

# A TOAST TO CRUMBLING BUILDING'S BETTER DAYS

**D**on House recalls how his grandfather, Hollister Hessler, used to boast about the tin factory he owned at 921-25 N. State St.

"It's the best location in town," he'd say. "There's a railroad in front and the canal (Oswego) in back." He's glad Hollister isn't around — he died in 1929 — to see the ruin it has become.

This is the property the city and the state of New York argue over. Who pays the bill for demolition? It may collapse and tumble onto the nearby interstate. Meanwhile, a section of I-81 North remains closed, tying rush-hour traffic in horrific knots.

The building has an interesting history. The canal now is I-81 North, the rail line torn up.

Once, according to Don House, this neighborhood was one of Syracuse's most "beautiful." Now, well, we know about the modern mess. "I'm very depressed," Don explained. He's 80 and retired from the retail clothing business.

The big, brick, five-story temple of industry seems to have come to life in 1888 as the National Brewery Co., a company that included the three sons of brewer Benedict Haberle as trustees. Syracuse brewery historian Ron Wolf pointed me to



Courtesy Ron Wolf

**THIS IS** an engraving of a five-story brick building that opened in 1888 as the National Brewery Co. Later, other things were made there, including metal mailboxes, tin ceilings, roof flanges and cookstoves.

"Bottoms Up!" a pamphlet about the brewing industry of Syracuse published by the Onondaga Historical Association.

In 1900, Haberle assumed complete ownership of National and the

plant on State Street "ended production." This apparently was when Don's grandfather, Hollister Hessler, bought the building to use as a factory, making tin products for his hardware store at North Salina and Butternut streets (now the site of HSBC Bank).

Don said the new owners made changes in the brewery: They replaced a steam station and added a stable and a park. Here H.E. Hessler Co. manufactured one of his grandfather's inventions, the "Hessler Rural Mail Box" and the McGuire Adjustable Roof Flange, a standard piece of hardware on homes of the period. "They were the largest manufacturer of mailboxes in the country," Don says proudly.

The original mailbox created by Hessler was 20 inches

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Gary Waits / The Post-Standard

**THIS IS** what the condemned building at 921-925 N. State St., in Syracuse, looks like now. It is in danger of collapsing into the northbound lane of Interstate 81.

# Brewery, Tin Factory, Rubble

## **BREWERY, FROM PAGE A-3**

long, rounded at the bottom and had a lid that flipped up, according to Don, who recently bought one on the Internet with the help of a friend, Coy Ludwig. The government changed the design of rural mailboxes in the early 1900s to the conventional boxes we see today. Hessler continued to make the boxes at the Syracuse plant next to the canal.

The company also made tin for ceilings and Andy's cookstoves. If you

want to see a sample of a Hessler tin ceiling, look up at Riley's on Park Street. Don's dad, Hollister House, installed it.

Don's family has another interesting line: the Houses, his dad's people. This began with Louis House, Don's great-grandfather, who moved to Syracuse and started a successful beverage company in 1870. Perhaps House's best-known drink was ginger ale, which evolved from the original spruce beer, which came in returnable

stoneware bottles. House made a lager beer and a line of flavored soft drinks at a plant at State and North Salina streets.

The family sold House's to Ma's Beverages in the 1950s. Hessler hardware was a victim of the Depression. Don's father spun off the tin shop, which continues today as House Sheet Metal Co., 1227 W. Genesee St. The big factory on State Street was sold.

Its most recent incarnation was as a motorcycle shop.