

Hounded by Prohibition: H. Clarke & Sons

by Jack Sullivan
Special to the Potomac Pontil

There is a climactic scene in Uncle Tom's Cabin where the slave girl, Eliza, baby in arms, hops over ice floes to cross a river to freedom, chased by a pack of bloodhounds. Henry Clarke, a whiskey dealer of considerable imagination, at times must have felt like Eliza. The hounds of Prohibition seemed always to be nipping at his heels.

Henry Clarke's story begins in Salisbury, North Carolina, where he established a highly successful liquor distribution company in 1884 and brought his three sons – Emile, Leon and Sol – into the business. He was an enthusiastic resident of his state and in 1905 registered his first whiskey brand – Tar Heel, the state nickname. Its label proudly bore the state seal that had been adopted 12 years earlier (**Fig. 1**).

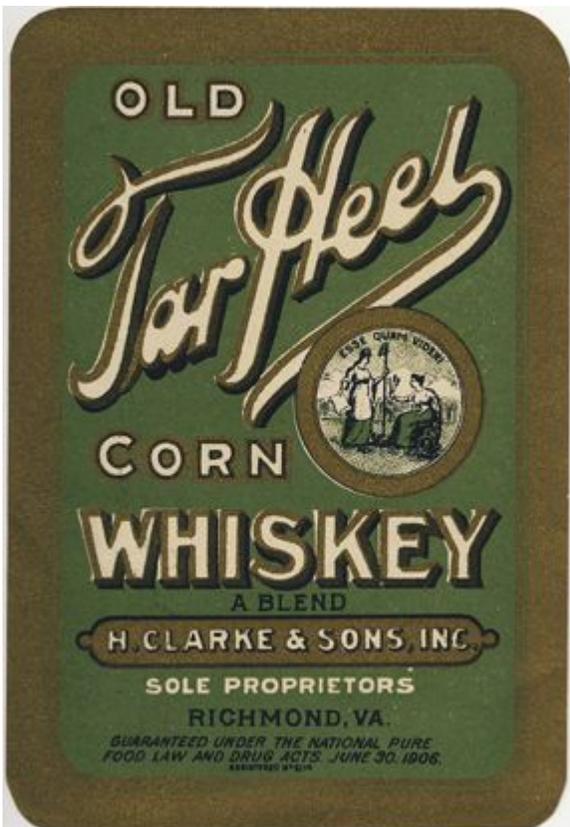


Fig. 1 - Old Tar Heel label

The Clarke family also was active in North Carolina Jewish life. With only a handful of his fellow religionists in Salisbury, Henry and his family regularly traveled 30 miles by horse and buggy to neighboring Statesville, N.C., for Sabbath services in the Fireman's Hall. Eventually that congregation built an imposing Romanesque revival brick synagogue (**Fig. 2**), which stands today as an historical landmark. The Clarke family

was among major contributors to the project. In 1900 the Jewish Yearbook listed him as vice president of Congregation Emmanuel and his son Sol as secretary-treasurer.

