



# The ARMIGER'S *News*

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## CIGAR BOX HERALDRY

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There is perhaps no better way to portray the 'capitalist class' than dressed in tails, a top hat, and smoking a cigar. In some cases it appears that the model for the figure is Winston Churchill, who was photographed many times posing with his fuming attribute. It is difficult to tell if the cigar smoking caricature is a badge of infamy, or a clever ploy to divert attention away from health risks and onto an idealized vision of an elite lifestyle. As with so many things, context is everything. The phrase "close but no cigar" comes from the tradition of giving a cigar as a prize. Cigars have come to represent different things to different people, and in the modern world their advertising has drawn upon a rich store of history.

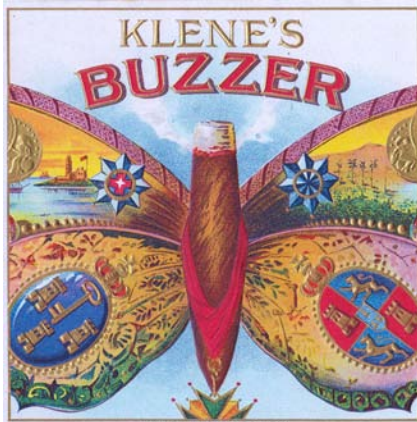


Fig. 1

(although not as often as wines). The way they do this is a little different from wine, but before considering this aspect it is perhaps best to digress and discuss the history of the cigar. Smoking tobacco originated in the southern part of the New World. The term for smoking rolled tobacco used by the Mayans was *sikar*.<sup>1</sup> There are depictions of ancient Mayans smoking rolled tobacco. According to early Spanish accounts, native people on the island of Cuba smoked a primitive form of cigar. The island, as is well known, became a major producer of cigars. The Spanish *cigarra* ('cicada') is likely a derivation of the Mayan word. Both the insect and a dried roll of tobacco have a similar shape. Columbus and his men are generally credited with the introduction of tobacco to the



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

It is interesting to speculate why the British preferred smoking in pipes. While the issue is far from solved, it seems that smoking tobacco in pipes was a custom of native North Americans. One of the earliest industries in Jamestown, and perhaps the earliest printing in America, is on clay pipes.<sup>2</sup> In 1614 John Rolfe, the husband of Pocahontas, sent the first successful tobacco harvest to England. He obtained tobacco seeds from Caribbean species, as the local tobacco, *Nicotiana rustica*, grown by the Indians, did not taste as good. At this time these seeds would have been hard to obtain. Selling tobacco to non-Spaniards was a capital offense. One of the personalized pipes, with the name to Sir Walter Raleigh stamped on it, was found in Jamestown. During this time Raleigh was likely incarcerated in the Tower of London. Although he did encourage the settlement on Roanoke Island (modern North Carolina) he was not associated with Jamestown. In any case Raleigh is credited with popularizing tobacco smoking via pipes in England. Making a pipe for him may



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

Old World. Cigars spread through the western Mediterranean, almost certainly under the guidance of the historical figure Jean Nicot - who gave his name to nicotine - the French ambassador to Portugal. Smoking became familiar throughout Europe, but in some countries like Britain tobacco was put into pipes.

have been a tribute to his patronage of smoking, or perhaps a plea for him to support Jamestown. History suggests that - at least at first - the British/American culture did not embrace smoking cigars. The result is that when cigars were smoked in America they were



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

associated with an exotic, and non-Anglo-Saxon, culture. This tradition is reflected in the origins of the finest tobacco, which was Cuba. Many American producers of tobacco who would go on to claim a legitimate or imaginary connection with Havana.

