

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

December 2009 - January 2010

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Meeting January 26th

Our January Meeting will feature the club's annual contest. Members are encouraged to bring in their favorite dug bottle, shard, go-with, and bottle collected during 2009. We will vote on our favorites, and winners will be announced at our February meeting.

Collector of the Year will be awarded for the most impressive bottle entered.

Digger of the Year will be awarded for the best bottle dug by a club member.

Shard of the Year is traditionally awarded for the best broken bottle dug during the year. Please do not break one of your favorites in the hope of winning this contest.

Go-with of the Year entries are collectibles that complement a bottle collection. Most go-withs are advertising materials for bottled products. If you have the bottle that your entry goes with, please bring it along.

Dues are Due

We will collect annual dues of \$10 per individual or family at our January meeting. If you cannot attend please mail dues to

Jim Sears
P.O. Box 370
Garrett Park, Maryland 20896

The figural bottles shown at right are from the collection of Bob Ford. We appreciate the high quality show & tell items Bob brings to many of our meetings.



Lee Shipman displays figural bottles at the November meeting.



Meetings: 8:00 PM on the last Tuesday of each month in the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer, 6201 Dunrobbin Dr., Bethesda, MD 20816.
President: Andy Goldfrank Vice President: Al Miller Secretary: Jim Sears Treasurer: Lee Shipman
Pontil: Jim Sears (email: searsjim@usa.net, PH: 609/472-5473) & Andy Goldfrank (email: amg_sticky@yahoo.com, PH: 202/588-0543)
Web Site: www.potomacbottlecollectors.org Maintained by Al Miller: www.potomacbottlecollectors.org/contact.php

Old Henry: A Richmond Success Story

By Jack Sullivan

[Special to the Potomac Pontil]

Shown here is the back of a celluloid pocket mirror whose major feature is a portrait of a distinguished looking male sporting a long beard (Fig. 1). It advertises “Old Henry” pure rye whiskey and is the product of a Richmond, Virginia, liquor firm known as Straus-Gunst & Co. We can assume that the mirror depicts Henry Gunst who indeed was old – 75 – when the firm first registered this brand but whose “rags to riches” story began in 1832.

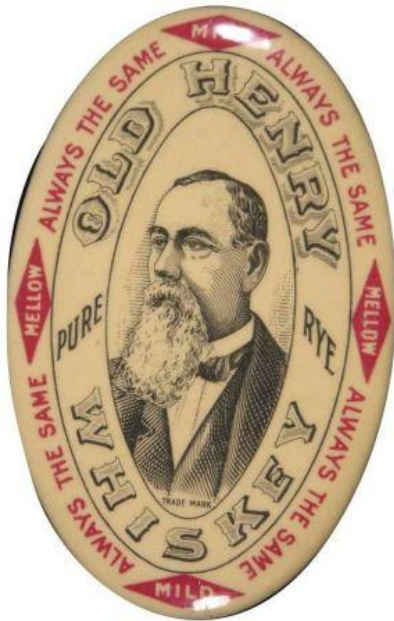


Fig. 1: Old Henry Rye pocket mirror #1

That was the year Henry was born of Jewish parentage in Bavaria, Germany. As a youth with a few possessions he emigrated to the United States before the Civil War, settling in Virginia. Caught up in the conflict, he enlisted in the Confederate cause and saw considerable combat. It should be noted that many Jewish soldiers fought for the South. Unlike General Grant in the North, General Lee allowed them to observe their religious traditions in camp.

After the war, Henry located in Richmond. There he met and married Bettie Orbendorfer, like himself a native-born German of Jewish heritage. She was seven years younger and would outlive him by 10 years. The couple produced a large family, although their first born, Walter, would die at the age of six.

During those pre-Prohibition days the liquor business was thriving in Richmond. As other Southern states increasingly voted “dry,” the Virginia capital became a Mecca

for whiskey distillers, rectifiers and dealers. My earlier *Pontil* articles have told the Richmond stories of H. Clarke and Sons and Phil. G. Kelly – both noted for their flamboyant liquor merchandising.

Henry Gunst preceded them both. In 1879 he founded a whiskey firm, claiming to be both distiller and whiskey blender. A man named Straus was his cofounder. Richmond directories of the time list several Straus males who were in the liquor business. My research could not determine whether one of them was Gunst’s partner. Straus-Gunst & Co. remained the name of the business through its existence. Initially located at 7 S. 4th Street, in 1895 the firm moved to 1010-1013 S. 14th Street.

Straus-Gunst & Co. issued liquor in embossed clear flasks bearing its name in both block letters and script (Figs. 2, 3). The firm also put its products in larger jug-like containers (Fig. 4) and in dark amber “lady’s leg” quarts. The latter is shown here along with details of the embossing (Fig. 5, 6).



Fig. 2: Straus-Gunst clear flask



Fig 3: Straus-Gunst clear flask - script embossing



Fig. 4: Straus-Gunst amber jug (above left)

Fig. 5: Straus-Gunst amber quart



Fig. 6: Detail - amber quart

The liquor firm advertised widely in regional newspapers and claimed outlets for its whiskey in Washington, D.C., most of the larger cities in Virginia, North Carolina, and Jacksonville and Pensacola, Florida. It also carried on a vigorous mail order business, particularly in states and localities that had gone “Dry.” The liquor firm excelled in its giveaways, including 3 by 5 inches booklets of riddles and banquet toasts (Fig. 7,8).