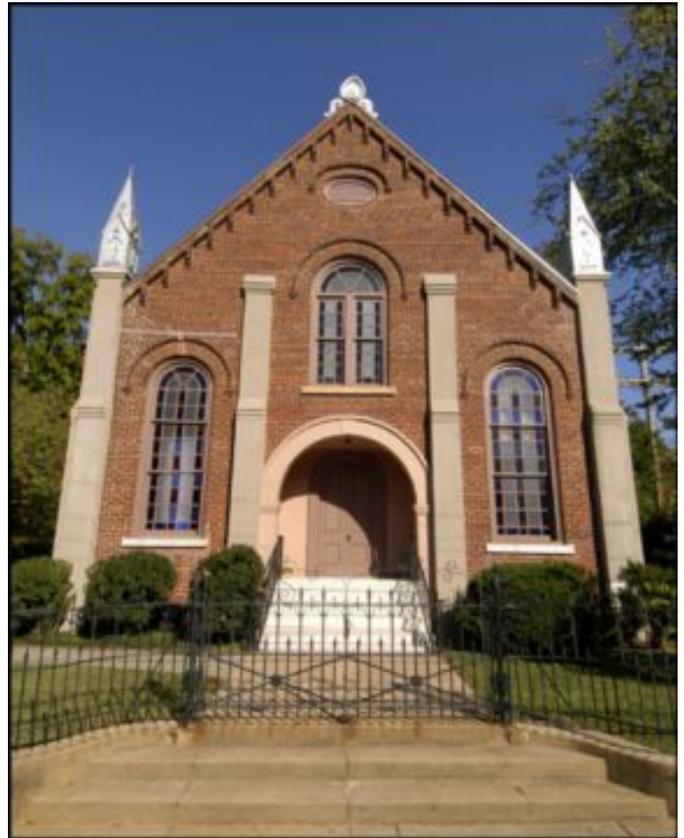


Fig. 2 - Congregation Emmanuel Synagogue

North Carolina Votes Dry

Yet even then the Prohibition bloodhounds were on the prowl. Despite its flourishing liquor industry, "Dry" advocates were flooding into North Carolina in an effort to make the state the first in the South to ban alcohol completely. The night before a May 26, 1908, statewide referendum on the issue, Mordecai Ham, described as a

"Baptist evangelist and temperance zealot" (**Fig. 3**), visited Salisbury for a rally. Mordecai was greeted by a mob that shouted, "Hang Ham!," and he had to be escorted to his train by sheriff's deputies with drawn pistols. Whether Henry or any of his sons were among the angry crowd is unknown.



Fig. 3 - Mordecai Ham

In any case the protest meant little. The following day North Carolina by a vote of 62% to 38% went totally dry. A local cartoon (Fig. 4) hailed the new day that was coming. The caption read in part: “Saloons and dispensaries will be hunting for a city of refuge.” Those were prophetic words for Henry Clarke and his sons. Within weeks they relocated their business to 1207 Main Street in Richmond, Virginia. A 1909 company letterhead from that location lists Henry as president, Emile as 1st vice president, Leon as 2nd vice president, and Sol L. as secretary & treasurer.



Fig. 4 - Prohibition cartoon

Thriving in Virginia

At their new home in Richmond H. Clarke & Sons continued to merchandise their Tar Heel brand, despite the disappointment North Carolina had provided (Fig. 5) Their ads (Fig. 6) emphasized the firm as “the South’s Greatest Mail Order Wine and Whiskey Merchants,” and offered free transport within the express territory of the Adams and Southern Lines, at that time the leading package delivery company south of the Mason-Dixon Line. This suggests that the Clarkes were keeping in touch with their Tar Heel customer base by shipping whiskey into the state in two gallon jugs, like the one shown here. (Fig. 7).

