

Old Whisky May Be Under Light Street

Former Employee Of Liquor Store Believes 80 Cases Have Been There Since Fire Were Left In Cellar When Other Stock Was Re- moved From Danger Zone

By GEORGE W. EVANS
TWENTY-SIX years after the great Baltimore fire, the anniversary of which will occur next month, comes a story which, if true (and I have no reason to believe otherwise), leads to the belief that right in the heart of the city there lies buried a small fortune in a commodity for which men, in the last ten years, have fought, bled and died.

To be more specific and to the point, there is tucked away in a perfectly accessible spot, awaiting some adventurous spirit with daring and ingenuity enough to get it, eighty cases (800 quarts) of genuine, unadulterated Hunter rye whisky, of the vintage of 1800.

But hear the story first and then make your plans.

A VIVID MEMORY

Older Baltimoreans will remember with mixed emotions and with great vividness that Sunday in February when flames, carried by a high wind, swept from building to building, eating out the very heart of the city. To those who had no particular interest in the downtown section it was a spectacle never to be forgotten. But to others, who had everything at stake, it was a time of torment when every leaping flame was a demon hand reaching out to drag them down to financial ruin.

It was a day of unusual activity, with everybody running hither and yon and a great assemblage of police and the military present to see that no one loitered on the way. As a newspaper reporter of the time, the writer did considerable running about himself, most of it leading to regimental headquarters in the Courthouse to find out why the military pass issued only an hour before had been countermanded, and to get one that would pass muster.

VALUABLES REMOVED

All day long every truck, wagon and push cart that could be impressed into service thronged the streets carrying loads of merchandise, books, papers and other valuables out of the danger zone and to places of safety. From shortly after noon, when it was seen that the Fire Department would be unable to halt the progress of the fire until late at night, the cavalcade of vehicles streamed back and forth keeping just a little ahead of the advancing wall of flame.

Among the business places destroyed early in the evening was that of William Lanahan & Son, wholesale dealers in malt and spirituous liquors, at 24 Light street. This concern was one of the largest distributors of whisky in the city and at the time of the fire the warehouses were filled with a huge stock of barreled and bottled goods of the choicest brands. This concern was one of the first to realize that the progress of the fire could not easily be checked and early in the afternoon its own fleet of trucks was assembled and set to work hauling away all the stock that could be transported. Feverishly the force labored to get out the barrels and cases and, according to reports, all of the stock except liquor in the blending vats was gotten out safely.

EIGHTY CASES LEFT

That is, all of the stock except the eighty cases referred to above and which, it is the belief of those who are familiar with the situation, are still there, as has been said, waiting for some one with ingenuity enough to bring them forth. How these eighty cases of liquor became lost in the shuffle and why it is believed that they are still there is best told by Mr. Thomas Tighe, who at the time of the big fire and for many years thereafter was employed at the Lanahan warehouses.

"Well do I remember that day," says Mr. Tighe. "Word came early in the afternoon that there was danger of the fire spreading eastward to Light street and all of the employees of the company were mobilized for the purpose of salvaging as much of the huge stock of whiskey as possible before the flames reached the building.

TRUCKS ASSEMBLED

"Trucks were assembled and the work went merrily on, with everyone doing his utmost to facilitate the moving. Most of the bottled goods was on the upper floors with an old-fashioned hydraulic elevator as the only means of getting it down. I remember very well, indeed, how we worked like Trojans loading the cases of whisky on the old lift and then lowering it gently to the first floor, where willing hands were waiting to carry the cargo to the trucks lined up at the sidewalk.

"On one of the trips, in our zeal, we loaded eighty cases on the elevator, which, with the reduced water pressure occasioned by the demands made upon the service by the fire-fighters, was too much of a load and the whole business wound up in the cellar. The cases were hastily thrown into a corner and the lift started upward to begin work again with lighter loads.

REDUCED TO RUINS

"Several hours later the Lanahan warehouses, along with every other building in the neighborhood, had been reduced to a pile of smoking ruins, while the fire sped relentlessly on toward Jones' Falls, leveling everything

in its path. So intense was the heat that tall buildings seemed to crumple up like so many pasteboard boxes and walls toppled down even before the woodwork was half consumed."

After Baltimore had recovered from the shock of the fire and the city government, through its Burnt District Commission, had taken stock of the situation, one of the major projects promulgated was the widening of Light street. The new lines established took in nearly the whole of the Lanahan warehouse site, and as a result the debris of the burned structure was left where it had fallen prey to the flames and the fill necessary to make the street bed piled in on top of it.

That is why Mr. Tighe believes that the eighty cases of whisky, probably worth \$10,000 at current prices, that he last saw thrown hastily into the cellar of the warehouse, may still be there. Color is lent to his theory by a report a few years ago that workmen digging up the street on the old Lanahan warehouse site unearthed several bottles of the shape and color well known to the older generation, and containing real whisky.

That is the story, fantastic, perhaps, but encouraging to a thirsty man just the same.