

“NASTY WORDS” AND NIFTY WHISKEYS

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As collectors of American whiskey bottles and jugs know well, U.S.A. whiskiana history falls conveniently into four periods: 1) “pre-Pro” (up to 1920), 2) the Prohibition vacuum (1920-1934), 3) the “Nasty Words” era (1935-1964) and 4) ever since. While “pre-Pro” items obviously hold the greatest collector and historical interest, there is something to be said for products from the “Nasty Words” era.

Not long ago in this magazine, Cecil Munsey suggested items that contain the “nasty words” over the years may increase significantly in interest and value since their place in time would be appreciated by collectors. His observations confirm my own interest in the characteristic two-handled ceramic jugs produced during the period [Figure 1]. Although they currently fetch very little at auction or bottle shows, they have a definite appeal.

The Nasty Words

First a comment about the “nasty words”: The item was coined by author and bottle expert John Tibbitts years ago. After National Prohibition was repealed in late 1933, Congress followed up by passing laws controlling various aspects of liquor sales. Tibbitts was referring to a statement that lawmakers in 1934 dictated be imprinted on liquor containers. It reads: “Federal law prohibits sale or reuse of this bottle.”

As a result, after January 1, 1935, all hard liquor sold in the United States came

in containers that had the federal warning permanently fixed in the glass or ceramic [Figure 2]. The statement was not required on wine or beer bottles. The intention of Congress was to prevent bootleggers, moonshiners and unscrupulous saloon-keepers from putting new booze into old bottles. An unintended effect of the words was to discourage distillers from putting their legitimate products in “fancy” containers as many had done prior to Prohibition. Nevertheless, some whiskey companies as a marketing strategy, like the two featured in this article, packaged their whiskey in distinctive two-handled ceramic jugs.

Chicago’s Hannah & Hogg

Alexander Donnan (known as “A.D.”) Hannah and David Hogg both were natives of Scotland. Hannah was born there in 1845, the son of Alexander and Mary Hannah. He emigrated to the U.S. in 1868 at the age of 23, going first to Kansas City to work as a store clerk. In 1872, he moved to Chicago where he was employed in the liquor business as a traveling salesman. In that pursuit, he met David Hogg, who was running a small business in Chicago. Hogg was born in 1842 in Kinrosshire, Scotland, and came to the U.S. in 1863, working first in the East and then in Chicago as a painter and wall paper hanger.

In 1873 Hannah & Hogg decided to go into business together and opened a store at 190 Madison Street. They called their

drinking establishment “The Thistle,” the symbol of their native Scotland. Soon they branched out into retail sales of liquor and cigars, buying more stores in several parts of the Windy City. Hannah was president of the company and Hogg was vice president. They appear to have married sisters. Hannah wed Catherine Grady in 1874 and Hogg married Mary Grady in 1878. The Hannahs had three children; the Hogs had four. The two families lived within a block of each other on Chicago’s fashionable Oak Street.

These transplanted Scotsmen were eminently successful and soon became well recognized figures in Chicago. Canny about politics, they covered both bases: Hannah was a prominent Democrat, Hogg an active Republican. So well known was their establishment that the American author, Theodore Dreiser, used it as the backdrop for scenes in his famous 1910 novel, “Sister Carrie.” In the book, he described Hannah & Hogg’s as “a gorgeous saloon from a Chicago standpoint” and his story fictionally included its manager as a major character.

In time Hannah & Hogg came to own and operate the Brevoort Hotel, one of Chicago’s premier hostelryes. This establishment, in the city’s Loop District, was built in 1906 and still stands as a landmark at 120 W. Madison Street. Elderly George Moll, who like his father before him ran a tavern in Chicago, remembered their saloon from his childhood. Moll told me

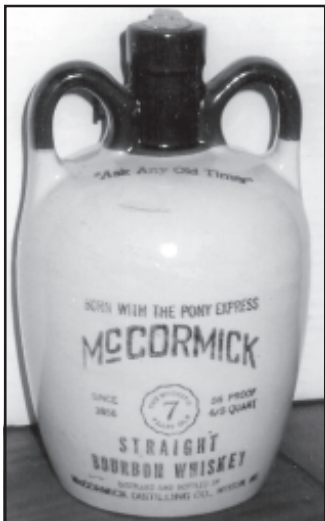


Figure 1: McCormick “fifth” two-handled jug.

