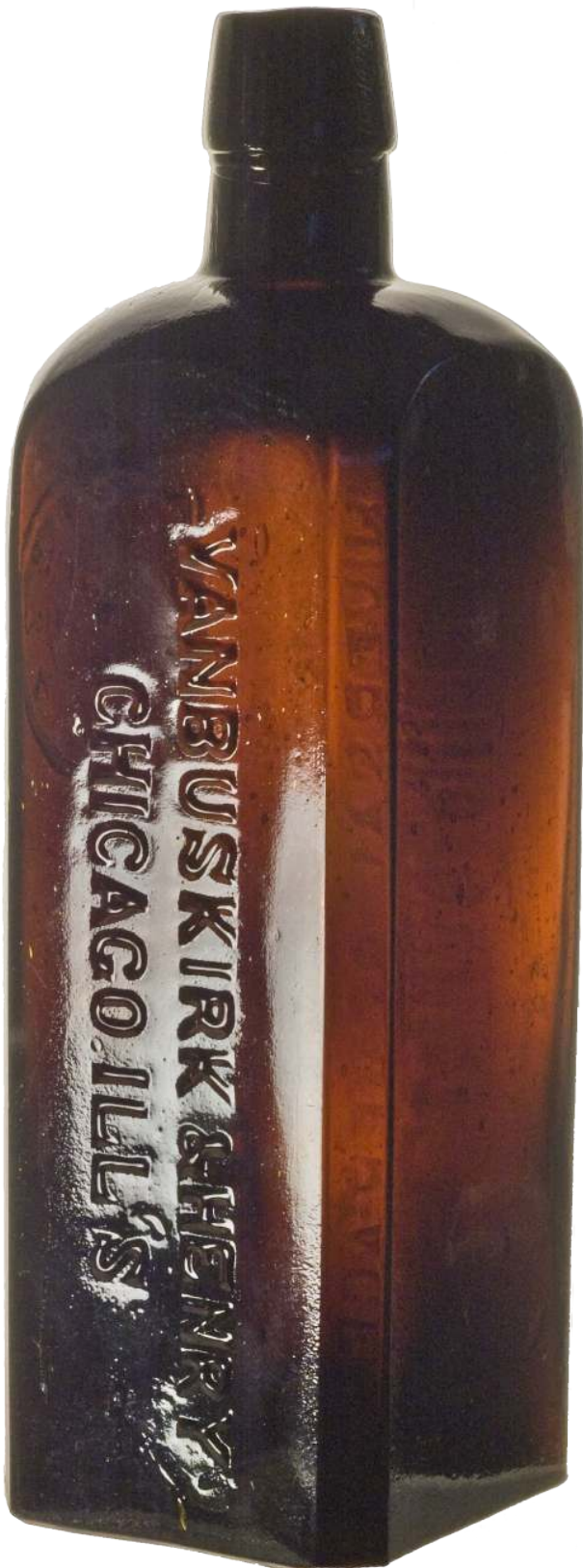


# Celebrating the 11<sup>th</sup> Hour

## John Van Buskirk & David Henry

by Ray Komorowski  
Bottle images by Ken Farnsworth



I'm sure that most of our Chicago Club members are familiar with this rare Chicago bottle from the partnership of John Van Buskirk and David Henry. The shape of the bottle is common enough, but you have to admit that it has more than a few odd sounding features. First of all, what is a Universal Beverage or Tonic Schnapps? Secondly, why in the world would there be a clock face on one of the panels? This article will deal with the latter, the clock face. Before I give away the answer, a little background history is necessary.

According to the Chicago CD's, John Van Buskirk and David Henry began their partnership in the "wholesale wines and liquors" business at 20 State Street in 1864. They placed a large introductory ad for their business on the back cover of that year's directory. Van Buskirk was the senior partner in the company for just three years: 1864-66, and the listed bottles were likely produced during this time.

During 1867 and 1868, Van Buskirk became junior partner, and the company name was changed from Van Buskirk & Henry to David Henry & Co. In 1869, David Henry was listed alone in the CDs, with an office at the same address. In 1870, David Henry moved to 79 Wabash, where he was listed as a distiller. This was his final listing in the liquor business. In the early 1870's, Van Buskirk was listed in partnership with Dugal Stewart as storage and commission merchants at 131 Kinzie. (Source: *Bottled in Illinois*, by Ken Farnsworth and John Walthall. )

Possible explanation of the clock face:

For as long as I can remember, people have wondered about the significance of the clock face set at 11:00. The clock face side obviously had room for a paper label and that label probably would have explained things. To my knowledge there are no known examples with labels so I'll throw my idea on the wall and see if it sticks.

