



SPIRITS IN THE ATTIC

By Steve Ketcham

MINNEAPOLIS – It was a bottle collector’s dream. A cache of 90 pre-Prohibition liquor bottles and jugs, many still full of original contents and in original wrappers, lay waiting nearly 100 years to be found. It appears Karl Gluek, from a local brewing family, hid the collection in his house around 1917 on the eve of Prohibition and died on the brink of Prohibition’s repeal in 1933 without revealing the hoard.

Instead, they were discovered in August of 2010 when new owner Mary Shanesy had the house remodeled. Her reaction? “I was in a bit of a daze – I went over to the house that evening with my camera. It was buried treasure – an unlooked-for gift from the universe.” Shanesy contacted the Hennepin History Museum, where Executive Director Jada Hansen helped uncork the mystery behind the hidden bottles.



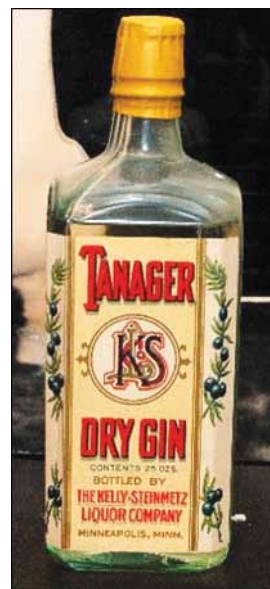
Mary Shanesy, the Hennepin History Museum benefactor in whose home the bottle cache was found, opens a bottle of Tanager Gin for tasting prior to the auction.

In October, some of the bottles were auctioned off at the Hennepin History Museum to benefit the museum. Shanesy explained, “This was clearly a piece of Hennepin County history, and since this was an unexpected gift to me, it seemed right that I should share my good fortune with the museum.”

At the event, three bottles of the cache were opened and tasted: a bottle of Tanager Gin, circa 1908, put up by Kelly and Steinmetz of Minneapolis, a liquor dealership that had

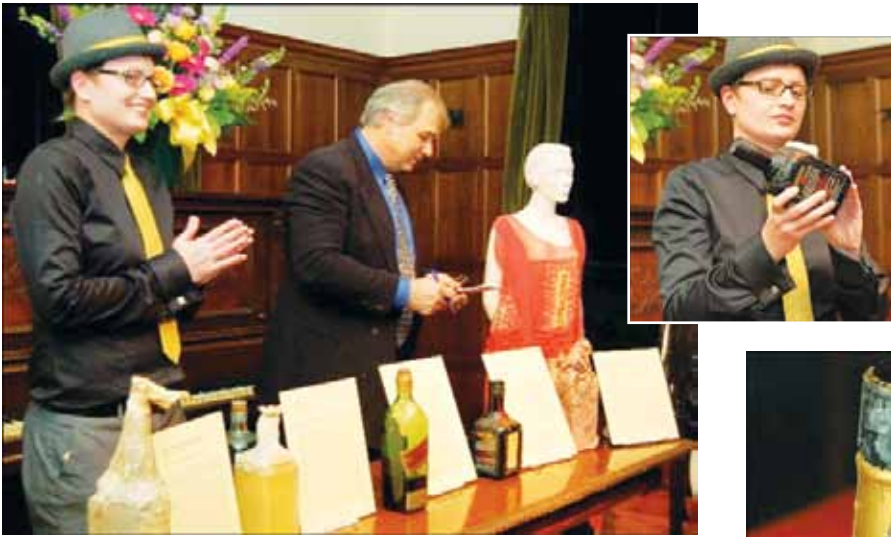
A full bottle of Tanager Dry Gin, put up by the Kelly-Steinmetz Liquor Company of Minneapolis. Sealed in this bottle since 1908, the gin received high praise from those who sampled it. It brought \$1,000.00 at auction.

It should be noted that the high prices realized for the bottles in this auction were due to several factors, including the history behind the bottles, their contents, the desire held by the bidders to help the Hennepin history Museum, and the wish to keep the bottles and their local history in the area. Typically, an empty-but-nicely-labeled bottle like this, which is late enough to be machine made and thus not as collectible, might bring \$50.00 - \$150.00 at an antique bottle auction.