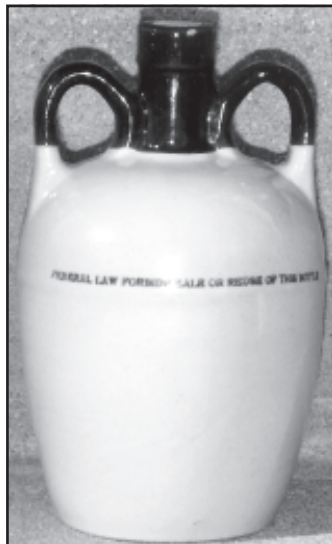


Figure 2: The “Nasty Words.”



Figure 3: A “pre-Pro” Hannah & Hogg whiskey jug.



Figure 4: Hannah & Hogg “Thistle” fifth.



Figure 5: Hannah & Hogg "93" fifth.

that Hannah & Hogg were celebrated for the quality of their whiskey. They were distributors rather than distillers, buying bulk whiskey, bottling it and selling it under their own labels. Their pre-Pro jugs and bottles featured the Scottish thistle motif [Figure 3].

Enter the Medley Family

The two founders sold their enterprises and brand name about 1910 and retired. Their names on whiskey, however, had a continuing attraction in the Chicago region and the Middle West. That reputation even survived the 13 years of Prohibition and the Hannah & Hogg label was revived during the 1930s. The Medley Distilling Company of Owensboro, Kentucky, owned the brand. It was a family owned operation whose roots in whiskey distilling dated from 1800.



Figure 6: Hannah & Hogg half-pint & mini.



Figure 7: Hannah & Hogg gallon with wire rack.

Shown here are the two-handled containers in which the Medleys merchandised Hannah & Hogg whiskey. The jugs come in four sizes and two styles: Shown here in the "fifth" size (4/5th of a quart) one has the familiar thistle motif [Figure 4], and the other a "93," symbolic of its being 93 proof - or 46.5 percent alcohol [Figure 5]. The thistle jug also comes in half-pint and mini versions [Figure 6]. The "93" style likewise is found in a gallon container that has its own wire stand,



Figure 8: Tom Hannah fifth.



Figure 9: Tom Hannah fifth & gallon.

allowing it to be tipped more easily into a glass [Figure 7]. The big one bears the slogan: "World's Best Bourbon." The "93" jug boasts that the whiskey has been "famous since 1873" - the year Hannah & Hogg got started.

The Medleys also sold a Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey under the name "Tom Hannah." This brand also used the thistle motif, an 1873 origin (same as H&H), the Hannah name and two-handled jugs. The slogan for this product was "Enjoy the Best Now," which was underglazed on the containers. Tom Hannah brand bourbon came in a fifth package [Figure 8] and one-gallon [Figure 9].

The Medleys sold their Owensboro plant in 1957, but members of the family continued to run the facility. Hannah & Hogg remained as a bourbon brand, merchandised in interesting containers such as a bottle shaped like a pair of binoculars [Figure 10]. Sometime after 1971 the brand was sold to White Rock Distilleries, an operation on Maine's Androscoggin River, inland from the Maine coast at Lewiston. Through acquisitions and expansion, White



Figure 10: Hannah & Hogg binocular bottle.

Rock represented in 50 states and 20 countries with sales exceeding two million cases annually. It continues to distribute Hannah and Hogg gin and vodka, but not bourbon.

The Glenmore Story

The Glenmore Distillery Company of Owensboro and Louisville is another operation that marketed the two-handled jug. The firm traced its origins back to 1871 when it was founded by an Irish immigrant named James Thompson, who arrived in America at the age of 16 with barely the clothes on his back. History records that he first entered the whiskey business as a broker and commission agent, selling spirits to both wholesalers and retailers. He saved his money and eventually opened his own distillery, calling it James Thompson & Bro. This company produced such brands as Old Thompson, Kentucky Tavern and F.O.E. (Finest On Earth). For a time during the 1880s, Thompson partnered with his cousin George Garvin Brown of the Brown-Foreman whiskey dynasty.

