the years, but perhaps none was more memorable than the 1980 convention in Denver. That's because he was accompanied by his wife, Helena, who has been by his side at many conventions. Mike and Helena had been married the weekend before the convention, and the trip west to Denver was part of their honeymoon. Over the years, the couple have enjoyed many more conventions together, including the one in Philadelphia this past year. Along the way, Mike said they "have met some great people and the NABA community felt like a family."

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The collection's turning point

It was at more recent conventions that Mike heard Chris Moore, the founder of the Cone Top Brewery Museum, speak to the membership at the banquet about the museum's goals and its partnership with NABA.

"We had been considering what to do with our collection. I'm getting to the age where I've got to start thinking about who is going to be the next caretaker," Mike explained. "My sons appreciate the collection, but don't have a desire to own it. I just didn't want to sell it off piecemeal or send it to an auction house. I spent many years putting it together and it was important to me to keep it together."

In February 2024, the Cone Top acquired the well-known Haydock breweriana collection. In June of that year, Mike and Helena attended the "Haydock Haydays" commemorative event. This was created by the museum to celebrate Helen and the late Herb Haydock and their leading influence on NABA and the breweriana collecting hobby. "We had heard some of Chris Moore's vision for the museum when he spoke at NABA conventions," Mike said. "It simply felt right to share it with the Cone Top and we approached the museum staff about the idea of donating our collection."

Mike was impressed with the museum's plans and its pursuit of tax-exempt status. As of October 2026, Cone Top was officially certified as a 501(c)(3) organization, a federal IRS designation that makes it eligible to receive tax-deductible contributions.

A new home

Chris Moore said he is delighted to have Mike's collection of Bartels breweriana donated to the museum. "This is quite an interesting collection because it consists of high quality breweriana that is focused on one brand name." Chris said. "We appreciate that a collection like this takes a lifetime to assemble and are honored that Mike chose the Cone Top as a place where his impressive collection can be kept intact, preserved, and displayed for years to come."

The museum is planning an event in 2027 to celebrate the Mike Bartels Collection, both in Vicksburg and at next year's NABA convention in Green Bay, WI. This will be similar to past celebrations of significant acquisitions, like the Stan Summers and Haydock collections.

Mike said that he and his family are happy that they are able to donate the collection to a place that will keep it together. "They know the collection is special to me and in the future they can visit it—and others—at the museum."



The Herman Bartels Legacy

Brewer Herman Bartels led a very colorful life. The German immigrant showed flashes of brilliance as a businessman, establishing multiple brewery concerns in Upstate New York and Pennsylvania. But Bartels also could be unscrupulous in his dealings. This resulted in him getting on the wrong side of creditors and ultimately the law. Convicted of attempted insurance fraud, Bartels ended up serving a year in prison, from 1908-1909. By that time, he was no longer in the brewing business. He suffered from kidney disease and died at 57 years old in 1910.

The Bartels name lived on in what had been his breweries. In fact, two of them not only outlived Herman, but also survived Prohibition. His coveted Syracuse brewery re-emerged after Prohibition but ultimately closed in 1942. The one in Edwardsville, PA carried the Bartels name the longest. It brewed independently until 1967, when it was sold to the neighboring Lion Brewing Co. of Wilkes Barre.

Sadly, the old Bartels Brewery was shuttered the following year in 1968 after 70 years of operation. A flood in 1972 led to the demolition of the aged structure. Lion continued to brew a "bottom shelf" beer with the Bartels label, but let the trademark lapse in 2012, 102 years after the passing of its controversial namesake, Herman Bartels, Sr.

The Professor says...

Editor's Note: The Bartels breweries that were most prolific in producing breweriana were the companies in Edwardsville, PA and Syracuse NY. Herman Bartels was involved in them only from the 1890s through the early 1900s, yet they continued to bear his name. Accordingly, they also had very different brand identities and advertising, with only the "Bartels" name in common. In this article, we focus on breweriana from the Edwardsville brewery.