Typically a \$200-\$300 bottle, this Appetine Bitters, a product of George Benz & Sons of Minneapolis-St. Paul, brought \$1,025.00 at the Hennepin History Museum’s auction. It was full. The Benz

Appetine Bitters is found in two sample sizes as well as quart and pint sizes. While most are found in amber, quart examples may be found in dark amethyst. All have the embossed filligree on corners and shoulders, but only the earlier versions are embossed on one side panel with the words “GEORGE BENZ & SONS APPETINE BITTERS ST. PAUL, MINN.”



Jada Hansen, on left, Hennepin History Museum Executive Director, and North St. Paul auctioneer Tracy Luther, stand behind some of the bottles to be auctioned.

roots going back as far as 1866 and lasting until Prohibition; a bottle of Old Monastery Brandy, circa 1910; and a bottle of Canadian Club Whisky, circa 1911.

Expert Dean Phillips of Phillips Distilling testified that the contents were still good after all those years. “Everything we sampled was remarkably smooth and soft. Spirits like these don’t age once they leave the cask. Either time has smoothed them or we have to re-learn the lost art of distillation.”

The auction generated international interest, not because any of the bottles themselves were rare or valuable, but because the contents were so old and rare. After all, how often can one buy a full bottle of circa 1917 gin taken directly from its original packing crate?

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– Dean Phillips, Phillips Distilling

Most bottle collectors agree the 12 bottles sold brought much higher than market value. An Appetine Bitters, typically a \$200 to \$300 bottle, brought just over \$1,000. A Johnnie Walker scotch brought \$1,100, and a Black and White Scotch Whisky commanded \$775.

A bottle of Johnnie Walker Old Highland Blend for \$1,100? Museum director Jada Hansen explained that the 1907 vessel “was something that people from, literally, all over the world inquired about.” Hansen went on to say, “It turns out that the Johnnie Walker that had been found in

Jada Hansen, Hennepin History Museum Executive Director, discusses the history of the Appetine Bitters bottle with the audience prior to the auction.



This Canadian Club bottle was one of three bottles which were opened and tasted during the auction. Of this product museum director Jada Hansen said, “Canadian Club. Hands down the best. The other two were good, but the whiskey was different than anything else I have had and I am certain that I won’t find that flavor in any of the liquor stores. It was very smooth as well as surprisingly complex.”



Bottles of Black and White Scotch Whisky and Tanager Gin in their original wrappers. Though an original wrapper adds value, bottle collectors do not typically prize original packaging to the same degree as do collectors of antique toys or banks.



The Hennepin History Museum researched each of the bottles found in Mary Shanesy's attic. The museum found that the Los Hermanos Vineyards of California, the firm that produced this bottle of Old Monastery Brandy, eventually became a part of the present day Beringer Brothers, Inc. The Hennepin History Museum produced an informative brochure to accompany the tasting event.



This bottle of Old Bushmills Pure Malt Whiskey is one of several bottles donated to the Hennepin history Museum collection by home owner Mary Shanesy. A full example sold for \$550.00.



Among the cache of attic bottles were two examples from the liquor firm of George Benz & Sons. While the Benz Appetine Bitters was sold, this Pickwick Club Whiskey was added to the Hennepin History Museum collection.



Wines as well as liquors were a part of the attic stash. Shown here with its original straw wrapper is a bottle of Edouard Dubonnet and Labussiere red wine.

Museum director Jada Hansen explained that the [Johnnie Walker Old Highland Blend] 1907 vessel “was something that people from, literally, all over the world inquired about.”

Mary's walls was something that could be narrowed down to a small window in time between 1906 and 1907. Because the bottle indicated an award for 1906, we must have had one of the final runs of that brand. Old Highland Whiskey would be replaced by the recognizable Red Label shortly thereafter.”

Bidders were motivated by the added value of contents, a great back story, a chance to keep these pieces of history local, and the opportunity to help the Hennepin History Museum. One local bidder shared, “My bidding was inspired by the idea that these great old pieces of local history could have ended up in New York or London. It was too much for me. I felt a responsibility to the community to keep them here. I also wanted to help the museum, which is a wonderful local institution.”

Shanesy is debating what to do with the rest of the collection. “We are discussing a second auction with some of the remaining bottles,” she said. “I may sell some privately, and some will remain in my personal collection.”

Note: This article first appeared in the March, 2011, issue of the *Old Times*, a newspaper which reports on the antiques world in Minnesota and western Wisconsin.

Photos for this article are courtesy of the Hennepin History Museum and photographer Brad Ogbonna.

Thank you to all who contributed to the “**Paper Trail**” column. This is the final one.