I believe the key here is the 11th hour. It just so happens that the Benevolent & Protective Order of Elks of the United States of America uses that reference in their logo. There is definitely a connection between the 11th hour and the Elks.

The following is from the web site of The Benevolent & Protective Order of Elks of the United States:

The Hour of Recollection: Deceased and otherwise absent lodge members are recalled each evening at 11 p.m. Chimes or sometimes a bell will be rung

VAN BUSKIRK & HENRY / CHICAGO ILL'S // clock-face image, hands set at 11:00 // UNIVERSAL BEVERAGE / OR TONIC SCHNAPPS.

Colors: amber and olive green, 9-1/2 inches tall, square, short neck with tapered collar



11 times and the Lodge Esquire intones, "It is the Hour of Recollection." The Exalted Ruler or a member designated by him 11 o'clock toast, of which this version is the most common: You have heard the tolling of eleven strokes. This is to impress upon you that with us the hour of eleven has a tender significance. Wherever Elks may roam, whatever their lot in life may be, when this hour falls upon the dial of night, the great heart of Elkdom swells and throbs. It is the golden hour of recollection, the homecoming of those who wander, the mystic roll call of those who will come no more. Living or dead, Elks are never forgotten, never forsaken. Morning and noon may pass them by, the light of day sink heedlessly in the West, but ere the shadows of midnight shall fall, the chimes of memory will be pealing forth the friendly message: "To Our Absent Members." Toast Origin of the Toast: In regard to the Elks' 11 O'clock Toast and

its origin, we have to go back long before the BPOE came into existence. One of the main contributions of Charles Richardson -- in stage name of Charles Algernon Sidney Vivian and founder of the American branch of the Jolly Corks -- was to deliver into the hands of newborn Elks the rituals and traditions of a fraternal organization started in England around 1010 A.D., the Royal and Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, to which he belonged prior to coming to New York.

The RAOB, or Buffaloes as we shall henceforth refer to them, also practiced an 11 o'clock toast in remembrance of the Battle of Hastings in October of 1066. Following his victory, William of Normandy imported a set of rules, both martial and civil in nature, to keep control of a seething Norman-Saxon population always on the edge of a revolution.



Among those rules was a curfew law requiring all watch fires, bonfires (basically all lights controlled by private citizens that could serve as signals) to be extinguished at 11 each night. From strategically placed watchtowers that also served as early fire-alarm posts, the call would go out to douse or shutter all lights and bank all fires. This also served to discourage secret and treasonous meetings, as chimney sparks stood out against the black sky. A person away from his home and out on the darkened streets, when all doors were barred for the night, risked great peril from either evildoers or patrolling militia.

The hour of 11 quickly acquired a somber meaning, and in the centuries that followed, became the synonym throughout Europe for someone on his deathbed or about to go into battle: i.e. "His family gathered about his bed at the 11th hour," or "The troops in the trenches hastily wrote notes to their families as the 11th hour approached when they must charge over the top."

Thus, when the 15 Jolly Corks (of whom seven were not native-born Americans) voted to start a more formal and official organization, they were already aware of an almost universally prevalent sentiment about the mystic and haunting aura connected with the nightly hour of 11, and it took no great eloquence by Vivian to establish a ritual toast similar to that of the Buffaloes at the next-to-last hour each day.

The great variety of 11 O'clock Toasts, including the Jolly Corks Toast, makes it clear that there was no fixed and official version until 1906-10. Given our theatrical origins, it was almost man-

datory that the pre-1900 Elks would be expected to compose a beautiful toast extemporaneously at will. Regardless of the form, however, the custom is as old as the Elks.

