

The Secret History Of The Cocktail



The Palo Alto Hotel at Bladensburg in 1846.

From an old print in the possession of the Ohio Historical Society.

THE cocktail," said an intellectual Baltimore street bartender the other day, "is a distinctively American invention. True enough, the name originated in England, and was there applied to mixtures as early as the time of Dr. Johnson; but the true cocktail, as every patriotic American knows it today, was invented in the State of Maryland on April 17, 1846.

"I am well aware that, in maintaining this thesis, I am laying myself open to bitter attacks from so-called experts. The principal text books of alcoholia tell other stories, and the fact that these stories differ widely in no wise dampens the enthusiasm of each author for his own. "The great alcoholic statistician and genealogist, Prof. Dr. Ferdinand Braun, of Halle, insists that the cocktail was invented in the Middle Ages by Wolfram von Espegelsen, the minnesinger, who is best known to fame as the discoverer of yodling. Braun devotes a whole chapter in his mammoth work "Die Alkoholismus" to the denomination of his theory, and quotes 100 forgotten books and manuscripts, but his argument, for all that, is ridiculous. "As a matter of fact, whisky and gin were entirely unknown to the human race until toward the middle of the seventeenth century, and a cocktail without whisky or gin, as everyone knows, would not be a cocktail at all.

An Ancestor Of The Flip.

"On Braun's own showing the drink that Espegelsen invented was a sort of cheap brandy punch, made of Bordeaux brandy, nutmeg and sugar. One might conceivably call this drink a flip, but it was in no sense a cocktail.

"Maloney, the Irish whisky historian, is well aware of the distinction, but in one part of his book on "The History of Drinking in Great Britain" he falls into a similar error. That is to say, he seems to confuse the cocktail with a drink which was the forerunner of what is now known as the stone fence.

"In the year 1784, he says, there settled in the county of Wicklow, Ireland, an Irish-English officer named Fergus Hamilton, who had served in the Low Countries and learned the bartending art from the Prussian professors.

"Hamilton was a hospitable man and delighted in entertaining the neighboring gentry at banquets. A feature of these spreads was invariably a drink which he called "the Emperor." For more than a century its formula remained a secret, but in 1874, while going through some yellowed papers in the archives of the Licensed Victuallers' Association, in London, Maloney happened upon it.

"The Emperor," he found, had Irish whisky as its base. It was made by emptying a pony brandy glass of whisky into a wine glass, adding a bit of sugar and filling up with apple brandy. This was certainly not a cocktail, as I shall show, for a cocktail without bitters is no cocktail at all. It was, indeed, nothing more or less than a primitive sort of stone fence.

"In the modern stone fence Bourbon whisky is used instead of Irish, ice is added and the fill-up, instead of being apple jack, is commonly hard cider. Sometimes, however, apple jack is substituted for the Bourbon.

"The Smithsonian Institution, in a somewhat elaborate report upon early drinking customs in the United States, says that the cocktail was invented in London in 1834 and introduced into this country, by way of New York, the year after. The University of Chicago, in a later work upon the same subject, repeats this error.

The Diary Of Smith.

"That it is an error is shown by the diary of Herman Smith, published by the Falstaff Society in 1884. Smith was employed as head bartender at various New York hotels during the period 1832-1840, and later became superintendent of the wine cellar at Delmonico's. He kept an elaborate diary from 1832 to 1838, in which he noted down innumerable facts and happenings of interest to students of alcoholia.

"He recorded, for example, the drinks called for by his most distinguished clients—Daniel Webster, General Scott, John Tyler and the elder Astor among them. We learn from this quaint old chronicle, written in Smith's bad English (for he was a Bavarian) that Webster's favorite tipple was what we now call the whisky sling—that is to say, a mixture of whisky, sugar, nutmeg and water. Webster, according to Smith (or Schmitz) insisted that there be no more than 10 per cent of water, and refused to take a chaser of water afterward.

"He drank 24 of these slings a day while in New York, and every Saturday night took to his hotel room three-quarters of a quart of his favorite whisky for his Sunday potatoes. Smith records that Webster was a man of remarkable vigor and capacity, both intellectually and alcoholically, and that he could drink 15 slings in two hours without apparent effect.

