

The Multi-millionaire and the Making of “Old Crow” (Special to *Bottles and Extras*)

By Jack Sullivan

Growing up, Edson Bradley probably could not tell sour mash from sweet corn, but in maturity he turned whiskey-making into abounding wealth. In the process, he made possible the rise of Old Crow bourbon – still one of America’s most popular whiskeys.

Bradley was born in 1852 and grew up a large frame house in Roxbury, Connecticut where his father, Edson Sr, was a partner in a shoe manufacturing company. Although details about Edson Jr.’s early life are sketchy, he was born into money, well educated and eventually trained for a career in finance. While still in his twenties he became associated with Paris, Allen & Company, a leading New York and London financial and importing firm.

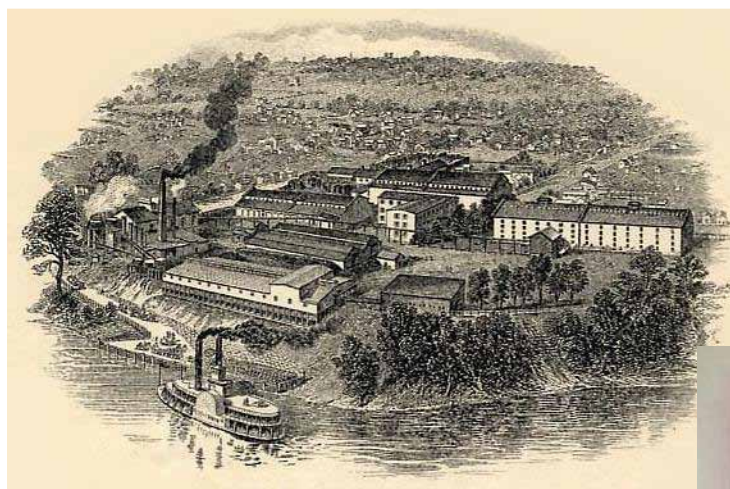
Immediately after the Civil War, members of the firm had become interested in whiskey production as an investment. They connected financially with Frankfort, Kentucky, distillers that included the estimable Colonel E.J. Taylor, a major force in Kentucky bourbon. Together the money men and the whiskey makers built a distillery in Frankfort, shown here). At the same time, they purchased the nearby Old Crow distillery, closed it down, and moved the operations to the new facility along with the brand name.

The Crow name had particular importance. A Scottish physician, James Crow (1789-1856) is credited by many for inventing the sour mash method of making whiskey and for being the father of modern bourbon. After his death, his recipe was handed down through several distillers until purchased by the Taylor group. Through the years the Old Crow brand repeatedly has invoked James Crow’s heritage, including ads purportedly showing him delivering whiskey to the American statesman, Henry Clay.

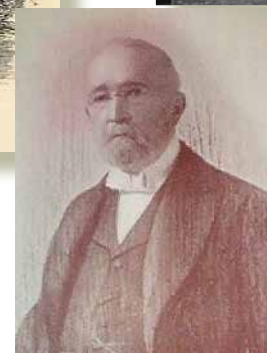
In 1887, the firm incorporated in Kentucky as W.A. Gaines and Co. New York-based Marshall Allen of Paris became president and Bradley a vice president. Although the whiskey industry has always emphasized the backwoods, rustic nature of distilling, the truth is more complicated. New York Wall Street investors frequently were directly involved in the whiskey trade. Edson Bradley, the Eastern aristocrat, was among the most successful.



Edson Bradley birthplace



The W.A. Gaines Distillery, Frankfort, Ky.



Colonel E. J. Taylor

Almost immediately upon joining the distillery, the youthful Bradley was anointed the principal spokesman for the Gaines Company and represented its interests and those of the distilling industry on Wall Street and in the halls of Congress. The operation became highly profitable, selling the Old Crow brand nationwide. The distillery was expanded. A photo from the Kentucky Historical Society shows the enhanced facility.

