

The Wondrous World of Whiskey Exonumia

By Jack Sullivan

My interest in pre-Prohibition whiskey distilleries and brands has taken new directions from time to time and so it did while I was writing an article on Baltimore's Monticello Rye that appeared in the last *Bottles and Extras*. A Monticello "coin" came up for sale on eBay and I bought it (**Figure 1a**). Ensuing research opened up to me a whole new collecting world — whiskey exonumia.

Literally the word means "out of" nummus, the Latin word for coin. Exonumia basically refers to coin-like objects, such as tokens and medallions, although some collectors expand the definition to include even watch fobs and badges. The word was coined in 1960 by Russ Rulau, a noted researcher and author on the subject, and is found in some dictionaries. Whiskey exonumia, to my thinking, generally falls into six categories: 1) spinner/flippers, 2) redeemable tokens, 3) good luck pieces, 4) fob/key chains, 5) sports schedules and 6) simply advertising. This article examines each of them.

Flippers & Spinners

The Monticello token is a spinner/flipper. It was kept on the bar as a gambling device for patrons to decide who would pay for the next drink. The distiller's idea was to suggest to contestants to make their drinks Monticello Rye. No doubt a bottle of the stuff was close by on the bar.

Black & Gold Rye issued an example with the face of a donkey on one side and the legend: "Heads you win...if you drink Black and Gold Rye." The flip side (**Figure 1b**) shows the backside of the donkey and admonishes: "Tails you lose...if you don't drink Black and Gold Rye." This whiskey was the product of the G. Froehlich Co. of Newark, N.Y., which registered the brand with the U.S. government in 1912. An Old Granddad flip coin left nothing to chance (**Figure 1c**). The top is the familiar bust of Granddad himself, with the legend: "Head of the Bourbon Family." The other side has been left blank.

Flippers could be used in one of two ways: through a typical coin toss to the floor or sent spinning on edge until it fell over. Spinners, on the other hand, were kept flat on the bar and pointed either to the person getting a free drink or, conversely, to the loser who would be made to pay.

Spinners have a telltale bump on one side, as shown in the coin on the left in **Figure 1d** from Park & Tilford, distillers of Louisville, Ky. The side with the horse faced down the bar while spin was applied and the individual to whom it pointed was "it." In this token it appears that the "pointee" was a winner, signaled by the horseshoe — a traditional American symbol of luck. Park & Tilford was founded in the late 1800s, survived Prohibition, and produced whiskey and industrial alcohol

into the 1950s. The firm was purchased by Schenley Distilling about 1955.

Being at the end of the pointer more often was unlucky. A token from Jesse Moore (**Figure 1e**) says "Your Turn." The Moore firm also had Louisville roots, but sold nationwide, at one time boasting outlets in 13 major American cities from New York to San Francisco. It did not survive Prohibition.

The Brown Foreman spinner arrow (**Figure 1f**) is up front about the bad news: "All right...You pay." The flip side of this spinner (**Figure 1g**) features a bottle of "Bottoms Up" whiskey from one of America's most successful distilleries. Found in 1870 by George Garvin Brown, a pharmaceutical salesman, with an investment of \$5,500, Brown Foreman currently is a multimillion-dollar enterprise. Old Forester is its flagship brand.

Probably a post-Prohibition spinner (**Figure 1h**), an example from Paul Jones is positively blunt in its message: "Buy," it commands of whomever the arrow faces. For further information on this Frankfort, Ky., distiller, see my *Bottles and Extras* article, Summer 2006.

Redeemable Tokens

According to the experts, the heyday of trade tokens occurred about the time of the United States Centennial in 1876.