Prior roughly to the Civil War cigars in America were commonly sold singularly, but they could also be bought in bulk and tied into bundles of 25 or 50 cigars which were all tied together with a ribbon. There were no brand names on the cigars then, but this would change. The popularity of cigar smoking suddenly surged during the Civil War. While some have suggested that stress led to more smoking, as during the second world war, there are other factors as well. General Grant was a visible smoker. Before the war he apparently smoked a pipe, but during the war he switched to cigars. He obviously did not mind images of him smoking a cigar to be released in the media. Perhaps, like Churchill, he was drawing upon the inherent phallic imagery of the cigar. After the Civil War, cigar smoking rose in popularity so that there were a number of different producers in America. Tobacco rollers could practice their trade at home. Somewhat surprisingly, there were many rollers in New York, a place not now associated with producing cigars. By 1900 there were many thousand producers and many small shops that rolled and sold their own brands. In an attempt to recover debts incurred by the war, the US government decided to place a tax upon cigars, and this required that there be a definite quantity that would be taxed. Cigars were placed in boxes which were secured by a tax stamp.<sup>3</sup> At first the cigar box housed bundles of cigars which were tied with ribbon. They were made of wood and had a lid that could be nailed shut. It was essential that the box be made tamper proof, as a seller could restock a box with un-taxed cigars and



Fig. 8

therefore circumvent the tax. Therefore a box could represent the products of a number of different people. This includes the tobacco, the roller, the box maker, and the producer of the label. Some labels have the maker's name inconspicuously at the bottom (where it is noted it will be recorded with the figures). Cigar makers of the 1870's capitalized on the fact that the box lids could be used to advertise the contents. Labels were applied to the inside lid that would be left open. It is no surprise that producers spared no expense to make their labels stand out, and soon they literally did with embossed paper. Bright colors and metal foil were also used to decorate what would become prime examples of the printer's art. Given the relative expense of cigars, that considerable effort was made to make the labels as attractive as possible (unlike many other consumables one may purchase in a general goods store).<sup>4</sup>

Cigar label collecting reached a peak in the heady 1990's, when cigar smoking was extolled and before smoking was largely banned from bars and restaurants. It was also a time when it seemed collectables of all kinds would do nothing but appreciate in value. As a result, many labels were found, in pristine unused condition, in former factories, warehouses, and smoke shops. Prices for labels went up during the decade. Many labels rose in value, which stimulated more to be found. Eventually the market stabilized to where it is today.<sup>5</sup> There were so many producers that there are a myriad of themes to collect. Women are of course a popular theme, but there are also military, patriotic, and even humorous labels. The idea of using colorful lithographic labels, started when Ramon Allones, a Galician immigrant to Cuba. He used this new media for the brand he started in 1837. The open lid soon become the visual fly paper for the honey trap. The industry grew apace during the 19th century, and other brands soon adopted this idea.<sup>6</sup> Tobacco is still grown in the New World, and in the 19th century there were a welter of producers in the eastern United States. Now of course China has entered the tobacco market as a bulk producer, but it seems the New

Queen Seal Cigar Label. The label features a central illustration of a queen and a seal. Text includes 'QUEEN SEAL'.



Fig. 10

Montebello Cigar Label. The label features a central illustration of a shield with a crown and stars. Text includes 'MONTEBELLO'.



Fig. 9



Fig. 11

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World is the major producer of tobacco used in high end cigars. However, the printing process owes much to Germany.

Stone Lithography has a fascinating history. Aloys Senfelder was born in Prague in 1771. A lawyer with a first love of acting, he ran into trouble after a play he wrote was late due to the printer's fault. Hand-engraved copper plates took too much time to prepare, and they soon wore out. Working with Bavarian limestone, he invented a much more efficient method that became popular. Unlike previous printmaking techniques like engraving, which required advanced craft skills, lithography was more accurate. The artist can draw directly onto the stone plate with familiar pens.<sup>7</sup> The first private U.S. concern to sell stone produced prints was Currier & Ives, which is still justly famous for its designs. Using stones, sometimes as many as 25 different ones, hues and tints could be achieved. Tiny dots of color could also be used to convey shading. However, the images did not come without cost, as a number of different specialists could be involved. "Each label could involve a dozen highly skilled specialists, take a month to create and cost upwards of \$6000.00 (1900's dollars) to produce. Stone lithography's biggest problem was in the use of the stones. The Bavarian limestones were 3-4 inches thick, ranged in size from 6 x 8" to 44 x 62" in area and weighing up to 600 pounds each. By 1892 lithographers were using 38 ton presses and precision machined dies to emboss many of their labels. The embossing process highlighted the raised portions of the label with 22K gold or bronze leaf."<sup>8</sup> However, by the 1920s cheaper metal plates were used for printing. Labels were soon simplified so that fewer colors were used.

