

# Philadelphia

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*Andr. J. Poir*

## Frederick August Poth



HE well known subject of this brief sketch was born in the village of Walhalben, Rheinfalz, Germany, March 15, 1840, passing his boyhood amid those delightful surroundings that every traveler of that part of Germany knows so well. His father, a dealer in grain and sheep, owned an extensive bakery, besides being a landowner of prominence, gave his son every opportunity to enjoy the educational facilities of his native place. Exhausting these at an unusually early age, he became assistant to his father in the management of the latter's varied enterprises, and was affectionately known in the town as "Raritätche" (Little Rarity). At eighteen years of age he was sent to "Zweibrücken" to secure a commercial education, but soon after his father met with reverses in business, which involved the abandonment of the young man's ambitions in this direction. Quick to realize that his future depended upon his own efforts, he decided to emigrate to America, where so many of his countrymen had already established themselves to their great advantage and profit.

Arriving in the United States in the year 1861, he found a position with a firm of brewers in Philadelphia, Vollmer & Born. His success was rapid, for in 1863 we find him married and established in a small brewing business for himself in the yard of his dwelling at Third and Green streets, Philadelphia, his output for the first year being five hundred barrels. It was not long before this enterprising young German realized that he must lay down lines for himself, at the same time competing with others who had just entered the field. He made it his purpose to produce an article that his competitors could not adversely criticize. As he expressed it, "I will make the best article on the market at a fair price." This he accomplished, establishing a name second to none in the United States in this business.

Like every man of character, his personality was a strong feature of his success. As years went by he developed a keen knowledge of human nature and made for himself a large number of friends who were able and willing to cooperate with him.

Finding his limited quarters inadequate to his rapidly growing business, he rented a building at Schuylkill Falls. But it was not

long before the demand for his product called for still further increased facilities, and he rented a portion of Benz & Reily's brewery, in "Brewerytown," the latter part of 1868 finding him the owner of the entire plant. Two years later, in 1870, he purchased the site of the present plant of F. A. Poth & Sons, Incorporated. A now fully established practical brewer, he was ever on the alert for improvements in methods of manufacture or new inventions in machinery to reduce cost or improve his product. He was one of the first to experiment with refrigerating machinery, but after a large outlay of money and time was compelled to abandon it at its then imperfect stage of development. As illustrating the painstaking care he gave to every detail of his business, when examining this machinery to test its utility and at the same time to be perfectly fair to its designers, he passed his hand across the pipes through which cold air was to be discharged from the air chamber in which it accumulated, but could feel no expulsion of cold air from them. Turning to a friend of his who stood near, he said: "Perhaps it is that my hands being hard are not sensitive enough to feel the current of air; you are bald, put your head down there and see if you can feel any cold air blow on it." He was one of the pioneers in extensive advertising and inaugurated in Philadelphia the use of the elaborate signs now freely used by all brewers.

As his business steadily grew, year after year, he extended his activities in other directions. At the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition in 1876 he rented considerable ground directly opposite the site of the exposition, on which he erected temporary structures and fitted them up as restaurants; but the exposition not fulfilling the expectations of its projectors, his enterprise showed a loss. The unflinching determination that Mr. Poth exhibited throughout his entire business career was strikingly illustrated in this instance, and instead of abandoning this land he had rented for the purpose mentioned, he bought it outright and subsequently erected on it an extensive apartment house, together with a row of attractive residences, not only recouping his early loss on the property but realizing handsome returns on the investment. This group of buildings is known as "Parkside." Another building is the "Brantwood," the city residence of the Poth family. At the time of his death this property formed no inconsiderable portion of his large estate.

In 1887 he turned his business into a corporation, known as the F. A. Poth Brewing Company, subsequently changed to F. A. Poth & Sons, Incorporated, in which his two sons, Frederick J. and William O. were associated with him. William O. Poth has

since died, and the company is managed by Frederick J. Poth, president; Harry A. Poth, secretary and treasurer. The youngest son, Frank Poth, will enter the management on attaining his majority. The brewery is situated at Thirty-first and Thirty-second streets and Jefferson street, Philadelphia, and in its buildings, equipment, output and quality of product is considered a model in this industry in the United States. Its capacity is five hundred thousand barrels a year.

Mr. Poth was a generous employer, paying on an average the highest wages in this industry in Philadelphia. His consideration for his men was at once paternal and brotherly. He felt that in a great measure he was responsible for their happiness, contentment and general wellbeing. In 1887 a strike was brought about affecting all brewing establishments in the locality known as "Brewerytown." The demands of the workmen were for shorter hours, which while opposed by some of the brewers, Mr. Poth was ready to grant. Unfortunately, however, the strikers showed a disposition to assume an arrogant attitude, which at once animated Mr. Poth to take the lead in combating threatened intimidation or undue influence on himself or his colleagues. Throwing all the force of his personality, determination and diplomacy into the fight he succeeded in bringing about an amicable settlement between men and employers, receiving not only the gratitude of his colleagues but of the men also, ultimately.