"Well, the thing I started to say is this: That Smith, despite the minuteness of his chronicle, makes no mention whatever of the cocktail. This to me is proof positive that the cocktail was unknown in New York in the thirties, for had it been introduced in 1835, as the Smithsonian and Chicago scientists say, it is obvious that Smith would have heard of it and mentioned it. "New drinks are not so plentiful that they pass unnoticed. An observer as keen and accurate as Smith would have heard of the cocktail two hours after it landed at the Battery, and his diary would have been heavy with references to it, and lists of its advocates and opponents.

"So much for the university pundits. The researches of Sir Edward McCubbin, the Scotch distiller, are deserving of more respect, but he, too, I am convinced, makes many errors.

"Sir Edward's treatise upon the cocktail (it was privately printed in a limited *de luxe* edition and I have, I believe, the only copy in America) deals at great length with the origin of the name. He says that it was first applied to a drink in the middle of the eighteenth century.

"The first drink to bear it was a diabolical sort of concoction of beer and brandy much affected by the officers of the Second Regiment of Royal Sussex Fusiliers, in the British Army. The men of this regiment, because they wore plumes resembling rooster feathers in their caps, were commonly called "the cocktalls" by the men of other regiments. The new drink, when it began to attain fame, took the name.

"No doubt much of this is true. I have seen several references to the Second Regiment's plumes in old newspapers of the period, and in at least one case the men are referred to as "the cocktalls." But as for the rest of Sir Edward's story, there is no proof whatever.

The Truth About Brooks.

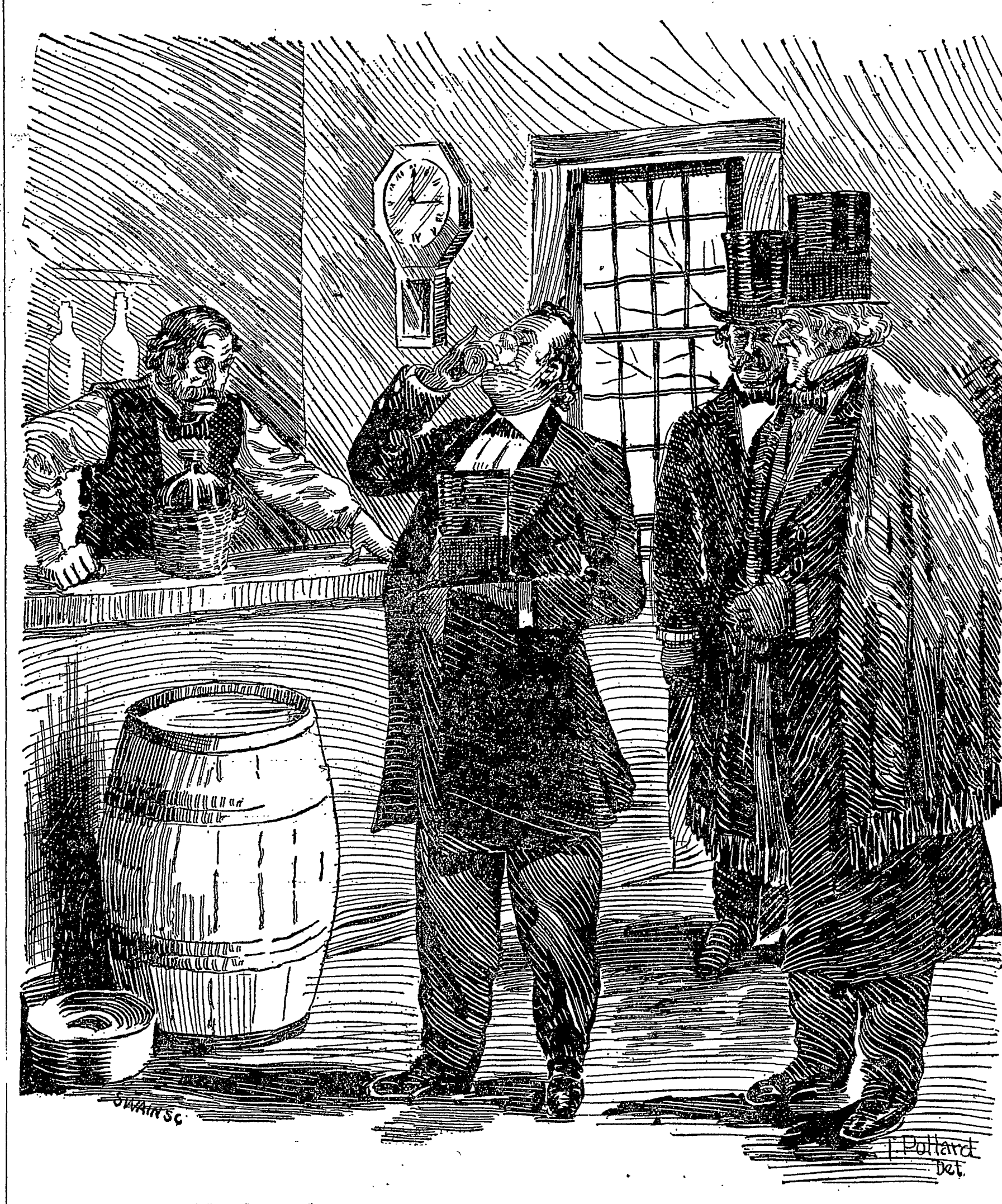
"His book contains no bibliography, and he doesn't mention his authorities, and when I wrote to him several years ago asking for information I received a reply from his secretary stating that, on account of the infirmities of age, it was impossible for him to discuss the matter. Since then, I believe, he has died.

