

The Potomac Pontil

The Potomac Bottle Collectors – Serving the National Capital

March 2014

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Lee Shipman Funeral March 22nd

Lee Shipman has played a huge role in our club for many years, and our group will never be the same without her. We were proud to see Lee's collection featured in the February 9 edition of the *Washington Post Magazine*, and we believe her style of collecting for joy rather than monetary value will continue to be an inspiration for others.

Lee's daughter Deena Kirkland writes the following:

On March 8, 2014 my mother, Lee W. Shipman, concluded 91 years on this earth. She lived a long and fruitful life. Lee helped many people in her life, and I invite you to help us celebrate her life on March 22, 2014 at 2 PM at the Church of the Redeemer, 6201 Dunrobbin Drive in Bethesda, MD 20816. Please join us for her service that will be followed by a reception in the Church fellowship hall. Instead of flowers we ask that you make a donation to the Church in her name or a nonprofit of your choice. My sisters and my brother hope to see you there. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions (301/905-7617 or mzspell@verizon.net).

March 25th Meeting

Please join us at St. Mark's Orthodox Church in Bethesda at 8 PM. We will debut our new club book at the meeting.



The pictures above are from the club picnic that Lee Shipman hosted in September 2013. Her display of bottles and mementos included pictures with her late husband Karl, whom we also remember fondly.

Meetings: 8:00 PM on the last Tuesday of each month January-June, October-November; picnic in September.

President: Andy Goldfrank

Vice President: Al Miller

Secretary: Jim Sears

Pontil: Jim Sears (email: searsjim@usa.net, PH: 609/472-5473) &

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Shipping Booze to the Heart of Dixie

By Jack Sullivan
[Special to the Potomac Pontil]

On almost any day back in 1910 a bystander could watch as wagon after wagon, most pulled by horses, arrived at the busy Richmond, Virginia, railroad station. There dozens of heavy cases would be unloaded onto trains bound for North and South Carolina, Alabama, Georgia, and even Mississippi. Those cases held bottles, jugs and kegs filled with whiskey. They were heading down the rails to slake the thirst of a “dry” Dixie.

With strong Prohibition forces at work in most of the Deep South, many Southern states had enacted laws completely banning sales of alcohol, or virtually so. But Virginia was still “wet,” federal interstate commerce laws still applied, and Richmond boasted three major railways supplying the region. The result was the creation for a few years of a booming Richmond mail order industry in whiskey. As we will come to see, however, it was a trade that held its own perils.

Henry Clarke with his three sons had established a highly success liquor distribution company in 1884 in Salisbury, North Carolina. In 1908 that state by a popular vote of 62% to 38% went totally dry. Within weeks Clarke and his sons were forced to relocate their business to Richmond. In their new home, H. Clarke & Sons continued to merchandise their “Tar Heel” brand corn whiskey to their former customers base in North Carolina.



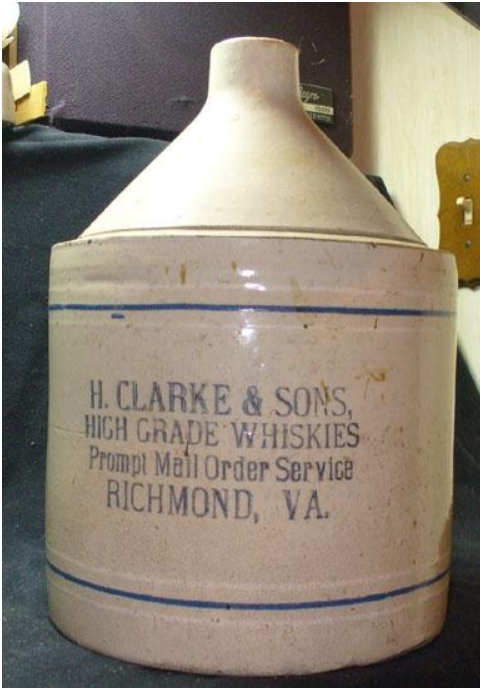
Fig. 1. H. Clarke trade card

Their ads call their firm “The South’s Greatest Mail Order Wine and Whiskey Merchants.” They offered free transportation within the express territory of the Adams and Southern Lines, at the time the leading package delivery firm south of the Mason-Dixon Line. As shown on a Clark trade card (Fig. 1), the firm sold its whiskey in sizes ranging from half pints and pints, to quart glass flasks and bottles, on up to one and two gallon ceramic jugs, and even in 4 gallon wooden kegs.