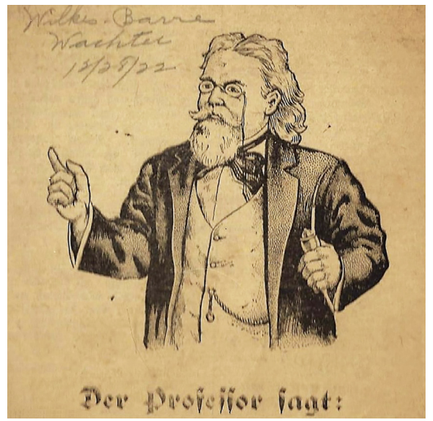
The Bartels Brewery of Edwardsville was never a powerhouse. But it did bring the world of breweriana a unique, memorable spokes character.

Known simply as "The Professor," the character was an older sage with long white hair and a beard who gave praise and advice about drinking his brand of beer. He became the face of the Edwardsville brewery's advertising for almost 60 years, beginning in 1909 and lasting until the brewery's closure in 1968.

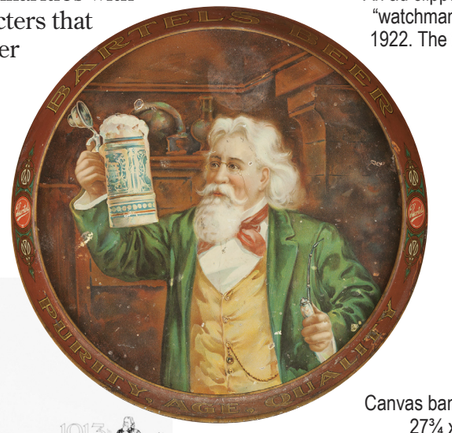
The Professor was said to be modeled after a German university mathematics instructor, but who that might have been is uncertain.

The Professor bore similarities with other, grandfatherly characters that were widely featured in beer advertising. These icons were used in both the Pre-Prohibition era (older men knew high quality, authentic beer because they were from the "Old Country") and immediately after Repeal, (older men knew what good, authentic beer tasted like from before Prohibition). Continued on page 46

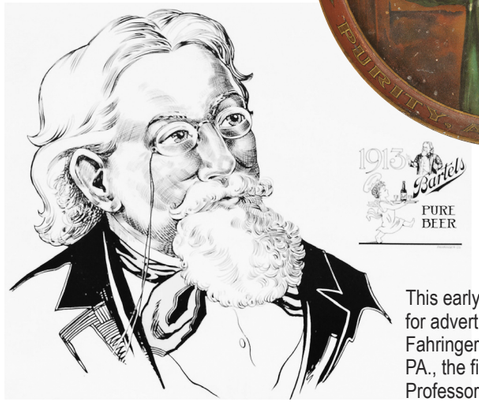
All breweriana pictured is from the collection of Mike Bartels.



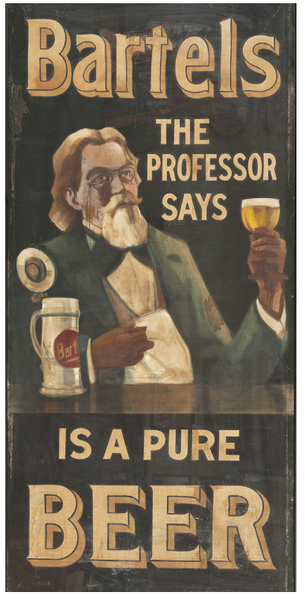
An ad clipped from the Wilkes-Barre Wachter (German for "watchman"), the local German language newspaper, in 1922. The translation to English is "The Professor says:"



Serving tray featuring The Professor in his classic early pose, admiring his stein of Bartels beer, by Chas. W. Shonk, Chicago, IL, c. Pre-Prohibition.



This early rendering is from a logo sheet used for advertising. It was created in 1913 by the Fahringer Engraving Company, Wilkes-Barre, PA., the firm that helped develop The Professor character and its advertising.