"In his book Sir Edward admits freely that there is nothing in common between the cocktail of today and the horrible mess allowed by the officers of the Second Fusiliers. He seems to hold that the modern cocktail was invented in 1836 by George Brooks, proprietor of the famous Brooks Club, in London. Again his authorities do not appear, and again I doubt that he is true.

"As a matter of fact, Brooks was not a bartender at all, but a fishmonger, and his club was noted less for its wet goods than for its gambling tables, though its wine cellar at one time was very extensive.

"Brooks began in a small way as a race-track plunger, and, being lucky, soon accumulated considerable capital. With this he bought a one-third interest in a small gambling house, and there greatly increased his wealth.

"Later on he started Brooks' Club, the most famous gambling establishment London has ever known. His tables were crowded for years, and his annual income often reached \$500,000. One of his daughters married an Anglican clergyman who



The First Manhattan Cocktail.

This old print is now very rare, and but two copies are known to be in the United States. The man drinking in the center is John A. Hopkins, of Fairfax County, Virginia, a celebrated *bon vivant* of ante-bellum Washington. The two men observing him are Col. Denmead Maglone, U. S. A., and Hon. George W. Mattingly, member of Congress (1842-58) from Georgia. The man behind the bar is "Jack" Henderson, "inventor of the cocktail."

afterward became a bishop, and three of his four sons took degrees at Oxford.

"But despite this wealth and this effort to educate and refine his children, Brooks himself remained an ignorant man to the end. He dropped his "his" like a cockney, and could scarcely read and write. It is obvious that a man of such limited intelligence could never achieve the complicated chain of ratiocination necessary to the deliberate invention of a thing so subtle and complicated as the modern cocktail.

"It is true enough, unfortunately, that many bartenders are ignorant men, but these are the hevers of wood and drawers of water of the profession. No one expects them to invent drinks, and they do not disappoint public expectation.

"Sir Edward says that when Brooks perfected the new drink he was at a loss for a name for it, and that "cocktail" was suggested by Col. William de Forrest, of the British Army, who had served in the Second Fusiliers years before and recalled the old brandy-and-beer cocktail. Colonel De Forrest, he says, was a celebrated *bon vivant* of the period, and spent much of his time at Brooks' Club.

"Chiefly as a matter of idle curiosity, I recently communicated with the British War Office regarding this Colonel De Forrest. What was my surprise to learn that he was killed on July 18, 1831, in Monmouthshire, while riding to hounds with the Fanlow Hunt, of which he was master of foxhounds.

The Six Problems.

"This, you will note, convicts Sir Edward of a serious error, for he says that De Forrest named the cocktail in 1836, whereas the records show that De Forrest died in

1831. In the face of such an egregious blunder we may well view with suspicion all the rest of Sir Edward's argument.

"There are many other accounts of the origin of the cocktail in the literature of alcohol, but I won't bore you with them. It is my purpose, later on, to digest them critically in an elaborate treatise which I purpose to submit as a thesis when I go up for my doctor's degree at the University of Cambridge, England.