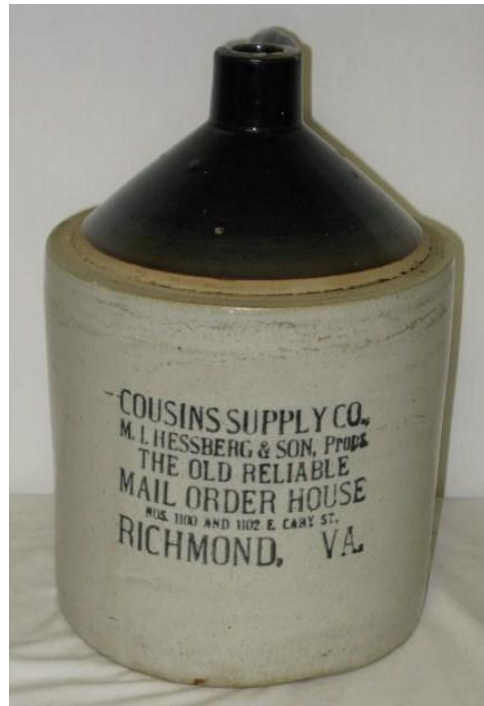
Although packed in plain cases, Clarke’s jugs, shown here in one and two gallon size (Figs 2, 3), carried a similar message as the company advertising: “Prompt Mail Order Service.” The Clarks had to be prompt because they were surrounded by fierce competitors. Among them was the Cousins Supply Company, an outfit that first showed up in Richmond business directories in 1905 located at 10-12 South 12th Street. It was the name given to the mail order branch of an enterprise owned by M. I. Hessberg and his son. The firm subsequently moved to 1100 and 1102 East Cary Street where the Hessbergs also conducted local wholesale and retail sales.