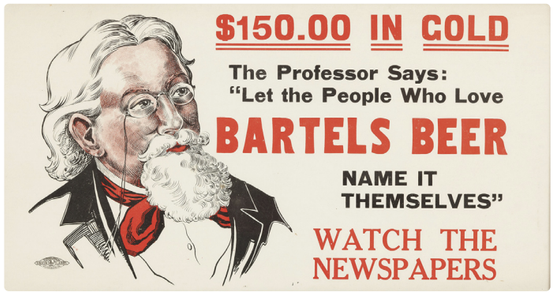
Canvas banner sign, 27¾ x 57¾ in., no mfg. mark, c. Pre-Prohibition

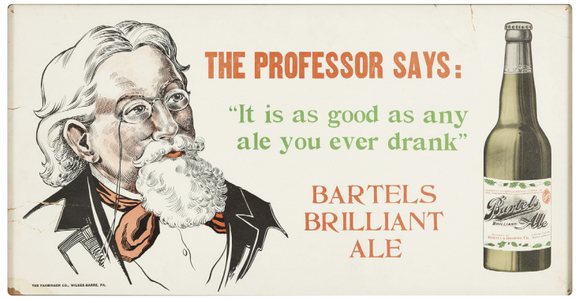
Trolley Car Advertising

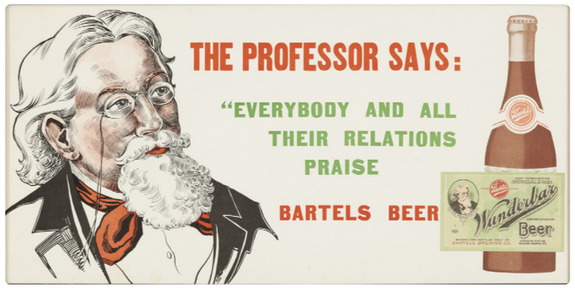
The Bartels brewery was located in the small town of Edwardsville, PA adjacent to Wilkes-Barre (Bartels primary market) and the populous Scranton—Wilkes Barre metropolitan area.

The Lackawanna & Wyoming Valley Railroad was an electric trolley which operated as a commuter line from 1903 to 1952. Its main line ran from Scranton to Wilkes-Barre, a hilly area with several small mining towns along the 20-mile route between the two major cities.

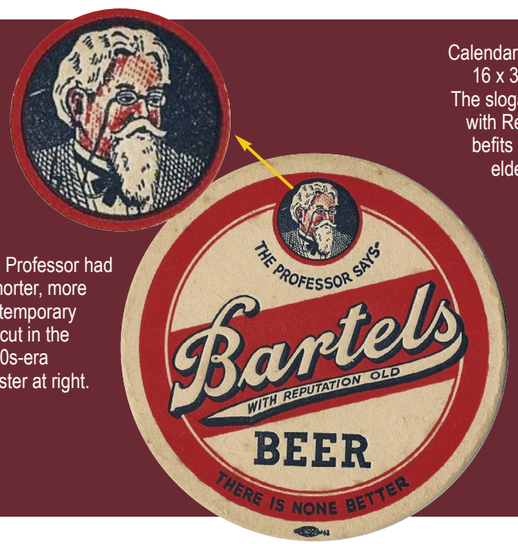
This trolley was the primary means of transportation in the area, making it a choice place for Bartels to advertise its beer.





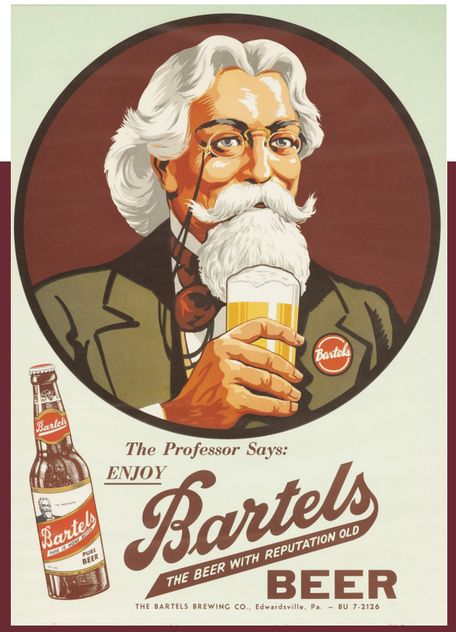


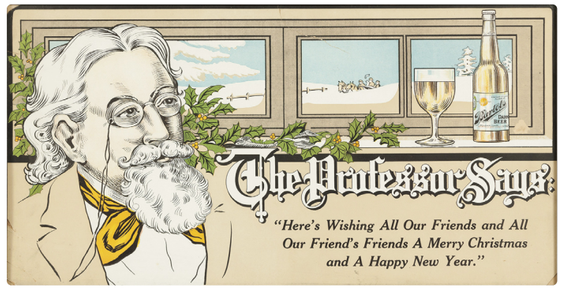
'These three trolley car ads are 19¾ x 9 ¾ in., c.1914-1915. They were part of a promotional campaign in the local newspapers inviting the public to submit name ideas for the Bartels beer varieties. They promote Bartel's Brilliant Ale (top) and the newly-named "Wunderbar" Beer, the winning name for Bartels' Export beer brand.

