



If I had to give this edition of Random Shots a title, it would probably be along the lines of “All That Glisters is not Glass”. Purists will probably not appreciate me torturing Shakespeare’s oft-quoted line from *The Merchant of Venice* in this way, but the city *is* synonymous with fine crystal glassware so it seems fitting for an article on the metal varieties of shot “glasses.”

My first introduction to metal shots was not a happy one. I was a long-time shot collector but newly-introduced to the bounties of eBay. I had yet to learn that the ability to commit e-funds with the click of the wrist short-circuits the normal deliberative process during which one weighs the object’s history and worth. I happily forked over the costs of the auction and shipping on two metal pre-pro shots which, upon arrival several days later, turned out to be bottle caps!

In retrospect, the presence of threads around the rims was a major clue as to their true origins [Figure 3], but they weren’t apparent as such in the auction photos. Not without good reason is “*Caveat Emptor*” the first rule of eBay! But there are a number of *bona fide* pre-pro metal shots and they provide an interesting means of breaking up the glittering regularity of a shot-glass display case.



Figure 3

Metal shots come in three basic forms: telescoping [Figure 2], two-part sliders [Figure 1], and thimblefuls. The first of these is also the rarest and possibly oldest of the metal advertising shots. Telescoping shots consist of a wide base attached to the lower of 5 concentric chrome-plated bands that lock when pulled apart to form a 1-3/4" cup. Surprisingly, this simple form is both robust enough to drink from and completely liquor-tight. Brand information was stamped on a detachable lid that clips over the base of the collapsed shot and allows it to be tucked neatly into a vest pocket. Although unbranded versions bearing only patent information or the word “Knox” appear for sale occasionally, the only version I’ve seen bearing liquor advertising

is shown in Figure 4. The cap reads DRINK / LUCKY MYSTIC / 3 TIMES 3 / RYE WHISKEY.

This shot’s origins remained unknown until a booklet featuring Lucky Mystic whiskey appeared at auction about a year ago. It showcased the wares of Mihalovitch, Fletcher & Co., a Cincinnati-based company that was first listed in city directories in 1875. The only other telescoping “shots” I

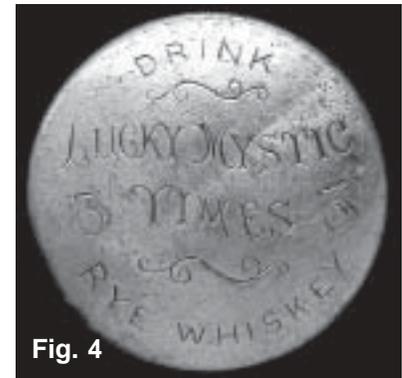


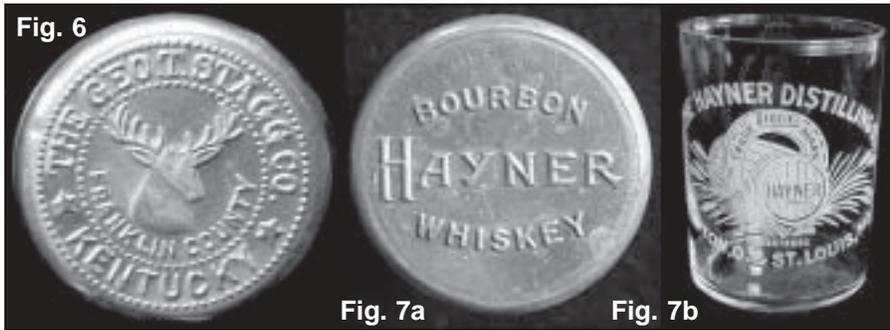
Fig. 4

I know of all stand around 3" tall when open and are made of aluminum. One advertises Victor Whiskey [Figure 5], the product of an old and revered Philadelphia concern. The company was established in 1832 by J. A. Daugherty and operated from *ca.* 1844 until Prohibition by two generations of Gills. The cup has a decidedly industrial or even WWII-era military feel to it and must have been the pre-pro equivalent of the modern Big Gulp promoted by 7-11 convenience stores.