Fig. 1a: Monticello Rye flipper - heads



Fig. 1b: Black & Gold Rye - tails



Fig. 1c: Old Granddad flipper - heads



Fig. 1d: Park & Tilford spinner - both sides



Fig. 1e: Jesse Moore spinner - top

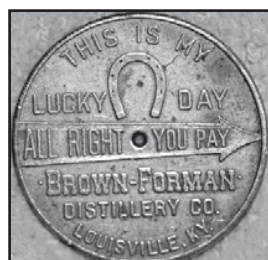


Fig. 1f: Brown Foreman spinner - top



Fig. 1g: Brown Foreman spinner - bottom



Fig. 1h: Paul Jones spinner - both sides



Fig. 2a: Jack Daniel's - side #1



Fig. 2b: Jack Daniel's - side #2



Fig. 2c: Clarke Bros. - side #1



Fig. 2d: Clarke Bros. - side #2



Fig. 2e: Hollywood Whiskey - oval



Fig. 2f: Hollywood Whiskey - triangle



Fig. 2g: Echo Springs - side #1



Fig. 2h: Echo Springs - side #2



Fig. 2i: Big Rock Whiskey



Fig. 2j: Palace Saloon



Fig. 2k: Paducah Club - side #1



Fig. 2l: Paducah Club - side #2



Fig. 2m: Old Fitzgerald

Companies began to vie with one another in issuing metal pieces, often utilitarian and worth a fixed amount: 25 cents, one haircut, one admission or, for whiskey — one drink or one bottle. A very early example is a hexagonal token reputed to be from Jack Daniel's (**Figures 2a, 2b**) that could be redeemed for 25 cents on whiskey.

A more handsome pre-Prohibition example, with an art deco design, is from Clarke Bros. Distillery of Peoria, Ill. (**Figures 2c, 2d**). It came in at least two versions, one promising a free drink and the other a free "highball."

This company was founded by C.S. Clarke in 1862 to manufacture diverse spirits and alcohol. In 1888, it reincorporated and concentrated on making and selling Clarke's Pure Rye, until Prohibition.

Hollywood Whiskey, a brand originating far from California, offered both oval (**Figure 2e**) and triangle (**Figure 2f**) tokens. The oval generously could be redeemed for a full pint of whiskey. The triangle was less explicit but cautions the owner to be discreet. Both items are blank on the bottom. Hollywood Whiskey was registered as a brand of the B. W. Allen Co. of New York City in 1886 and again in 1907 by The Hollywood Company of NYC.

According to the experts, very few trade tokens were made of aluminum before 1890. Until that time the metal sold at about \$2 an ounce, twice the value of silver. With improved methods of refining, the price fell sharply, making aluminum feasible for tokens. Thus an Echo Springs token (**Figures 2g, 2h**), despite its modern appearance, can be dated from 1890-1918. Redeemable whiskey tokens have been illegal from Prohibition to the present day. One like this sold last year on eBay for \$214.

Bonnie Bros. & Co. of Louisville, Ky., promised a shot of its Big Rock Whiskey to anyone presenting their token (**Figure 2i**) and assured the bartender that the company would redeem it. This firm appears in city directories from 1895 to 1918. It registered the Big Rock brand in 1906. Other Bonnie whiskeys included Nelson Club, Old Joe B. Frazier, and Bonnie Rye.

Saloons also issued tokens good for whiskey. The Palace Saloon in Austin, Texas would give the bearer a free drink without restriction. Their token featured "Parole," a famous race horse of the period that nevertheless finished out of the money in the 1876 Kentucky Derby (**Figure 2j**). A vintage example that advertised Paducah Club (**Figure 2k**) seems notoriously stingy at being worth only 2 and ½ cents (**Figure 2l**). Paducah Club was registered as a brand in 1905 by Loeb-Bloom & Co. of that Kentucky city.

The last redeemable shown here, (**Figure 2m**) was never cashed.

Executives at the Stitzer-Weller facility in Louisville about 1969 decided it was time to reinstate the venerable trade token for its flagship brand, Old Fitzgerald. A number of tokens offering a free drink were manufactured. Subsequently, federal officers caught wind of the idea, pronounced it illegal, and stopped distribution. Most tokens were destroyed but a few were kept by distillery workers, perhaps as souvenirs to the follies of their bosses.

Good Luck Pieces

A third category of whiskey exnumia is the good luck pieces. Of these, the most common were issued by Green River Whiskey. The front bears the trademark picture of the man and horse (**Figure 3a**) while the rear (**Figure 3b**) features three traditional good luck symbols: the horseshoe, a wishbone and a four-leaf clover. The meaning is enforced by the legend: "It is lucky to drink Green River Whiskey." This distillery was founded by J.W. McCulloch in Owensboro, Ky., in 1885.