A black crow early became a fixture on its



Old Crow shot glass



Depiction of James Crow



An Old Crow Trade Card



The Gaines Distillery, c. 1918



Old Crow flask

labels. Bold and interesting advertising, exemplified by a racy trade card and a giveaway shot glass, were part of the success.

As the driving force behind Old Crow, Bradley soon became a national figure. In 1884, the New York Times identified him as a leader of the Wine and Spirits Exchange – an early attempt at a “Whiskey Trust.” In the process, Bradley also was becoming immensely wealthy. Soon the press was referring to Bradley as a liquor

millionaire and a kingpin of the American distilling industry. About this time he moved his family from New York City to Washington, D.C. He bought a large Victorian home on fashionable DuPont Circle and tore it down to build the grandest mansion the Nation’s Capitol had ever seen.

Bradley’s home was truly his castle, featuring towers, turrets and stained glass windows. It contained a Gothic chapel, an art gallery – to hold his extensive collection of ceramics, tapestries and books – and a 500-seat theater he called “Aladdin’s Palace.” Some interior rooms were transferred intact from France. Almost instantly, the Bradleys became a regular item on the society pages of Washington newspapers. Edson’s daughter, Julia, had a splashy and well-publicized



The Bradley Newport mansion



Bradley's New York drawing room



Chapel in the Bradley DC home

“coming out” party in 1894 that drew a crowd of the rich and powerful to his home.

At the same time, Bradley was finding that success had its downside. Because “Old Crow” had achieved national fame as a brand, other whiskey organizations were using some variation of the name on their products. Some of these were licensed bottlers, such as H.B. Kirk Company of New York and Thompson & Howe of Boston. Others simply appropriated the Crow name and prestige. W.A. Gaines Company sought to fend off this competition by registering the Old Crow trademark in 1887. When that move failed to deter the copycats, Bradley and his



Above, left: Ad for Kirk Old Crow; above, right: Old Crow labeled bottle



Hellman's Old Crow



Thompson & Howe Old Crow

colleagues registered again in 1897 and repeated the process in 1904 and again in 1909.

The principal culprit was the Rock Springs Distilling Company

of Daviess County, Kentucky. It persisted in selling a whiskey it called Hellman's Old Crow. Eventually the dispute found its way into the courts. A federal judge in Kentucky