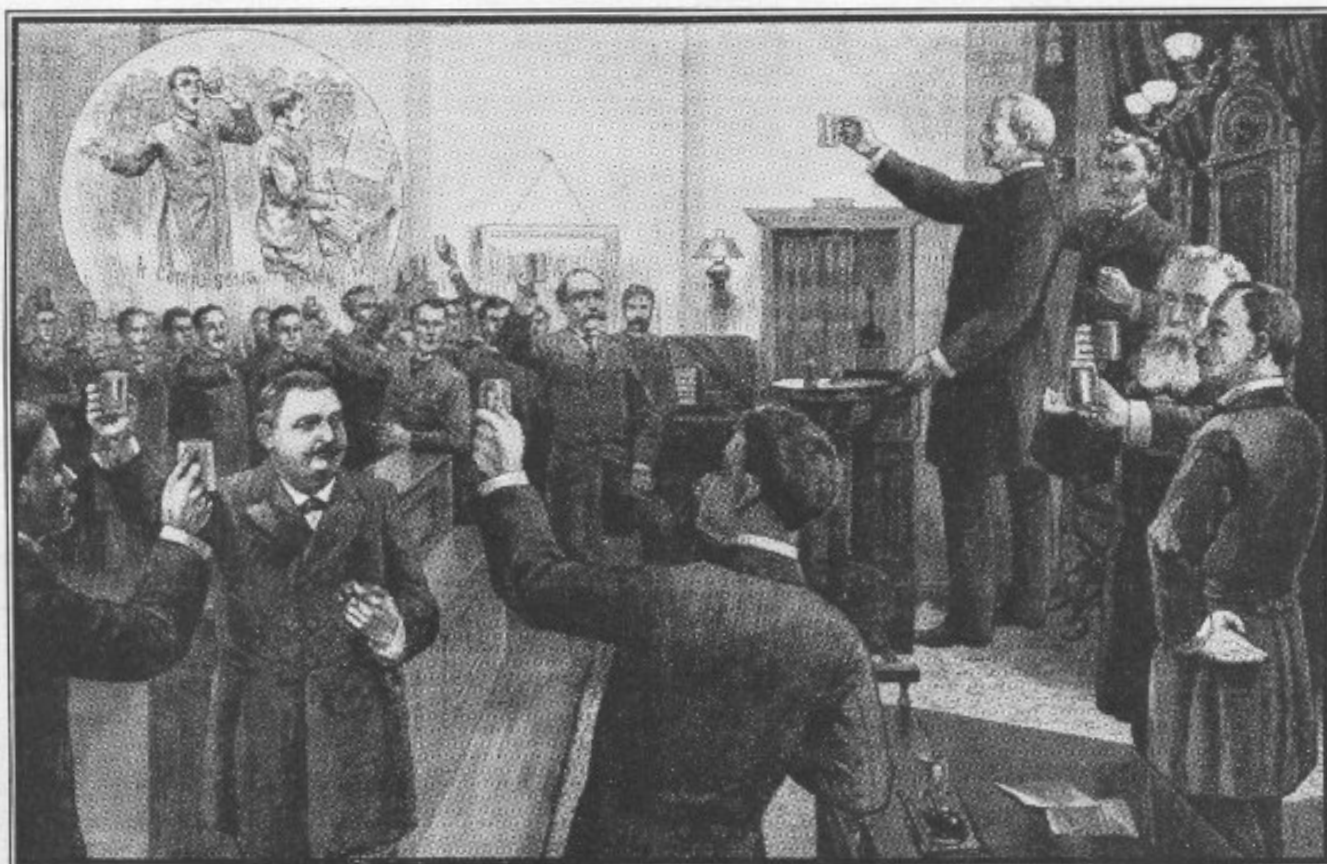
#### **Final thoughts:**

The Elk order in the United States was established in 1868; this is within the timeline of the business partnership of Van Buskirk & Henry: 1864 to 1868.

It is very possible that John and David were paying tribute to their own Elk roots and/or honoring the memories of past Elks with the clock face. It could even be paying tribute to prior and much older beliefs as outlined in the "Origin of the Toast". Also, this product was marketed as a "Universal Beverage"; meaning it should appeal to all walks of life (Elks and non-Elks). Toasts are usually given with a drink in hand and what better than this product?

What set this whole thing in motion, was when I was watching an episode of Antiques Roadshow. An older gentleman came in with a presentation sword to be appraised. The sword was pulled from the scabbard and there in the center of the sword was the elk logo with 11th hour clock face as shown on the previous page. The lightbulb clicked and my research followed. If on a sword why not on a bottle!

It's an interesting way of marketing a product; anyone have a better explanation?



*The 11 o'clock toast to the absent: an Elk custom*

Culver