2. H. Clarke & Sons quart jug



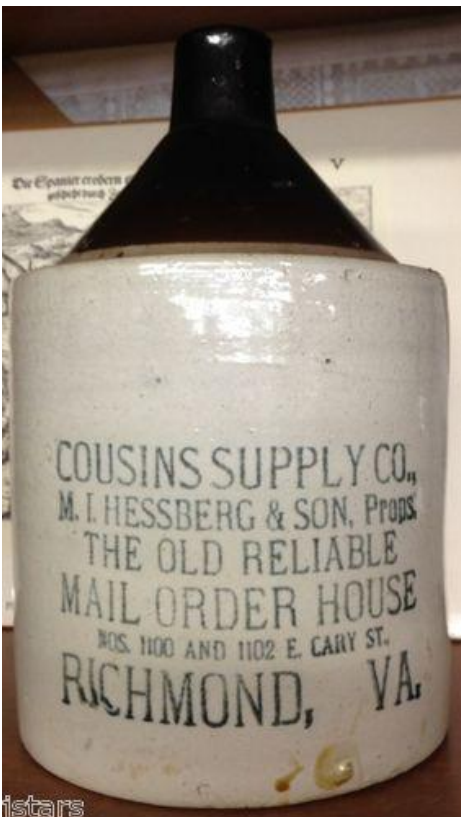
3. H. Clarke & Sons gallon jug



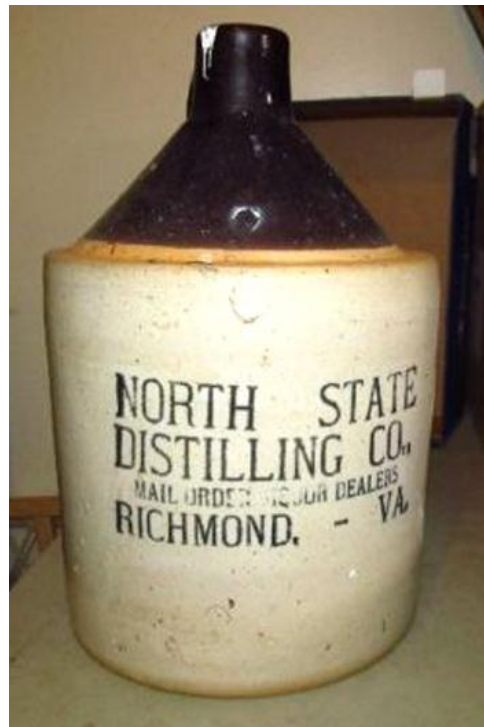
5. Cousins Supply gallon jug

The Hessbergs were whiskey “rectifiers,” blending and compounding raw whiskeys to achieve mellowness and taste. Their house brand ingeniously was named “Inspection.” They used both glass and ceramic containers for their products. Shown here are one and two gallon jugs (Fig. 4,5) that would have been encased in plain wooden boxes for the trip South. This firm’s slogan was “The Old Reliable Mail Order House.”

Another company shipping whiskey in large pottery jugs (Fig. 6) from Richmond was the North State Distilling Company, located at 610-612 Broad Street. It too was a rectifier and upon request would send customers a several page brochure touting its house brands such as “Dido Rye” and “North State Rye Whiskey” (Fig. 7). Those brands also could be obtained in a variety of sizes from pints to kegs. North State promised that all express charges would be prepaid.



4. Cousins Supply quart jug



6. North State Distilling jug



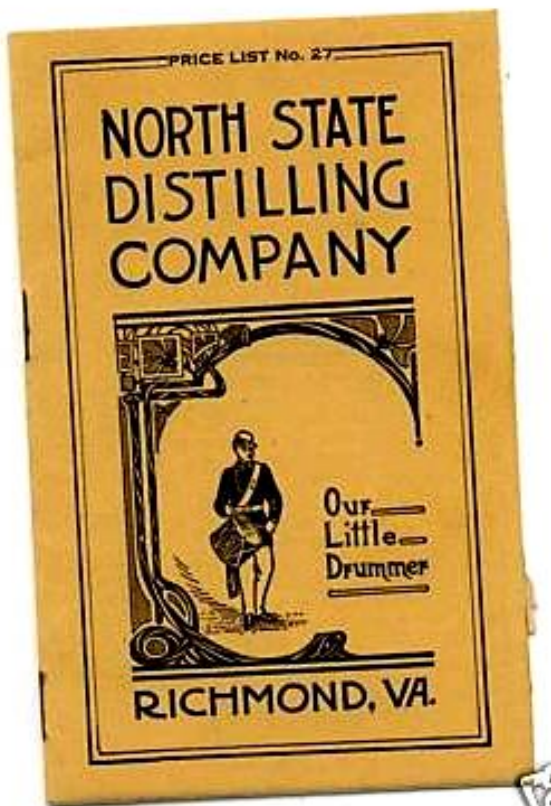
7. North State brochure pages

The cover of the North State price list showed a Confederate drummer boy and the legend, “Our Little Drummer Boy” (Fig. 8). The message it sent was “double entendre.” A salesman often was called a “drummer.” While the brochure might have been a “little drummer,” North State also was sending adult drummers into the South to advertise its mail order trade. That was where peril lurked. While the Interstate Commerce clause had been ruled by Federal Courts to bar states from stopping express mail shipments of booze, drummers could be fair game.

That is what happened to Fletcher Davis, a salesman for North State who ventured into Laurens County, South Carolina to, as his indictment said, “willfully and unlawfully conduct the business of a liquor drummer...soliciting orders for interstate shipment of corn whiskey, rye whiskey, apple brandy, peach brandy and other alcoholic liquors used as a beverage....” What the hapless Davis had done was to approach personally a number of South Carolinians with a letter that stated, among other things, that there would be times when an “absolutely pure” whiskey would be useful in a home for medical purposes (wink, wink) and North State would supply the “medicine.” Unfortunately, the General Assembly of South Carolina had passed legislation making it a misdemeanor, punishable by law, to solicit orders in that manner for alcoholic products.

Davis was on the hook. When a lower court convicted him, North State recognized the threat to its business practices and appealed the case to the South Carolina Supreme Court on the grounds that the state law was unconstitutional under the interstate commerce clause. In January 1910, that Court determined that the law was not “repugnant” to the U.S. Constitution and upheld Fletcher Davis’s conviction.