To return briefly to Cuba, which many would regard as the natural home of cigars, American sanctions have now made Cuban cigars forbidden fruit. President Kennedy seems to have wanted to exempt cigars: "We tried to exempt cigars," John Kennedy told me in early 1961 when I brought him the order that imposed an embargo on trade with Cuba, "but the cigar manufacturers in Tampa objected. I guess we're out of luck." As is well known, real property was seized in Cuba when Castro came to power in 1959. Some growers moved to other places, such as Florida or the Dominican Republic, and continued to make cigars and continuing their brand names. Romeo y Julieta, La Gloria Cubana, Montecristo among others, exist in both Cuba and the Dominican Republic. There is a brewing legal battle when or if Cuba joins various world intellectual property law conventions. Well-known brands that were seized by Cuban authorities also continued, and many lesser known brands simply disappeared. Since the revolution there were some foreign firms operating in Cuba to produce cigars, but due to regulation they have now shifted operations away from the island.<sup>10</sup> Some former Cuban companies produce cigars in the U.S. and advertise them as 'Cuban' because they are made by refugee Cubans. Many of the modern advertisements from 'refugee producers' harken back to Cuba, Havana in particular.

Havana's arms have a clear relationship with the arms of Spain. The current arms of the King of Spain follow a long and relatively continuous tradition. The royal arms are similar to the arms of the Spanish state and affiliated bodies. The shield of the Royal arms is divided into four quarters, and blazoned: 1st, gules a castle or, triple-embattled and voided gate and windows, with three towers each triple-turreted, of the field, masoned sable and ajoure azure, which is for Castile; 2nd, argent a lion rampant purpure crowned or, langued and armed, of the second, which is for León; 3rd, or, four pallets gules, which is for Aragon; 4th, gules a cross, saltire and orle of chains linked together or, a centre point vert, which is for Navarre; Argent enté en point, with a pomegranate proper seeded gules, supported, sculpted and leafed in two leaves vert, which is for Granada. Inescutcheon azure bordure gules, three fleurs-de-lys or, which is for Bourbon-Anjou.<sup>11</sup> A few labels draw upon The arms of Castile and Leon in particular. The arms of

Castile and Leon depict the traditional arms of Castile (the yellow castle) quartered with the arms of Leon (the red lion). The lion design is attributed to Alfonso VII, king of Castile and Leon in 1126. The castle is attributed to his grandson Alfonso VIII. In 1230, Ferdinand III united the two kingdoms and quartered the arms as a symbol of the union. The arms of Castile and Leon appear in the modern arms of Los Angeles, California,<sup>12</sup> as well as in the governor's seal of Alabama (and many other places as well). The Viceroyalty of New Spain was a viceroyalty of the crown of Castile. It was formed in 1535 and comprised the territories from North America and the Caribbean to the Philippines.

King Philip II of Spain granted Havana the title of City in 1592 and a royal decree in 1634 officially designated it the "Key to the New World and Rampart of the West Indies." Many arms on cigar box labels are based on the arms of Havana, which in turn are clearly influenced by the arms of Spain, but the underlying history is different. The three castles on the arms of Havana represent three fortifications which defended the city: Fuerza Castle, the Morro Castle and the Punta Castle. The castles also clearly can be understood as relating to the Kingdom of Castille. Because Havana was the gateway to the Spanish New World, there is a key in a blue background (representing the ocean).<sup>13</sup> Of course the symbol has other meanings to Catholics as well. Christ is often depicted as handing the 'keys of the kingdom' to Saint Peter. The Symbol would have had particular resonance in an age where wars of religion were commonplace in the wake of the Reformation.