The Four-Cee Whiskey token (**Figures 3c, 3d**) featured the familiar symbols and added one that today would be highly politically incorrect — the swastika — at that time considered a Native



Fig. 3a: Green River - side #1



Fig. 3b: Green River - side #2



Fig. 3c: Four-Cee - side #1



Fig. 3d: Four-Cee - side #2

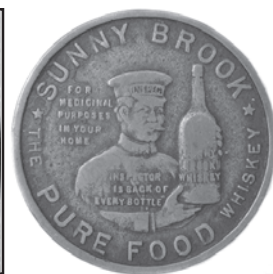


Fig. 3e: Sunny Brook - side #1



Fig. 3f: Sunny Brook - side #2



Fig. 3g: Tioga Rye - both sides



Fig. 3h: Schenley Reserve



Fig. 3i: Old Crow



Fig. 3j: Jim Beam with hole

American good luck sign. The motto around the rim reads: "Membership Emblem of the Don't Worry Club." It would not be long until Hitler's swastika gave many people much to worry about. This was a brand from E.N. Cook & Co. of Buffalo, N.Y., founded in 1879 by Cook and partner Gustav Fleischman. They are said to have owned two distilleries in Buffalo, one of which apparently was Buffalo Distilling, founded in 1895. Both operations ceased in 1918.

The swastika symbol appeared on a number of good luck pieces. Among them was an item from Sunny Brook "Pure Food" Whiskey (**Figures 3d, 3e**). Sunny Brook was founded in 1891 by the Chicago-based Rosenfield Bros., who owned a distillery

in Louisville. Although production of the brand was halted by Prohibition, it later was revived by Jim Beam.

Some good luck pieces contained a copper penny inside an aluminum rim. Like the Tioga Rye token (**Figure 3g**) they usually had the motto: "Keep me and you will never go broke. In this case the penny is a 1903 Indian head. Tioga Rye was registered as a brand in 1905 by Raphael & Zeugschmidt of Pittsburgh. "Smooth, sociable" Schenley Reserve Whiskey provided a 1950 Lincoln head penny and plenty of good luck symbols (**Figure 3h**). Originally a Canadian firm, it listed a New York City address.

Another post-Prohibition example is an attractive pocket piece from Old Crow of

Frankfort, Ky. (**Figure 3i**). One of the few brands to survive Prohibition, it also issued a wooden good luck piece featuring its famous bird. These and other Old Crow tokens were flung to crowds from floats as part of Mardi Gras celebrations.

While a Jim Beam token (**Figure 3j**), does not specifically mention good luck, its shape is revealing. When I was a boy, carrying a Chinese coin with a center hole was considered good luck. Even today some claim that a Chinese coin in the pocket attracts wealth. Beam's token may reflect that superstition.

Watch Fobs and Key Chains

Another form of whiskey exonomia features a loop or hole. Some may have been meant to be worn as a medallion on a chain, perhaps as a watch fob, or to hold keys, either externally or in a pocket. The Old Kirk Whiskey piece (**Figures 4a, 4b**) clearly was meant to be worn outside. Its star points would have shredded a pocket. This brand was registered in 1906 by a firm founded by Anson Parsons Hotaling. He came to California in 1852 as a miner during the Gold Rush and stayed to be San Francisco's largest whiskey wholesaler. After his death, family



Fig. 4a: Old Kirk star - side #1



Fig. 4b: Old Kirk star - side #2



Fig. 4c: Seagrams "Legion" - side #1



Fig. 4d: Seagrams "Legion" - side #2



Fig. 4e: Beam Medallion



Fig. 4f: Harper "Columbus" medal



Fig. 4g: Old Granddad



Fig. 4h: James Pepper



Fig. 5a: Sunny Brook - side #1



Fig. 5b: Sunny Brook - side #2



Fig. 5c: Mount Vernon Rye



Fig. 5d: Johnny Walker - both sides



Fig. 5e: George Dickel - side #1



Fig. 5f: George Dickel - side #2

members continued the business until Prohibition.

Many of these items are post-Prohibition, such as the 1937 tribute to a national convention of the American Legion in New York. The front depicts a World War I soldier against the skyline of Manhattan (**Figure 4c**). The back admonishes us to “think before you drink” but to say Seagrams (**Figure 4d**). A handsome medallion from Jim Beam (**Figure 4e**) celebrates the 200th anniversary of Jacob Beam’s first sale of whiskey in 1795 from his small farm distillery in Washington County, Ky. The distillery was named after Jacob’s grandson, James.

An excellent design is from the I.W. Harper Distilling Company of Louisville reproducing one of four gold medals the firm was awarded in the early 1900s (**Figure 4f**). This one depicts Christopher Columbus as he first stepped ashore in the New World. Founded by the Bernheim brothers, Bernard and I.W., soon after the Civil War, the distillery later became another Schenley purchase.