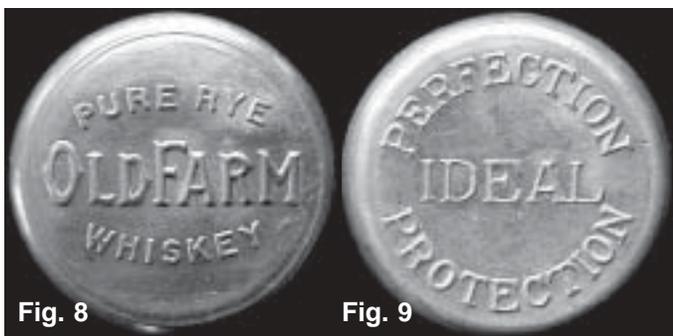
Figure 5

Another example of this type of aluminum cup is listed in Edmonson’s *Old Advertising Spirits Glasses*. It was distributed by Peter Espenscheid of Mt Vernon Ind., and it is likely that there are several additional examples that are unlisted.



The second class of metal shots includes the one that most glass collectors are familiar with. These are two-part sliders that stand around 2-1/4" tall when open but collapse down to 1-1/2" [Figure 1]. It was one of these that first got me started down the shiny path, a once-in-a-lifetime find at a local antique show. The find turned out to be folly, however, because it advertises "Silver Dollar Rye", the most common of all metal shots that appears with vulgar regularity every two weeks or so on eBay. Worse was yet to come, but not before I had acquired several different varieties of slider. The brand information always appears embossed in the base of a slider so as to be visible when viewed from the outside. This feature is a major clue as to its original use, although this did not become apparent until recently (see below). A second common slider features the trademark of the Geo Stagg Company of Franklin Co., Kentucky [Figure 6].

These can also be found relatively easily and at modest cost. The remaining examples are considerably less common. One was produced by The Hayner Distilling Co., the giant mail-order business that saturated the market with the most common of all pre-pro glasses [Figures 7a, b]. My favorite slider (probably because I don't own one) features a banjo-playing African-American with an embossed label that reads "Old Man River Pure Rye Whiskey". The maker of this brand is unknown to me, but one might guess that it has southern roots. There is also one advertising Old Farm Whiskey, presumably from Abraham Overholt's distillery in West Overton, Pa. [Figure 8]. Finally, there's the slider labeled "PERFECTION IDEAL PROTECTION" [Figure 9]. The statement is sufficiently vague that it might advertise a whiskey, a medicinal, or even a household-cleaning product: there's no way to know for sure.



Most collectors assume that these sliders originated in pre-Prohibition times and the Hayner surely must since the company did not survive Carry Nation's posthumous hatchet. I recently discovered that the Silver Dollar did not – indeed it's probably not even of US origin - though a manufacturer's stamp tells us it was made here. Sliders almost invariably surface in solitary fashion, but in very rare instances they appear married to a bottle. One such pairing is shown in the photo below; the slider sat

atop a screw cap, providing a convenient alternative to taking a surreptitious swig when sampling the contents became necessary [Figure 10]. I obtained the pristine example shown here from Jay Hawkins and I'm most grateful to him for being willing to part with it.

The bottle label tells a clear and intriguing story. Prior to the bottle surfacing, it was generally assumed that the slider hailed from St Louis, because Bob Snyder had recorded the "Silver Dollar" brand as being used by Louis Teuscher of Teuscher & Co. The company had a fairly spotty



representation in the city directories but they apparently operated from at least 1892 until Prohibition. But the bottle label identifies the contents as being Canadian, a product of Distillers Corporation Limited. This was the company that marked the transition of the powerful Bronfman family from mail-order wholesalers and bootleggers to respected distillers. The name was surely designed to ape the old and revered Distillers Company Limited of Scotland, a company that the Canadian upstart hoped to emulate, and eventually partnered with, for a time. The Bronfman enterprise incorporated in Montreal in 1924, meaning that the Silver Dollar slider must date to that time or later. Interestingly there are at least two variants of this slider. The one that came with the bottle is relatively uncommon and crude [Figure 11a], whereas my antique-show purchase is much more common and the impression is crisper [Figure 11b]. Perhaps the latter is more modern, its prevalence a reflection of the gaining popularity and ascendancy of the new company during a time when official US production and sales of whiskey had been reduced to a medicinal trickle.

Finally, we have the thimblefuls. The origins of these oversized sewing accessories (they are typically shot-glass sized,





Figure 12

standing around 2" tall: **Figure 13a**) is obscure but they clearly existed long before they were used as an advertising medium. The unbranded versions are novelty items, fashioned to closely resemble a sewing thimble and bearing the usual inscription "Just a Thimble Full". They can be obtained in sterling silver but the advertising variants were made from a metal alloy or more typically aluminum.

