

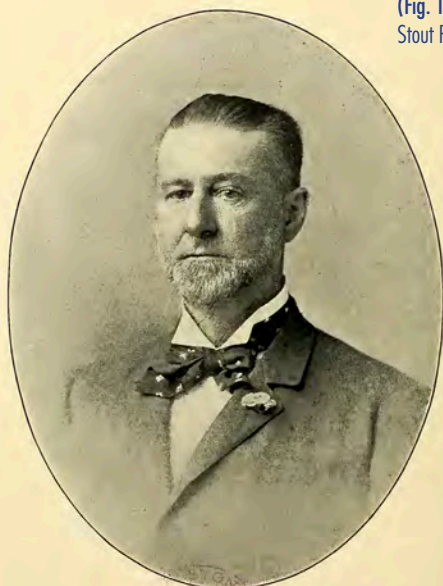


(Fig. 3) M. & J.S. Perrine, No. 37 Nth. Front St. Philadelphia advertising card

The Perrine's “Blue Bloods” in Philadelphia Whiskey

By Jack Sullivan

(Fig. 1) Jonathan
Stout Perrine, 1879



JONATHAN STOUT PERRINE. (1879)



(Fig. 2) Perrine's Apple Ginger figural cabin bottles

In the 1890 "Blue Book," the defacto social register of Philadelphia, among the names to be found in that highly selective volume - 1.6% of the city's population were those of Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Stout Perrine, living on fashionable Mount Vernon Street. The entry did not mention that Jonathan (Fig. 1), and his brother, Matthew, were among the city's most successful liquor dealers. In subsequent years while the Perrines' whiskey would be forgotten, their bottles would become objects of collector attention (Fig. 2).

The Perrine's had long been an established American family. Their founding ancestor, Daniel Perrine, known as "The Huguenot" (French Protestant), had arrived on the shores of America in 1665, settling in the New York area. The brothers' father was Thomas Morford Perrine, whose first wife, Elizabeth, was the daughter of General James Cook, the famous British explorer. After she died in childbirth, Thomas married Elizabeth Stout, likely a cousin. This Elizabeth was the mother of Mathew, born in 1831, and Jonathan, 1836.

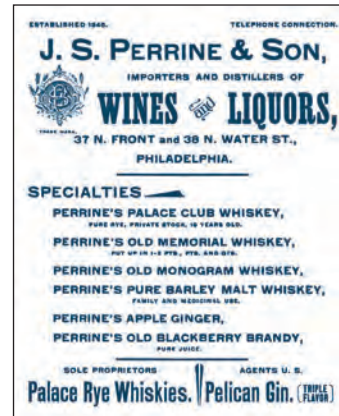
Because the brothers claimed that the origination of their business was in 1845, when both would still have been children, I speculate that their father started the liquor business in Philadelphia. Thomas Perrine, however, was recorded serving many years as the chief warden of the state prison in Trenton, New Jersey, and is not known to have left the state. A more likely explanation is that the Perrine brothers bought an existing liquor dealership in Philadelphia that dated back to 1845. The brothers were recorded by the 1870 census working in the liquor business. Their first listing in business directories was 1871, called "M. & J. S. Perrine," located at No. 37 North Front Street, Philadelphia (Fig. 3 title page).

The substantial three-story building that housed their liquor dealership (Fig. 4), related billheads and advertising pieces indicate that the brothers were "rectifying" whiskey, that is, buying it from the many distillers then operating in Pennsylvania, blending and compounding it, and selling retail under their own Perrine labels. As a result, the Perrines were able to merchandise quite a few brands. They included "Chemically Pure Rye," "Palace Club Whiskey," "Old Memorial Whiskey," "Old Monogram Whiskey," "Pure Barley Malt Whiskey," "Palace Rye Whiskey," "Pelican Gin," "Perrine's Golden Lake Pure Rye," and "Perrine's Pure Barley Malt Whiskey," among others. (Fig. 5) With the exception of "Chemically Pure Rye" registered in 1886, the company did not trademark its brands.

The brothers also featured a line of gins, brandies, and alcoholic products they called "Perrine's Apple Whiskey," "Perrine's Apple Ginger," "Apple and Blackberry Brandy," and Raspberryade."

