



Fig. 3

Bottle caps are among America's favorite collectibles. Ah yes, just go to [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com) on the Internet and indicate you want to see bottle caps for sale. Today, as an example, there are 852 lots (groupings), of bottle caps for sale. Since they are crown caps they are mostly from soft drink and beer bottles. Go figure...

As most bottle collectors do know, the first Crown Cap was invented by William Painter of Baltimore, Maryland in 1892 and was a metal enclosure with a cork lining. As most bottle collectors do not know, the initial caps were purchased and used by the American Brewing Co. of Baltimore, Maryland. Several hundred cases of American Brewing Co. beer were used as ballast in a ship bound for London and when the ship returned the bottles were still full with their Crown Caps intact. Again, go figure...

(Over the next 10-20 years, after 1892, nearly all beer and soda bottles had a crown cap. The cork liner remained in place until the mid- to late-1960s when it was replaced by a plastic or vinyl lining. Today the aluminum screw top and plastic screw top have replaced many of the traditional crowns.)

### Katzenjammer Kids "COMICAPS"

While attending one of the annual bottle and collectibles shows in Las Vegas, I found six full-color bottle caps that I fell in love with. But I felt they were greatly overpriced at \$15 apiece. I laughed to myself and walked away. But having learned the lesson many years ago about not buying something I really wanted and then regretting the decision for months and sometimes years later, I decided not to put myself through the inevitable misery. I went back to the dealer. We dickered a bit and he let me acquire the bottle caps for the "bargain" price of all six for \$80. I hugged my conscience with the rationalization that I had "saved" \$10 in the deal.

At the end of the day I showed the caps to my wife. Of course, she asked how much they had cost me. I was going to lie about the price but decided quickly to tell her the truth. She winced, as I would have had the circumstances been reversed, but said nothing. She's good that way. I have learned to treat her indulgences at Neiman Marcus with the same courtesy. I think that has taught each of us the self-control necessary to carry on a marriage between a collector and a shopper. But I digress...

The bottle caps are not just bottle caps. They are caps featuring most of the famous comic strip characters from "The Katzenjammer Kids" drawn by Rudolph Dirks. From close examination of the bottle caps I quickly learned they were copyrighted in 1935 and were part of a series used on bottles of Goldenrod Beer and Goldenrod Ale of Brooklyn, New York.

To me the caps were so fascinating I spent over a year tracking down the history of them and the brewery (see chronology at end of article) that selected them for its beer. It has been a great trip and one that readers might find interesting. For me, just collecting isn't enough. I am joyously compelled to research and write about the things I collect. Dessert is sharing the results.

According to the Crown Cap Museum: <http://www.geocities.com/crowncapmuseum/katzenja.htm> "... the Katzenjammer

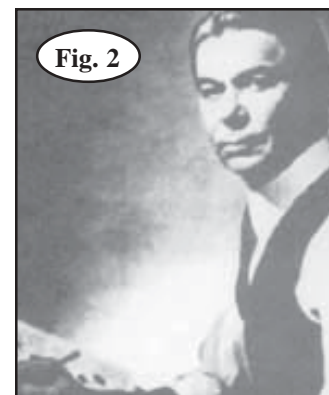
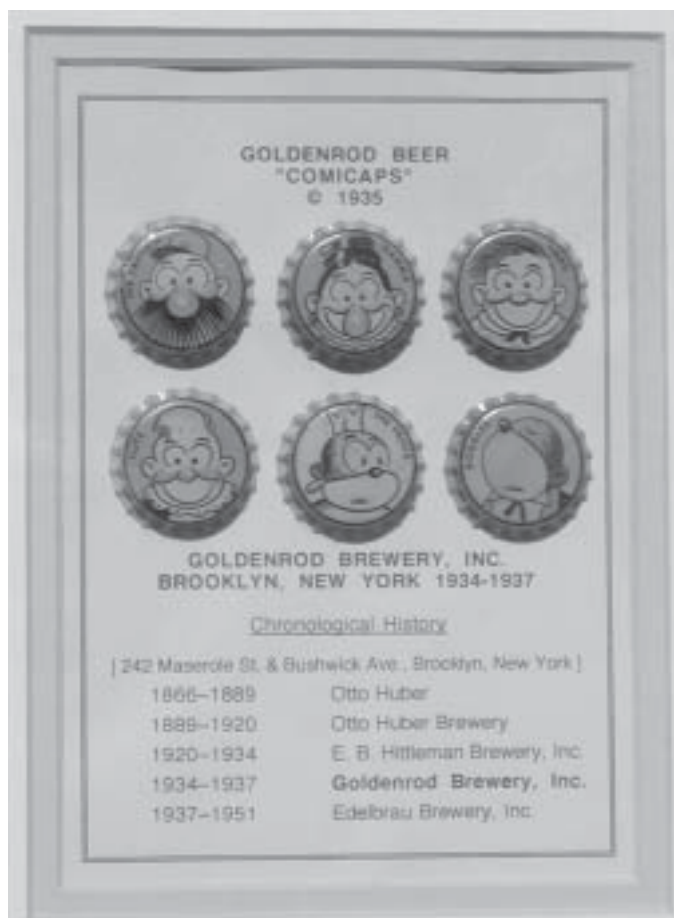