Many different thimblefuls survive, although in relatively small numbers. Since they are not prone to breakage, one has to assume that they were a more expensive form of getting the message out than their crystal counterparts. Company information appears on the cap **[Figure 12]** and many include an additional advertising line running just below the rim. For example, the Betterton thimble has a rim line that reads "JUST A THIMBLE FULL OF OLD WHITE OAK", whereas the Lancaster version assures us that "GOOD OLD QUALITY / WILL NEVER TARNISH" **[Figure 13b]**.

Unfortunately most aluminum thimblefuls do tarnish over time and survive with an unappealing patina of oxidation and grime that's difficult to remove even with vigorous scrubbing. But a few were made of a more resilient alloy and they're not only stronger but more pleasing to the eye. The Alex Young Co. Ltd.'s "Old Y.P.M." thimble is a prime example and,

coincidentally, is a rare relic of one of Philadelphia's finest distilling operations (see the end of the article for more information on this company) **[Figure 14]**.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to mention the metal shot cups produced by the M Wollstein Merchantile Company of Kansas City, MO. Their shape and form is identical to that of the thimblefuls but they make no pretense about their function as an advertising giveaway. I have two examples in my collection and both provide the name of the company in three simple stamped lines with the minimum of embellishment. **[Figure 15]**

Glass collectors generally hold metal shots in great disdain. I collect them largely for their historical value but, while I enjoy having them displayed alongside my finer glasses, it is difficult to get as emotional about them as I do about my etched, gold-rimmed treasures. The lack of competition means that they can usually be purchased at modest cost, but they're sufficiently scarce that putting together a significant collection requires diligence and patience (shot glasses outnumber metal shots by around 100:1).

One notable exception to the "modest cost" rule is a thimble advertising The Casper Co., of Roanoke, Va. John Casper was a large mail-order wholesaler who established his business in Winston-Salem, but was chased out of the State into Virginia

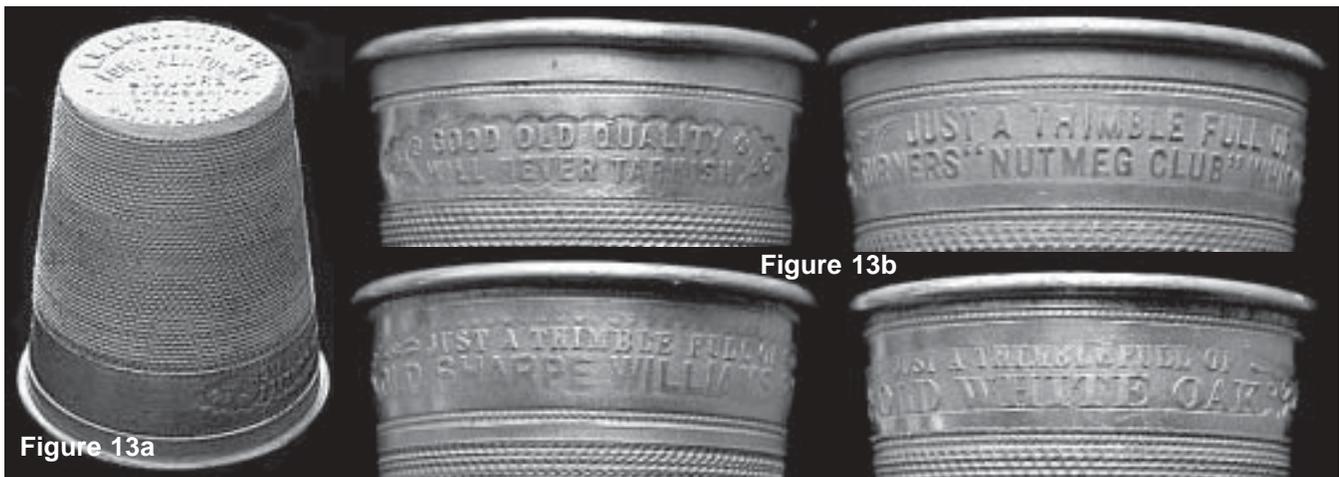


Figure 13b

Figure 13a

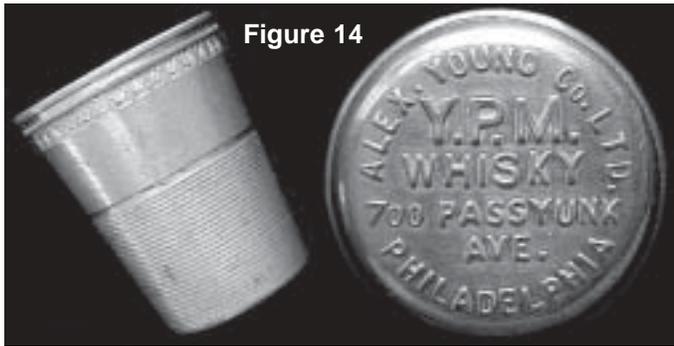


Figure 14



Figure 15

by the rising tide of Prohibition in 1906. Casper thimbles are rare, but coincidentally, one appeared at auction while I was writing this article. It sold for \$196.49, a princely sum that matches some of the rare etched shots. “All that glisters is not glass” indeed, but some of these poor relations are certainly worth their weight in gold.