"Meanwhile, you are probably recalling my statement that the modern cocktail was invented in 1846, and wondering how I will prove it. Attacking the subject in the scientific manner, we find that it breaks up into definite questions, to wit:

"First—When was the cocktail invented?
"Second—By whom?
"Third—Where?
"Fourth—Who were present?
"Fifth—Who drank the first cocktail?
"Sixth—Who gave it its name?

"My answers to these questions are as follows, viz: "First—On the 17th of April, 1846, at 8.15 A. M.

"Second—By John Welby Henderson, a native of North Carolina.

"Third—At the old Palo Alto Hotel, at Bladensburg, Md.

"Fourth—Col. Denmead Maglone, U.S.A.; the Hon. George William Mattingly, member of Congress from Georgia, and Messrs. J. Upton Benson, Frederick G. Allison and John A. Hopkins, besides the aforesaid Henderson.

"Fifth—John A. Hopkins, of Fairfax, Virginia.

"Sixth—I don't know.

"The story is an interesting one, and as it has come to me, bit by bit, out of the

dim limbo of the past, it has enthralled me like some medieval romance.

"Bladensburg, in those days, was a place of spirited combats and heavy drinking. The old dueling grounds were still in use, and almost daily a party of gentlemen—members of Congress, diplomats or high officials—would come to settle some affair of honor. There were hotels which catered almost exclusively to such parties—the old Palo Alto, the George Washington and others still standing.

The Scene Of Bladensburg.

"The principals and seconds, with their attending surgeons, executors, coroners and admirers, would drive out from Washington in the evening, put up at one of these old hostleries for the night, and then, in the gray of the early morning, repair to the field of honor.

"When the fight was over and the dead duly removed from the sward the others would go back to their hotel and partake of a hearty breakfast. Then, toward noon, they would go back to the capital and resume their various duties.

"On the evening of Tuesday, April 16, 1846, a party of 12 gentlemen left the old John Adams House, in Washington, and galloped northward along the deserted streets. A late fall of snow had covered the ground with its white mantle, and the sound of their horses' hoofs was scarcely heard. It was cold and windy and they were muffled to the ears.

"The party rode in two groups, one of which contained seven and the other five. In the first group were the Baron Henri de Vrie et Chalono, an *attache* of the French Legation; his fellow-diplomat,

Chevalier Luigi Lugno, representative of the King of the Two Sicilies; Messrs. Jones, Lorrimer and Burton, members of the lower house of Congress, and Drs. John Malone and Gufford Galloway, of the Army Medical Corps.

"In the second group were Mr. Hopkins, Colonel Maglone and Messrs. Mattingly, Benson and Allison.

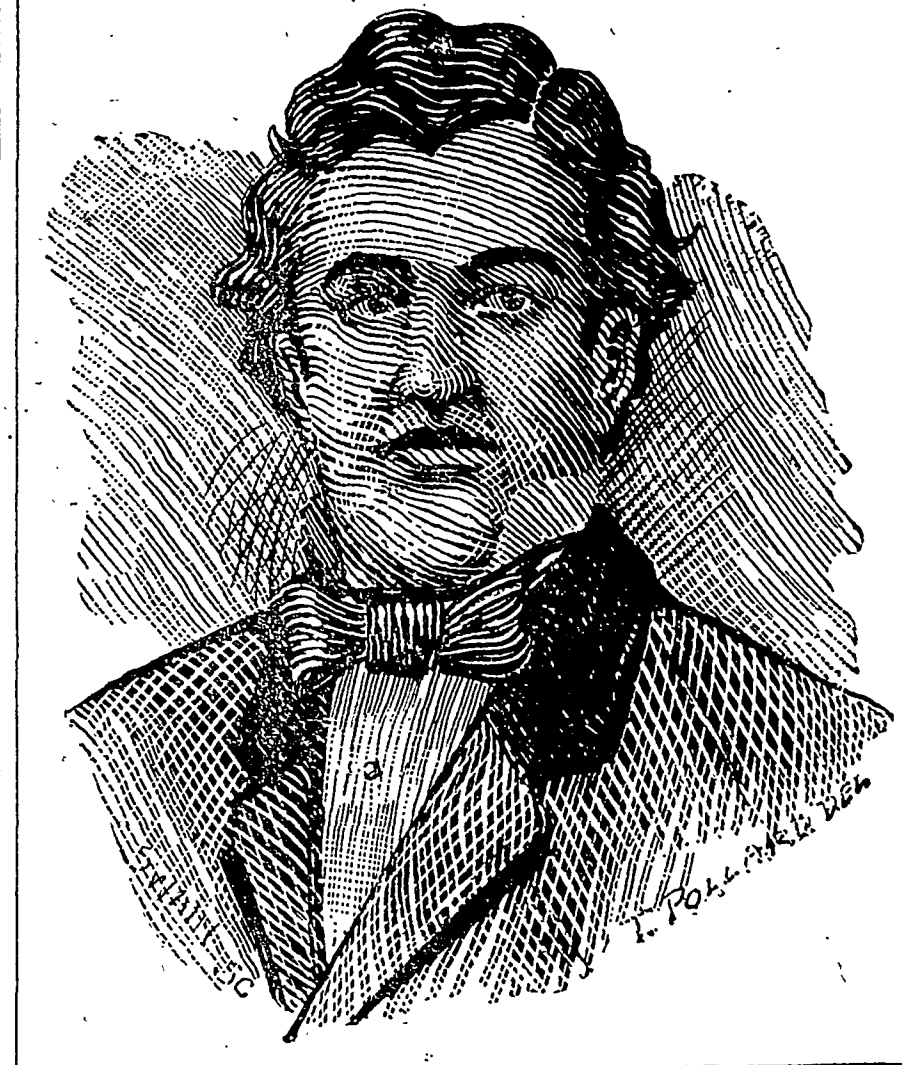
A Duel In The Dawn.