As is clear from the saga of cigars, Spain had a very important role to play, with Cuba and Havana in particular having the major role. In contrast, Britain and Anglo-America came into the game late, and as a result even for cigars made in America they can harken back to a Latin heritage. This is not a hard and fast rule, as clearly other heraldic traditions can play a role. Indeed, even when heraldry in a strict sense not represented, there can still be some echoes in the arrangement of designs. Everyday life suggests – to those who challenge the relevance of heraldry in the modern world – that it is very much alive and adapting to new situations. Sigmund Freud had a long love affair with cigars. He reputedly smoked 20 cigars a day. It has been claimed that his colleagues challenged him on the 'phallic' shape of the cigar. Freud is supposed to have replied "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar." There are no records of such a conversation ever having taken place.<sup>14</sup> As is the case with many historical figures, the quote is simply too good not to associate with them. However, while a cigar is just what it is, the advertising label is – particularly to a non-smoker – far more interesting. With a wealth of rich colors accentuated with a richly embossed design, they can be very beautiful. When it contains heraldry, it is even more interesting still.

## Figures

1. Klene's Buzzer (title and design owned by H.A. Klene, Quincy, ILL). There are many cigar box labels that are both creative and colorful, but on many levels this is one of the most visually interesting. The butterfly wings (it may have been even more interesting as a cicada) are decorated with various arms. Modified Havana is on the left with three castles and a key. The right bears the modified arms of Castille and Leon (with three castles in an inescutcheon). The body of the insect has a ribbon which supports what looks like an order of chivalry. Clearly the advertiser was aware of the power of heraldic symbols to lend an air of exclusivity.
2. Companita (Heywood, Strasser & Voight Litho Co, NY) is a wonderful name for a cigar company. Tinker Bell of Peter Pan fame is called *Campanilla* in Spain, and *Campanita* in Hispanic America. The supporter on the left bears a caduceus, the staff carried by Hermes in Greek mythology.

The same staff was also borne by heralds in general, for example by Iris, the messenger of Hera. It is a short staff entwined by two serpents, sometimes topped by wings. The Roman Mercury, the messenger of the gods, was also the guide of the dead and protector of merchants, shepherds, gamblers, liars, and thieves. For some reason the caduceus is often mistakenly used as a symbol of the medical profession. The rod of Asclepius (the true patron of medicine) has only one snake and is never depicted with wings. The arms on this label appear to be modified from Spain/Havana.

3. La Credencia's arms have a single castle which likely harken back to the three castles on Havana's arms as well as to Castille.
4. Clarendon's arms, supported by griffons, incorporates many symbols of interest. The castle, lion, and fleur-de-lis is clearly from Spain/Havana. The harp almost certainly refers to Ireland. The harp was adopted as the symbol of the new Kingdom of Ireland under Henry VIII in 1541. The symbol was almost certainly seen as being a widely recognized one even then. The harp was displayed in the unified Royal Coats of Arms of England, Ireland and Scotland upon the Union of the Crowns of the three kingdoms in 1603. The harp was adopted as the emblem of the Irish State in 1922, although this label may be earlier.
5. Garcia's arms clearly follow the Spanish (fleur-de-lis) and the Havana (key and castles) tradition. The feathers on top of the helmet are typical of Spanish heraldry.
6. Castle Hall depicts what appears to be one of the fortifications of Havana. The arms depict a lion and a castle in shields on either side, which could refer to Castille and Leon.
7. Lord Roberts has modified arms from Spain/Havana, and has them pierced by halberds.
8. The Red Swan has a very pleasing design not based upon the Spanish/Havana arms. The swan is a popular symbol used in heraldry. Perhaps the best example is the so called 'Dunstable Swan' made in England or France in about 1400 and now in room 40 of the British Museum. It was excavated in 1965 on the site of Dunstable Friary (about 30 miles north of London), and is presumed to have been intended as a livery badge of the future Henry V of England, who was Prince of Wales from 1399.
9. Montebello's arms do not follow heraldic rules and are not particularly memorable. The name, Italian for 'beautiful mountain' would have been a much better theme.
10. Queen Seal's advertisement is in a modified shield/frame that is surmounted by a crown which is flanked by supporters. It is 'sealed' by arms which have a tiny lion (left) and a star/moon (right).
11. Blue Ribbon (M.H. Sevis & Son, Springvale, PA). The top has a crown like structure which not in fact a crown (lions on either side of a staff or modified caduceus). The ribbon design must refer to the ribbons associated with cigars. On the bottom is a tiny, almost vestigial shield with a single castle.

