

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

June-July 2010

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Meeting June 29th

Please join us at 8 PM at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer in Bethesda, Maryland.

This is our last meeting before the summer break. We are considering changing our meeting time or location in the fall to try to encourage greater attendance. Please let your opinions be known at our web site.

We still have money, but Lee Shipman notes that our club treasury is declining. Anyone interested in joining or rejoining the Potomac Bottle Collectors may send \$10 annual dues to the club care of Jim Sears, P.O. Box 370, Garrett Park, MD 20896

Club History by Mike Cianciosi

20 years ago

The June 1990 issue of the *Pontil* thanked everyone for making the 1990 bottle show a success, with over 300 people at the door. Special thanks went to Lee for doing the floor plan, and to the Richmond club for helping out. The program at the May meeting was on digging at construction sites, and the program scheduled for June was on threadless insulators.

30 years ago

The June 1980 issue of the *Pontil* congratulated the newly elected club officers. There was also an announcement that the July meeting would be combined with the club picnic. The club meetings were held at the Coca-Cola plant, 5401 Seminary Road, Alexandria.



Above are some views from our May meeting.

Scott Gordon (at left) displayed a redware bowl that he dug and glued back together. Peter Rydquist (center) showed a mini jug from L.N. Stely, Vienna, VA. See the last page of this newsletter for a close-up photo of the jug. New collector Jim Gallahan (right) brought in some bottles to get information.

Mini-Jugs and Virginia's "War in the West"

By Jack Sullivan

[Special to the Potomac Pontil]

One result of researching Virginia mini-jugs was the discovery of a court case that involved many the liquor dealers whose ceramic containers are shown here. The year was 1909 and the cause of the dispute stemmed from four western Virginia towns – Radford, Marion, Saltville, and Glade Springs – officially going "dry." Alcoholic beverages were strictly forbidden to be sold within their city limits. Violations meant stiff fines.

The Southern Express Company, the carrier of choice, was refusing to deliver booze from Roanoke to the four towns, apparently fearing arrest of its agents. This did not sit well with Roanoke's whiskey merchants, particularly those who were heavily involved in the mail order trade. Although much of their product went to North Carolina where prohibition was statewide, their Virginia consumers also were important. Although usually business competitors, the Roanoke whiskey men joined forces to do battle with the four towns.

First they took the issue to the Commonwealth's Attorney who agreed that the localities had no legal standing to bar whiskey deliveries. Together they then took their fight to the Virginia Corporation Commission. It heard the case in June of 1909. Arrayed in opposition were attorneys for Southern Express and the quartet of prohibition towns.

Among the plaintiffs was John Casper, who bragged that his Roanoke business was the largest mail order whiskey distributor in the world. After being chased from North Carolina when that state went dry, he relocated in Richmond and built a large new facility (Fig. 1). Although Casper was known for his giveaways, this Christmas mini is fairly rare and, in good condition, fetches a high price (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2: Casper holiday mini-jug

Casper was joined in the petition by Gordon L. Aronhime, a longtime Roanoke whiskey merchant, who may have begun as a small distiller. In a 1908 Roanoke business directory his operation was listed as the Aronhime Distillery Company, located on Tinker Creek Road. A mini-jug bearing this name and the federal distillery number recently drew extensive bidder interest on eBay, eventually selling for \$129 (Fig. 3).



Fig. 1: Illustration of Casper's Roanoke plant



Fig. 3: Aronhime logo

After receiving a charter from the State of Virginia in 1909, Aronhime changed the name to the Aronhime Liquor Company and moved to 127 Salem. He emphasized mail order sales and boasted “The Express Companies Make Us Next Door Neighbors.” He was finding, however, that sometimes neighbors, like those in Radford, Marion, Saltville, and Glade Springs, rejected being “next door.”

Like Casper, Aronhime was an able whiskey pitchman and his business was a notable success. He adopted a fancy trademark. It featured a large letter “A” with wings sprouting from it and sunbeams emerging from behind a hovering cloud. This symbol appeared prominently on his giveaway shot glasses and other merchandising (Fig. 4).