"As you have, no doubt, suspected ere this it was a dueling party. Baron Calono and Mr. Hopkins were the principals and Chevalier Lugno and Colonel Maglone were their seconds. The cause of the difference I have never learned, but it was a gentleman's fight and it was to be conducted in a gentlemanly manner.

"Shortly after 9 o'clock the 12 men reached the Palo Alto Hotel and there enjoyed an excellent supper. At 10 o'clock, after courteous good-nights, they retired to their chambers. At daylight next morning they were awake and ready for the journey to the dueling ground, a few hundred yards away.

"The chronicles are obscure as to what happened on the field, but I rather judge that Baron Calono was badly wounded. At any rate, he required the services of both surgeons for more than two hours, and the ground where he fell was drenched with blood. His courtly adversary, Mr. Hopkins, rushed to his side as soon as he fell.

"Mr. Hopkins, it appears, was a man of delicate perceptions in spite of his intrepid daring, and the slight of the Baron's gushing blood made him ill. As a result, though he was not scratched himself, he staggered and seemed about to faint. His second, Colonel Maglone, and the other gentlemen



John A. Hopkins, Esq.

This crude portrait of the man who drank the first cocktail was printed in the Washington Weekly Constitutionalist of December 14, 1848. The Constitutionalist was a weekly of considerable influence and its capital gossip was famous in the forties and early fifties. It occasionally printed bad wood-cuts. It ceased to issue at the beginning of the war.

rushed to his side and took him off at once to the Palo Alto.

"Once there they conducted him to the old tap room and called upon Jack Henderson, who was on watch behind the bar, to set up something stimulating at once.

"Jack, a man of resource, saw that something unusually tempting and powerful was needed. Grabbing up a champagne glass he filled it half full of good old Maryland rye, and then seizing a bottle of bitters he heaved in a few drops. As he stirred up the mixture a bottle of syrup caught his eye and he put in a swig. Then he pushed the mixture forward—and the first Manhattan cocktail in the world was born.

An Historic Scene.

"Mr. Hopkins seized the glass, poured down the liquor and at once recovered. "Another!" he cried, enchanted.

"Jack made the second one with more care and, seized by a happy thought, dropped a brandied cherry into it. Mr. Hopkins gulped it down and then insisted that his friends try the new drink. They were charmed, as might be expected, and when they sat down to breakfast half an hour after they were all in high, good humor.

"Colonel Maglone, who was a celebrated connoisseur of wet goods, said at once that the moment had been an historic one, and soon after caused to be inserted in the old National Intelligencer, a newspaper of the day, an account of the new drink. He proposed that it be called the Royal Jack, in honor of Jack Henderson, its inventor, but somehow the old name of cocktail became attached to it and the cocktail it has been ever since.

