

"A Novel Maryland Tobacco Store"
Carroll County Times Article for 14 April 1996
By Jay A. Graybeal

The September 4, 1896 issue of Tobacco carried a front page story entitled "A Novel Maryland Store" and an interior photograph of Charles Valentine Wantz's Westminster store located in the Wantz Building at 25 E. Main St. The article describes the store and the unique "wallpaper" selected by Mr. Wantz.

The illustration on this page is the reproduction of a photograph taken for TOBACCO of the retail store of Mr. Chas. V. Wantz, of Westminster, Md., which is one of the most uniquely fitted and decorated cigar stores in this country, if not in the world.

The photograph is taken from the street door, and, as will be seen by a reference to the photograph, this cuts off the first counter case, and so scarcely does full justice to the size of the store, which has an area of sixteen feet wide by thirty-five feet long, with an office at the rear of twelve feet by sixteen. The fittings are in white ash, with a fine hard oak finish, the counter cases having nickel mounts, and the wall cases being fronted with plate glass doors of the orthodox design; the counter is massive, and the store is wainscoted all around to a height of about four feet. Above this rises the novel part of the decorations, the walls being actually papered with cigar labels, neatly and artistically arranged by expert workmen, who followed out Mr. Chas. V. Wantz's ideas, superintended by him. These labels are those sent out by the lithographic firms to cigar manufacturers, and it may be imagined that a carefully arranged display of these as a wall papering might be made very artistic and attractive. There is a border of twenty-three inches wide made of the small end labels or "outs," and the balance of the walls are covered with the large or "inside" labels, over 8,000 of which are used, these having been received by Mr. Wantz during the past five years, it taking two practical workmen three days to do the work. It can readily be imagined that the display made considerable stir in local circles, and so spread by report through that part of the State, bringing many strangers, and possibly many customers, to see the novel effect. As far as TOBACCO knows, nothing on this scale in label decoration exists in the trade, and information on this point would be gladly received.

The trade done is mainly in the private brands of Mr. Wantz, these being manufactured in his own factory in the same building, and to which the retail store has only been, comparatively speaking, recently added; the special leaders are My Own, Fragrant, Diamond Crown, Victoria, and Superb, the prices of the cigars manufactured running from \$15 to \$150 per 1000. There are also a few imported cigars handled. Tobaccos are a heavy line, and the leaders in plug are B. F. Gravely's and in twists the R. J. Reynolds Company's product, with a private brand of Wantz. Cigarettes have the specialties of the American Tobacco Company and the High Admiral of the National Cigarette, & Tobacco Company, and in smoking tobaccos a very heavy seller is the Rose Leaf of P. Lorillard Company and the Golden Sceptre of the Surbrug Company, the Blackwell's Durham Tobacco Company, and a private brand of Universal made by the American Tobacco Company, with a line of their specialties.

Mr. Wantz is one of the popular men in his district, and started the business in 1876, slowly but steadily extending it as its success became apparent; some idea of his progressive and energetic methods may be formed from the details of the decorations of his store.

Mr. Wantz became quite successful making and selling cigars. Part of his success was due to a novel inducement; each purchaser of 1,000 cigars received an imported breech-loading shotgun. Throughout his career he gave away 5,000 guns representing sales of 5,000,000 cigars!

Photo caption: Mr. Charles V. Wantz stands behind the counter in his Westminster tobacco store at 25 E. Main St., in this image from the September 4, 1896 issue of Tobacco. The store was well lit by several ceiling mounted gas light fixtures and heated by a potbellied stove. The most interesting feature, however was that the walls were papered with more than 8,000 cigar box labels. Customers could also use the ceramic spittoons conveniently located on the floor in front of the counter. Historical Society of Carroll County collection, gift of Mrs. Davis Taylor, 1982.

Side bar copy: Historic Westminster businesses will be the topic of the Westminster Business Walking Tour from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. on Saturday, April 27th. The tour begins at the Historical Society (210 E. Main St.) and includes twelve historic sites on Westminster's Main Street. The event is sponsored by the Greater Westminster Development Corporation. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for Seniors; children are free. For more information call Doug Mathias at (410) 876-6664.