

Clarke and Kelly: Hounded in Richmond

By Jack Sullivan
Special to Bottles and Extras

Henry Clarke came from a rich Jewish tradition. Phil Kelly was an Irishman with ancestors from the Auld Sod. Competitors in business, they were united in their occupation as whiskey merchants in Richmond, capital of Virginia, seat of the former Confederacy, and among the most historic cities in America (**Figure 1**). The fate of both was sealed in 1916 by the State Legislature, voting just across town.

Henry Clarke's Story

A climactic scene occurs 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 (**Figure 2**). 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.

Clarke's business career began 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 firm. 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 (**Figure 3**).

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 (**Figure 4**), which stands today as an historical landmark. The Clarke family was among major contributors to the project. In 1900 the *Jewish Yearbook* listed Henry as vice president of Congregation Emmanuel and his son Sol as secretary-treasurer.

North Carolina Goes 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" (**Figure 5**), 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.

In any case the protest meant little. The following day North Carolina, by a statewide vote of 62% to 38%, went



Figure 5: Mordecai Ham

totally dry. A local cartoon (**Figure 6**) hailed the new day that was coming. The caption read in part: "Saloons and dispensaries will be hunting for a city of refuge."

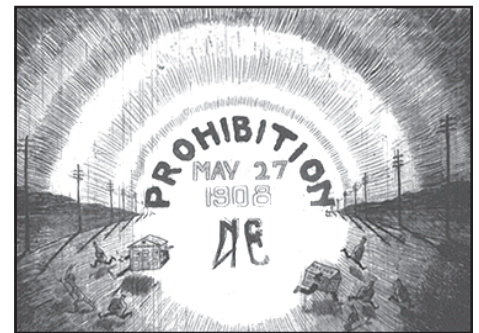


Figure 6: Prohibition cartoon

Those were prophetic words for Henry Clarke and his sons. Within weeks they had relocated their business to Richmond's Main Street, shown in a postcard view of that era (**Figure 7**). 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.



Figure 7: Main Street, Richmond, looking east

A New Start in Richmond

In Richmond, H. Clarke & Sons continued to merchandise their Tar Heel brand, despite the disappointment North Carolina had provided (**Figure 8**). Their ads 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

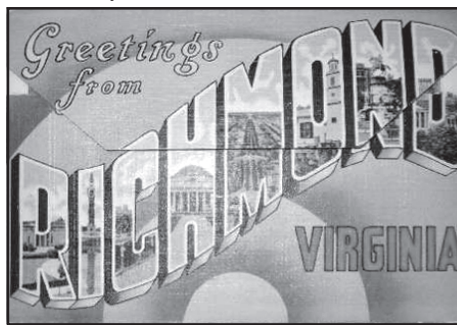


Figure 1: Postcard of Richmond attractions



Figure 2: Lithograph of Eliza escaping

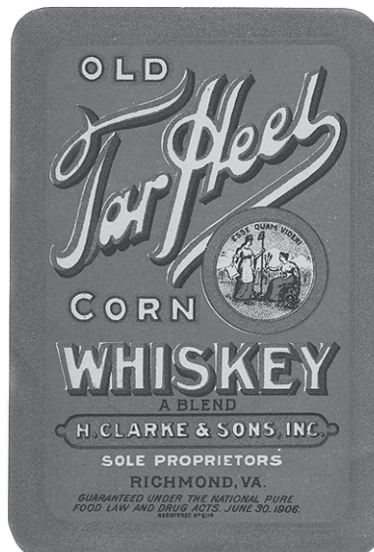


Figure 3: Old Tar Heel label

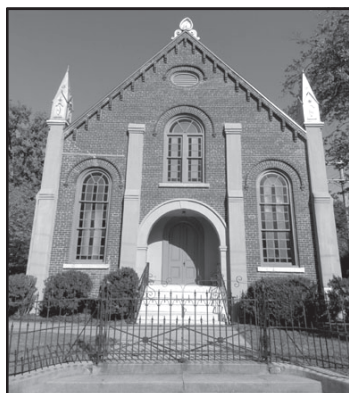


Figure 4: Congregation Emmanuel Synagogue



Figure 8: Old Tar Heel "Corn" ad

leading package delivery company south of the Mason-Dixon Line. This suggests that the Clarks 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. (Figure 9). One Tar Heel Whiskey handout, featuring an ear of corn, emphasized that the liquor came "packed in plain cases" (Figure 10).

