

# Canadian Ace

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**May 11, 2022**

**Newton, Iowa**

If you bought beer in Iowa between 1919 and 1968 the mafia got a slice of the profit from every bottle.

Al Capone and his *Chicago Outfit* gained control of the mid-western beer market in 1919 with the acquisition of the Chicago/Des Moines-based Manhattan Brewery. There were other brewers in operation at the time, but if bartenders were caught serving anything other than Manhattan Brewery products, they might find themselves at the bottom of the Des Moines River, wearing a pair of cement shoes.

As a result of the mob's effective "advertising campaign" with the bartender's union, Manhattan Breweries flourished. Government mandated prohibition in the 1920s was little more than an irritant for the organized crime-controlled brewer. Manhattan sold its products in bulk barrels and unmarked bottles during the prohibition years, with barely a glitch in sales.

After Prohibition ended in 1933, and during the war years of the 1940s, beer sales skyrocketed. Despite the mob's heavy-handed tactics, other brewers began to gain a foothold in the market. In 1947 Manhattan Breweries officially changed its name to Canadian Ace, to clean up its image and distance itself from its crime syndicate past.

Canadian Ace operated with *legitimate* front men at the helm, but control of the company remained squarely in mob hands.

In 1944, the US Federal Trade Commission took exception to the misleading use of "Canadian" on the American-based brewer's bottle labels. The dispute with the brewer lasted for two years, until Canadian Ace agreed to slap a "Made in U.S.A." banner on their labels.



Al Capone went to jail in 1934 and was succeeded by Charles “Cherry Nose” Gioe. Cherry Nose died by suicide in 1939. The gangster who assisted in Gioe’s “*suicide*”, Louie “Cock-Eyed” Fratto, took control of Canadian Ace until his death in 1967, at 60 years of age by reported “natural causes”.

The company went into a literal tailspin a year later when Fratto’s son Frank died in a plane crash. The gangster family successor was co-passenger in a Cessna 172 with heavyweight boxing champion Rocky Marciano. The pilot of the aircraft encountered low ceilings before their destination at Des Moines airport. The pilot attempted to reverse course in cloud, at low altitude, but stalled the plane killing all three on board.

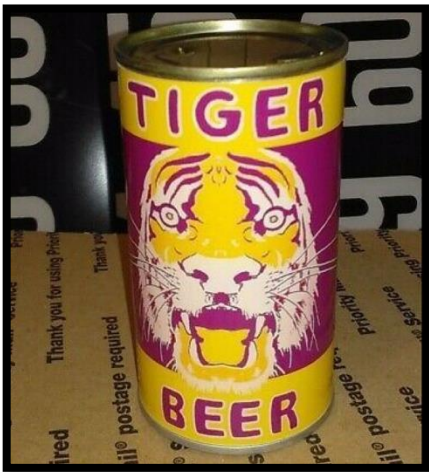
The crash near Newton Iowa was the end of the line for a long string of gangsters and ...

...Canadian Ace.

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**We visited the crash site in Newton, Iowa. There wasn’t much to see, just a marker with facts and figures, no mention of beer or gangsters.**

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Manhattan Breweries produced another product labeled *Tiger Beer* in 1938. For reasons unknown, the product was taken off the shelves after the initial offering.

**This is the only Tiger Beer can known to exist.**

Because of its rarity and its mob connections, the can is the *Holy Grail* for brewing memorabilia collectors. The can hasn’t been on the market for many years but if it ever surfaces, experts believe it would sell for tens of thousands of dollars.

If you find a Tiger Beer can in your recycling bin, don’t throw it out.