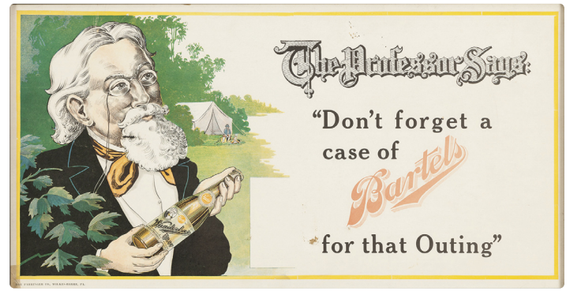


The Professor had a shorter, more contemporary haircut in the 1950s-era coaster at right.

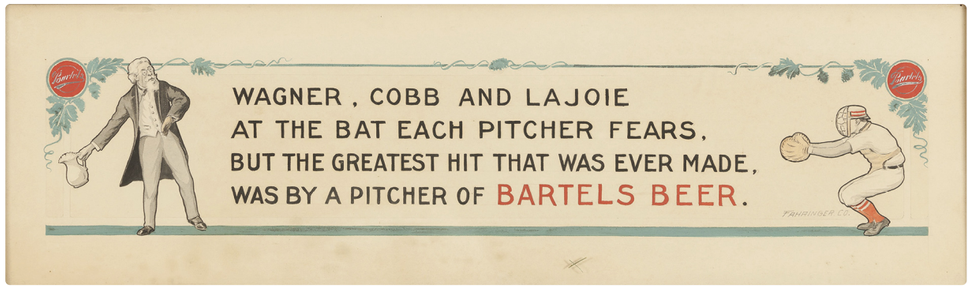
Calendar (without pad) 16 x 33 in., c. 1960. The slogan, "The Beer with Reputation Old" befits the venerable elderly character.



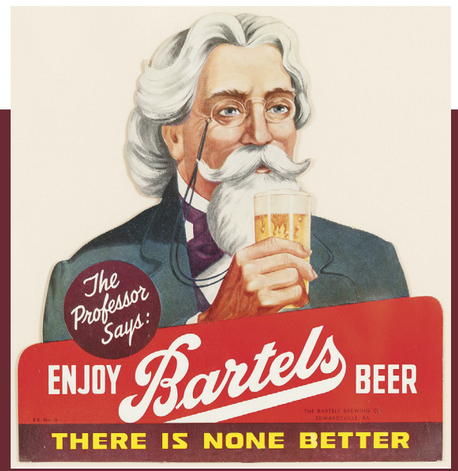




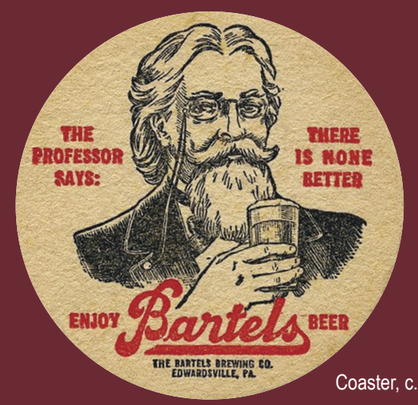
Trolley car ads, 19¾ x 9 ¾ in., engraved by Fahringer, c. 1915. One carries a Christmas greeting. The other shows The Professor outside with a tent in the background, and a reminder that Bartels in bottles is good for "that outing."



Original artwork for a baseball-themed ad, by Fahringer, 20½ x 6½ in., c. 1915.



Die cut-cardboard sign with easel back, featuring the final slogan, "There is none better," 9 x 9½ in., c. early 1960s.



Coaster, c. 1960.