"The South's Greatest" also blossomed out in other new brands and imaginative advertising. Select Old Stock Corn (Figure 11) and Clarke's Monogram (Figure 12) featured the same attractive designs that distinguished most Clarke products. The firm's flagship brand became Royal Wreath Whiskey. It appeared prominently in ads and merchandising items (Figures 13-14). Royal Wreath was touted as having a Kentucky pedigree and no less a hero than Daniel Boone was its champion.

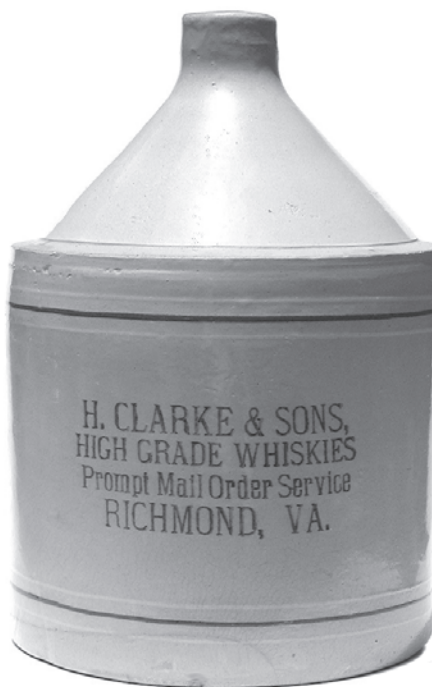


Figure 9: Clarke two-gallon jug

Moreover, someone in H. Clarke & Sons also was exhibiting a sense of humor. Shown here (Figure 15) 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..." This silly pun may help explain why a company shot glass bears the slogan: "Smile Producers (Figure 16).

At the same time, the firm was serious



Figure 10: Clarke Tar Heel Corn handout



Figure 11: Clarke's Old Stock - front

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 (Figure 17). Other merchandising items trumpeted that Clarke whiskey was



Figure 12: Clarke Monogram Whiskey ad

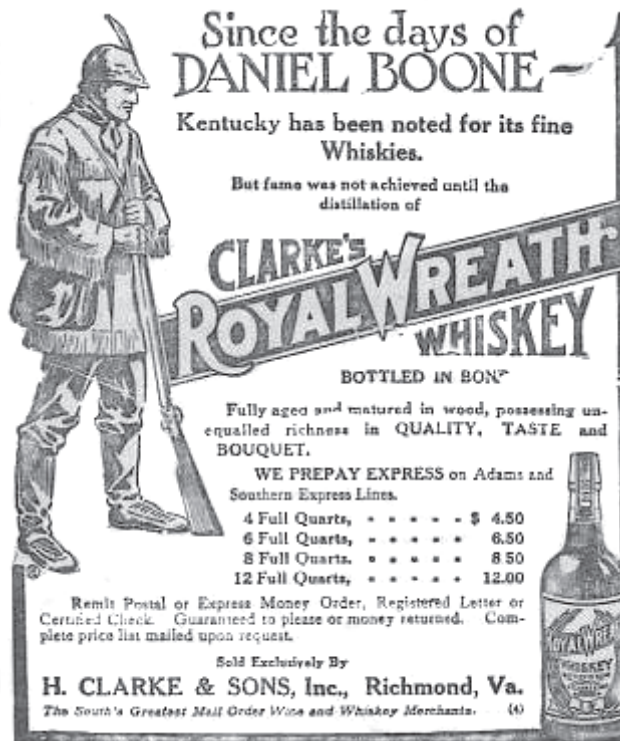


Figure 13: Royal Wreath Whiskey ad



Figure 14: Royal Wreath handout




Figure 15 (above): Clarke cork pull



Figure 16 (left): Clarke shot glass

Figure 17 (right): Clarke Old Stock handout - back

Figure 18 (below): Kelly ad showing building



190

The Phil. G. Kelly Co., Inc.
P. O. BOX 89, RICHMOND, VA.