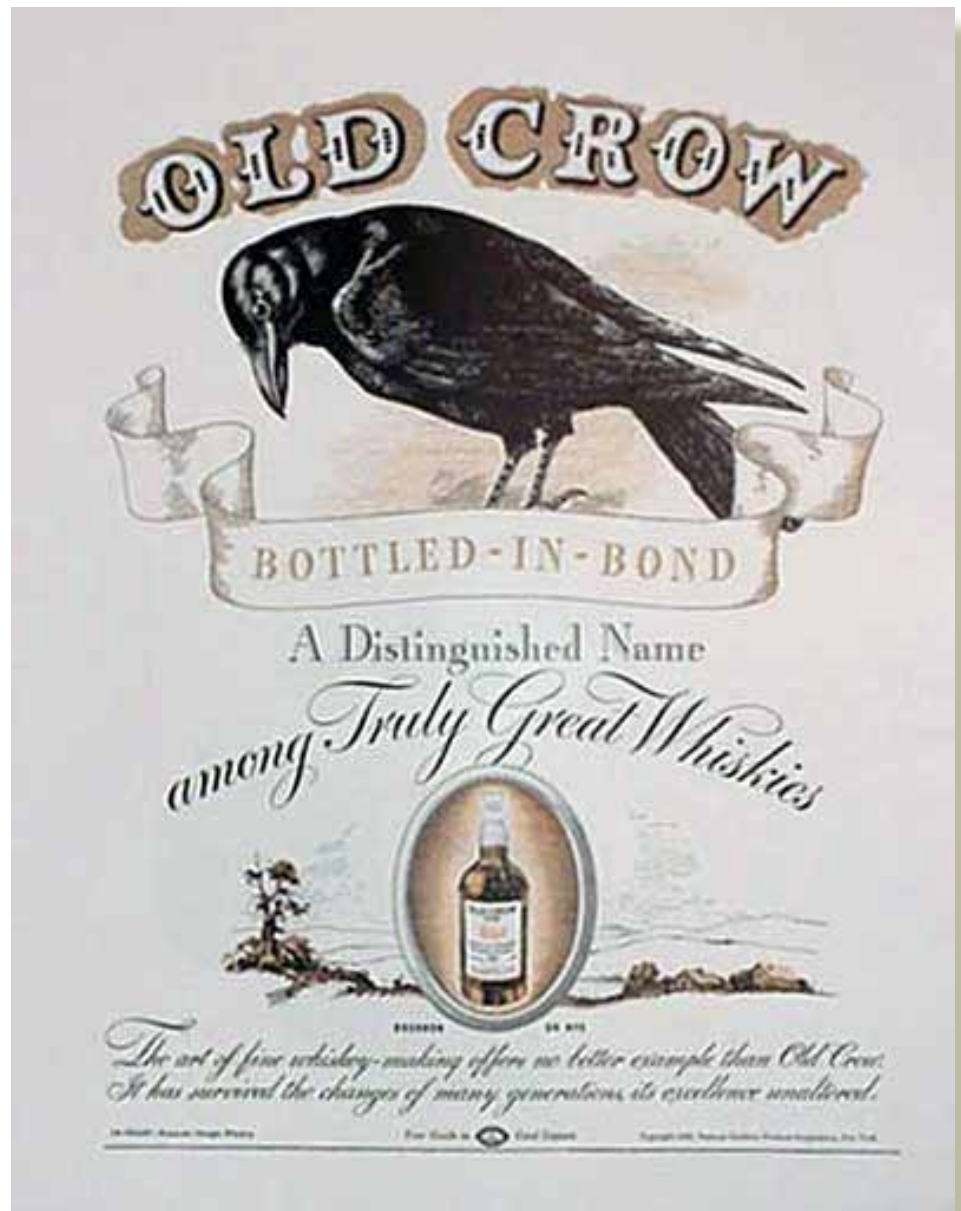
decided for Bradley and the Gaines Company. That decision was reversed by a Federal Appeals Court. In 1918, the case found its way to the United States Supreme Court. The High Court ruled in favor of Bradley and ordered Rock Springs Distilling to “cease and desist” its use of the Old Crow name. We can speculate that at least a few of the Supreme Court justices had been guests at Bradley’s palatial Washington home.

Bradley’s victory quickly became a hollow one as National Prohibition was imposed a year later. His company struggled along until 1922 when it was dissolved and the Gaines distillery was left for a time abandoned and derelict. Now 70 years old and enormously wealthy from Old Crow profits, Bradley was restless. He determined to leave Washington, move to fashionable Newport, Rhode Island, and, almost incredibly, to take his castle with him.

Brick by brick, tile by tile, the mansion was dismantled and transported to Rhode Island while the fascinated populace of Washington looked on. Ripley’s “Believe It or Not” highlighted the event for a national audience. In Newport, Bradley purchased a large existing home called Seaview Terrace. He joined the two structures to become one of the largest mansions in America. It featured 17 rooms on the first floor, 25 on the second, and 12 on the third.

He also bought a 20-room suite in the exclusive River House in New York City. Its sumptuous drawing room indicates the elegance of his life style. In both residences he kept his notable collection of fine art and ceramics.

Time, however, was catching up with the Bradleys. A few months after construction was completed on Seaview Terrace, Mrs. Bradley died there, age 76. Six years later in 1935, Edson, while on a trip to London, also died. He was 83. Today the mansion in Newport still stands. From 1966 to 1971, it was the setting for a spooky ABC daytime soap opera called “Dark



Old Crow advertisement, c. 1938

Shadows.” The house currently serves as a dormitory for a local college.