Fig. 2

Kids Comicaps are one of the rarest sets [of bottle caps] in the world. They were produced for Goldenrod's Beer and Ale products during the years 1935 and 1936. There are a total of 8 crowns in the set: Hans, Fritz, Mamma, the Captain, Boggles, the Prince, the Inspector, and the Director" – (Figure 1).

### The Comic Strip

The creator of the Katzenjammer Kids was Rudolph Dirks (Figure 2) who was born in 1877 in Heinde, Germany. His family came to America in 1884 settling in Chicago. His cartoons appeared in *Judge* magazine as early as 1894, and *Life* magazine shortly thereafter. In 1897



he found his way to Hearst's *Journal American* where he was asked by editor Rudolph Block to create a strip that would compete with the Yellow Kid at Joseph Pulitzer's *The World*.

Dirks suggested his version of Germany's Max und Moritz, a very successful comic strip in Germany. The Katzenjammer Kids first appeared in the Sunday comics' section of newspapers on December 12, 1897. The main characters were Mamma Katzenjammer, her twin sons, Hans (Figure 3) and Fritz, and eventually, the long-suffering target of their mischief, The Captain. The Strip is an "ethnic" one. All of the characters speak with a German accent. "Just" becomes "chust," "we" becomes "ve," and the Captain is, "Der Captain."

In the early decades of the strip's existence, the Katzenjammer family engaged in adventures all over the world. Ultimately, they settled on a tropical island [easier to draw maybe?]. The continuing and repeated theme centered around the ability of Hans and Fritz to pull creative pranks, get into trouble as a result, and end up being hunted down and spanked over somebody's knee in the last panel.

While the strip began in 1897 (see above), "Der Captain" was not a member of the cast for the first five years. He first appeared on August 31, 1902. Nor was he ever married to Mrs. Katzenjammer. Rather, the old sea dog was a boarder or, if you will, a live-in companion.