Dear Sir:—Please ship me by Express, Prepaid, the following goods:

4 Full Quarts of "WESTOVER RYE" at \$3.10; 8 Quarts,	\$5.95
4 Full Quarts of "EL MAIZE CORN" at \$2.60; 8 Quarts,	4.95
4 Full Quarts of "HURON RIVER RYE" (Bottled in Bond) at	3.95
8 Quarts at	7.65
4 Full Quarts of "DR. BARRON'S MEDICINAL GIN" at	3.40
8 Quarts at	6.55
4 Full Quarts "DONALD KENNY MALT WHISKEY" (Medi-	6.25
cial) at \$3.25; 8 Quarts at	7.55
4 Full Quarts "KELLY'S MEDICINAL MALT WHISKEY" (Bottled in Bond) at \$3.90; 8 Quarts at	7.50
4 Full Quarts "BLUE RIDGE" (VA. MOUNTAIN WHISKEY) at \$4.00; 8 Quarts at	7.50

It is expressly agreed that if, after having sampled goods, and I am not satisfied with the same, I am at liberty to return goods at your expense, and the full purchase price will be returned to me.

Please mark the goods you wish with an (X) in front of same.

NAME _____

P. O. ADDRESS _____

SHIPPING ADDRESS _____



Figure 19: Westover Rye label



Figure 20: Huron River label

“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 Phil. G. Kelly Story

The Phil. G. Kelly Co. first appears in Richmond directories in 1905, three years before the Clarks arrived. The firm initially was located at the corner of 17th and Franklin Streets. A 1909 ad gives its next address as 1413 East Main St. and shows a three story building with the slogan “The House that Treats You Right.” (Figure 18). Other ads of that time claim the Kelly enterprise as “importers, distillers and distributors of fine liquors.” It is doubtful that the firm actually was a distiller. More likely it was a “rectifier,” an operation that bought raw liquor from distillers, mixed and bottled it, slapped on a label and sold it to the public.

The sign on the Kelly building claimed “distributors of straight whiskies.” The company also boasted that it handled only “straight goods...the pure food kind.” That too may have been disingenuous. Real distillers were seeking to have the government enforce the Pure Food and Drug Act against rectifiers on the grounds that they made only “artificial” whiskey. Kelly Co. clearly was retaliating by claiming its whiskeys were “straight” and the pure food kind.

Kelly Brands Proliferate

The company featured more than a dozen brands of whiskey, of which only one — its flagship label, Westover Rye (Figure 19)— was registered with a federal trademark (1905). Kelly whiskeys included Huron River (Figure 20), Tide Water (Figure 21), Money’s Worth and Climax Whiskey (Figure 22). Among other Kelly brands were Maryland Belle, Bankers Rye, Miss Tempting Rye, Old Tiverton Rye, Kelly’s Special Reserve, Virginia Queen Corn, El Maize Corn, Blue Ridge, and Donald Kenny Malt Whiskey.

Kelly bottles, jugs and giveaways are very popular with collectors in Virginia and elsewhere. For example, a fairly ordinary looking miniature pinch bottle of Kelly’s Bankers Rye (Figure 23) sold on eBay in October 2006 for \$357. More recently, a Miss Tempting Rye advertising hand mirror, two inches in diameter, with pictures of birthstones on the back, brought \$103.50 (Figure 24). A Kelly souvenir thimble, probably costing a few cents to make, has sold for more than \$20.

Part of the Kelly mystique may be the prominence of its name on its whiskey containers. The firm embossed many of its glass bottles and

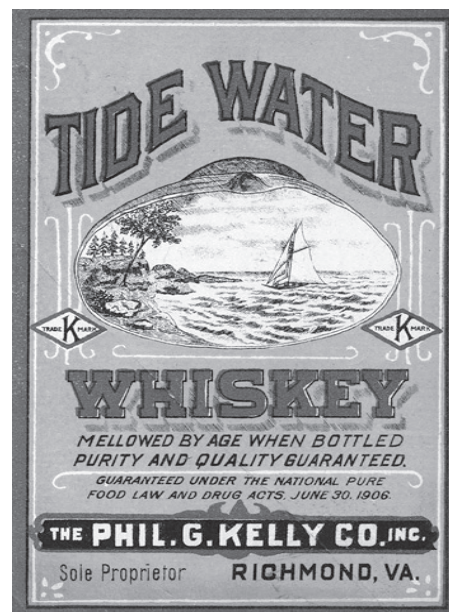


Figure 21: Tide Water label

Figure 22: Ad for Money's Worth & Climax brands

flasks prominently with its name and often added decoration (Figures 25-26). My own preference has been for Kelly ceramic jugs that appear in more than a dozen variations. They range from very crude (Figure 27) to decorative (Figure 28), with a number of variations in between (Figures 29-30). My particular favorite is a blue and white miniature jug (Figure 31).