The Old Crow brand survived and thrived. A 1926 magazine cartoon in the midst of Prohibition indicates the importance the brand had achieved with the public. Immediately after Repeal, American Medicinal Spirits Co. bought the Frankfort plant, renovated it and later turned it over to National Distillers Products Co. which purchased the brand name in 1947. That firm operated the distillery as W.A. Gaines until it went out of the whiskey business in 1985. National Distillers



then sold the brand and facility to the Jim Beam Brands Co. It shut the plant but has continued to market Old Crow. Regardless of ownership, the black bird has remained a constant in its merchandising.

Notes: The information for this article comes from a wide range of written and Internet sources. The Old Crow trade card is through the courtesy of Reggie Lynch. The photo of the shot glass is from Robin Preston and his www.pre-pro website. Portions of this article previously appeared in the Potomac Pontil, the monthly newsletter of the Potomac Bottle Club.

The California Perfume Company

1886-1939

By Rusty Mills

The year 1892 was especially significant in the history of an entrepreneurial venture pioneered by David Hall McConnell and his young bride, Lucy Hays. McConnell received a letter in 1892 from his previous employer, who was then in California, wherein he suggested that the name of the "Union Publishing House" be changed to the "California Perfume Company" to coincide with McConnell's refocusing of this New York-based publishing company toward the exclusive manufacture and sale of perfumes, extracts, and other household consumables. "The name," as McConnell's previous boss purported, "provides the allusion to far away Californian fields, filled with beautiful flowers." And the rest, as they say, is history.



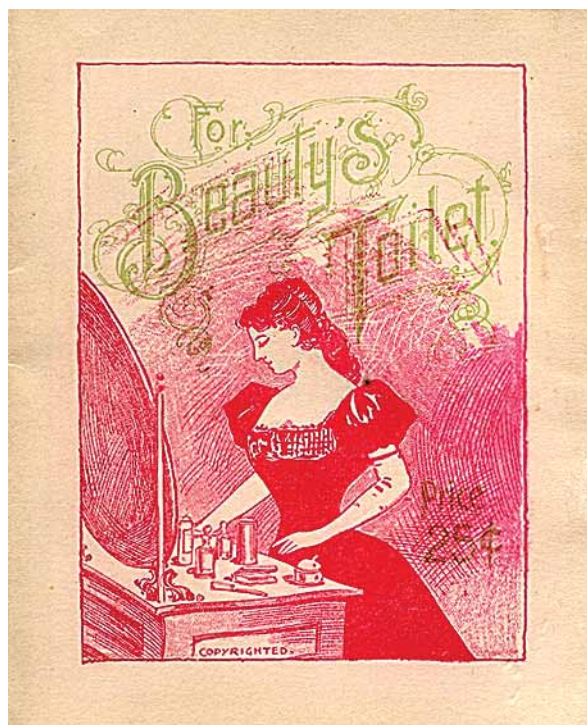
David H. McConnell, age 28, c. 1886, founder and president of the California Perfume Company

hard work and proper training developed a good, strong, hardy, rugged constitution. When I started out in the world "to make my fortune," I had this positive advantage over many who were less favored.

My first experience in the business world was as a book agent [for the Union Publishing House,

McConnell authored a substantive article detailing the historical development of the California Perfume Company in 1903 entitled, "the Great Oak." Following are key excerpts from the Great Oak article, punctuated with amplifying comments:

In 1878, when but a mere lad, I left my father's farm located near Oswego City, New York State. Here I spent my boyhood days, and through



The second catalog of the California Perfume Company, dated 1897. There are only three known to exist.

Chicago]. I took this up during my school vacation, and developed quite a faculty for talking, which I have since learned is quite essential, and has stood me well in hand many times.

My success in canvassing was such as to invite me into the same field the following year, and after two years' hard work in the canvass, I was promoted from local canvasser to that of General Traveling Agent. As General Agent I traveled in nearly every state east of the Rocky Mountains; this gave me a valuable knowledge regarding the country; and my experience, both as canvasser and as General Agent, gave me a good insight into human nature.