Other examples are more difficult to date. The Old Granddad with a loop

(**Figure 4g**) probably is post-Pro since the concept of “proof” (percentage of alcohol) did not emerge until after Prohibition. Compare the bust of the old gent to the one in **Figure 1c**. The James Pepper token (**Figure 4h**) celebrates the founding of the firm by Elijah Pepper of Lexington, Ky., in 1780. The token reproduces the famous painting of the American Revolution, “The Spirit of ‘76.” Schenley bought the brand in the early 1930s and phased it out about 1960.

Sports Schedules

After World War II, whiskey merchandisers began to understand the importance of linking their products to popular American sports. Denied access to advertising on radio and TV, some issued tokens, usually aluminum, listing the dates of baseball and football games. Sunny Brook Whiskey (**Figure 5a**) showed Detroit Tiger fans their home games in 1951 (**Figure. 5b**). In 1950 Mount Vernon Rye (see my *B&E* article, Summer 2005) issued the schedule for the Cincinnati Reds (**Figure 5c**).

As professional football grew in popularity, even foreign whiskey makers took notice. Johnny Walker Scotch (**Fig. 5d**) issued a token with the New York Jets games for 1972 (**Fig. 5e**). That was a season in which Joe Namath was hurt and the team finished 7-7.

The Miami Dolphins did much better

on the 1974 schedule issued by George Dickel Whiskey, making the playoffs (**Fig. 5f, 5g**). The Dickel operation was founded by a Nashville whiskey rectifier and wholesaler who bought a distillery in 1870 that operated until 1910 when Tennessee went dry. After Prohibition Schenley Distillery bought the rights to the facility and moved it to Tullahoma, Tennessee.

Simply Advertising

Clearly, whiskey exnumia could serve real uses: They facilitated gambling, paid for drinks, anchored watches, secured keys and presumably brought good luck. Other items, however, had no discernible functional purpose. They existed entirely for their advertising value. But many have an intrinsic interest that has resulted in their being preserved and collected.

A favorite of mine is the pre-Pro token from Old Government Whiskey depicting a splendid eagle and shield (**Figure 6a**). The flip side is blank. This brand was registered by William Wolff & Co. of San Francisco in 1897. The company appears to have ceased business in 1910, at which point the brand continued to be distributed by the Rathjens Mercantile Co. of San Francisco until 1918.

Another vintage example is from Toole’s Whiskies with an ingenious “eye” motif (**Figure 6b**). This liquor claimed to be the “Creme (Cream) of Irish Whiskey” and emanated from F. Toole & Co. of London (**Figure 6c**). The Scottish motif of thistle flowers was the well-recognized symbol of Hannah & Hogg, highly successful whiskey merchandisers of pre-Prohibition Chicago (**Figure 6d**). The opposite side lists the firm’s addresses, including its ownership of the fashionable downtown Brevoort Hotel.

Another Chicago-



Fig. 6a: Old Government Whiskey



Fig. 6b: Toole’s Irish - side #1



Fig. 6c: Toole’s Irish - side #2



Fig. 6d: Hannah & Hogg

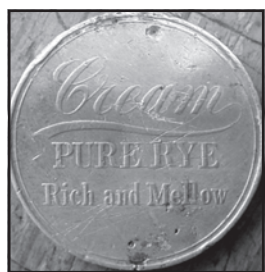


Fig. 6e: Cream Pure Rye
- side #1



Fig. 6f: Cream Pure Rye
- side #2



Fig. 6g: George Stagg - side #1



Fig. 6h: George Stagg - side #2

based outfit, the Dallemand Co., issued a pre-Pro aluminum token with its elaborate monogram (**Figures 6e,6f**). This firm, that also had roots in San Francisco, was in the business of whiskey wholesaling from 1885-1918. Cream Pure Rye was its flagship brand. Dallemand's labels also included Old Joe Murphy and Old Ripy.

Ending on a modern note, this handsome token (**Figure 6g**) from the George T. Stagg Co., of Frankfort, Ky., and New York City probably was issued in 1992 for the 500th anniversary of Columbus

landing in America. The initials "O.F.C." on the flip side (**Figure 6h**) refer to Old Fire Copper, the name by which the distillery was known at its founding. Since Stagg's death in the early 1890s, the facility has gone through a series of owners. Today the brand is a limited-production bourbon distributed by Buffalo Trace Distillery, currently operating at the original Stagg site.