About 1890, Thompson broke family ties and on his own, founded the Glenmore Distillery Company at Owensboro, consolidating his buildings under that name. Just as Hannah & Hogg had harked back to their native land for their thistle symbol, Irishman Thompson remembered a castle called Glenmore in County Wicklow [Figure 11]. A perfect name for his flagship whiskey brand, he decided, and so it became.

Thompson proved to be an able businessman and his distillery thrived. The firm advertised widely its Glenmore bourbon and other house brands. One 1893 advertising piece boasts: "The queen of Daviess County (Ky.) whiskies...If you buy Glenmore you are sure of a whiskey that stands at the head of its class. It is pure and fine as silk." Glenmore's vigorous



Figure 11: Glenmore Castle, Ireland.

marketing brought the whiskey a national market and wealth to James Thompson. In 1901, he used some of that money to buy a neighboring Daviess County operation, the R. Monarch Distillery, adding it to his holdings. In 1912, he completely rebuilt his main plant, making it one of America's most modern of that time. He also established a business office in Louisville.

Glenmore's Whiskey Jugs

Throughout this period, Glenmore whiskey renamed the firm's flagship brand. It was sold in quart-sized stoneware "shoulder" jugs with a round, cream Bristol glaze body and a brown Albany slip top [Figure 12]. By far the most striking element of the Glenmore jug was the underglaze cobalt blue picture of a Kentucky Colonel on the back of the container. The Colonel sports a full mustache, a long goatee, bushy eyebrows and a full head of hair. The artist has given him a look of intensity, bordering on a scowl, that renders him very formidable indeed [Figure 13]. Perhaps the portrait was just too strong. Later, the distillery reissued a similar jug - but with a considerably toned-down portrait of the Colonel.

Unlike many of his neighboring distilleries, James Thompson's operation survived Prohibition. Glenmore was selected by the U.S. Government as one of the seven distilleries nationwide authorized to produce alcohol for medicinal purposes. This privilege insured that Glenmore would be one of the few lucky survivors of the Volstead Act. But Thompson himself never saw Repeal, dying in 1924. Subsequently, the distillery was managed by his sons, Col. Frank B. and James Frank Thompson, president and chairman. Frank was a real-

life Kentucky colonel by reason of his distinguished World War One military service.

With Repeal, Col. Thompson revived the Glenmore brand and packaged it once again in stoneware. He adopted the two-handled bottle [Figure 14]. From the numbers of these items seen today at bottle shows and at auction, the brand and the container were very popular. Eventually the distillery abandoned the tradition of stoneware packaging in favor of glass - glass made to look like ceramic [Figure 15].

Glenmore Distilleries continued to prosper despite a 1938 fire in its warehouses that cost an estimated \$2 million in lost products and damages. By 1941, the firm was calculated to be worth \$7 million. Its main brand became Old Kentucky Tavern (no longer Glenmore), and it marketed other whiskeys such as Tom Hardy and Kentucky Club. In 1944 the firm purchased Yellowstone brand from the Taylor & Williams Distillery of Louisville. Following the trend of the times, the firm also expanded to importing liquors. It also opened a New York City office at 30 Rockefeller Plaza.

Glenmore Distilleries eventually bought two other Prohibition survivors, the Medley and Fleischmann distilleries, both Owensboro-based. In so doing, it apparently was trying to win at the consolidation "game" that gripped the U.S. whiskey industry in the 1960s and 70s. In the end, it was no match for the big international liquor cartels that were buying distilleries in Scotland, Canada and - finally - the United States. During the 1980s, Glenmore became part of the United Distilleries international conglomerate.

Most of its brand names were terminated



Figure 12 (L): Pre-Pro Glenmore jug.
Figure 13 (R): Back of jug: The Colonel.

