



GRAND CANYON GLASS

By Michael Miller

ARIZONA'S BEST

Last summer I received a phone call from a collector in Colorado offering to sell me a mini-jug from Arizona. Though this was a great thing to hear, the excitement of the conversation was tempered initially by the fact that I had been involved in false alarms before involving items for sale. Several questions were already forming in my head, such as: was this really a mini or one of the several half-pint jugs; was there any damage; and if this truly was a mini-jug, which one was it.

Since I was trying to remain calm, I was careful to space these all-important questions throughout our conversation. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the gentleman on the other side of the phone was knowledgeable in jugs and that the one in question was a true mini. Secondly, the jug had no major flaws and was intact with just a glazing buildup on several letters. Finally, only two questions remained: what was the asking price and which jug was it?

Since all of the minis accounted for when compiling the book on Arizona bottles and stoneware were from either Phoenix or Tucson, I knew it had to be from one of those two cities, but which one? Our conversation went on for some time before I finally asked if it was a Tucson or Phoenix jug. Much to my surprise the reply was neither and that the mini was from Willcox. At this point I was a bit in shock, and though I was trying my best, remaining calm was no longer a possibility. You see it was in a small town

just 30 miles from Willcox where I met my wife and our first date was to Willcox of all places.

After this, I was told that the jug was from The Elite and advertised Montreal Malt Rye. I was trying to write the information down as we continued to talk but all I could think about was that it was from Willcox and initially the significance of the jug failed to sink in. After another half-hour of talking, a price was agreed upon and I hung up the phone.

For about an hour or so I was still in shock and anticipated my wife's arrival back home from shopping. After all I was paying quite a bit for the jug and I do like to include her on these decisions when that kind of money is to change hands. When she returned I told her of the jug, and when I spoke to her I could see that look of how much did you spend? But when I told her where it was from, she became more excited than I had been. She asked what was stenciled on the jug and it was then that I realized that my phone notes made no sense at all. All I could tell her was that it mentioned something about a type of whiskey from Canada and that it was from Willcox.

So much for staying cool.

A week later the jug arrived and it was just as described. While I waited for it, its significance began to sink in. Of course I realized that it was the only small town mini from Arizona, but it was also the only saloon mini and it had the added rarity of



advertising a specific brand of whiskey. A day or so after it arrived I spent several hours researching The Elite in the research library at the Arizona State Capitol building.

THE ELITE

The Elite opened in Willcox as early as 1885 under the ownership of John F. Crowley. By 1893, the name of the establishment changed to Elite Billiard Exchange, and in 1895, Crowley sold his bar to M. C. Cooper.

Now listed as The Elite Saloon, the bar changed proprietors several more times. Firstly in 1898 to C. D. Monroe, who had previously operated the Headquarters Saloon, and then to its final owner, T. P. Coleman. Coleman ran the saloon from late 1898 to 1903.

No further mention of The Elite is mentioned in 1904 copies of the Willcox paper, nor was it listed in the 1907 Arizona business directory.

By 1907 The Elite's original proprietor, John Crowley, had opened a general store in Willcox. A 1911 directory listing shows Crowley back in the saloon business, but there is no reference to the name of the saloon or to the Elite.

"THE ELITE,"
JOHN F. CROWLEY, Prop.
Wines, Liquors, Cigars.
Cigars sold at wholesale.
Willcox, ARIZONA.