The items shown here represent more than 100 years of whiskey-related tokens and medallions. Thousands of others exist.

Whether considered as a separate collection or as providing a rich source of "go withs" for whiskey bottle, jug or shot glass aficionados, the wondrous world of whiskey exnumia offers virtually limitless possibilities.

References: Material for this article has been drawn from a wide variety of Internet and printed sources. "United States Trade Tokens, 1866-1899" by Russell Rulau (Krause, 1983) contains important information on early exnumia. Portions of this article earlier appeared in the *Potomac Pontil*.

More New Finds, by Barry L. Bernas Continued from page 41.

from Perfection," Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, May-June, 2008. In addition to the more comprehensive accounting in the first article above, the second write-up previously reported a Hotel or Style 52 scalloped flange container as Figure 10. The third round report documents the existence of a flangeless Colonial tumbler, previously shown in advertisements as Figures 3 and 8 in the initial reference, which was unavailable when the first article was written. The actual specimens documented in these articles constitute the known editions of a scalloped flange or flangeless tumbler made by the Sterling and Perfection Glass Companies of Washington, Pennsylvania.

² *Tumblers, Jars and Bottles; A Product Identification Guide for the Capstan Glass Company, South Connellsville, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, pg. 136. "A Look at the Capstan Glass Fluted Tumbler Series," Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, March-April 2008, pgs. 37-40. Mike Black's fluted version can also be placed in the mold number section under the second entry for the Fluted Outer Surface-Plain Inner Surface grouping in this article.

³ Over the past several years, Mr. Rhinberger has allowed me to examine and measure over forty examples of this style of screw cap that he has in his collection. Other collectors have also contributed to my database on this cover. They are: Bobby Butler of

Brookside, Alabama; Don Burkett of Monroe, Michigan and Wayne and June Lowry of Raymore, Missouri.

⁴ "Cataloging a Russell Uhl-Patented, Glass Screw Cap," Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, Spring 2004, pgs. 29-33. For those unfamiliar with this sealer, the above article will provide more details about it.

⁵ Ibid, pgs. 30-33 and *Perfection Glass Company, One of Many Glass Houses in Washington, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 2005, pg. XXIX. The identification, classification and cataloging process for the Russell Uhl-patented screw cap was initially laid out in the first reference. The second one updated the methodology to its current status.

⁶ The height was calculated without the stopper being in place.

⁷ On the Internet, I've seen the composition of this threaded metal coupling device be described as being made of anywhere from pewter to nickel. However, in Company literature only two kinds were offered for sale. One was the coated version that I've described and the other was uncoated and made of tin.

⁸ *The Evolution of Table Glass* is the title of the circa August to October 1903 product catalog from the Perfection Glass Company, Washington, Pennsylvania. Please consult the following references for more information about the Optic motif. *Perfection Glass Company, One of Many Glass Houses in Washington, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 2005, pg. 55 and

"The William B. Fenn Patented Water Bottle,

Made For Perfection," Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, Summer 2004, pg. 18.

⁹ *The Evolution of Table Glass*, updated (circa August to October 1903), Perfection Glass Company, Washington, Pennsylvania (product catalog); *Perfection Glass Company, One of Many Glass Houses in Washington, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 2005, pgs. 58-59 and 69; "If it separates, it's perfection." Identification and Price Guide for PERFECTION Tableware, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania 17325, 2006, pg. 4 and *A Third Round of Separating Glassware from Perfection*, Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, May-June, 2008. Each of the above references lists this model of squirt bottle.

¹⁰ "Have You Seen a Scalloped Flange Tumbler?," Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*. Part One, Sept.-Oct.2007, pgs.38-42 and Part Two, Nov.-Dec. 2008, pgs. 54-60. This article documents a flared scalloped flange tumbler with the word – Mother – engraved on it.

¹¹ *Tumblers, Jars and Bottles; A Product Identification Guide for the Capstan Glass Company, South Connellsville, Pennsylvania*, Barry L. Bernas, 239 Ridge Avenue, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, 17325, pg. 60.

¹² "Updating of the Cataloging Process for the Russell Uhl Patented Cover," Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, future edition and *Capstan's Applied Color Tumblers*, Barry L. Bernas, *Bottles and Extras*, March-April 2007, pgs. 23-25. The above two articles contain more examples provided by Galen Ware.