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[Edward Bransten: Tea Taster](#)

Posted by [Lara Michels](#) on Tuesday March 24 2009

I have been processing the papers of the Haas-Bransten family, members of the San Francisco Jewish “aristocracy,” and was struck by this clipping from one of the scrapbooks:



Now, Edward Bransten Sr. was an extraordinary man. He was born in San Francisco in 1870 to Joseph and Jane Brandenstein (the name change to Bransten came during the First World War). He grew up to become a key executive in the Brandenstein family firm, the MJB Company. In 1903, Edward married Florine Haas, daughter of William and Bertha

(Greenebaum) Haas. Edward and Florine had four children: William, Edward Jr., Frances, and Alice.

In addition to all that, he was a government tea taster. This clipping suggests he could recognize by taste, smell, and touch alone over 1500 types of tea! This was curious to me, so I researched it a bit. It seems that the US Government passed legislation in 1897 entitled the Import Tea Act. This legislation, in turn, created the Board of Tea Experts as well as the position of Federal Tea Taster. This position remained intact until 1996, when the Clinton administration decided that the Feds should not be spending \$120,000 per year tasting tea. In 1995, the Federal Tea Taster rejected about 1% of the tea entering the country for poor quality. I am thinking in this time of tainted toys, pet food, you name it, that this position should be re-instated.

Below is a photograph of the Federal Tea Board taken around 1920, I would guess. Edward Bransten, Sr. is second from the left:



Federal Tea Board, NYC, circa 1920 (Magnes Collections)

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