It is uninteresting to you to follow me through the different work from Chicago to New York and from New York to Atlanta, Georgia, and back to Chicago, and finally back to New York. During all these years I represented in different ways the same publishing company [the Union Publishing House] with which I originally started as a canvasser; canvassing, appointing and drilling agents; starting and drilling General Agents, and corresponding with both after they once entered the field. My work as a canvasser and on the road taught me not to enter right into the everyday work of the canvasser and advise and encourage, so as to obtain the best results. If I learned to be anything, I learned to be practical.

On my return from Chicago, I purchased the entire business from my employer [Union Publishing House, New York – at 126 Chambers Street, New York, N.Y.] and managed it myself for some time. During this time the one thing I learned successfully was how to sell goods to the consumer.

My ambition was to manufacture a line of goods that would be consumed, used up, and to sell it through canvassing agents, direct from the factory to the consumer.

The starting of the perfume business was the result

of most careful and thorough investigation, guided by the experience of several years' successful operation in the book business; that is, in selling goods direct to the consumer or purchaser. I learned during this time that the proper and most advantageous way of selling goods was to be able to submit the goods themselves to the people. In investigating this matter nearly every line of business was gone over, and it seemed to me, then, as it has since been proved, that the perfume business in its different branches afforded the very best possible opportunity to build up a permanent and well established trade. Having once decided that the perfume business was the business, the question naturally presented itself, "By what name are these perfumes to be known; by what name is this company to be called?" The gentleman who took me from the farm as a boy became in the past years, not only my employer but my personal friend, and after buying him out he moved to California, and while there wrote me glowing accounts of the country, and to him belongs the idea of the name California, as associated with this business [from the letter received in 1892].

I started the perfume business in a space scarcely larger than an ordinary kitchen pantry [a single room at 126 Chamber's Street.] At first I manufactured but five odors: Violet, White Rose, Heliotrope, Lily-of-the-Valley, and Hyacinth. I soon found it necessary to increase the odors, and to add to the line other articles for the toilet. Among those first put out were: Shampoo Cream, Witch Hazel Cream, Almond Cream Balm, Tooth Paste, which afterwards was made in the Tooth Tablet, Toilet Waters, etc.

As the business increased the laboratory must, of necessity grow, so that at the end of two years [approximately 1894] I was occupying one entire floor in this building for manufacturing purposes alone.

While in the book business I had in my employ as General Traveling Agent, a Mrs. P.F.E. Albee, of Winchester, N.H. Mrs. Albee was one of the most successful General Agents I had in the book work, and it was in her hands I placed the first sample case,

or outfit, in the perfume business. Mrs. Albee was the only General Agent employed for the first six months of the business. During that time she secured a number of good workers, some of whom are with us today. It is, therefore, only befitting that we give her the honorary title of Mother of the California Perfume Company. For the system that we now use for distributing our goods is the system that was put in practical operation by Mrs. Albee.



Little Folks Set – 1912

As the business grew, through the work of our agents, we were forced from time to time to increase our laboratory space, and in 1895 we built our own laboratory in Suffern, New York, 32 miles out on the main line of the Erie Railroad. This building has been enlarged and remodeled three different times, until today we have a building 120 feet long, main building 50 feet wide and the wing 30 feet, all three stories and basement giving us four working floors, each floor having 4,800 square feet of floor

space, or a total floor capacity of 17,200 feet. This building is equipped with the best possible machinery and latest devices for bottling goods and so on, until I feel we can truthfully say that there is not a plant of our kind in the country so large and so well fitted for our business, as the laboratory of the California Perfume Company.

As well directed efforts and hard work must eventually win their way to the front, so the manufacturing end of the California Perfume Company grew out of my hands; that is to say, I found that it was almost impossible for me to manufacture, to give the personal attention to both manufacturing and correspondence which the merits of each required. Therefore, in 1896, I secured the services of the best perfumer I could find, a gentleman who had been in the perfume business himself for 25 years and had the reputation in New York and vicinity for making the finest perfumes on the American market [this perfumer was Adolph Goetting, founder of Goetting & Company, New York.] In order to secure his services I was obliged to buy out his business and close up his laboratory, and he now has full charge of the manufacturing of every ounce of goods we put out.



