

THE COHN BROTHERS OF BENDIGO

In 1853, three brothers, Moritz, Julius and Jacob Cohn left their hometown of Horsens in Denmark and sailed in the ship *Antelope* to the southern shores of Australia. On arrival at Port Phillip in August that year they immediately set off for the goldfields of Bendigo. They abandoned their plans of digging for gold and opened a general store in Camp St. that was between the Bendigo Creek and the present day Pall Mall.

In 1854 the brothers, in partnership with Messrs. Wallach and Saloshin, built the *Criterion Hotel* on the corner of Mundy and Hopetoun Streets. (See Grapevine Cutting of Oct. '98) This hotel was acknowledged as the premier hotel of the district with no expense being spared in its furnishings. Apparently this meant it was overcapitalised and after 12 months the business failed and the hotel was sold.

In 1856 the Cohn brothers began making cider, raspberry vinegar, soft drinks and other beverages. They then constructed their *Victoria Brewery* in Bridge Street and began production in 1858. Moritz Cohn then went to Talbot and started up a brewery there in 1861. He sold it in 1872 and returned to Bendigo. Julius Cohn sold his share in the *Victoria Brewery* to Moritz and moved to Melbourne where he started up his own brewery in Latrobe St. opposite the Flagstaff Gardens. He was forced to sell it in 1874 and returned to Bendigo.

By the 1860s the people of Europe and North America began to favour a new type of beer called lager. It was lighter, less intoxicating and more gaseous than the older style beers and porters. (Porter is a dark brown bitter beer brewed from malt, partly charred or browned by drying at high temperatures. It was originally made as a drink for the porters, luggage carriers etc.) This was a beer more suited to the hotter climate of Australia where a long drink was preferable to a strong one. In 1880, aged 18, Julius Cohn, (1862-1919) the eldest son of Moritz Cohn, was sent to the brewing college in Worms, Germany. He returned in 1882 and persuaded the partners to install the necessary equipment to manufacture lager beer. The new product was called Excelsior Lager. The Cohn Bros. Bendigo brewery can be credited with being Australia's first successful commercial brewer of lager beer.

Other breweries soon followed by making lager under their own brand names including one William Foster. In 1887 this William Foster and his brother Ralph arrived in Melbourne from New York bringing with them a German-American who had studied lager brewing in Cologne, Germany. The brothers built a modern brewery in Collingwood with equipment and machinery imported from the U.S.A. Fosters Lager went on sale on 1st Feb. 1889 and was an immediate and obviously a long lasting success.

In addition to the production of ale, lager and beer the Cohn Bros. also made and sold ice, soft drinks, cordials and a new non-alcoholic lager called Tonic Ale. This was later called '9:30 Lager' and then '6 o'clock Lager'. The business became a public company in 1887 and in the following year took over John Wharton's aerated water factory. In 1893 they took over the Bridgewater brewery and continued to expand through acquisitions of aerated water and cordial factories, hotels and wine and spirit outlets. The brewing interests and all their hotels were sold to Carlton & United Breweries Ltd. in 1925 and beer production in Bendigo ceased. Cohn Bros. continued to produce aerated waters, ginger beers, cordials etc. and in the 1970s the company became part of the Coca-Cola Amatil Group. The newly developed offices of Coliban Water now occupy the site.

Julius Cohn died in 1877, aged 50 years. Moritz Cohn died in 1878, aged 55 years. Jacob Cohn died in 1911, aged 80 years. Another brother Henry Cohn (1826-1874) was also involved in the brewing business but to a lesser extent.

Reference: The Breweries of Australia, a History by Keith M. Deutscher