Fig. 8: Riddles booklet



Fig. 7: Banquet toasts booklet



Fig. 9: Old Henry pint

Although Straus-Gunst marketed a number of brand names, two were principally featured. A moderately priced whiskey was “Old Henry Pure Rye. It came as a long-necked pint (Fig. 9), a flask size with a cork pull (Fig. 10), and in a a quart bottle (Fig. 11). In addition to the pocket mirror shown above, the firm gave away “Old Henry” shot glasses (Fig. 12) and a second style of pocket mirror (Fig. 13). All featured the man with the long beard – “Old Henry” Gunst.



Fig. 10: Old Henry half pint

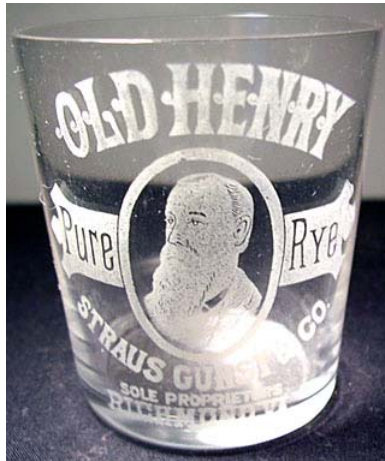


Fig. 12: Old Henry shot glass



Fig. 15: Full Dress Rye shot glass



Fig. 13: Old Henry pocket mirror #2



Fig. 11: Old Henry quart



Fig. 14: Full Dress Rye match safe



Fig. 16: Full Dress Rye corkscrew with case

The top quality whiskey featured by Straus-Gunst was "Full Dress Maryland Rye." A quart bottle of this brand is shown on a celluloid match safe (Fig. 14). Other advertising giveaways bearing this brand name were a shot glass (Fig. 15), a tube enclosed corkscrew (Fig. 16), and, for a saloon keeper, a metal sign showing a gent having a drink with a lady of dubious character (Fig. 17).

In 1907 Henry Gunst died, age 75. The business was carried on without interruption by other family members until Virginia voted complete prohibition of alcoholic beverages in 1916. That same year Straus-Gunst moved to Baltimore, setting up shop at 35-37 Gay Street. With the onset of National Prohibition in 1919 the company disappeared completely. Nonetheless, it had survived 40 years, unusually long in the whiskey trade, and fulfilled the vision of its immigrant co-founder, Old Henry.

References: The information and images for this article are from a number of Internet sources. Principal among them was the www.pre-pro site maintained by Robin Preston.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

FEBRUARY 7 - SOUTH RIVER, NEW JERSEY

New Jersey Antique Bottle Club (NJABC) 15th annual show and sale, from 9 a.m. till 2 p.m. at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 88 Jackson St., South River, NJ 08882
For Info: NJABC, 24 Charles Street, South River, NJ 08882-1603 or call **JOE BUTEWICZ** (732)-236-9945
email: botlman@msn.com



MARCH 7, 2010 BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

The Baltimore Antique Bottle Club's 30th Annual Show & Sale, (8 a.m. to 3 p.m.), Physical Education Center, CCBC-Essex, 7201 Rossville Blvd. (I-695, Exit 34) Info: **ERIC EWEN** PH: (410) 265-5745, e-mail: teresaanderic@comcast.net
www.Baltimorebottleclub.org

April 11 - TYLERSPORT, PENNSYLVANIA

The Bucks-Mont 15th Annual Bottle Show & Sale (9am - 2pm with early buyers in at 8am), at the Tylersport Fire Company, 125 Ridge Rd, Tylersport, PA.
Info: **David Buck**, ph: (215) 723-4048 or **Greg Gifford**, ph: (215) 699-5216.

APRIL 25 - HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA

The Historical Bottle Diggers of Virginia's 39th Annual Show & Sale (9am - 3pm), at the Rockingham County Fairgrounds, US Route 11 (Exit 243 off I-81), south of Harrisonburg, VA.
Info: **Sonny Smiley**, 1025 Greendale Rd, Harrisonburg, VA 22801, ph: (540) 434-1129, email: lithiaman1@yahoo.com.

MAY 2 - BRICK, NEW JERSEY

Jersey Shore Bottle Club's 38th Annual Postcards & Local Memorabilia Show & Sale (8:30am - 2pm), Brick Elks Lodge, 2491 Hopper Ave, Brick, NJ 08723.
Info: **Richard Peal**, 720 Eastern Ln, Brick, NJ 08723, ph:(732) 267-2528, email: manodirt@msn.com or www.bottleclub.org

Club History

By Mike Cianciosi

A couple club members have given me their old copies of the Pontil, and I'm starting to build up a library of them. I'm going to try to do a monthly recap of some of the things that appeared in those old issues. Here's my first shot at it.

35 years ago

The Jan-Feb 1975 issue of the pontil was volume 14, presumably the 14th issue that was ever published. In it was a report that the contract for the club meetings in the Alexandria Coca Cola bottling plant had been renewed for another year. There was a page-long message from the club president (Bus Nusbaum) thanking members for the club support in 1974, and asking for more support in 1975. And finally, there was a warning to collectors reprinted from the Southern Connecticut ABC newsletter *The Scarred Bottom* saying, "If you are offered or see a black, black amethyst bottle that only comes in clear color usually, beware! These bottles are being made black amethyst by placing them in a nuclear reactor and they are radioactive!" I'm pretty sure this was dis-information – it's hard enough to get permission to dig in someone's back yard, but can you imagine trying to get permission to use a nuclear reactor to make your bottles purple?

15 years ago

The Jan 1995 issue of the *Pontil* reported that the December meeting featured Al Steidel presenting a program called "Al's Marbles". It also enticed club members to come to the January meeting, which would feature a banquet and award presentations. The newsletter had 3 articles that were reprinted from various other newsletters.



Our November meeting featured a great show & tell of a recent dig by several members. We hope to feature an article on this dig in a future *Pontil*.