On October 1, 1895, a jubilee was held, arranged for entirely unknown to him, to commemorate the event of the enormous production of a single establishment from such modest beginnings as above shown. Strange as it may seem, this celebration was made a carnival, lasting for a fortnight, when brewers and distillers from all parts of the world were entertained by him and his sons. It was a conspicuous incident in the history of the city of Philadelphia and made the name of Poth known in every part of the country.

For thirty years previous to his death in 1905, Philadelphia saw among its leaders in commerce and industry no more potent and interesting personality than Frederick A. Poth. In fact, there was no other brewer in the country during that period that commanded the attention he did. He was easily the primate of his profession. Apart from his indomitable will power, his early success was largely due to the fact that he wisely selected a portion of Philadelphia that was destined to grow rapidly, its development being fostered and nurtured by his virility. From the time of establishing his first plant there he exploited that wholesome and prosperous portion of Phila-

delphia, then known as "Northwest Philadelphia," or "Brewerytown," which latter name it still more or less retains.

While Mr. Poth was one of the most prominent men in Philadelphia in commercial affairs, his business ventures involving the investment of large sums of money, he was the unidentified director or adviser of the operations of the various corporations and societies in which he was interested. His extensive real estate and building operations contributed largely to the development of "Greater Philadelphia," and particularly that part of it lying adjacent to Memorial Hall and Parkside avenue and Viola street. He was vice president of the Integrity Title Insurance, Trust & Safe Deposit Company, the success of which was largely due to his ability as a financier. He never made a promise, direct or implied, that he did not fulfill. His word was his bond. In financial circles in Philadelphia and elsewhere he was a prominent factor. He was broad minded, liberal in thought and action and sought to help others to succeed as he had done. In the prosecution of his commercial affairs, or in the social humanitarian objects with which he connected himself he showed the same determination that brought him his first success, and he never neglected a detail that could help to foster and attain his end. He was a man of ability, possessing a remarkably keen discernment in business affairs. Success with him was not the result of accident. In looking at his record one is filled with admiration for the courage, industry and integrity from which such small beginnings were turned by him into such magnificent results. The source of his success was first his strength of will, next his personality, and then his intuitive knowledge of human nature improved by observation and experience. His charity was intelligent and discriminating. Many a poor, young man he brought from Germany is now a prosperous mechanic, merchant or manufacturer.

He was a man of simple tastes, loved nature in all its aspects, and was never happier than when surrounded by his dogs, horses and cattle on his farm at Norristown, Pennsylvania. This property he purchased some years ago. It was a barren waste but afforded a magnificent view of the surrounding country. At a large outlay of money he had it graded and laid out an extensive lawn, leading up to the eminence on which was to be erected a handsome residence. He built large barns to house the herd of seventy-five Holstein-Friesen cattle which he later acquired. He put the same enthusiasm into his farming that he had into his business and determined to secure the greatest yield per acre. His stock was only of the best, his farming implements and appliances the latest. Not satisfied with bring-

ing this tract of land under perfect cultivation he purchased one after another many surrounding farms which he brought up to the same state of perfection that made his first farm a model one.

While in every sense of the word a loyal, patriotic American citizen, he never forgot the land of his birth and the scenes of his childhood and early youth. During the later years of his life he made annual visits to his birthplace, and it was while on these pilgrimages to the Fatherland that some of his large benefactions were made. He sought to learn what public improvements his native town was most in need of and provided them—an aqueduct, a church, a school house.

A self-made man, he exemplified during his life-time all the traits that distinguish a determined and self-reliant character, softened by a true humanitarian spirit, a tender family love and inborn generous impulses. His death on January 21, 1905, came with almost as great a shock to the community and those who knew him intimately as it did his devoted employes and sorrowing family.

The buildings occupied by F. A. Poth & Sons, Incorporated, cover nearly two square blocks from Thirty-first to Glenwood avenue, and from Oxford to Jefferson streets, Philadelphia. The brew-house is five stories in height, seventy-five feet on Thirty-first street and sixty feet on Jefferson street, and is built of stone, brick, iron and concrete only, and like all the other structures, is absolutely fire-proof.

On the first floor, and extending into the cellar, are four immense brine-tanks, in which the necessary brine for circulation in the refrigerating pipes of the storage-house is stored. In the center of this building the majestic staircase extends to the full height of the structure. On the second floor, the two five hundred-barrel hop jacks are placed, as also the brew-house engine. On an intermediate staging above this floor are the supports for the two three hundred and fifty-barrel steam kettles. Upon another entresol above the kettles are the two mash-tubs, in which the infusion of malt is made, the stirring devices of which are operated from the kettle floor. On the fourth floor are two malt hoppers, rice tubs and a copper hot-water tub of eight hundred barrels capacity, as well as a cold water tub of equal size, elevated into the dome.