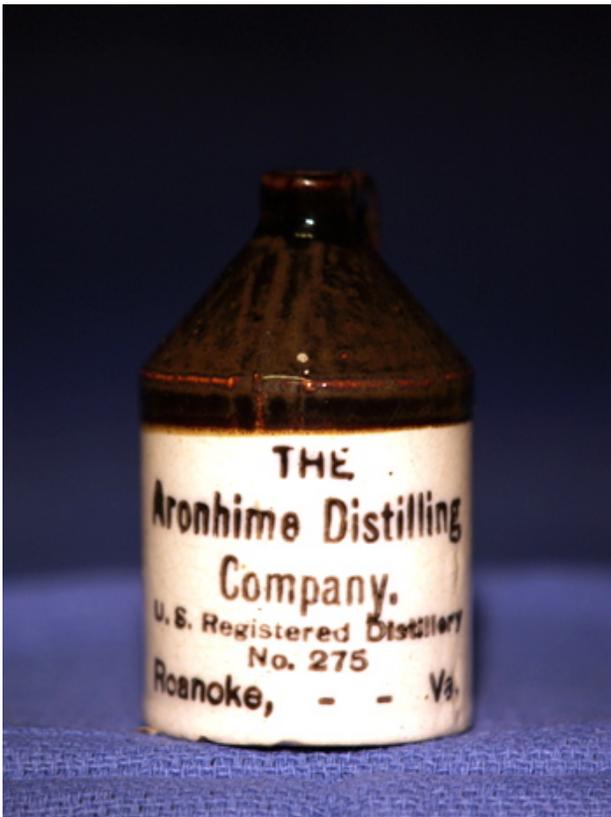


Fig. 4: Aronhime mini-jug

A third plaintiff against the express company was B.B. Dillard, whose slogan was a somewhat uninspired, “The Whiskey Dealer.” Like his colleagues, Dillard also issued shot glasses and mini-jugs. The ceramic container shown here (Fig. 5), also briskly bid, fetched \$158 recently on eBay.

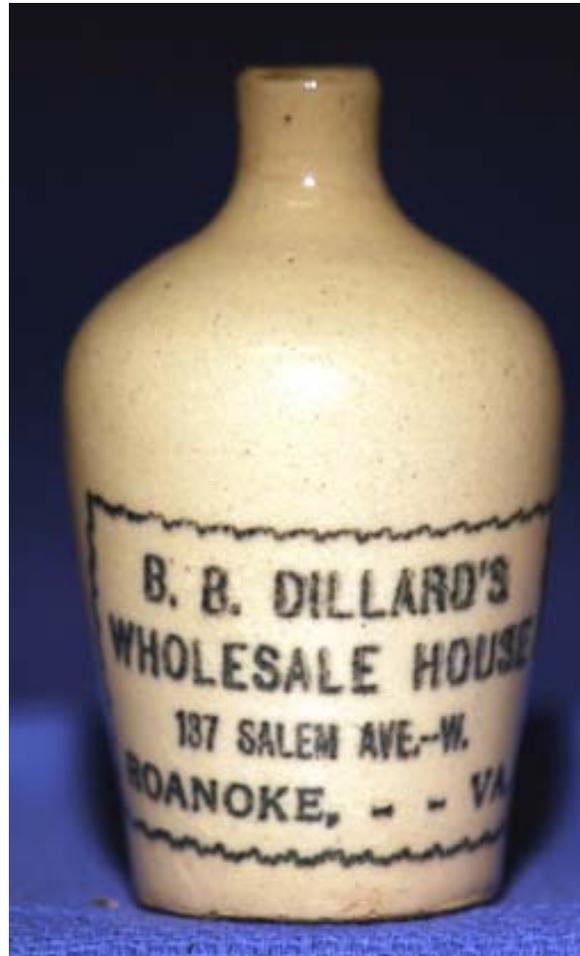


Fig. 5: Dillard mini-jug

A fourth outfit in the whiskey war was John J. Brady & Son. The historical record tells us some things about Brady. Born in 1849 and married to a Wytheville woman named Sue Umbarger who was 18 years his junior, Brady owned liquor interests throughout western Virginia. He is identified in the state petition as a Roanoke dealer but also had outlets including saloons in Wytheville and Bristol. Well known was his Bristol watering hole called “The Hub” (Fig. 6). A Brady jug like one shown here recently sold at auction for a whopping \$550 (Fig. 7).



Fig. 6: Photo of Brady's “The Hub” saloon



Fig. 7: Brady mini-jug



Fig. 9: Blue Ridge Grocery mini-jug

My research yielded little about three other Roanoke companies that produced mini-jugs (Fig. 8-10). One was a saloon, another a grocery company. None apparently sold mail order whiskey. But their owners must have been aware of the conflict and probably were cheering on their Roanoke colleagues.