Kelly Buys E.A. Saunder's Sons

Early in the 1900s the Kelly company bought out a competing whiskey merchandiser, the E.A. Saunder's Sons Co., which had been active in the Richmond liquor trade since 1885. Saunder's Sons thereafter concentrated on the "fancy and heavy" grocery trade. In buying out their rival firm Kelly added Saunder's brands to its own. Those included Casey's Malt Whiskey, Old Bob Burton Rye, Old Fulcher Va. Mt. Rye, Old Bumgardner Va. Mt. Rye, and Possum Hollow Corn.

It apparently required a large and fancy catalogue to tout all these brands. Strong in the mail order business, Kelly Co. asked customers not to tear out pages or otherwise mutilate the catalogue in ordering their favorite liquor: "...It may prove of use to you in the future." The company also promised to send its goods in neat, plain packages "with no marks to indicate contents." Kelly's Special Reserve, for example, shipped in one, two or three gallon glass jugs packed inside a wooden case. That jug, its ad claimed, is the "the safest and most up-to-date package. It's a beauty and you will say so when you see it." Another Kelly slogan was "The Prompt Mail Order House."

The Bloodhounds Triumph

Despite their energetic efforts to stay in business, Prohibition was rapidly closing on Kelly and the Clarkes. In 1913 the U.S. Congress passed the Webb-Kenyon Act that forbid any mail order sales of liquor into dry states. The Act effectively terminated whatever brisk trade the two Richmond liquor houses had developed for sending whiskey into North Carolina and other parched areas. The ban clearly delivered a severe financial blow to both firms. In Virginia as well, "temperance" drums were beating loud for statewide Prohibition. In 1914 the Virginia



Figure 23: Bankers Rye mini



Figure 24: Miss Temptress Rye mirror

Figure 25: Kelly embossed glass pint



Figure 26: Kelly embossed flask



Figure 27: Crude Kelly jug



Figure 28: Blue and white quart jug



Figure 29: Kelly quart jug

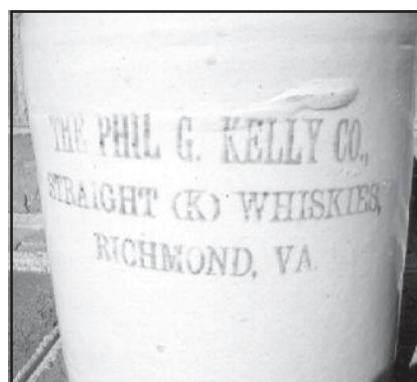


Figure 30: Detail of a Kelly gallon jug



Figure 31: Blue and white mini jug

Anti-Saloon League held its annual convention in Richmond, determined to end liquor sales in the Commonwealth. They posed righteously on the Capital steps (Figure 32). Giant anti-drink rallies were the order of the day in Richmond (Figure 33).

Continued on page 43.

A Cap for What? by Barry L. Bernas Continued from page 37

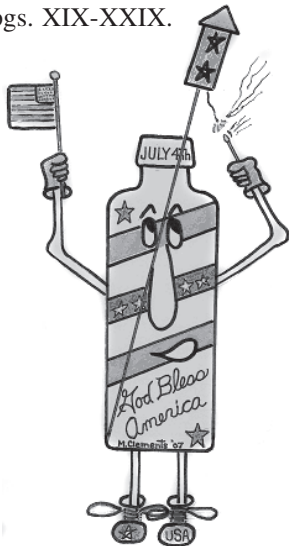
Extras, January-February 2007, pg. 19.

²⁰ *Patents Issued to William Beach Fenn* (Part 2 of 2), Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, March-April 2007, pgs. 36 and 39-40. I used the generic term "composition material" and the word "waxed" to describe the elements of the vertical gasket which was used to seal Cap Two. The two patents for Cap Two carried the following descriptions of the material that comprised the packing gasket. As you will see, these were more precise: "...A packing device formed as herein described and composed of fibrous material saturated with paraffin or other preservative material...a ring composed of asbestos fiber and paraffin or of wax..."