The mill-house is in the rear of the brewery, and contains the machinery required to clean and grind the malt required in brewing. Next to the mill-house, on Thirty-first street side is the malt storagehouse, having a capacity of one hundred and twenty thousand bushels of malt, which is arranged with machinery to automatically deliver, store, convey and otherwise handle the malt.

A second building adjoins the brew-house on the Jefferson street front and to the west. On the ground floor are the four one hundred-ton "Consolidated" refrigerating machines, which are a refrigeration equivalent to the melting of four hundred tons of ice per twenty-four hours. The finish of this room is in marble and Spanish-glazed tiling, with bronze trimmings, rails, etc. On the second floor are the condensers, enormous stands of piping in which the compressed refrigerant is condensed and delivered in liquid condition in the storage-house on the opposite side of the street. The third floor is surrounded by a hipped roof, and contains the "surface cooler."

On the north side of Jefferson street is the storage-house, four stories in height, with cellar and an additional central gable. This entire building is used for fermentation and storage of beer only. Adjoining the refrigerated storage-house on the Jefferson street front are the stables. This building is V-shaped, having a front of two hundred feet on Thirty-first street and two hundred and fifty on Glenwood avenue, and is three stories in height; the lower being for wagon storage; the second floor throughout for stalls to accommodate one hundred and forty to one hundred and fifty horses; the third floor contains the hay-lofts, harness-cleaning and repair-shops, blanket-drying and storage-rooms, and other auxiliaries of a modern stable.

On the southwest corner of Thirty-first and Jefferson street is the boiler-house, which contains a battery of five two hundred horse-power boilers. Separated from the brew-house and boiler-house by a neat park, stands the magnificent office building. On the first floor center is the main office, in which are the bookkeepers, clerks and office force. To the right and left of this room in the rear are the private offices of the firm, and in the rear is a reception room. On the second floor are the collectors' rooms, and a third chamber devoted to the business uses of the office. In the basement are the kitchen, dining-room and cosy "Bier-stube."

### Frederick J. Both

There is no stronger proof of Philadelphia's business opportunities and conditions and the attractiveness of the city as a place of residence than the fact that a large percentage of its prosperous business men are those who claim the city as the place of their nativity and have spent the greater part of their lives here, enjoying the advantages offered for progress in many ways. A representative of



this class is Frederick J. Poth now the president of F. A. Poth & Sons, Incorporated, brewers.

He was born here March 20, 1869, and is a son of Frederick A. and Helena M. Poth, whose sketch precedes this. Spending his youthful days in his parents' home, Frederick J. Poth attended the public schools to the age of fourteen years, after which he entered the Nazareth Hall Academy, where he also spent two years. In further preparation for life's practical and responsible duties he entered Pierce's Business College, in which he remained as a student for two years, after which he went to Reading, Pennsylvania, where for one year he occupied a position with the Reading Brewing Company. He next went to New York and engaged with the Eblings Brewing Company for a year. Returning on the expiration of that period to Philadelphia he joined his father in the brewing business as foreman of the plant and also had charge of the office. After his father's death he was elected president and has been very successful in the control and management of the business, which is now of large and profitable proportions, employment being furnished to one hundred and thirty-five men, while the capacity of the plant is five hundred thousand barrels per year.

Mr. Poth was married in Philadelphia to Miss Mary C. Clarke, and they have two children. Frederick Clarke, two years of age; and Gilbert Leslie, who is in his first year. In his political views Mr. Poth is an earnest republican. He belongs to various German societies, in which he is popular, and he also holds membership with the Red Men and with the Masons. In the latter organization he has attained high rank, belonging to William G. Hamilton Lodge, A. F. & A. M.; Freeman Chapter, R. A. M.; Pennsylvania Commandery, K. T., and Lu Lu Temple of the Mystic Shrine. While he entered upon a business already established he has displayed an initiative spirit in further extending its interests and his life record proves that success is not a matter of genius, as held by some, but is rather the outcome of clear judgment, experience and indefatigable energy.

### **Harry A. Poth**

Harry A. Poth, secretary and treasurer of the F. A. Poth Sons Company, owning and conducting a successful brewing plant in Philadelphia, was born in Atlantic City, New Jersey, July 11, 1881, and is a son of Frederick A. and Helena M. Poth. His father was the founder of the business, which is now being carried on by his sons.

Harry A. Poth

Reared in his parents' home Harry A. Poth attended the William Penn Charter school until 1898, after which he was graduated from the Pennsylvania Military Academy with the class of 1902. He then spent six months as a student in the Wallerstein Brewing Institution, after which he went to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where he engaged with the Lancaster Brewing Company for two months and obtained practical experience of the brewing business. He then returned to Philadelphia and engaged with his father and following the death of his father was elected, in January, 1905, to the office of secretary and treasurer. The company has a very large local business, although they make some shipments to New Jersey. That they receive the support of their home town is indicative of the excellence of their product and the high standing of the company in a business way. On the 19th of October, 1910, Mr. Poth was married in Philadelphia to Mary P. Skelly.