"The gentlemen who were actually present when the first cocktail was compounded and swallowed were Mr. Hopkins, Col. Maglone, Mr. Benson and Mr. Allison, with Jack Henderson behind the bar. A few years later, after the new drink had attained world-wide repute, Colonel Maglone employed a Washington artist named Timothy Pollard to make a drawing of the scene. "This drawing was engraved upon wood and copies of the print were given to a limited number of the cognoscenti. The print is now very scarce, and the only one I know of today, aside from my own copy, is in the possession of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

"I also have a copy of an old portrait of Mr. Hopkins, executed by the same Pollard, taken from a weekly paper of the period. There is a contemporary wood cut, very crudely done, of the Palo Alto Hotel in the collection of the Ohio Historical Society.

The Inventor's Career.

"Jack Henderson, at the time of his epoch-making contribution to the mixological sciences, was a man of 35 years. He was a vigorous, handsome fellow, with coal black, curly hair and a long, well-kept mustache.

"Early in the fifties, after the laws against dueling had blasted the prosperity of Bladensburg, he came to Baltimore and was for a while head bartender at the Eutaw House. Ned Herbert, the present manager of the Eutaw House, was then quite a young man and was employed at another hotel in this city. No doubt he remembers old Jack.

"After the war Jack accepted a call to New York, where for a while he was head bartender at the Fifth Avenue Hotel.

Early in the seventies his health failed, and, having amassed a competence, he retired from the active practice of his profession and sailed for Europe. After a tour of several years he returned to this country, settled in Baltimore and married.

"He lived for many years in Waverly, but he was so retiring in manner that few of his neighbors knew much about him. Not one, I believe, knew that he was the inventor of the modern cocktail.

"He died in 1889, leaving a widow and four children. His only son, Leander W. Henderson, is now a practicing physician in Sioux City, Iowa, and the three daughters have married and gone West too.

"Mr. Hopkins, who drank the first cocktail, was a wealthy young Virginian. He did not long survive his distinguished feat, for he was slain in a duel at St. Augustine, Fla., in 1846. He was then 46 years old and unmarried.

"Colonel Maglone, who alone realized the historic significance of the little scene in the old Palo Alto taproom, lived to become a brigadier-general in the army. At the outbreak of the Civil War he was sent to Missouri to buy mules for the commissary department, and there died in 1862.

"Mr. Mattingly survived until 1870, and Messrs. Benson and Allison, who had married sisters—the beautiful Misses Ferguson, of Macon, Ga.—lived until 1883. Then they went down together in the wreck of the ill-fated ship General Stewart, which was lost with all hands off the coast of Yucatan. They were wealthy and enterprising men and owned extensive plantations in Central America.

References In Literature.

"The cocktail spread throughout the world like some gentle pestilence, and by 1850, four years after its invention, it was a favorite drink in all parts of the United States. It was known, too, in England, and Thackeray mentioned it in "The Newcomes," written in 1854. Two years before that our own Nathaniel Hawthorne had immortalized it in "The Blithedale Romance."

"Many other authors have referred to it in their works. Even Walter Pater, purist that he was, has given it a complimentary notice of a few lines. The late Lord Tennyson, it is said, left a manuscript sonnet to the cocktail, but his family deemed it inadvisable to include it in the definitive edition of his works.

"Kipling, Conan Doyle, Zangwill and other later writers have referred to it often, and Miss Marie Correll has written a number of essays about it. It has even crept into foreign literature, and there are references to it in the works and letters of Tolstol, Isben and Gabrielle D'Annunzio.

"Isben, as is well known, drank four cocktails a day during the last 30 years of his life, and ascribed his good health to their virtues. Tolstol is generally supposed to be a rigid teetotaler, but a recent biographer asserts that he frequently takes a Manhattan cocktail before dinner.

"Considering the enormous number of books upon the subject of alcoholic beverages, it is strange that there are so few references to the cocktail. In the monumental French work of L'Ensoez there is not a word upon the subject, and most of the later German alcoholic archaeologists and paleontologists, when they mention the cocktail at all, merely quote Braun and let it go at that.

"In the monthly issues of the *Aromateur Alkoholwissenschaft* since 1880 there have been but six references to the cocktail, and these have thrown no light upon its history.

"I have given you today a brief outline of the truth. No doubt, many an egotistical lowbrow will rise up to call me a nature faker, but I have no fear of the result. When my formal treatise upon the subject is issued the dispute will be over forever."