California Lavender Salts – 1898

Please see www.californiaperfumecompany.net to read the entire Great Oak article as well as much, much more on the history of the California Perfume Company.

The California Perfume Company (CPC) continued to grow and thrive in the succeeding years. A few of the company's important historical milestones: the first catalog (text only) – 1896; the company's first trademark (the Eureka trademark) used – 1898; the first national advertisement (1/4 page Roses perfume advertisement in Good Housekeeping magazine) – March, 1906; the main office moves from 126 Chambers Street to 31 Park Place in New York—1909; achieved the status of international



California Tooth Tablet - 1910

company with the opening of the Montreal, Canada office – 1914; won a gold medal award for quality at the Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Francisco – 1915; the Avon line of products introduced – 1928; the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval awarded to 2 first set of CPC/Avon products – 1931; Mr. David H. McConnell died – 20 January 1937 (and was succeeded by his son, David H. McConnell Jr. as the president of the California Perfume Company); the company was renamed Avon Products Inc., in honor of David H. McConnell Sr. – 6 October 1939.

Collecting the products and sundry memorabilia of this vast American company (that still dominates the cosmetics



Natoma Rolling Massage Cream – 1914



Bay Rum – 1915

world as Avon Products, Inc.) connects one with a rich history that spans the industrialization and maturation of our nation in its youth. Importantly, McConnell enabled and empowered women throughout the country to earn a good, profitable living as door-to-door salespersons well before the 19th Constitutional Amendment to allow universal suffrage in 1920. Early representatives' sales periodicals are replete with success stories and testimonial pictures of women earning the money for motor vehicles and even houses. McConnell was an inspiration to untold numbers and his products were always of the best quality, and everything sold came with his unconditional money-back guarantee – a groundbreaking approach that absolutely bolstered sales.

So then, the company known as the California Perfume Company operated for just over 53 years, producing a wide array of consumable goods for the customers and mounds of information and sales helps for the representatives. This amounts to a wealth of collecting potential! Some of the great finds that are still newly discovered ever day include perfumes, toilet waters, talcum powders, sachets, lavender salts, tooth tablets, shampoo creams, men's sets, women's sets, soaps, food colorings, flavor extracts, laundry products, furniture polish, and so much more!

The art of collecting CPC items can prove quite difficult, but ultimately, it is great fun! Following are a few collectors' tips:

- 1) Six years of perfume manufacturing and sales are unaccounted for! The company began in 1886 with McConnell's purchase of the Union Publishing House. He started manufacturing his own perfume products at that time (Violet, White Rose,



Rose Talcum – 1908

Heliotrope, Lily-of-the-Valley, and Hyacinth). The question is: under what name or banner were the first products labeled? No one knows! 2) The first text-only catalog was produced in 1896, ten years after the start of the company. The second catalog, produced in 1897, consisted of a few hand-drawn illustrations to compliment the wealth of text. The 1898 and 1899 catalogs continued this same practice. Furthermore, early CPC catalogs contained sparse pictures of the company's many products--and many products have never been illustrated. Therefore, literally hundreds of different products were manufactured and sold by the CPC over the company's first two

decades with no illustration

or picture to guide the collector and enthusiast... so happy hunting!

- 3) McConnell successfully reduced his costs to the customer by utilizing common bottles. That is to say that McConnell did not produce propriety glass containers for his liquid and powder products. A close examination of the CPC bottles compared with other perfume and household product suppliers of the era will clearly show the use of common bottles. The value, therefore, rests almost exclusively in the CPC label. A bottle with a mint label is worth much, a bottle without a label is worth almost nothing.

This article only touches the very tip of the proverbial iceberg when considering the vastness of David H. McConnell's California Perfume Company. For more information on this subject, please visit the CPC Web site at www.californiaperfumecompany.net.