Fig. 5 - Old Tar Heel “Corn” handout



Fig. 6 - Clarke Tar Heel ad

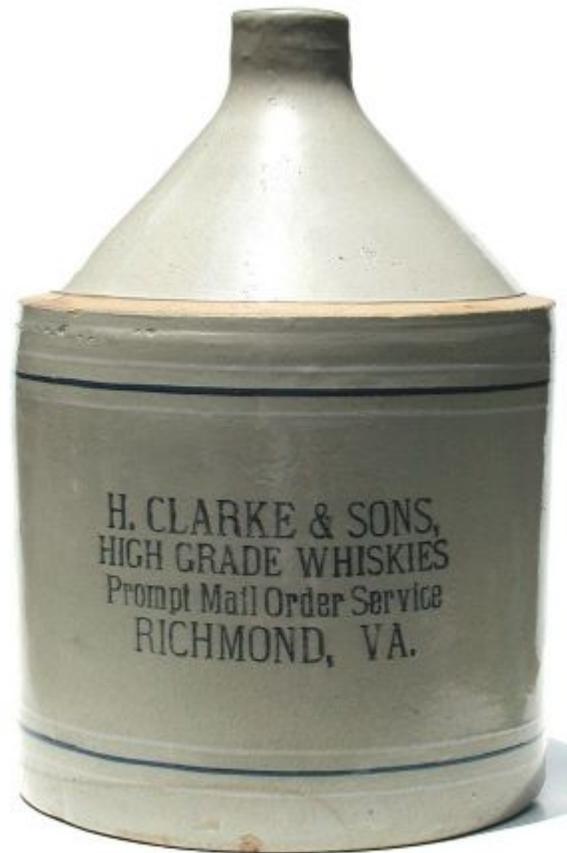


Fig. 7 - Clarke two gallon jug

“The South’s Greatest” also blossomed out in other new brands and imaginative advertising. Select Old Stock Corn (Fig. 8) and Clarke’s Monogram (Fig. 9) featured the same attractive designs that characterized most Clarke products. The firm’s flagship brand became Royal Wreath Whiskey. It was featured prominently in ads and merchandising items (Figs. 10, 11). Royal Wreath was touted as having a Kentucky pedigree and no less a hero than Daniel Boone was its champion. Moreover,

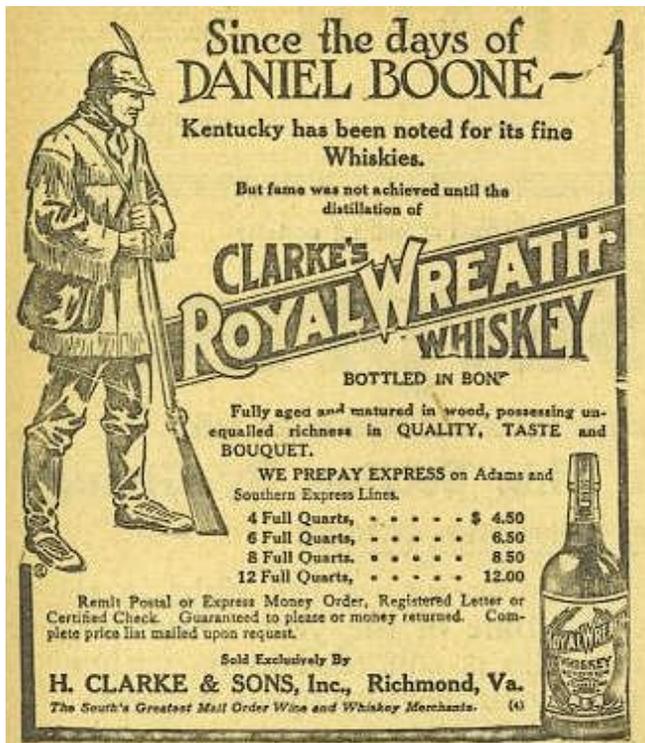


Fig. 8 - Clarke Select Old Stock label (above left)
 Fig. 9 - Clarke Monogram Whiskey ad (above right)

Fig. 11 - Royal Wreath handout (above left)
 Fig. 12 - Clarke cork and pull (above right)

someone in H. Clarke & Sons also was exhibiting a sense of humor. Shown here (Fig. 12) is a pull cork giveaway with advertising that includes a drawing of two monkeys threatening to cut off the tail of an anxious cat. The caption reads: "A great deal could be said about the merits of our whiskeys, but to make a long tail short...."

At the same time, the firm was serious about trying to stave off the forces of Temperance, using tactics similar to many other U.S. liquor distillers and distributors of the time. Some Clarke advertising touted its whiskey as "highly recommended for medicinal and family use," playing down implications that it also might be fun to drink. Other merchandising items trumpeted that Clarke whiskey was "guaranteed under the National Food and Drug Act, June 30, 1906," a claim that not only was untrue, but mangled the name of the Federal Food and Drugs Act. Later Clarke ads eliminated the guarantee language – perhaps at government urging – but still cited "compliance" with the Act.