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Sunshine Jar: Myth or Reality?*, Barry L. Bernas, *The Guide To Collecting Fruit Jars Fruit Jar Annual Volume 12 – 2007*, Jerome J. McCann, 5003 W. Berwyn Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 2007, pg. 15. In this article, I opined the second of my assumptions was the correct sealing technique for Cap Three on the Sunshine jar. In retrospect, either one could have been valid.

²³ United States patent Office, application filed May 20, 1905, Serial No. 261,319, Patented December 5, 1905, No. 806,602. For more information on the Uhl style of screw cap, please consult the following references. *Cataloging a Russell Uhl-Patented Glass Screw Cap*, Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, Spring 2004, pgs. 29-33 and *Perfection Glass Company, One of Many Glass Houses in Washington, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, 2005, pgs. XIX-XXIX.



Clarke and Kelly: Hounded in Richmond, by Jack Sullivan, continued from page 41.



Figure 32: Anti-Saloon League at the Virginia Capitol

Most of Virginia voted itself dry in September of that year, but Richmond, along with Alexandria, Danville 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 Virginia Legislature — disregarding the views of Richmond voters — completely banned sales of liquor, wine, and beer throughout the state.

The Fates of Clarke and Kelly

Remember that Eliza successfully escaped over the ice floes from the pursing canines and found safety. 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 also fade from view, victims for the second time of Prohibition forces.

Kelly was similarly affected. In 1915, the year before the Prohibition ax fell, the firm moved to 427-431 N. 18th St. That was the last year it was listed in Richmond directories. After Virginia went dry the business appears to have moved operations to Baltimore. A cork pull bearing Kelly's name indicates a location at Baltimore and Howard Streets in that city (**Figure 34**). Kelly does not appear to have prospered there and if the firm was still extant in 1919, it did not survive National Prohibition.

Despite their ill-starred efforts, both firms left notable legacies. Kelly in the short period of 10 years amazingly was able to produce an elaborate array of brands, bottles, jugs, and giveaways that today are avidly sought by collectors. From Henry Clarke and his sons we have inherited colorful advertising materials, labels, and souvenirs. These items remind us of two enterprising Richmond whiskey merchants that struggled hard to survive but ultimately could not escape the bloodhounds of Prohibition.

Notes: Material for this article was gathered from a number of Internet and written sources. The Clarke and Kelly items shown here are largely through the courtesy of Ed and Lucy Faulkner, Marv Croker and Lou Sutton, all highly knowledgeable Virginia collectors. The photo in Figure 32 is from the Library of Congress. Portions of this article appeared earlier in the *Potomac Pontil*, the newsletter of the Potomac Bottle Club.

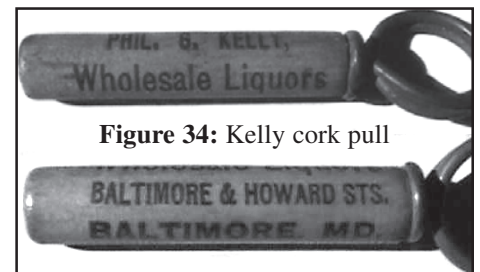


Figure 34: Kelly cork pull

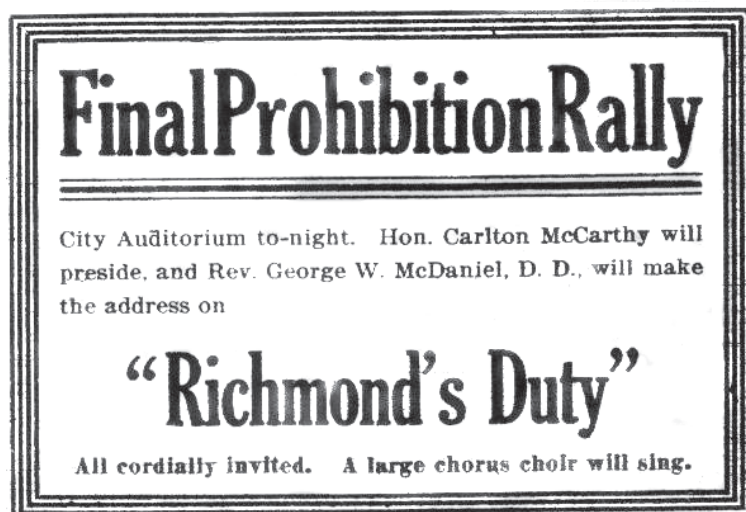


Figure 33: Richmond prohibition rally poster