Figure 14: Glenmore fifth - ceramic.



Figure 15: Glenmore fifth - glass.

or their distilling transferred to other parts of the organization. By the mid-1990s, the Owensboro distillery that the Thompson family founded and fostered for almost a century had been stripped of any active whiskey-making and was being used only for warehousing and bottling. Nevertheless, the Glenmore name - sometimes with the colonel - has continued to be seen on whiskey and in advertisements [Figure 16].

Collecting the “Nasty Words”

By the early 1960s, it had become clear to political leaders that the nasty words were



Figure 16: Glenmore ad with colonel.

no longer necessary, if they ever had been. The infamous bootleggers were a thing of the past. The vast majority of American liquor purchases occurred in stores either run by the states or closely controlled by them. This understanding led Congress in 1964 to amend Federal law and to eliminate the reuse provision. As glass and ceramic molds were replaced, the nasty words were history after a run of 31 years. Their demise made possible innovations of whiskey being sold in a wide range of figural and fanciful containers, both glass and ceramic. Those have included Beam, Lionstone, Michter, Wild Turkey and many other whiskeys. Many whiskeys are colorful, well-designed and have attracted collectors.

In the meantime, whiskey containers of the 1934-1965 era have flown under the collecting radar. They come up so commonly on eBay and other auction sites that we really don't take a second look at items such as this Platte Valley jug [Figure 17]. In his book, “Looking at the Overlooked,” art historian Norman Bryson talks about “...things which, belonging to the numerous spaces of daily life, are taken entirely for granted, that familiarity itself pushes them far below the threshold of visual distinction.” The two-handled jugs shown here, and others of that style, fit Bryson's description.

I believe they deserve better. They represent the production of notable American potteries. The Glenmore jug shown in Figure 14 has been identified as a

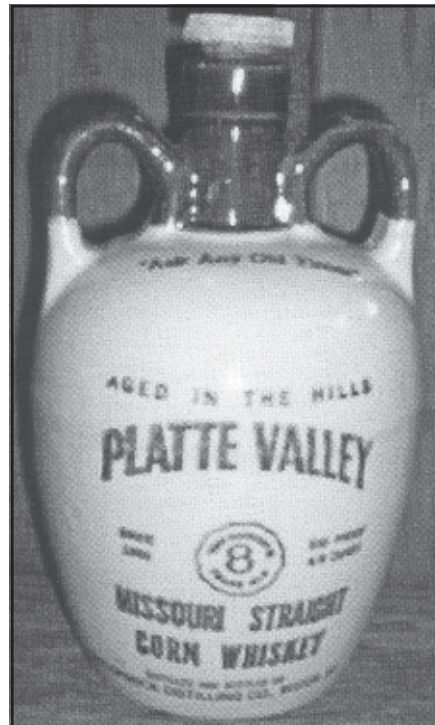


Figure 17: Platte Valley fifth.

product of the widely collected Red Wing potteries by specialist Ray Reiss in his book “Red Wing Art Pottery.” Jim Martin and Bette Cooper in their book, “Monmouth-Western Stoneware,” depict the same jug as having been made by Western Stoneware. It is possible that Glenmore ordered from both firms. Without a pottery mark, it is impossible to tell. A few later two-handled jugs are marked with a U.S.A. on the base. Again, it is not definitive. My own hunch is that most of these jugs were made by Western Stoneware.

A second reason for collecting these ceramics is their quality. In addition to being tastefully designed, virtually all have underglazed transfers, meaning that the labels cannot rub off over time, unlike some pre-Pro whiskey jugs. Their lettering will remain crisp and legible for as long as the jug is intact. Finally, as Cecil Munsey has suggested, the ability to place these containers in a definite time frame adds importance. That is another way of saying that future generations may decide those words were not so nasty after all.

Material for this article was gleaned from a wide range of sources. Most important were: *Dictionary of the History of the American Brewing and Distilling Industries* by William L. Downard (1980) and *Bluegrass, Belles and Bourbon* by Harry Harrison Kroll (1967).