The Bloodhounds Triumph

Despite these energetic efforts, the Prohibition bloodhounds were closing in again on the Clarks. In 1913 the U.S. Congress passed the Webb-Kenyon Act that forbid any mail order sales of liquor into dry states. Whatever business H. Clarke & Sons was doing in North Carolina and other parched areas was terminated. The ban leveled a severe financial blow on the firm. In Virginia as well, drums were beating loud for statewide Prohibition. In 1914 the Virginia Anti-Saloon League held its annual convention in Richmond, determined to end liquor sales in the Commonwealth. They posed righteously on the Capital steps (Fig. 13). Most of Virginia voted itself dry in September of that year, but Richmond, along with Arlington, Williamsburg, and Norfolk rejected the idea under a local option provision. Prohibitionists, however, kept the pressure on and in November, 1916, three years before National Prohibition, the Commonwealth of Virginia legislature completely banned sales of liquor, wine, and beer.

Fig. 10 - Royal Wreath Whiskey ad



Fig. 13 - The Virginia Anti-Saloon League's 1914 Convention

Remember that Eliza successfully escaped over the ice floes from the pursuing canines and found safety (Fig. 14). Henry Clarke and his sons were not so lucky. The same year that Virginia went dry, the firm that had survived for 32 years in two states disappeared forever from Richmond directories. Henry Clarke and his sons similarly fade from view, victims for the second time of the Prohibition hounds.



Fig. 14 - Eliza escaping the bloodhounds

Notes: Material for this article was gathered from a number of Internet and other sources. Among the illustrations, the items shown in Figs. 1, 5, 6, and 12 are courtesy of Marvin Croker. The jug in Fig. 7 is through the courtesy of Ed and Lucy Faulkner. The photo in Fig. 13 is from the Library of Congress.

Upcoming Area Bottle Shows

NOVEMBER 4 - ELKTON, MARYLAND

Tri-State Bottle Collectors and Diggers Club, 35th Annual Show & Sale (9 AM - 3 PM) at the Singerly Fire Hall, Routes 279 & 213, Elkton, Maryland. INFO: **DAVE BROWN**, PH: (302) 738-9960.

NOVEMBER 11 - PITTSBURGH, PENNSYLVANIA

The Pittsburgh Antique Bottle Club's Annual Show & Sale (9 AM - 2 PM, Early Buyers 7 AM) at The Ice Garden, Rostraver Twp (Exit 46B off I-70 to Rt. 51 North, 4.1 miles), Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. INFO: **BOB DeCROO**, PH: (714) 326-8741 or **JAY HAWKINS**, PH: (724) 872-6013, E-mail: 1hawkins63@msn.com.



NOVEMBER 11 - OAKLAND, NEW JERSEY

North Jersey Antique Bottle Collectors Assn. 38th Annual Show & Sale (9 AM to 2 PM, Early Buyers 8 AM \$15.00) **NEW LOCATION:** 33 Ramapo Valley Rd., Route 202, Oakland, New Jersey. INFO: **KEN** (973) 907-7351 or **JIM** (516) 454-8993.

NOVEMBER 18 - GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

Southeast Bottle Club 6th Annual Antique Bottle & Collectibles Show & Sale (Sun. 9 AM - 3 PM, Adm. \$1; Dealer Set-Up 6 - 9 AM; Early Buyers 7:30 AM) at the Greensboro Farmer's Curb Market, 501 Yanceyville St., Greensboro, North Carolina. Free appraisals. INFO: **REGGIE LYNCH**, PH: (704) 221-6489, www.antiquebottles.com/greensboro

NOVEMBER 25 - BETHLEHEM, PENNSYLVANIA

The Forks of the Delaware Bottle Collectors Assoc. 34th Annual Show & Sale (9 AM - 3 PM, Early Buyers 7:30 AM) at the Bethlehem Catholic High School, Madison & Dewberry Avenues, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. INFO: **BILL HEGEDUS**, 20 Cambridge Place, Catasauqua, PA 18032, PH: (610) 264-5945.H.

MARCH 2 - BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

The Baltimore Antique Bottle Club's 28th Annual Show & Sale (8 AM - 3 PM) at the Physical Education Center, CCBS-Essex, 7201 Rossville Blvd, Essex, Maryland. INFO: **BOB FORD**, PH: (410) 531-9459, E-mail: bottles@comcast.net.