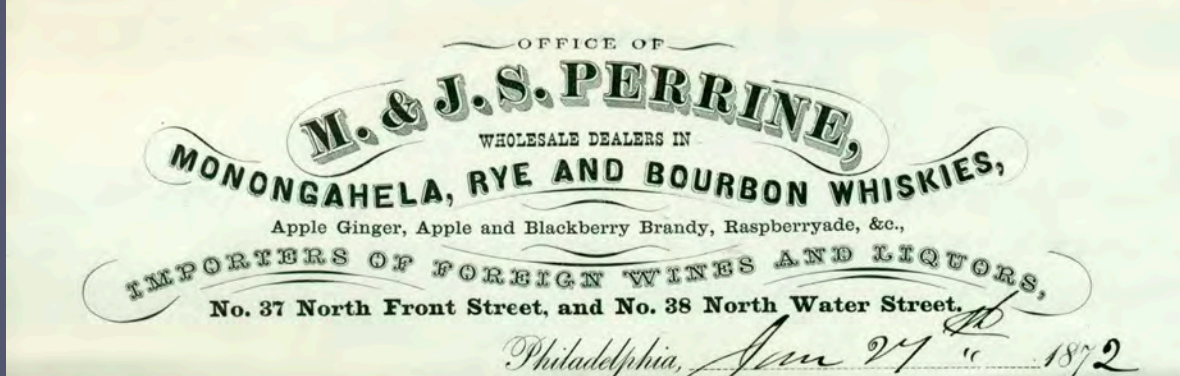
The Apple Ginger was well-laced with alcohol and put up in square "figural cabins" made in various shades of amber glass. The quarts are remarkable for their embossing of a realistic apple on the front. The Perrine's "depot" address was on the rear.

M. & J. S. Perrine typically sold their products in glass containers such as amber quarts, unusual because they bear a slab seal on one side with the brothers' address (Fig. 6) and, on the opposite side, embossing with much the same information. I assume that a paper label, now absent, was attached below



(Fig. 6)





the seal and represented the front face of the container.

The Perrines marketed their Barley Malt Whiskey as medicinal, claiming that it was a remedy for “malaria, indigestion and all wasting diseases.” Since no one knew the cause of malaria, it was a claim unlikely to be challenged. The brothers advertised this whiskey with a colorful trade card of a winsome young woman filling orders from the ague-phobic and sticking a Perrine label on the bottle.

(Fig. 7 Left) Her comely presence emphasized the “purity” of the

product. Unlike the many malaria cures of that era that contained opium, the brothers’ nostrum provided only substantial swallows of alcohol.

Given their evident marketing abilities, the Perrines were among the whiskey dealers providing giveaway items to their wholesale customers that included saloons, restaurants, and hotels. One example was a decorative back-bar bottle advertising “Perrine Rye.” The elegant shape and molded glass stopper were in keeping with the brothers’ well-designed trade cards.

The Perrine’s flourished with vigorous marketing and quality liquors, opening a second retail outlet at 238 North Water Street. Meanwhile, Jonathan had a personal life. About 1862, he married

Anna M., who also was born in New Jersey. The 1870 census found them living in Ward 14 of Philadelphia. With them were their two sons, Edmund, age 7, and William, age 4. Also in

residence was brother Mathew, still a bachelor at 40 years old.

As William matured, Jonathan brought him into the business. Edmund became a medical doctor of considerable reputation in the Philadelphia area. About 1894, Mathew, now age 63 and possibly in bad health, withdrew from the firm. The following year the name was changed to J. S. Perrine & Son Company. William, age 30, was now a full-fledged partner in the liquor house.

During this period, the Perrines became active in the fight against the Whiskey Trust, formally known as the Distillers and Cattle Feeders Company. In 1892, Jonathan was a leader in organizing a meeting of prominent wholesale liquor dealers in Eastern cities, representing \$6 million (\$150 million today) in assets. Their purpose was to organize an association for their protection against the Trust which was viewed as “stretching out its influence all over the land...”

Most anti-trust Eastern liquor dealers would have been “rectifiers” like the Perrine’s blending and compounding whiskey bought from distillers. The Trust was known to seek a distilling monopoly and then hike prices steeply to rectifiers. The new association was described as seeking to “free its members from the exactions...” of the monopoly. Jonathan was elected treasurer. Faced with similar organized opposition in New York State, Kentucky, and elsewhere, the threat from the Illinois-based trust eventually dissipated.

Meanwhile, Jonathan and his wife had achieved “Blue Book” status. While that publication claimed not “to pass upon the social standing of the parties listed within its pages,” the implication was clear. Being in the *Blue Book* made one a mainline Philadelphia “Blue Blood.” The volume advertised its benefits to “wives and daughters at home” (i.e., information about marriage-eligible men) and “the commercial and professional community in their offices and counting-rooms” (i.e., doing business with the “haves”). Wealth, even from whiskey, went a long way to gaining social status.

Jonathan Perrine died in October 1906 at age 72. He left an estate to his wife, Anna, and his sons said to be worth \$135,000 (\$3.4 million today). He was buried in West Laurel Hill Cemetery in suburban Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. Six years later, he would be joined there by Anna. Buried nearby is Mathew, who had died earlier. Meanwhile, William was guiding the fortunes of the Perrine liquor business that relocated at least twice during his management. Records indicate that William died in 1914, but the company continued until 1918, apparently run by other family members.