North State was not the only Richmond enterprise to fall afoul of South Carolina. The Howard Distilling Company, ignoring the example made of Davis, sent its man, named L.R. Smalls, into South Carolina during September of 1911. He was armed with price lists (Fig. 9) and post cards (Fig. 10) on which orders could be sent. The picture on the card was of a railroad train rushing the whiskey to the customer from Richmond. Significantly, Howard Distilling did not provide a street address, just a post office box number. There could be no doubt about what Smalls was up to.



8. North State brochure cover

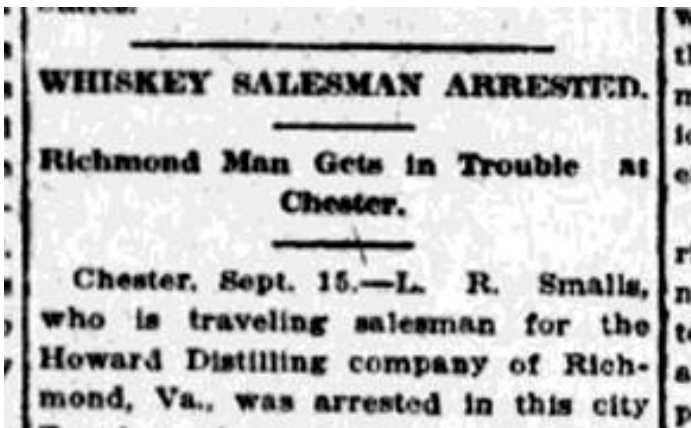


9. Howard Distilling trade cards



10. Howard Distilling postcard

While drumming in the city of Chester, S.C., he was arrested and charged with soliciting orders for whiskey and placed under a \$2,000 bond -- the equivalent of \$50,000 in today's dollar. The case made local headlines (Fig. 11). Recognizing that an appeal within the South Carolina court system would be fruitless, Howard Distilling negotiated a settlement. The case against Smalls was dismissed with the payment of a \$50 fine on the condition that the salesman never return to Chester.



11. News story on Smalls arrest

During this period court cases involving sales of whiskey into "dry" states and localities abounded, but never seemed to discourage the mail order liquor dealers from their lucrative trade. In 1913, however, the U.S. Congress, bowing to Prohibitionist forces, passed the Webb-Kenyon Act making it illegal to ship alcoholic beverages interstate into areas where it was banned. That blow was followed three years later with Virginia itself voting to go "dry." Those liquor dealers who had not already shut their doors were out of business overnight. The mail order whiskey "bubble" had burst and the Richmond train station became a much less lively place.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows



- March 23 Bloomington, MN
- Mar 28-29 Morro Bay, CA
- March 30 Brewerton, NY
- March 30 Enfield, CT
- April 5 St. Clairsville, OH
- April 5 Daphne, AL
- April 6 Dover, NH
- April 6 Hutchinson, KS
- April 11-12 Antioch, CA
- April 12 Memphis, TN
- April 26-27 Old Greenwich, CT
- April 26 Aiken, SC
- April 27 Rochester, NY
- May 3 Gray, TN
- May 4 Utica, NY
- May 17 DeFuniak Springs, FL
- May 18 Coventry, CT
- May 29-31 Grantville, PA (Milk Bottle Collectors Assoc.)
- May 30-31 Butte, MT
- June 7 Ballston Spa, NY
- June 14 Smyrna, GA
- June 21 Tulsa, OK

- April 12 Kalamazoo, MI
- April 13 Tylersport, PA
- April 26 Salisbury, NC
- April 27 Brick, NJ
- April 27 Harrisburg, VA
- May 4 Antioch, IL
- May 10 Mansfield, OH
- May 18 Washington, PA
- May 24 Richmond, RI
- May 31-1 Santa Rosa, CA
- June 14 San Diego, CA
- June 21 Tallahassee, FL
- June 28 Reno, NV

August 1-3, 2014 FOHBC National Show in Lexington, KY



These are some of the show & tell items at our February meeting. We will include additional pictures in the next newsletter.