Many thanks to Howard Currier for divining the historical origins of the Silver Dollar and Lucky Mystic shots. For more

information on anything appearing in this article, please contact Robin Preston at 245 N 15th St., MS #488, Philadelphia, PA 19102, or by E-mail: robin.preston@drexel.edu.

Robin is an enthusiastic collector of pre-prohibition shot glasses in all their various forms and maintains the collector's website, www.pre-pro.com.

The Alexander Young Distilling Co. Inc., ca. 1824-1821

Difficult though it may be to believe today, Philadelphia was once a distilling powerhouse with at least five major spirits manufacturers to its name. The history of John Gibson's company and Gibsonton Mills, Pa., has been well documented, but the other four have slipped into near oblivion over the interceding years. Indeed, there's precious little evidence in the way of



collectibles to show that these manufacturers ever existed, making it difficult for anyone interested in pre-pro Philadelphia history to flesh out the details of their operations. The Alexander Young Co. mentioned in the preceding article has been the most opaque, or at least it was until recently.

Alexander Young was a native of County Derry, Ireland. He arrived on U.S. shores in 1821 at the age of 22. It was not long before he built a still and, somewhere around 1824, entered into partnership with John Maitland to begin commercial production of malt whiskey. Their distillery was located at 4th & South Streets, within a large structure that had once served as a theatre. Their product was clearly a great success because the operations were gradually expanded and improved in succeeding years. In 1837, Maitland's son took his father's place in the partnership but died ten years leaving Alexander Young in sole control.

McElroy's Philadelphia City Directory first began publication in the 1850s and lists Alexander Young as “Grain Distiller and Rectifier.” By 1865, he is billed as “Distiller of Y.P.M. Whiskies.” Young seems to have established such a strong brand recognition that the three letters YPM were all that were

necessary to assure the quality of the product within.

Bottles surviving from pre-pro years have no identifier other than a diagonal embossed banner that reads “Y.P.M.” The acronym refers to “Young's Pure Malt” whiskey and appears on all surviving artifacts from the company — not that there *are* many artifacts. The Y.P.M. thimbleful shown above is the

only known example of a shot and I have yet to see a corkscrew, a trade card, or even a letterhead.

Alexander Young died 1884 but the business continued operations as the Alexander Young Co. Ltd., with five capable family members at the helm. They were responsible for the advertising reproduced here (ca. 1892). My collection also includes a minutes book detailing the company's activities over a 10-year period from 1887-1897. It reveals that Lewis T. Young, Alexander's youngest son, drew a President's salary of \$3,500 per annum. While that doesn't sound excessive for 1890, he also received several times that figure in stock dividends, one-time shareholder payouts, and from sales of personal property to the company! Wilson Young, distiller, received an annual salary of \$1,500. Workers on the distillery floor and salesroom were drawing around \$15 per week at this time.

The minutes record construction of a new 1,500 gallon still and worm tub on the South St. site, and erection of the bonded warehouse at 616-622 Charles St, as indicated in the company advertising. The plans for the warehouse were drawn

up by Geo. W. and W. S. Hewitt, Architects, and were implemented by George P. Payne & Co. at a cost of \$22,399. The thimbleful in the preceding article records an address on Passyunk Ave. This was the original residence of Alexander Young and it also housed the Company store. A sum not exceeding \$1,500 was approved for renovation of the storefront during 1890.

As was usual for the times, The Alexander Young Co. Ltd. was truly a family business. Several Youngs could be found on the distillery floor and John H. Young, a grandson, ran the “Up town” store at Ridge Ave & Spring Garden Sts. A shot glass from this establishment are shown to the left. John died sometime in the 1880s, leaving behind a wife and several young children, but the minutes showed that they were well provided for by the company.

The once thriving Alexander Young Distilling Co. Inc. died with Prohibition and slipped silently into the mists of time, like many proud old family businesses across the country. But should you run across a bottle with the letters “Y.P.M.” emblazoned across its face at a local show, at least you'll now remember that it once contained a quart of Philly's best (*many thanks to David Young for providing details of early company history*).

