

THE R. M. ROSE CO. DISTILLERS YESTERDAY AND TODAY

By Bill Johnson



Ask the Revenue Officer™



R.M. ROSE

EST. DISTILLERS 1867

It isn't often that a bottle show has a sponsor, but this year we do! The Atlanta Antique Bottle & Pottery Show is pleased to announce that the R. M. Rose Co. Distillery has agreed to lend its name, and honorable tradition, to our show, which will be held at the Smyrna Community Center on September 11th & 12th, 2020.

Rufus M. Rose was born May 19, 1836 in New London, Connecticut where he was educated. In his early adult years he moved to New York City, where he practiced phar-

macy and possibly attended medical school. After a while he took a job in Sailor's Hospital on Long Island, NY.

Before the Civil War, he had studied medicine (history is not sure whether he received a diploma) and then moved to Hawkinsville, Georgia. In 1858 he began working in his Uncle Darius Randolph Mathewson's pharmacy, Mathewson Drug Store (Dr. Rose's middle name was Mathewson). While he was living there the war broke out in 1861, so this "Connecticut Yankee" enlisted and



Early Advertising Postcard from the R.M. Distillery, Chattanooga, Tenn.

joined Co. G of the 10th Georgia Regiment, Confederate Army, as an infantry foot soldier. However, he was soon moved into the army's medical department and was transferred to Williamsburg, Virginia, where he spent some time as an apothecary at William & Mary College's old hospital. Even though discharged from the Confederate army in December, 1861 – due to a personal injury – he was later mustered back in & joined Capt. Mitchell's company of Georgia Cavalry (for home defense), continued making medicines for the army until very near the end of the war (probably while working at a hospital in Macon). His first wife, Susan Bowman (Bowen?), died in 1864, and he later married Katherine (Katie) Fleming on April 4, 1865.

After the war, he saw a great business opportunity in Atlanta, despite the despair and ruin caused by that war. Dr. Rose started the business that would later be called R. M. ROSE Company Distillery in Atlanta in 1867, and it operated continuously until it was shut down by the Prohibition Act (it was about this time that one of Rose's catch phrases became popular – "Ask the Revenue Officer").

Some sources say Dr. Rose actually began his business under the name Mountain Spring Distillery, and set up his operation in Vinings, Georgia – then a small community about 12 miles North of downtown

Atlanta. He sold his "corn and rye whiskeys to the public from retail outlets he owned and operated in Atlanta." In his advertising, he claimed his liquors were "the safest, purest drink you can buy." Other sources say that the Mountain Spring Distillery was actually opened in 1889 in Gilmore, Georgia.

Upon Rufus' retirement in either 1905 or 1907, his son Randolph became President of the company, although Rufus retained a financial interest in the business until his death on July 21, 1910



Two different stencil jugs, 1st image is Chattanooga and the second images is from the Atlanta Branch

(both are buried in Atlanta's Oakland Cemetery). Soon after taking over, Randolph was forced to move the company's whiskey and distillery to Chattanooga, Tennessee, after the Georgia Legislature voted the state "dry" effective January 1, 1908. An advertisement from the Chattanooga era clearly pictures their "main office at 819-812 Chestnut St." and their "Pine St. warehouse and shipping department". That same advertisement also reveals the company had "branches in Jacksonville, Fla., Girard, Ala. Newport, Ky. & Somerset, Ky." Some sources claim that when Atlanta went "dry" in the mid-1880s Dr. Rose moved their wholesale operation to Chattanooga at that time.



Several Whiskey bottles with original labels, notice some of the bottles are embossed too

A Victorian mansion, the R. M. Rose house was built in the early 1900's at 481 (later changed to 537) Peachtree St., near the intersection of Linden Avenue and Peachtree St. Among the original items of note were "beautifully carved front steps...and the tiny front yard shaded by a large Elm tree." Until about 2017, the second floor was home to the Atlanta Museum. I parked near the house recently, and discovered there is now a fence around it with a "For Sale" sign visible. What a pity that this house, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has been allowed to deteriorate so badly!

Today, the wonderful R. M. Rose distillery business has re-opened and is located at 890 Franklin St., Dillard, GA 30537, a tiny little town in the extreme northeast corner of the state. Their web site "www.rmrosecos.com" assures us that their whiskeys are "copper pot distilled and made with Blue Ridge mountain water." Down the street a bit is located their storage and shipping building, which contains their "Classic Cypress wood Fermentation vats." Their phone number, (706) 982-8115, will put you in touch with both their office and tasting room. Tours may be arranged in advance, if desired.

The company's General Manager, Andy Sudderth has perhaps the finest and most complete collection of R. M. Rose bottles, pottery and go withs; some of which are on display in the company's tasting room. Both Jack Hewitt and John Joiner (Co-Chairs of the 2105 FOHBC National Show) have promised to evaluate and appraise Andy's collection – WOW! That will be some job. Andy says he will have some of the nicer pieces in his collection on display during our September 2020 show. It is the 50th Anniversary of our show, so make a concerted effort to come be with us!



New R.M.Rose's Distillery on display in Georgia

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

R. M. Rose Company web site
Findagrave.com web site
Wikipedia article, 11-19-2017
City of Atlanta, Historic Preservation Dept.
Interview with Andy Sudderth, April 2020