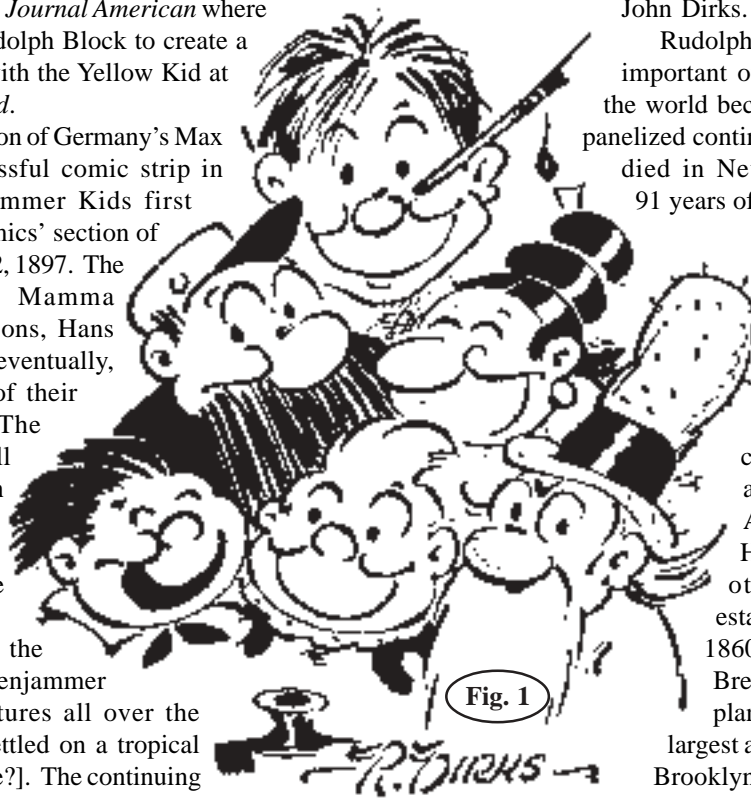
The other major cast member, "Der Inspector," first appeared on January 15, 1905. He was not an inspector in the ordinary sense of the word, but, rather, an officer of the school system. (Unfortunately I was not able to obtain a bottle cap featuring "Der Inspector" and "Der Director.")

**A Lawsuit**

After drawing a weekly Katzenjammer Kids comic strip for 15 years or so, Rudolph Dirks wanted to take a break. His boss at the Hearst newspaper syndicate didn't agree. Dirks left anyway and his duties drawing the strip were assigned to other artists.

Dirks felt that he owned the right to his characters and a lawsuit followed. The popular strip dropped out of the Sunday funnies for more than a year. Ultimately, artist Harold H. Knerr continued the Katzenjammer Kids for the Hearst papers. The court awarded Dirks the right to continue drawing his characters, so long as they were not entitled "The Katzenjammer Kids."

Dirks went to the rival Pulitzer newspaper *The World*, and the end result was that two separate, but very similar strips appeared weekly. "The (original) Katzenjammer Kids," drawn by Knerr and "The Captain and the Kids," drawn by Dirks, ran in competing Sunday papers for more than half a century. Dirks drew his characters until 1958, after which having drawn the strip for 61 years, he handed it over to his son



John Dirks.

Rudolph Dirks is recognized as the most important of the founding comic artists in the world because of his pioneering use of a panelized continuity and in-panel dialogue. He died in New York on April 20, 1968 at 91 years of age.

**The Brewery**

The Goldenrod Brewery, Inc., that was the only beer manufacturer to ever use the Katzenjammer Kids on bottle caps (1935), history reveals was a 75-year old brewery at the time. A German immigrant, Otto Huber, Sr., who had worked for other breweries in Brooklyn, established his own plant in the late 1860s. He purchased the Hoerger Brewery in 1866 and built the new plant into what became one of the largest and most productive breweries in Brooklyn. After his death in 1889, his sons (Otto, Jr., Joseph, Charles, and Max)

managed the company and it remained a family enterprise until 1920 (during Prohibition) when it was sold to Edward Hittleman, who re-named the brewery after himself. Hittleman produced *near* beer until repeal of Prohibition, and in 1934 he changed the name of the company to Hittleman-Goldenrod Brewery. Goldenrod was a traditional brand name dating to the Huber Brewery. The comic bottle caps were a part of the program to regain the beer market lost during Prohibition.

After being re-named Edlebrau after a popular beer, it was changed to Edlebrew in 1946. Not long after Hittleman's death in 1951 at age 68, the brewery closed.

**1860 – 1951 BREWERY CHRONOLOGY**

242 Maserole Street & Bushwick Avenue, Brooklyn, New York

1860-1889	Otto Huber
1889-1920	Otto Huber Brewery
1920-1934	E. B. Hittleman Brewery, Inc.
<b>1934-1937</b>	<b>Goldenrod Brewery, Inc.</b>
1937-1946	Edelbrau Brewery, Inc.
1946-1951	Edlebrew Brewery, Inc.

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