Fig. 8: Eagle Saloon mini-jug

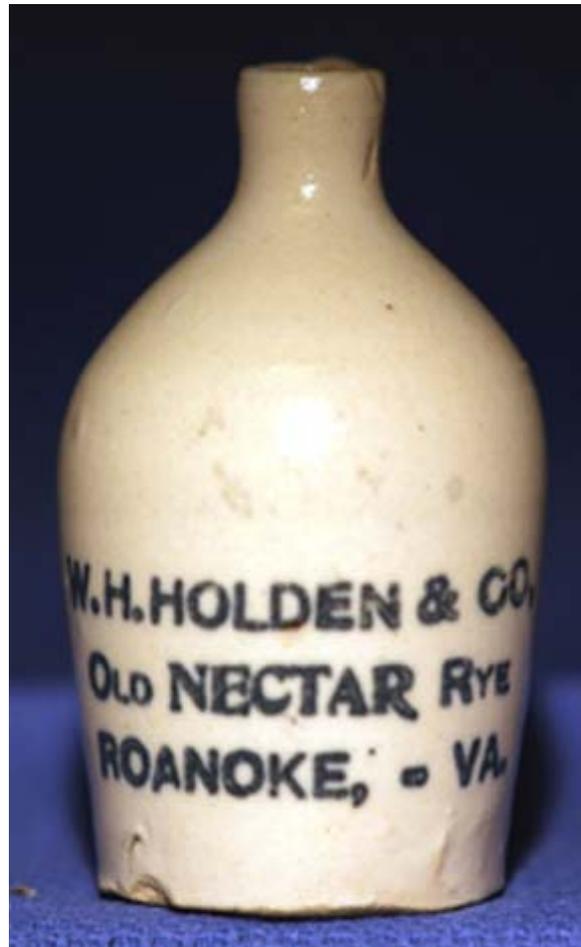


Fig. 10: Holden's "Old Nectar" mini-jug

Although Pocahontas, Virginia, is located not far from the four dry towns, it had virtually no potential for banning liquor. Set in the heart of a coal mining region, this town was a hotbed of beer and whiskey bottlers, distributors, dealers and saloons. From Pocahontas came a mini-jug labeled "M. (Meyer) Kwass & Son (Fig. 11). Harry Grass is also mentioned on the ceramic as a member of the firm. He was Kwass's son-in-law. The company shows up in local directories only from 1904 to 1910.

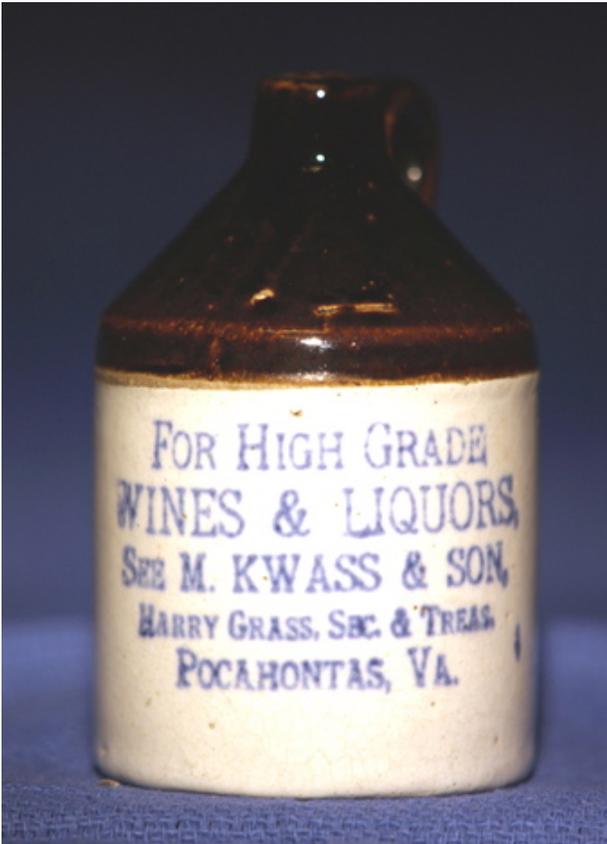


Fig. 11: M. Kwass & Son mini-jug

Rounding out this collection of mini-jugs are two from nearby Bristol. Like Roanoke and Pocahontas, it was a center for producing and distributing strong drink and produced a number of whiskey collectibles, including mini-jugs. Among them was one from M.R. Miller, a whiskey distributor who featured such brands as Bristol Club, Clinchfield, Cream of Bristol, Dixie Club, Miller's Oldest, and Potters Club Corn (Fig. 12). Directories indicated that Miller did business from 1905 to 1914. A second mini was from the T.H. Haynes Co., another lively Bristol establishment (Fig. 13).