## Notes

1. A team of Tampa University scientists working in SE Guatemala has unearthed a large cache of 828 pre-Columbian cigars from a Ch'orti' Maya cave site. Some of them were auctioned off and could still be smoked after at least 600 years. See the website: <http://www.prlog.org/11838165-famous-smoke-to-auction-pre-columbian-mayan-cigars.html>. The entire collection sold for \$507,000 to Gary Liotta, owner of the Santiago Cigar Factory. The story does not end here, however: "...Incredibly, the master roller for Santiago Cigar Factory, Mr. Amadeo Bonilla, claims that he is directly descended from the makers of these ancient cigars! This was confirmed by a family seal found pressed into the clay humidor containing these cigars - an emblem that Mr. Bonilla's family continues to use to this day." This very interesting claim can be found on: <http://forums.cigaraficionado.com/eve/forums/a/tpc/f/6346086/m/6867040142>.
2. Paula Neely "400-Year-Old Personalized Pipes Found at Jamestown: Indian-English designs may bear earliest known printing in English America": <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/11/101129-jamestown-personalized-pipes-virginia-history-colonial-america/>
3. Tony Hyman, "Taxes in the U.S. 1791-1868, How cigar taxes came about": [http://cigarhistory.info/Taxes/Tax\\_history.html](http://cigarhistory.info/Taxes/Tax_history.html)
4. Many label makers produced excellent labels, see the National Cigar History Exhibits: "Patriotic themes": [http://cigarhistory.info/Cigar-box\\_THEMES/Patriotic.html](http://cigarhistory.info/Cigar-box_THEMES/Patriotic.html); "Fraternal Orders" [http://cigarhistory.info/Cigar-box\\_THEMES/Fraternal\\_orders.html](http://cigarhistory.info/Cigar-box_THEMES/Fraternal_orders.html)
5. The "Cigar Label Price Guide" has excellent images as well as values: <http://www.cigarlabelpriceguide.com/Cigar-Box-Label-A.html>
6. See the small but interesting website (the articles by Anwer Ali Khan): <http://www.cigarsoftware.com/box-lb.html>
7. Martyn Lyons "Books: A Living History" Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011, p. 135.
8. See the excellent site by Chip Brooks, "Cigar Box Junkie": <http://www.cigarlabeljunkie.com/Html/StoneLith.html>
9. Richard Goodwin, "President Kennedy's Plan for Peace with Cuba" July 05, 2000 *New York Times* <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/07/05/opinion/president-kennedy-s-plan-for-peace-with-cuba.html>
10. Tad Gage, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Cigars*, 2007, pp. 78-80.
11. "Armas de Su Majestad el Rey,": [http://www.casareal.es/ES/FamiliaReal/rej/Paginas/rej\\_armas.aspx](http://www.casareal.es/ES/FamiliaReal/rej/Paginas/rej_armas.aspx)
12. "The City seals of the city of Los Angeles": [http://www.lacity.org/stellent/groups/lacity/@lacity/documents/contributor\\_web\\_content/lacityp\\_023683.pdf](http://www.lacity.org/stellent/groups/lacity/@lacity/documents/contributor_web_content/lacityp_023683.pdf)
13. See the website by Nigel Hunt: <http://www.cubaflags.com/>. It is an excellent discussion of Cuban heraldry with images.
14. An excellent site for this and many other suspect quotes is: <http://quoteinvestigator.com/2011/08/12/just-a-cigar/>



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