Who won the war launched by Roanoke liquor dealers against four dry towns? The whiskey forces. Following the hearing the Virginia Corporation Commission declared the four local ordinances void. It also ruled that the whiskey merchants could sell liquor up to five gallons at a time to customers in any of the towns. Furthermore, Southern Express was required to deliver the goods to consignees.



Fig. 12: Miller's Best Corn mini-jug



Fig. 13: Haynes Co. mini-jug

Roanoke's victory lasted less than seven years. In 1916 Virginia went dry. In the same year, moreover, the U.S. Congress passed a law, called the Webb-Kenyon Act. It forbade transport of spirits into dry towns or states via the U.S. mails or other express services. That law is still on the books these 94 years later.

Notes: Notes: The information from this article came from a number of printed and Internet sources. Once again my thanks are due Dr. Ralph Van Brocklin of Johnson City, Tennessee, for the images of mini-jugs seen here. Ralph is the former president of the Federation of Historical Bottle Collectors (FOHBC) and a major collector and expert on these pre-Prohibition ceramics.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

JULY 17 & 18 ADAMSTOWN, PENNSYLVANIA

The 9th Annual Shupp's Grove Bottle Festival, (Sat. & Sun from sun-up until ??, early buyers Fri. 5 PM), at the famous 'Shupp's Grove' in Adamstown, PA. Info: **Steve Guion**, PH: (717) 371-1259, email: affinityinsurance@dejazzd.com.



AUGUST 6, 7 & 8 - WILMINGTON, OHIO

FOHBC 2010 National Show will be held at the Roberts Center in Wilmington, Oh (half-way between Columbus, Oh and Cincinnati, OH on I-71). Host Hotel is Holiday Inn (937) 283-3200.

Info: **Jamie Houdeshell**, PO BOX 57, Haskins, OH 43525, ph: (419) 722-3184, email: JHBottle@hotmail.com or **Joe Hardin**, 594 Laymon Rd, New Vienna, OH 45159, ph: (937) 371-0264, email: jkcollectables@gmail.com.

SEPTEMBER 19 - WINCHESTER, VIRGINIA

The Apple Valley Bottle Collectors Club's 36th Annual Show & Sale (9am - 3pm \$3, early admission at 7:30am \$10, seniors 65 and over free), at the Mount Carmel Baptist Church, Family Life Center, 1309 Opequon Ave (just off Pleasant Valley Rd), Winchester, VA.

Info: **Richard Venskoske**, 2038 Chestnut Grove Rd, Winchester, VA 22603, ph: (540) 247-4429

OCTOBER 2 - CHESTERFIELD, VIRGINIA

The Richmond Area Bottle Collectors Association's Annual Show & Sale (9am - 3pm, early admission 7:30am \$10), at the

Chesterfield County Fairgrounds, 10300 Courthouse Rd, Chesterfield, VA 23832,

Info: **Marvin Croker**, ph: (804) 275-1101, email: RichBottleClub@comcast.net or **Ed Faulkner**, ph: (804) 739-2951

NOVEMBER 7 - ELKTON, MARYLAND

Tri-State Bottle Collectors and Diggers Club's 38th Annual Show & Sale (9am - 2pm), at the Singerly Fire Hall, Routes 279-213, Elkton, MD.

Info: **Dave Brown**, ph: (302) 738-9960, email: dbrown3942@comcast.net.

NOVEMBER 28 - BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA

Forks of the Delaware Bottle Collectors Association's 37th Annual Show & Sale (9am - 3pm with early buyers 7:30am) at the Bethlehem Catholic High School, Madison & Dewberry Avenues, Bethlehem, PA.

Info: **Bill Hegedus**, 20 Cambridge Pl, Catasauqua, PA 18032, ph: (610) 264-5945.

